

June 20, 2009

Saturday

Title: [Be a Sufi \(Student\)](#)

DVD title: Focusing Our Energy through the Latā'if:  
Transmission is a Communication with the Transmitting Shaykh.  
Speak what You Know as a Student of Sufism.  
Effort in Practicing brings Refinement.

Dinner blessing: O Allah Swt, again we ask You for Your Blessings and Your Protection, Ya Hafizu, for the people who are marching for truth, trying to break out of the prisons of the oppressors who are oppressing Your Name. We ask You, Allah, to send Your Healing upon those among us who are ill, and who are struggling with disease. We ask You, Allah, for blessings upon our families and all of us that we might learn the lessons of brotherhood and sisterhood, that You have instructed us and guided us in Qur'an, and the Hadith of Rasulallah (sal). We thank You, Allah, for the safe return of my family and insh'allah the safe return of Atefeh tonight, and the safe return of Fareeda last week from England. We ask You for the protection of those who are still away and will be away, and the safe return of Mustafa and Sahar and Saara. We are grateful to have the news that Dr. Hassouna and Mrs. Hassouna were returned under the wing of Your Compassion, Mercy, and Healing to Egypt, and we are grateful for that. For all the things I've forgotten, I ask You to read my heart. *Amin.*

Suhbat: *Bismillah.* It seems that some people are hard-wired to spirituality, and some people are hard-wired to religion, or religious spirituality. Recently it was said to me by some of the young men in Washington that people are "hungry" for meditation, for Tasawwuf, but they are not finding it. Let's put that part aside for a second; I'll tell you what my comment was. It is always interesting to me to see how some of these young men and women study Arabic and *fiqh* and *ulūm*, and go to Yemen and to Cairo and Al Azhar.

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When they gather together in *halkah*, they read Qur'an and do all this, *alhamdulillah*. For example, for the next two weeks there is a session on *hadith* coming out of Zaytuna Institute. People are going and spending six hours a day. Yet, most of them won't spend 40 minutes twice a day in *muraqabah*. Yet, without the meditation and transmission, they have to be missing at least 50% of understanding Hadith and Qur'an and whatever they are studying. If they would spend the time in the *muraqabah* and real *suhbat*, real *khidma*/service and truly awakening their *latā'if*, then they would have real, deep knowledge of the Hadith and the Qur'an, and whatever else they are learning. I don't want this to be taken in the wrong way, as being against study. A person with one arm can learn to do a lot of things, but it's better to have two. A person with one leg can learn how to run, ride a bicycle, or climb a mountain, but it's better to have two.

Then there is the reality that spiritual statements don't always come wrapped up in spiritual packages, that is to say, recognizably spiritually identifiable packages. It certainly doesn't always come in the form someone prefers, which is most likely the secular and worldly form. In fact, perhaps it is that whatever you prefer, the spiritual impetus will come in a different form, because part of this journey is to recognize the Divine Presence. Part of this journey is to awaken your consciousness to stimulate other ways of perceiving. Part of it is to understand that the compelling must not come from the outside, but from the inside. If things don't come to someone in the way they want or expect, they may be compelled to seek or recognize it in another way, or not. It becomes a test, if you will. Are we willing to see things in a different form? Are we doing things that only make sense, or do we do things that are nonsensical? Sometimes nonsense is important.

But at the end of the day, it is safe to say when you take the energy that is placed inside of us and focus it through the *latā'if*, and develop the capability using the body and breath as

a tool, and concentration as a tool, one can ultimately harmonize many different aspects of reality or life in their own being. In a sense, [they] can also then develop a kind of longevity or self-control. What happens, spiritually, is that when the transmission is received and the individual is receptive, and the *latīfa* begins to be recognized or one perceives through the *latīfa*, then one goes for a period of time beyond the realm of form and has experiences that begin to manifest in the realm of form. Experiences of one's *kashf* (loosely translated as insight) begin to be manifest in form. Or, one's *kashf* is affirmed when you find the efficacy of your insight, your inner sight, being attested to by things in the world, and you begin to trust it. You trust your intuition and insight. You have tuned the instrument of seeing; so now when you see, you trust it. It's not a serendipitous occasion, or an accidental thing like, "Oh, I just was thinking about that!" But we realize it is the result of attunement.

You utilize certain forms, and those forms are chosen first by Allah, because He gives us form. In the spiritual journey, the *shaykh* chooses the form, or presents you with the form that has been chosen over a period of centuries, perhaps, in which you tune your instrument and refine your perception. As you tune it, or as you do that practice, one of the first things that happens is you become attuned to the transmitting *shaykh*, the teaching *shaykh*. (A long time ago I gave talks about the different kinds of *shaykhs*. There is a *bāraka shaykh*, a teaching *shaykh*, and so forth.) That's why this whole subject of surrender or submission comes as a key to any form of discipline. It doesn't matter what kind of teacher: a teacher of martial arts, a teacher in college, a teacher of Tasawwuf. The process of accepting the transmission, or accepting the knowledge that is being given to you, accepting the guidance and training (of whatever teacher it is) is in itself a communication.

That transmission is a communication of fact, reality, truth, or information. If one can hear

while they are communicating, then they are really communicating in any form. If you speak to someone and you try to communicate something, and you get the feedback that they heard, then you can feel the communication is really complete. If you can't hear what you are communicating, then you are only presenting facts or information, ideas or perceptions, but not really communicating. This transmission is a form of communication that necessitates being able to adjust and adapt that communication to the moment, and to the individual in front of us. That's why I can't sit in a room and say, "Now, I'm going to give everyone the transmission of the second circle" and not delineate the individual. I could do that, but I'd have to say every one of your names, and think about every one of your *latīfa*. That may not seem very important, but it happens to be very important. It's one way Allah keeps the teaching very personal and independent, though it is general. And it is a way that we maintain not just a personal relationship, but *munasabat*, the *nisbah*.

It is very important to understand what Sufism is, and how one becomes a Sufi, other than just saying, "I'm a Sufi." Idries Shah used to say that very few real Sufis ever proclaim that they are Sufis, except they may talk about Sufism to their students. If it's their work, they have to proclaim it to the world like I do, because it's my work. If my work was just to run a shop somewhere, I wouldn't have to say anything about Sufism except to certain people who are qualified to hear it. But my work is to speak about Sufism, and obviously you have to have authority to do that.

I used to give this example: if you walk into a room where there is a piano, and you announce that you are a pianist, someone will ask you to play. You will be put to the test. If you are in a conversation and someone says, "Do you play any instrument?" you might say, "I used to play the piano." You could get away with the impression that you are a pianist but you don't play anymore. By not playing for them, you may even make people

think you are a humble great pianist, but you don't play [any more]. Someone may say, "I'm not going to play in front of you, because you must be a very great pianist," but you haven't even sat down at the piano and proven you can't play chopsticks, or proven you can play something really well. If you say, "I'm a Sufi," someone will ask you to prove that you are a Sufi.

Someone will ask you, "How long have you been studying Sufism?" "Oh, 25, 30 years." "Oh... do something Sufi for me!" It's not like that, is it? It's, how do you live your life; what kind of decisions do you make? What are your values? How do you deal with errors or mistakes? How do you explain Sufism in relationships to something else? It's the same thing one should say about Muslims. There are wonderful things in Hadith and Qur'an about brotherhood, trust, never doing harm, not raising your hand, and never causing any pain or suffering to another Muslim. No Muslim can do that, at least intentionally. Certainly Muslims create pain, grief, and unhappiness to other people out of error, but not out of intention. One has to qualify, qualify, qualify.

If you put yourself forward, someone will ask you to play the tune. When we don't put ourself forward, sometimes we imply things. In a way, I guess it's good that a person calls themselves a Sufi, because someone will put you to the test. But if you say, "I'm a student of piano; but I'm not very good." "Play something for us!" "Really, I am only learning..." "Please, play something." Then you can sit down confidently at the piano because you said you were a student, and say, "I'm learning this piece, and I'll play as much as I know." People will laud you for your effort, and say, "That's good!" When they say, "Keep on practicing," it's not an insult. It means you're doing very well. "Well, I'm a student of Tasawwuf." "Really? Tell me about Sufism." "Oh, well, you should ask the *shaykh*. Here's his number!" You should be able to speak about what you know. "I'm a student, this is what I think I know or understand."

You get strange anomalies, like some people become ayatollahs who aren't even Muslims, like the one in Iran. And I'm saying it: they are not Muslims. They are not even *kafirs*, because a *kafir* can be saved. Hopefully, a person whose profession is a pianist should be able to play the piano. And a person who is a student of Tasawwuf ought to be able to practice Tasawwuf. Practice does make perfect, and *insani kamil* is a goal, even if it is not a stated goal – otherwise you wouldn't try to do anything better. You wouldn't ever try to be any better or make a contribution to the world. You'd never want to contribute to your children's lives, or your brothers and sisters. You wouldn't want to do any of that. So *insani kamil* is an important thing to you, even if you don't think of it in those terms. Some people might say, "I'm a terrible Sufi; I'm the least of the least," out of humility. I say that because I believe it, but when a person says it from the *nafs ammāra*, then they probably are a terrible Sufi. But if a person is striving at all, then it's possible. There is potential.

If you practice, you can say, "I'm not practicing enough. I should be doing more..." Okay. If you have been given the teaching, and if the teacher keeps you on, then you probably can become a Sufi. If you practice, you probably can become a pianist. When we don't do it, we ought to at least ask the question, "Why am I not doing it? What are the preferences that are keeping me away from my *muraqabah*, my practices?" It's very easy to question your own commitment. It becomes an excuse, an out. "I allow myself this much guilt, just enough so I don't have to practice." Or, I should have that much (a large amount) guilt because I don't do my practices properly, but I only have this much (a little amount) guilt, because that's all the guilt I am comfortable with. I'm not comfortable with too much guilt.

Then things start to make sense: compassion makes sense. Honesty makes sense. Self-

discipline makes sense. Then you can really do a good evaluation of yourself and say, “I am not disciplined enough. I am not cultivating my sincerity. I am not repentant enough.” So things that everybody does because they are supposed to, becomes reality to a Sufi, a person who is striving. Many people can recite, “*Astaghfirullah, astaghfirullah, astaghfirullah,*” but it has to come from a sense of repentance and honest *muhasabat*. That’s where the alchemy takes place. When honest repentance or seeking of forgiveness meets the act of repentance or recitation of *astaghfirullah* in sincerity, that’s when the alchemic change takes place. That’s when a person transforms themselves.

When you sit in meditation, it’s not the content of your meditation. It’s the attitude you go and sit with. It’s the sincerity you make the *niyyat* with. It’s the time you discipline yourself to spend at it—and it will work. You could say, “I’ve been at this for 30 years, but nothing really happens.” The answer is, “You never really made the effort.” I don’t mean you haven’t made any effort, but *the* effort—the effort to really do it correctly, stay with it, and persevere. You are trying to second-guess the practices, second-guess the transmission, the philosophy of it, second-guess the transmitter. If your life is at stake, you don’t have to have a state of the art amateur radio. All you need to have is something that works to call in help. “I’m not going to use that radio! It’s an old radio. I want a brand new Itech! I’d rather die than use an old radio.” Who would say that? No one. “I won’t eat that. I’d rather die than eat that.” “Here, eat this. It will save your life.” “No, I won’t. I don’t like peanut butter!” Nobody in their right mind would ever say that. But look at what we say about the practices and *muraqabah*. People will spend 72 hours in classes, but won’t spend 40 minutes in *muraqabah*. How many 40 minutes are there in 72 hours? Do your math! It’s like 100 meditations.

Realize that we are practicing for the purpose of discipline and refinement. Effort makes things refined, not content. Content helps when you put effort with it, but it’s an effort

that is compelled by something. Curiosity doesn't live that long. Preference comes and goes. Desire depends on how intense it is. The right effort is compelled by a sense of purpose, a sense of real sincerity, a real yearning. With that you can find refinement. Refinement never comes from avoidance. "I have stuck it out and avoided doing the practices correctly for 30 years, and I think I deserve something for that. Look how disciplined I am. I have disciplined myself not to do these practices for 25 years fully. I never kept my *niyyat*; I never got a new transmission on time. I deserve something for that. I have never allowed myself to deviate from that path." You should be rewarded for that, don't you think? Isn't that the attitude, really, when you analyze it?

"I'm too proud to submit to a schedule. I'm too proud to submit to the will of the *shaykh* who wants to give me these transmissions and encourage me to go through these Orders. I'm an independent human being. I have proven it, because for 30 years I have resisted. How good is my resistance! Allah will reward me for that!" Maybe. (You didn't think I could come at this from a new way, did you?) Effort creates refinement. Very little refinement comes from avoidance. As our life progress or digresses, or progresses toward the grave, it presents us with situations we have to keep adjusting our life to. We integrate what has happened in our life, and learn things, and make adjustments. Wouldn't it be strange if the whole test of all those changes and adjustments and decisions, and all those things you have to do, wouldn't it be interesting if the whole essence, the whole *raison d'etre* of that is to see if you could just keep your discipline about the spiritual practices?

What if the whole point of all those changes was some cosmic plan of Allah's—good ones and bad ones, easy ones and hard ones, attractive ones and not attractive ones—would be just to see if you are offered gold, would you still pray on time? If you were sick, but you had an ounce of strength in you, would you still try to pray? Or would you start substituting: "I'll trade you three prayers for one *muraqabah*," like environmental credits.

“So and so does a lot of *muraqabah*. I’m going to ask them to sell me some of their *muraqabah*.” Wouldn’t it be great if we could do that? “I’m a polluter, and I’m going to buy environmental credits.” But that’s not the way it works. We can structure our lives to some degree. We try to avoid conflict; maybe we can buy our way out of the army or conflict if we had a lot of money, but we don’t. Very few of us can say, “Things are not very good here; I’m going to get on my own plane and fly out of here.” If you had a lot of money, you could live anywhere you wanted to.

Sufism, if we want to call it an ism, doesn’t always present itself in spiritual terms. It presents itself in very real-world situations that I’ve been trying to describe to you. It presents itself in the terms of our day to day life, both through our *kashf* and also through these tests and trials and challenges. If we combine it with work, like our community work and our summer program and day to day life, it’s meaningful. If we just sit back and think about it, it’s all theoretical and false. And we can’t use our daily life as an incentive and inspiration to dive deeper into our prayer and *muraqabah* and recitation, because we are not allowing ourselves to build a bridge between our day to day life and occurrences and our spiritual life. We are keeping them very separate. But we are putting an awful lot of time into our day to day life, a lot of physical, mental, and emotional energy. Very few people, even in this room, would put a tenth of that into their meditation. I include myself. Only when we are really resonant with the Attributes of Allah Swt can we become really resonant with one another and with that Divine Presence. *Asalām Aleikum*.