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Wednesday

Title: [What Can Sufis Do? The Trip to Morocco.](#)

DVD title: The Spirituality of Tasawwuf/Sufism
Must Reflect the 'Aqīda of Qur'an and Sunnah
Reflections after attending an international Sufi symposium

Dinner Blessing O Allah Swt, we are very grateful that You brought us home safely from our journey, and for the opportunity to meet over 1200 *shuyukh* in one place. From all over Africa, from Indonesia, from China, from the US, from Europe, and from all corners of the world, You brought us all together. We ask You, Allah Swt, to put into the hearts and minds of all those delegates the desire to do good for this world, and to unify them into real brothers and sisters of all humanity. O Allah Swt, we are grateful for the safety and security You gave to the people in our absence, to our children, and to our families. We ask You, Allah Swt, to continue to bless us with Your Blessings for the work You are doing this summer, and for the safety and well-being of the young people here, and for the people who are serving them. We are grateful Allah Swt for our family who has returned from Ethiopia bringing their blessings, their happiness, and their health to our community. *Amin.*

Sohbet: *Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem.* I think we live in a time when our society is very disorderly and chaotic. I can attest to the fact that we got a taste of disorder and chaos in the last 8 days. I don't want this to sound like a criticism, but I think it is reflective of the time and place. In a way it is a testimony to the necessity of the project (The Sidi Shiker Symposium in Morocco) which was to create a site where Sufism can flourish once again, and all the Tariqah can be united and cooperate. If it is born out of chaos, it is the perfect place. I think we live at a time when the world is bereft of spirituality; or at least not filled full with it. We live at a time of destruction, and real

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moral and ethical challenges. It's hard to see where the solutions are sometimes. When I am talking with the younger people, there is a sense of people wanting to turn toward religion to find their way out of the situation. That's fine, as long as what they are turning toward is spirituality.

We see in certain parts of the world people use religion as an excuse, or to see what religion can provide for them as yet another force to gain material wealth or power. If indeed people are turning toward spirituality, or can be turned towards it, it may be presumptuous and naive to think that will completely end the confusion, chaos, or destructive nature of humanity. I think we can hope that it would ameliorate the confusion and anxiety that occupies the hearts, minds, and souls of people who are confused and misguided, or those who are hungry for guidance. As in many cases, I think that people turn toward quick solutions. The quick solution to poverty in one country may be to overthrow the government. The quick solution to gaining power is to use religion as a tool to do that. But what is it we, Sufis, can do?

I'm going to be generous tonight and call you all Sufis, but it is very, extremely, generous. I think Tasawwuf offers a lot. There are people who are attracted to Tasawwuf who are looking for quick answers and miracles. You sit around with people, and mostly among the Westerners, we swap a lot of stories. Then you hear the stories of the saints whose tombs we visited, and in those stories you hear the thread of stories of *karamat*. You start to realize that maybe some of the younger people are attracted by the *karamat*/miracles. Somehow, in some of the cases, Sufism has become a function of art and culture. We had dinner with a woman one night. She was telling us about the groups that are meeting in France. She is Shadhili. She's the director of cultural policy for the Ministry of Culture. They have performances and gatherings and circles. I don't question the sincerity, but it sounds to me to be very "cultural." That's the kind of thing that has

traditionally in the modern world attracted people to Sufism: surreal stories and phenomenological events. You get that sense when some people, especially Westerners, tell stories about how their lives have changed, vis a vis [spirituality]. A lot of people were into the phenomena, magic.

Then there are those people who really are thirsty spiritually, and then there are the people who take advantage of the fact that there is a spiritual thirst. And there are people who are suffering from this need. And we heard deviant teaching. You will not be surprised to know that many of them came from the US. We call them “goofy Soofis.” I don’t doubt the sincerity of those people; they are deviants, but sincere. There are people in the world who take advantage of these kinds of things, and many use their wealth and power to gain some kind of control over the Sufis, or over society. This isn’t anything new to Islam. During [the rule of] the Abbasid dynasty, things were similar. There seems to be these cycles of history and time, cycles of degeneration that come about. I’m not so sure where I am standing on this cycle of generation and degeneration.

I would like to remind you that Islam, in its essence, is founded on *‘aqīda*. How do you translate *‘aqīda*? Correct belief; conviction or belief, but correct conviction, sincere conviction. Of course *‘aqīda* has to be based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah of Rasūlallah (sal). So you have the situation, especially among some of the American Westerners whose spiritual understanding and experiences are not based on the *‘aqīda* of Qur’an and Sunnah.

Then there is the group of people who may dress and act the part, but again their interests are power or control or [having] a following of people. Then there are the real people of *‘aqīda*. When you mix them together, it’s very interesting. It’s like water and vinegar. You get bubbles. I think that because over the centuries [there have been] miraculous and

unique stories – which are wonderful and good for the believer and the student – and because they are very attractive to people, there is a tendency for people to consider those stories or miracles as the template to determine the verity of any teaching. That’s all fine, but the Prophet (sal) was someone who did not advocate miracles. There were plenty of miracles, but what was followed was not the path of *karamat* but the path of *hidayat*, revelation. That’s what we should have our faith in.

The subjects of spirituality and spiritual refinement are integrated deeply into the teachings of Islam and Tasawwuf, but they are only accepted if they reflect the authenticity of the Qur’an and the Hadith. The foundation of spirituality in the Qur’an and the Sunnah is available to everyone; not just to the Sufis. What is available to the Sufis is the methodology with which to transform the individual from just a believer to a person who is *murad*, who is called by Allah to very special things. The point of Tasawwuf has to be about personal as well as societal renewal/*tajdīd*, in the context of Qur’an and Sunnah. It can’t be just about praising a “god” somewhere, because people praise gods all the time. In jungles, they praise the god of the trees. We know, wherever you look there is the countenance of Allah, so that’s fine; but it has to be something much more. If one holds firmly to the rope of Islam and to the hem of Rasūlallah (sal), you discover there are a lot of remedies for healing any spiritual need.

You will find that if you sincerely look to the Qur’an, and if you sincerely look to the Sīrah and Hadith of Rasūlallah (sal) you will find clearly an understanding of the *nafs ammāra*—at least that it’s there—and that *atazkiyā an nafs*, the purification of the *nafs* is possible. If one sees the manifestations of an uncleansed or impure *nafs ammāra*, one can be sure they are not on the path of Rasūlallah (sal). Just like the utterances of Rasūlallah (sal) are *sahih* (they are the authentic guidelines), so too, a devotional person actions are also *sahih*/authentic. This is not usually how the term is used. People do say things that

are not authentic, or not truthful.

It really behooves a student of Tasawwuf to pursue within themselves sincerity, devotion, devotedness, and *taqwa*. If you do that, you begin to realize the real subtleties of these practices. There were an awful lot of people who were phenomenal scholars. I would guess at least half of those people were *hafez* of Qur'an. I think one of the things that stood out the most to me was the power of *suhbat*. That was the real beauty. If you don't allow the *suhbat* to transform you or to inspire you to dive deeper into the pursuit of knowledge, piety, and transformation; if you don't really allow the practices and presence of being in the company of other good people to transform you, then what is it you have? What do you have other than interesting conversations with people, which one uses to somehow label themselves with as spiritual beings because of the company they keep, as opposed to being humble and allowing the knowledge, wisdom and *bāraka* of those meetings to transform you.

On the micro-level, the same thing applies here. If you keep the company of one another out of tradition, or you keep the company of one another out of a sincere desire for community, but you don't keep company and adjust your words, actions, thoughts, and piety to reflect the purpose of being together, then that's how you get lost. That's how every Muslim and every Sufi can get lost. If you use it as an encouragement and a sharing of a common bond, goal, practice and *dīn*, then those stories of miracles and personal experiences reinforce one's capacity to change, to be transformed. Otherwise, it's just a kind of convenient friendship or communal existence, often without dialogue, without proper dedication of time and effort to *atazkiyā* of the *nafs*.

Understand the purification of the *nafs* is not something that has to be a terribly difficult and painful situation. It's like saying, if you have water, good soil, and sun, the chances

are the plant will grow. [We] keep ourselves in the company of good people doing good things for a good purpose. [You keep] refining yourself so that the next time you are in the company of good people, you are better equipped. You come with more to give. You come with something you thought about from the last time you were there, and you engage in good conversation. The beauty of that gathering was there was never a lapse of good conversation, [whether it was] on the bus, in the *zawiya*, over breakfast, in the desert, over lunch, over dinner. When there was a lapse in it, or a potential lapse in it, it was because you were with the wrong people. Many deep subjects were talked about, as I understand. You have to ask yourself: why should you have to convene a meeting to do that among the *shuyukh*? If the answer is, so you can go back and exhort your people to have meaningful conversations, meaningful relationships, meaningful standards and guidelines that come from the ‘*aqīda* and *akhlaq* of Islam, and the *Sīrah* of Rasulallah (sal), then it means something.

To take your guidance from the Qur’an for your work—no matter what your work is: for your counseling, for your gardening, for your computer writing, for your teaching, for your technical work—to take it from there is a guarantee of not only cleansing and refining yourself and your character, it is a guarantee of success or quality at least. Stop separating the outer from the inner, the work from the religious, the spiritual from the goofy. Spirituality doesn’t have to feel good all the time. People are not measuring their existence against the Qur’an and Hadith, against the ‘*aqīda* and the principles of Tasawwuf. That’s how people of Tasawwuf become disdained and feared and told they are *kafirs*.

I hope you get my point. There should be good conversation, and reasons for gathering. There should be purposeful attitudes. There should be laughter and fun and enjoyment like a family has, carefully, not insulting or harming, hurting, or speaking in a negative

way. You keep the atmosphere of the *suhbat* going so that anything that enters into that atmosphere is like getting a dose of nitrogen for the plant. It's not just sincerity. You get a shot of spiritual fertilizer in the right company, when the breeze is flowing through.

I keep exhorting you to understand the value of what you have: the practices, and the company you keep. There is a lot to get from the meditation. There is a lot to get from the opportunity to be together and speak on subjects that are at least reflective of the teachings of Rasūlallah (sal) and Allah Swt. At least, if you talk about the latest fashions or whatever, try to put it in the context of *akhlaq* and '*aqīda*. Don't go the way of the Salafis. Embrace the world and the things we have to do in the world, but see if you can find a way to do that truly spiritually. Then to me I think you are a Sufi. *Asalaamu aleikum*.