

July 31, 2009

Khutbah

Title: [Strive to Continue on the Sair-I-Suluk](#)

DVD title: Penetrating the Inner Meaning of the Dīn:
The Journeyer Seeks to Know More

Opening Prayers

Allah (Swt) reveals to us in the Holy Qur'an in Sūratu-n-Nahl:

Surely Allah enjoins justice and kindness and generosity to those near to you and forbids all that is shameful and that which is wrong and lewd acts. And He admonishes you in order that you may remember the Truth. Fulfill the covenant of Allah when you have taken it, and do not break the oaths after you have confirm them when you have made Allah the guarantor of all.

(16:90-91)

And again what Allah Swt says that I just read to you: that He has commanded that you be just and impeccable. Remembrance of Allah Swt is the best of all actions and He is the Superior, the Glorious, the Honored, the Faultless and the Magnificent.

The greatness of the truth that is revealed in the Qur'an is sometimes overwhelming by its simplicity. Of course, the result of that is that we live with this assumption that we understand everything and that we do not have to think about things. These great truths in such brief *sūrah*s give us a lot to think about if we do choose to think. For example, in Sūratu-l-Fajr, Allah (Swt) tells us something that He reveals to the Prophet (sal) in the context that we have recently been speaking about. He says: **“O you soul whose self is at**

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peace. Return to your Lord pleased and well-pleasing. So enter the ranks of My worshipers and enter My garden.” (89:27-30) It is a formula. Again, there is another reference: “...**and a soul in Him Who perfected it..”** (91:7) These brief statements have such profound meaning. We know that the function of the *dīn* of any religion in general and of Islam more specifically, is to give or to bestow order on this life, and to establish an outward harmony upon which the basis and the foundation of each of us can return to again and again, inwardly, and have an opportunity to return to, ultimately, our origin. This journey toward the interior direction that we speak of quite often, the *sair-l-suluk*, is most important to us who are on the path of *tariqah*.

This universal function [of the *dīn*] is especially true in Islam, because Islam is not just the last religion of humanity. I explained the other day to you why [this is so] when I spoke to you about the role of Prophet Mohammed (sal). But [Islam] is a Revealed Truth, clearly revealed, a Divine Injunction to establish a certain order in human society. [It is] an order in our own selves, an order within our own world, our souls. At the same time, it not only makes possible an orderly outer life, but an orderly interior life to prepare us inwardly to return to our Lord and to enter into this Paradise, which is none other than the Divine Grace of the Divine Beatitude of Allah (Swt). Allah is, as we know, the First and the Last. We know that He is the *adh-Dhāhir* and the *al-Bātin*, the Outward and the Inward. By the inner play of His outwardness, He creates an interplay of separation or otherness, differences and diversity, which we need to come to understand, to work with, to live with, and to apply the Compassion and Mercy of Allah (Swt) to.

You may know, of course you do know, the ‘*āyat* that precedes the ‘*āyāt* (16:90-91) that I quoted to you speaks to this. Allah (Swt) says: “**From that day we will raise up from every community of believers a witness against them from amongst themselves...**” (16:89) He talks to us about the necessity of community in many ways. Allah Swt says in

other places that if I wanted to, I could have made you one community (ref. 16:93), but I made you different. And I will raise up in your community ones that will bear witness against you—meaning that there will be the ones who present the Truth, as did Prophet Mohammed (sal), upon which you have a measurement. It is not to be an accuser, but a measurer. He brings us back to our origin to understand the context in which He has created us. Because the *dīn* (in general, Islam; and specifically, this *suluk*/journey) makes possible for human beings to move from the place where we are born to the place where we originated.

In a sense, it re-creates the structure of creation itself, which issues from Allah Swt and returns to Allah Swt, [giving us the journey of] how we should live our lives as a model in this creation, which we are always striving for. We should not bemoan the fact that we are always striving for that. We shouldn't complain. We shouldn't complain of our faults. We shouldn't complain when we have failures, setbacks, because this is part of the journey. If you love climbing mountains, you don't complain about the rocks under your feet. If you love to sit in meditation, you don't complain about the silence or the loneliness that you feel. It is part of the reality of the attraction. There is a dimension of our spiritual life that is called the outward, and a dimension that is called the inward—the *bātin* and the *dhāhir*. These dimensions in Islam have other names too. There is the *shar'īah* and the *tarīqah*; and the *haqiqah* is the truth that emerges from the balance of these two states or these two places.

From another point of view, we can correspond the same meanings to *islam*, *ihsan*, and *iman* as we spoke the other night. *Ihsan*, in general means surrender. But we also know it to mean safety and security, knowledge and faith. From the Sufic point of view, *ihsan* means to act as if we see Allah everywhere; and if we are not, know that Allah (Swt) is seeing us. That is, therefore, to act with some understanding of the benefit of acting

virtuously and perfectly or as perfectly we can before the One Who has created us—just as we show deference to a great person. Although the whole of the Qur’anic revelation is called Islam, from the perspective of what we speak about, not only those who follow the tradition of Islam can be *mu’minīn*. Those who possess faith, Allah Swt tells us, have *iman*. Those are the people who are defined as Muslims—not by their birthright or the nation or the language they speak. Nor do all those who are *mu’min* possess the degree of *ihsan*, which is a high degree of virtue, a sense of perfection, the sense of the beauty and the sense of the Divine Presence. This means, though, to penetrate to the inner meaning of the *dīn*, we have to look more deeply at things, as I spoke last night in detail about seeing and hearing.

This revelation of Islam is meant for everyone—everyone who is destined to follow this tradition of seeking this truth or knowledge. Not all people are destined to find the inner path. It is certainly enough for a person to have lived according to the Shar’īah, to surrender in Islam, to do good works, to try to live by the will of Allah, to die in grace and enter into the Jannah. There is no question about that. But there are those among us who yearn for something more, not more than that ending, but yearn to understand more, yearn for that sense of Divine Presence in the here and now; who love Allah (Swt) and whose tendency and propensity for *muraqabah*, for *tafakkur*, for study, for insight compel us to seek a path of inwardness.

Not to remove ourselves from the world—to be in the world, but not of the world—to seek the inner essence of things that we accomplish, to understand in a deeper way everything that is manifest by the Creator. The revelation of Qur’an also provides this path for people such as those men and women who strive to perfect our *iman*; who live with *ihsan*; who try to return to our Lord with happiness and gladness, while we are still walking on this earth. This is controversial to some people, but then, no real Muslim has

avoided real controversy that I know. We see it, even in the politics of Islam today, which I will not get into. But the concrete embodiment of the manifestation of the Will of Allah Swt, which is the Shar'īah and which is the exoteric dimension (in the sense of governing our outward lives and choices), leads beyond the usual understanding of life into a spirituality, into a path that is beyond just a physical understanding of day to day life. It can be separated in many different ways.

Whether a person is Sunni, Shi'a or Sufi, or has a slightly different take on the inner life, really, we are looking at the same thing. Allah Swt has only created one reality. Not many realities. Through Tasawwuf, we see it as dimension in Islam as a way. In another way, perhaps, our other brothers and sisters in the world look at inner ways and outer ways in different ways, but we are still looking at the same reality, the same expression of Divine Truth. There is this intermediate region between us: the outer and the inner world of our practices, and the applications and the guidance and the doctrines of Islam in our daily lives, like when we reflect on the inner teachings of the Shuyukh. People like Ibn Araby (ra) or Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) or Jellaludin Rumi (ra) or Imam al-Ghazali (ra) are always pointing to the Shar'īah in another way. It is their experience.

We are looking at the experience of those who came before us. They reflect an inner understanding of how those teachings affect, not only us, but the whole community. In fact, many of our prayer manuals that occupy an important portion in our lives in the world of Islam were written by Sufi masters. Many of them were written by those who had a deep, profound insight into the inner realms of things of life in *irfan*. Many of the things that uplift our souls are the *du'a* of great souls, like Iman Zain al-Abidin or Iman Jaffar Sadiq. These were the people who had the *dhawq*, the taste of the inner and the outer. Occasionally, one domain enters into the other domain, and you find in the sayings of the founders of different *madab*—Iman Malik and Iman Shaafi, Imam Hanbal, Imam

Hanifa—this taste is slightly different.

We are Americans. We have different tastes. We like Moroccan food one day; we like Indonesian food one day. We like Italian food another, Chinese food another day, Japanese food another day, American food another day. We are these globalized people called Americans. Of course, all that different food makes you sick. It is better to eat one food on a regular basis than to eat all these different foods all the time. But it is a matter of taste, and we are still appreciating the food that Allah (Swt) provided for us. Somebody makes rice one way; somebody else makes it another way. Somebody does couscous instead of rice. But everybody puts a chicken or fish on top of it, or at least some onions or vegetables.

We read these writings; we do the prayers; we make the recitations and something happens to us. When we are speaking of *irfan* or Tasawwuf, one is really speaking of *qalb*/heart. There is the turning of the heart, and sometimes it is the churning of the heart. The milk becomes butter when you churn it, because the butter, the essence penetrates all of the milk and you have to separate those molecules. So you churn it. The Light and the Love of Allah (Swt) and the Truth permeate our heart. We have to churn our heart to get it out. Let go of our fears and our worries and our doubts. Be the best person we can be, and not expect the other person to be the person they can be. Pray for them, but we must be the best person we can be—tolerant, patient.

Allah has put us where He has put us to learn something great, not something terrible. Do not close down and hold back. Sometime we are afraid to open ourselves up, because we are afraid that if we open ourselves up, we do not know what we are going to be filled up with. Or if we open up, everything inside of us will empty out. We will become empty. That is alright. It is alright. Who are the people who churn the hearts? They are

the people who are the greatest believers, the *awliyā*, the *ambiyā*. Khwaja Abdul Ansari, the Saint of Herat, in his supplications gave an example of the yearning of the heart for the ineffable, for the Infinite and the Divine in a very common, devotional prayer that is recited by many, many, many believers around the world. He said (I translated it into English):

*I live only to do Thy will. My lips only move in praise of Thee, O Lord.
Whoever becomes aware of Thee casts out all other than You. O Lord, give me a heart that I may pour it out in thanksgiving. Give me a life that I may spend it in working for the salvation of this world. O Lord, give me understanding that I stray not from the path. Give me light to avoid pitfalls. O Lord, Ya Rabb, give me eyes that see nothing but Thy Glory. Give me a mind that is filled with the light of Thy Service. Give me a soul drunk in the wine of Thy Wisdom.*

Here is a prayer to Allah, inward, that speaks about how to live in the outward. The outward is necessary. It is the basis of the point of departure for the *sair-l-suluk*. The experience of the Divine is imminent, because He is present in the beauty of nature, and in the beauty of every day life, and in the love in our hearts and in the passions, and is the essence at the core of all our desires, even. Our understanding is dependent on our awareness of this Divine Presence as being transcendent. No one has the right to approach Allah (Swt) Who is present (the Divine Presence), without surrendering some portion of themselves to that which transcends what they are able to comprehend, just as Nebi Mohammed (sal) had to surrender his mount to come near to the Throne of Allah (Swt). No one can approach Allah (Swt) without accepting at some level the Shar'iah, because this is the means through which we come to understanding and to travel on this path of *tariqah*. By accepting this, and traveling on the path of *tariqah*, we can finally

reach a deeper understanding of an inner truth, *haqiqah*, which lies literally at the heart of things. It is beyond anything that is limited. The things of this world disturb us. They cause us pain, misery. We see what is happening in Iran, in Iraq, what is happening in other parts of the world, what is happening in this country, what is happening in Afghanistan. I don't mean just to say where there are Muslims. We see what is happening in China. We see what is happening in Africa, Darfur. And they pain us.

So we have to turn inward and internalize, and become aware of the dimensions of Allah (swt) that He has provided us with. We have recourse to certain prayers, recourse to certain rites, recourse to certain rituals. The very nature of which is to cast light upon to help us to see, to be more at peace, to seek understanding, to create an inner foundation for an inner realization, an inner revelation. And we can have that revelation and apply it to day to day life. We have the *salat* and we have Ramadān coming. We have the *hajj* and we have the *zakat*, and the *jihad* of our soul, the *jihad al-akbar*. All of [these are] our means to interiorize our outer lives, that enable us to live and to serve and to die as individuals who are destined for something greater, [which] Allah calls the great reward. But these rites and these rituals are not limited to their outer forms, as some Muslims believe.

In *jumah [khutbah]*, we are to speak of Islam on Fridays, mostly in the way we should practice and live it. When we gather together all of us who have sought the inner way of life and understanding of Islam, it is important to again affirm that there is a deep, inward dimension and meaning where we can reach to and we can function at, where we can expand our *iman*, deepen our *islam*, and awaken our *ihsan*. Yes, at many *khutbahs* people speak of the five pillars of Islam, *salat* and the importance of *namaz* and the fundamental rite of *wudu*. That is fine. But we stand here because we seek something more. We seek something more and Allah reveals to us. The form of these prayers is derived directly

from the *sunnah* of Rasūla (sal). They are considered to be the most important of religious acts. Prophet Mohammed (sal) said:

The first of his deeds for which a man will be taken account on the Day of Reckoning will be his prayer. And if it is sound, then he will be saved and successful. But if it is unsound, he will be unfortunate and miserable.

But then he goes on and he says something very interesting. He says:

If any deficiency is found in his obligatory prayer, the Lord (who is blessed and exalted) will issue instructions to consider whether His servant has said any voluntary prayers. So that what is lacking in the obligatory prayer may be made up by the voluntary prayer. Then the rest of his actions will be treated in the same fashion.

Allah Swt always gives us a way in. Some might say a way out, but I say a way in. This *salat* that we do every day is a very profound aspect of the interiorization of the external life. The average Muslim sees the prayers as a rite and ritual to be done—and done sincerely, *alhamdulillah*—and the rewards are there. Clearly, Allah Swt says to the Prophet (sal) that the rewards are there. But for those of us who try to stay on the *sair-l-suluk*, we have to find also other things. We want to know more. Tell me more. Maybe this is the spiritual analogue to the materialistic western society. Western society's materialism says, "I want more and more and more," and the person seeking Tasawwuf says, "I want more and more and more."

The *salat*, which punctuates our daily life and which determines the rhythm of our lives and provides refuge in the storm of life and protects us from sin, has profound inner

meaning. Just as its performance is obligatory, its imprint on society as a whole and on an individual is profound. The way we are seen, and the way we understand or identify our collectiveness, our community, our fundamental basis is that there is so much to be learned from it. So by virtue of the degree of our *ihsan* and the *bāraka* contained within the forms of our prayers, we are able to attain some state of inwardness and stay at that state. We are able to return, thanks to these words [with which] we repent, and thanks to the movements that we make, and all of the inner echos with some state that the Holy Prophet (sal) revealed to us—a state of perfect servitude, a state of nearness to the Divine, both of which characterize the inner journey. The interior life of a Muslim or a *mu'min* is based upon the power of prayer, the grace of Allah (Swt), and the grace of the issues of the language in which we pray, [all of] which lead us from the world of outwardness to the world of inwardness, from the world of separation to the world of unity. You can look at every pillar of Islam in exactly the same way, just as I looked at *salat*.

So as Ramadān comes upon us, we want to remember the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (sal). We want to remember the teachings of those who came before us. We want to remember the words of those who cried out in love of Allah (Swt) and His Prophet. The Egyptian Sufi Dhul Nun said, *“O Allah, I never hearken to the voices of the beasts, or the rustle of the trees, the splashing of the waters, the songs of the birds, the whistling of the wind, or the rumbling of the thunder. But I sense in them a testimony to unity and a proof of the incomparableness that Thou art the All-prevailing, the All-knowing, the All-wise, the All-just, and the All-true. In You is neither overthrown, nor ignorance, nor failing, nor injustice, nor lying. O Allah, I acknowledge You in the proof of Your handiwork and in the evidence of Your acts. Grant me to seek Thy satisfaction with a satisfaction in the light of a father with his child, remembering You in my love for You with a serene tranquility and a firm resolve.”*

These kinds of prayers we wish would spring from our own lips, from our own hearts. I hope, *insh'allah*, that a sense of our purpose has been revived again on this *jumah*, as we dive a little more in the understanding of *irfan*, to find the strength and the permission, if you will, from the Prophet Mohammed (sal), from the Qur'an, from the *shuyukh* to travel on this journey with the utmost confidence and to know that it all lies in our ability to struggle and to live according to the way of Allah (Swt). Of course it is important that we succeed, but it is more important that we make the effort. It is more important that we strive.

I pray that Allah (Swt) hears our inner call and permits us to continue on this *sair-l-suluk*, to imbue our lives with deeper appreciation for the every day rites and rituals. A lifetime commitment and opportunities have been given to us in this *jihad-l-akbar*, to embrace our challenges and difficulties, and to be in the company of good people, without whom we could not make this journey.

Closing prayers.