

June 27, 2009

Saturday

Title: [Everything Has To Be Tested](#)

DVD title: Ihsan: The Beautification of Islam through One's Character
Dhikr and Tuning One's Self to the Standard

Opening Prayer: O Allah, Thank You for the opportunity to worship You, to give praise to You, to remember You tonight, and to ask You for our special needs. Thank You for providing us these young people who have hope, even after war and devastation. Let us be inspired by them during the hardest times, to look into their faces and hear their stories, and remember how blessed we are and how generous You have been to us. *Amin.*

Sohbet: *Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem.* Contrary to a lot of the misunderstandings about Tasawwuf, mysticism in Islam has to do with miracles, like it has in other expressions—a sort of psychic phenomena or ascetism, what the Hindus call mortification/*tapasya* or seclusion/*khilwa*. What comes out of that is an absence from reality. People get addicted to it, just like they get addicted to any kind of mind-altering experience. People have, over the centuries, pursued certain practices where they associate for example putting a skewer through their tongue or cheek (like the Rafai do), or walking on fire, or going into a trance as being some kind of proof of supernatural contact. That's one way of doing it. Another delusionary way of doing it is what Imam Khomeini did in Iran when he talked about the *waliyat-i-faqi*; that somehow there can be a human representative of the 12th Imam or the Māhdī on the earth. This delusion is the height of ego-centrism, which is born out of having no one set above you, and having the audacity to call oneself supreme.

The truth is, meditation is a very important thing, and it's the most important thing to build the bridge between the inner and the outer. But excessive seclusion or removal from the world, just like the Prophet (sal) said about excessive prayer, creates imbalance. It's not an end in itself. It's a means. People begin to worship the means and in effect, become polytheists, which is a higher level of *shirk*. I remember in March or May of 1982, we were in Baltimore to meet Muzaffer Effendi. Someone in the audience asked him a question, "Is it true that Tariqah is higher than Shariah, and therefore one who is a Sufi doesn't have to pray or observe Shar'iah?" I'll never forget his answer: "If you have a shop, and more people start coming to your shop, are you going to have to work harder or less hard? You have to work harder." If you attain to the level of Tariqah, it means you have to master Shar'iah. You have to practice Shar'iah and Tariqah.

I spoke earlier about *hasan*/beauty. Why Allah called this process of Tasawwuf also *ihsan* is because it beautifies the soul. One of the translations of *ihsan* is beautification. In that sense, it means to develop the best individual behavior that a person could possibly have. What this means is that you acquire real control over your own self. If you can begin to acquire that in childhood, you won't be an adult sitting and hearing a lesson on it. You will be giving the lesson. Control over oneself means to develop sincerity and humility, and to realize you are always in the presence of Allah. In the constant presence of Allah means there is a consciousness in everything, and the acts a person performs and the beliefs a person holds are "seen" by Allah. In other words, you are in the presence of Allah just like your body is in the presence of air. You don't think about being in the presence of air; but if it wasn't there, you'd sure think about it (like the story of the fish in the water). That's why the story that goes with the reality of *ihsan* is the Hadith of Jibreel: to act as if you see God in everything; if you don't, know that Allah is seeing you.

By developing that mentality, the mystic, the Sufi through meditation, *dhikr*, prayer,

zakat and all the pillars of Islam, and through all the good actions, and through *adab* and keeping the company (*suhbat*) of good people has the means to beautify the soul. Why do people want to decorate a room and make it look pretty? Why do you want to draw a beautiful picture? You [do it] to make something beautiful. You are acting as the Hand of Allah. You take something Allah created, like the girls drawing pictures of the seasons and of pandas. What are you doing? You are replicating the beauty in nature. You are acting not “as God,” but *fi sabīlillah*. We say “for the sake of Allah,” but it means you are acting in concert with Allah. You are remembering Allah. It’s a form of *dhikr* if you understand what *dhikr* is.

This word *dhikr* has a lot of meanings to it. Usually it is remembrance of Allah, but it has other meanings to it. If you remember Allah with humility, it is said, “Allah looks at that person with graciousness and forgiveness.” Allah says, “**Remember Me and I will remember you.**” (2:152) The conscious act of trying to replicate in some way the Beauty of Allah [is hard to do]. When you draw it, you are putting three dimensions into two. It’s very hard to do it in three dimensions unless you can create holograms, and then you lose certain qualities. You can’t touch it, smell it, or taste it, but you replicate it. In the same way, Allah has replicated His *Asmā’ al Husna* in us. They are projections. The only difference is we can affect the quality of it by our intention and actions. Just like any human being can affect the quality of their own character by the way they use or abuse their knowledge and capabilities. The opportunity to do more and more good, for example, is given to a person who is more and more in remembrance of Allah Swt.

The ultimate purpose of a mystic, a *wali*, a saint is to be in this constant state of remembrance. It’s like being in a constant state of *salat*. Allah says, “**Establish the *salat* for My remembrance.**” (20:14) If there is no remembrance of Allah in *salat*, there is no *salat*. Stand up, put your head down, bend over. There’s no *salat*. The Prophet (sal) said,

“There is no salat without the presence of the ruh.” You need the physical and the spiritual presence when you pray, just as an example. So the mystic is a person who understands the beautification of the soul in nature; and who understands it is something they are not creating but they are influenced by it, whether it is charity, gratitude, kindness, or acts like prayer and remembrance/*dhikr*. There are these external duties we know about, and there are the internal ones: faith, gratitude, sincerity, and freedom from our own ego.

That’s what this process is that we are all part of, a training for what comes later. Even the things that motivate our external actions (our prayers, etc) are for the purification of the inner self, the *ruh*. What is presented Islamically as the real pathway to salvation is refining the character, refining the inner being, and having the external actions be the refinement of the inner being. It is not using the religion, the text of Qur’an, or even the life of Rasulallah (sal) to prove your point and win the argument, or to control other individuals. As we do these spiritual practices, our faculties increase. The average person looks at them as being phenomenal. They say, “Wow, how do you do that? How do you have such a good attitude all the time? How do you see what you see?” It seems miraculous to people.

Yet, in the world we live in, there is so much difficulty. People are seeking differences instead of similarities. I spoke to the young people on this subject of universal values. Of course they are tested. They were tested already today, among our own staff. If you are going to go and teach people about getting along, friendship and bonding, universal values, trusting one another and working for the common good, you better believe the test is going to be there. Everything has to be tested. It’s one of the problems with prescription drugs. One of the complaints is that they are not tested enough. Things have to be tested out. Do you think our good intentions don’t have to be tested?

Of course they do. By what standard? By the standard of the Prophet (sal) and Al Qur'an. It makes perfect sense. Do you want to have a car that's never been test-driven? Do you want to have a surgeon who was never tested in school or work? Do you want to have a dentist who never drilled before? Everything has to be tested according to some standard. Even the mystic knows this. Even with all the subjectivity of mysticism, you still have to follow certain basic premises and principles, because those are the standards by which you can measure your progress, and by which you can get to a *maqam* where you never fall below that station.

People get fixated on the forms because they have no personal capability, no proper guidance and no *himma* to understand the Truth. That is why you see the violence after the Prophet (sal) or the sectarian differences that existed, or the question of who was the successor: was it really Abu Bakr (as) or was it Ali (as)? That is why people replace power with knowledge. They replace knowledge with power. They replace humility with arrogance. They replace spirituality with politics. They use the same terminology. "Oh excuse me. I will use the same terminology." (The Shaykh gives an example:) "Hello. What is your name?" "I am Bari'a. Bari'a Davis." "Well, who is that over there? (referring to the real Bari'a Davis)" "I don't know who that is. I'm Bari'a." Will the real Bari'a stand up? How do you know that I am not Bari'a? Because you knew her before. When I was someone else, she was Bari'a still. You have to know what came before, but that does not mean you are conservative and locked into the past. You have to know what came before so you have the baseline, the standard. You have to also understand change.

In that realm of understanding of what came before, there comes the character of the individual, this kind of character of respect, beautiful character, uplifted character. That kind of person does not have fears and jealousies and prejudices. That is also why you trace your lineage back to Rasūl'allah (sal). With the Naqshbandi, we trace it back to

Abu Bakr (ra). As Qadriyyas, Shadhiliyyas, Chistiyyas, we trace it back to Ali (ra). Then there are some simple, very simple ideas that have to be understood. One is, one of the human frailties: we think that so and so should love me, care for me, before I care for them. We think that Allah (SwT) should love us without us having to love Allah (SwT). Somehow we are entitled to well-being and happiness and wealth without having to work for it, without having to obey the Giver of all these things.

Allah says in Qur'an says, **“Those who are believers are stronger in their love for Allah.”** (2:165) **“...people whom He loves and who love Him...”** (5:54) people are described. Divine love is not human love. Divine pleasure is not like human pleasures, enjoyment of just the material aspects and comforts of life. But Allah sometimes gives us these comforts so that we are tested. What do I mean by “Allah gives”? I gave the kids an example about a guitar in resonance. A guitar has six strings. It has an E on one end and an E octave on the other end. And if you strike one, the others resonate. We all know the basic physics of that. The test that we have is what tunes us. The test is (the Shaykh sings two notes an octave apart but misses the second note) you are off by a half or quarter tone. You feel you need to tune it up a little. You can feel when you are off spiritually. You can feel when you are not in tune.

[There is] this tendency among human beings to want to be, if not God, at least like God. So they develop this pantheistic world view where they say, “This is the expression of God. This is the expression of God,” and they worship it instead of worshipping the God behind it, the Truth behind it. In the reality of the world we live in today, there is so much distraction and so much misunderstanding, it takes your name. It steals the name. “Ah this is Islam.” It is just like someone stealing your name, identity theft. Like some of the ayatollahs and muftis that rule Iran, they are all guilty of identity theft. They have stolen the identity of Rasūl'allah (sal). They have stolen of Iman Ali (ra). They have

stolen the identity of Imam Jaffar Sadiq (ra). They have stolen the identity of Prophet Mohammed (sal). Then, in order to keep those false identities (because the people know it is false), they take your identity away. They kill you or you lose your job. Or like in Bosnia, they take your driver's license, your pictures, all your papers away from you. They take all that away from you—why? So you have no identity. They dehumanize you. They beat you like cattle. And the people who do the beating are animals. They do it for a bag of potatoes. That is what Ahmedinejad gave out: bags of potatoes. And that takes us to something very important.

What this brings us to is the notion to understand *tajdīd*. If you are going to be a *mujaddid* of the Mujaddidī Order you have to understand *tajdīd*, because *mujaddid* comes from *tajdīd*. What does *tajdid* mean? It means renewal. I want to speak very seriously about the tradition in Islam, traced back to Rasūl'allah (sal) when he talked about the *mujaddid*. If you are going to call yourself Sufi, and you know that your main Order is Naqshbandī-Mujaddidiyya, what does it mean what our role is? If you don't know, look at what has Allah given us. Allah has placed us, given us, created a “secular” organization based on this whole subject of *tajdīd*. We could rename it: Tajdīd International. It is no accident that this is what our work is. If you don't get in resonance with that—just like tuning to the E string—you are out of sync.

This beautification of the soul is where we started. Actually we started with talking about lots of differences in the world we live in today. Go back to the beginning of yesterday's talk, to get where we come to now: to the subject of *tajdīd*/renewal and why our work is that. If your work is not *tajdīd*, if your work is really not around renewal, you are not going to be able to fulfill the fullness of the *mujaddadī* teaching. You are not. You can do whatever you want to do. You can be a farmer. You can have a business here and a business there, and do this and that. [But you are not fulfilling that teaching], unless in

your heart and your soul you are at least working part of the time for the renewal, of what? A renewal of Islam.

What do you mean by that? We are going to talk about that tomorrow. Because it is not what most people think. It is not about a religion. It is about Islam. It is about creating a certain reality. That is what Prophet Mohammed (sal) meant when he said, ***“I came to uplift, to beautify, to, exalt your character.”*** This is what it means. It is really important what it means. You can be an ascetic. You can sit in a cave and do your *tasbi* all the time, but what is really to be understood? What year is this? 2009. Right? We just passed the century mark not too long ago. We will talk about *tajdīd* tomorrow. Try and remember where I ended today, because your end is my beginning. Asalaam Aleikum.