



## Siddi Shiker Symposium

Marrakesh, Morocco: 10-11 July, 2009

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*Bismillaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem*

*Allahumma inna nasalaka mujibati rahmatika*

*Wa'aza'ima magfiratika, wa salamata min kulli*

*Itmin, wal-ganimata min kulli birrin, wal-fawza bil-jannati min-a nnar.*

**Oh Allah, we ask You for words which will make certain Your Mercy, actions which will make certain Your Forgiveness, freedom from every offence, a supply of every virtue, entering Jannah and safety from the Naar.**

*Asalaam alaykum wa Rahmatullahe wa Barakatuh!*

### **Standing At The Cross-roads**

When we look at the state of humankind and the world today we see all kinds of critical breakdowns and breeches in mental and emotional stability; we see disconnects between values, ethics, and actions. We see injustice wrapped in the cloak of law, and promiscuity wrapped in the cloak of love. We see a deteriorating of responsibility, compassion, patience and tolerance, among so much more. Most importantly, we see a lack of humility, an absence of sincerity, and a lack of *taqwa*. As it says in Qur'an:

*Dhahara-l-fasaadu fi-l-barri wa-l-bahri bima kasabat aydee-n-naasi*

*liyudheeqahum ba<sup>c</sup>da-lladhee <sup>c</sup>amiluu la<sup>c</sup>allahum yarji<sup>c</sup>uun.*

**Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of the evil wrought by the hands of people, so that He may make them taste some of what they have done, [and] so they may turn back. (30:41)**

When we search for the cause of all this degradation of the environment and of society's values we need look no farther than ourselves. All the issues we are faced with today—poverty, food security, war, genocide, depletion of natural resources—are because of an internal and external imbalance and disharmony. Until we correct the inner issues, any efforts we make to address the external issues will only be making a surface correction at best, give rise to other problems, at the worst.

But in the problem also lies the solution. Not only has Allah made us responsible and placed us in creation at the cross roads of the *bātin* and the *dhāhir*, but we also live at a time when we are at many crossroads: the crossroads of traditional family values and modern individualism; of theory and practice; of human responsibility for Allah (Swt)'s Creation and greed.

As Muslims, and particularly as Sufis, we are part of a global religion that can take advantage of our time placement in creation and the trends of modern forms of globalization to present to the world a clear and effective global perspective which has always characterized Islam. Islam is the expression of a comprehensive, compassionate, totally integrated system, which we identify with also as Tasawwuf. Tasawwuf is, by its essential nature and essence, reflective of the time, place and circumstance. It is moderate and promotes a view of humanity that is inclusive. It accepts the responsibility bestowed upon us by Allah (Swt): the *Amanah*. It affirms the dynamic presence of the Divine; moreover, Tasawwuf is the effective and affective mode of fulfilling the intention and purpose of the Prophet (sal), who said: "*Innamaa bu<sup>ʿ</sup>ith-tu li-utammim makaarimu-l-akhlaaq. I was not sent except to complete the best of manners.*"

This refinement and renewal process is the core of Islam for the living human being.

### **Time of Opportunity**

While we live at a time of great heart-ache and suffering in many places around the world, we also live at a time of great opportunities—opportunities to combat extremism, opportunities to end poverty, to create food security, to address inequities, bias and prejudice. We have tools to educate the masses of humanity to their common values and common purpose and we have the unique status as Muslims and people of *tarīqa* to bring a long history of wisdom, science and spiritual renewal to the world. *Alhamdulillah*, we find ourselves at an exceptional time of *tajdīd* (renewal), spiritually as well as socially.

It is precisely because Sufism is experiential and reflective of the moment, yet firmly rooted in the Sharia and the Sunna; precisely because Tasawwuf requires us to develop the personal reflective nature of the sincere and striving human being that it preserves and utilizes the traditions and the essential foundations of Islam in ever new and relevant ways. Tasawwuf is dynamic and organic and develops access to the direct energy (*fayyād*) from the Divine Presence. As it says in the Qur'an: “**He (Allah) is with you wherever you are** (*Huwa ma'akum ayna maa kuntum*).” (57:4)

The application of this message lies in the Universal Values (indicated by the *Asmā' ul Husna*), which are always relevant to the realities of the times. I call it Applied Sufism...Classical Teachings for the Contemporary Seeker. When applied, the *dkhīr*, *sohbet*, *munasabah* and *muraqabah*, the *khidmah* and *tarbiya* of the Sufi enables one to fully develop the eyes that see, the ears that hear, and the heart that beats in cadence with the beauty, light, compassion and love that *is* Allah (Swt).

Sufism is a bulwark against losing the essence of our *dīn*. It exemplifies the essential modernity of Islam, yet its deep roots must be firmly in the core principles and practices of Islam. As its practitioners, we affirm and work for justice, peace, tolerance, equality and trust in Allah (Swt). We try to address the ills of this world with the skills of the mystic and the devoted servant, drawing energy and guidance from Allah Swt, while inwardly being at peace and in harmony with that Divine Presence (Allah Swt) and His Prophet Muhammad (sal). Yes, my dear brothers and sisters, given our world, we have many, many opportunities to seize the moments we live in. Though our ways may seem strange to others, we must remember what the Prophet (sal) said:

**“Indeed, Islam began as something strange. And it will return as something strange the way it began. So give glad tidings to the strangers.” He was asked, “Who are the strangers, O Allah’s Apostle?” He answered, “Those who are righteous when the people have become corrupt.” (Ahmad/Sahih)**

### **Paradigm shift**

When will it no longer be the exception to be a person who works for good in this world? If and when a sufficient number of individuals realize that they stand at the nexus between knowledge, wisdom, insight and responsible, constructive, inclusive and positive well-being for all, and have internalized the values (universal) and intentions of Al Qur’an and the Sīrah of Nebi Muhammed (sal), then the paradigm can shift and the emergent phenomena will manifest as a positive period for humanity—for this world and for future generations—as we prepare for a time of total transformation.

Total transformation is possible because of the inter-connected nature of the system we live in. Everything is part of an integrative dynamic responsive system, a system of repeating patterns and signs reflected over and over again in the ‘*Ālam*

*ul Khalq*, the world of creation. The universes that Allah (Swt) is (the *Rabbi ul Ālamin*) consists of the dimensions of atoms, chromosomes, genes, cells, organs and the totality of our bodies, our social structures—i.e. cultures, races, communities, villages, and nations that comprise our world—and are all reflections of the same pattern. It is an endlessly integrated system where all things in this world, from the subatomic levels to the furthest universes, reflect the same universal Reality. The only separation exists in our minds. We are all children of Hazrat Adam (as), and all creation is the living intention of the One—Allah Swt.

As those who recognize this greater context, it is the duty of the Sufi in today's societies to encourage a renewal of both spiritually grounded intellectual and technological achievements, and inner refined moral and ethical principles, based on a personal relationship with that Divine Presence. We must develop comprehensive, realistic educational models that require individuals to study both the classical texts as well as hermeneutical approaches to modern religious beliefs, taking into consideration time, place, and circumstances, addressing the needs of today's communities with critical thinking, critical inquiry, and sound judgment based on a sound epistemology.

This Symposium comes at the right time, in the right place and brings together the right people to address the right issues, both inner and outer. It must not stop here; rather, we must use the technology of the day to remain in contact, [using] the skills of our brethren to address critical issues that face humanity, within and without. We are trying to build Teams of Excellence to reflect the capacity of Islam and Sufism in today's challenging world, and to encourage the sincere inner journey toward self renewal.

### **Time for Renewal (*Tajdid*)**

This subject of *tajdīd* is a very important one for the times in which we live. There is constant renewal on every level of creation—from new cell growth, to new generations, to a renewal of ideas and commitment to values. The *mujaddid*,

is thought to always come at a time when the Muslim community departs from the true path, as defined by Qur'an and the Sunnah. The task of the *mujaddid* is to return the Muslims to their basic sources and to cleanse Islam from the impure elements, creating an atmosphere in which Islam will flourish more or less in its original pure form.

In each age this has meant something different. Today, the world is a lot smaller than it once was. The message gets out very quickly on the internet. But what one views and listens to on the internet is still a matter of choice. The issues and choice have not changed, despite the changes in our world. The implication is that *tajdīd* is ongoing. It is constant and continuous. There is a continuous need for Muslims to explain Islam, to make Islam applicable to constantly changing circumstances and situations, and to do that without violating its essential principles. In that sense there is the possibility of there being a *mujaddid* in each of us...the yearning for a return to our *fitrah*.

*Tajdīd* does not mean going back to the beginning and trying to create a society that is a replica of the time of Medina in the time of Nebi Mohammed (sal). It means instead to renew the applicability of the principles of Islam, and belief in faith, submission, trust, kindness, inclusivity, mutual respect, love, justice, personal responsibility, community responsibility and global responsibility as exemplified by the Medinan example and Sīrah of Rasullulah (sal). The difference is that now the community is the globe. The contemporary resurgence of Islam may be most often inspired by the examples of the past, but we will never return to that time; rather, we must bring that ideal in practical ways to the present, through the living light of the Prophet (sal)

*Tajdīd* is like a perennial plant. When the new season comes and the time is right, it comes up out of the ground again. We should grow in this season of renewal, reflecting modernity without losing the essence, and the historical and spiritual origins of Islam and Tasawwuf. The difference between contemporary renewal and what has happened in the past is that in our time, *tajdīd* is occurring

in this time of globalization. It comes at a time when the internet revolution is taking place, when mass communications have broken down boundaries, and social media can become spiritual media. These technologies make all the people in the world a potentially global *ummah*.

The growth of a global system of communication is very appropriate for a message that is global, that is universal. This renewal, as I'm speaking about it, is not a message that is directed only to one religion or one group or one tribe. The crossroads that we are at now and the potential for renewal that we have today is unprecedented. This is more than a Renaissance, more than what happened in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe when the seekers of Truth were involved in science and ethics, aesthetics and rationality. We are living in a time when we have to allow people to grow, to give them the means to be educated, to have access to the technology and to address global problems.

### **Personal Renewal**

I have been speaking on a macro level, but our commitment to *tajdīd* is also a question of personal renewal on a micro level. It is about renewing our Islam, our Tasawwuf daily, and maintaining our relationship with Allah (Swt), maintaining it in a way that is applicable to our day to day life, our decisions and our choices. It requires a personal understanding of Islam, an educated spiritually alive, and traditionally loyal attitude towards Islam. On a personal level, *tajdīd* means reforming our thoughts and enlightening ourselves, remaining firmly on the *siratal mustaqim*, learning how to seek and how to obtain higher, purer levels of *muraqabah* and *tafakkur*. As Allah says in Qur'an:

*Qul innamaa a'idhukum biwaahidatin añ taquumuu li-Llaahi mathnaa wa furaadaa thumma tatafakkaruu.*

**Say, I advise you about one [matter]. Wake up for the sake of Allah, in pairs or Alone, and reflect. (34:46).**

Through *tafakkur* (reflection), one is able to contemplate and meditate upon ones self, one's relation to life and relationships in life, so that we clearly see our self and fulfill our destiny. Real renewal comes from upholding refined language and refined values that are handed down to us century by century, from the Prophet (sal) who said: **“Good manners (husn al-adab) are a part of faith.”** And he also said: **“My Lord corrected me (addabani) and gave me excellent correction.”**

Self- renewal takes place not in the outer realm, but begins in the inner realm where you allow your spirit to be revived and revived. Then it manifests in the physical world, insofar as it engages in and uses modern scientific discoveries, technology, concepts of psychology, to increase our knowledge of the universe. We have to constantly hold up our hearts and minds to self-accounting (*muhasabah*) to sustain interface with both the inner and outer.

### **Meeting of Outer and Inner**

Let me end by saying that as we move forward, what we need is a renewed understanding of *tajdid* as a movement to awakening, to enlightenment, a movement toward building a dialogue between ourselves and everyone else in the world, between ourselves and nature, between ourselves and the unknown. I don't know any group (other than certain groups of Sufis ) that either have that training or that ability or that inclination to that depth of that understanding.

The life of a Sufi today has to include a response, interest and actions that seek out the solutions to problems affecting all human beings. If Muslims actually attain and live this understanding of renewal, then they will be throwing off the chains of merely ritualistic behavior and attachments. They will learn the efficacy of Islam from their own personal experiences built on the foundation of the ethical and moral principles of Qur'an and Sunnah.



As we learn to see and hear, we find repeatedly that we are a part of a greater integrative and eternal system, a reflection of the very same truth, the very same love and compassion that is infused throughout the worlds, and in the *fitrah* of all humanity. We are not only the inheritors, but also the progenitors of the message of the essential goodness and truth and eternal peace that is Islam. Today, we must renew our commitment to fulfill our duty to Allah (Swt) and further refine our own selves.

I am humbled and grateful to stand here and share some thoughts with such a noble group of believers. May Allah (Swt) forgive my errors and omissions. I plead for your *du'ā*.

### **Closing Du'ā**

*Wa Llaahu lahu-l-h.aqqi wa huwa yahdii-s-sabiil.*

*H.asbunaa-Llaahu wah.dahu wa nicma-l-wakiil.*

*Wa s.alli calaa sayyidinaa Muh.ammadin wa aaalihi wa s.ah.bihi ajmaciin  
wa-l-h.amdu li-Llaahi rabbi-l-caalamiin.*

**Truth belongs to Allah; it is He who shows the way.**

**Allah, alone, suffices us, and what a fine guardian is He!**

**Blessings upon our Master Muhammad**

**and his family and Companions altogether**

**and praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.**