

August 7, 2009

Friday evening

Title: [Sincerity: Creating the Form to Fill Your Life](#)

DVD title: The Shapes and Forms of Sincerity:
Striving to move from the Common Level to the Level of the Elect

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. In the Hikam of Ibn At'ala Iskandari (ra), he speaks about *ikhlas*/sincerity. Hazrat was always keen on this word sincerity, and wanted us to speak and think about it a lot. You find that among the *shuyukh* of the Shadhiliyya, the topic of sincerity is very important, as it is among the Naqshbandi Tariqah.

Sincerity is a quality which is often claimed and rarely practiced or seen. Iskandari (ra) says, "*The life's breath is the presence of the secret of sincerity in them (in the life's breath).*" That's a pretty incredible statement, if you want to take the time to think about it. It refers to everything that takes place within the realm of your life's breath: your words, your thoughts, your actions. When we say a person is sincere, or we question their sincerity, we may be questioning their words, but most often we are questioning the actions that would follow those words or the completion of them. "I'm really going to help you do such and such a thing." Or even if you tell someone how beautiful they look. You are referring to something in the physical sense, because actions always refer to physical movements. A component of sincerity is the expectation that it originates in the heart.

Sincerity can take many shapes and forms. You can be very, very sincere in telling someone something positive or negative; or you can be very sincere in not telling someone something, because you sincerely don't want to hurt them or confuse them. The

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

exact opposite circumstances can be motivated by sincerity of the heart. Often it is very, very difficult to decode it. The shapes and forms of sincerity are the qualities the mind focuses itself on. The *ruh* and the *sirr*—the spirit or life-breath of the *ruh*, and the secret—are implanted in everything, especially in living beings. Perfection takes place through good intentions, sincerity, and actions that follow. So when the heart is devoted, it is said, to the worship of Allah, one is really unlocking the secrets hidden within intentions and action. And one is really addressing the eternity or the core issue, the core reality of life's breath.

The truthfulness that is assigned to sincerity; the value that is assigned to sincerity in truth—if it's true sincerity—has a lot of force or power. Arrogance and ego, self-aggrandizement and selfishness are negated by sincerity. If one wants to admit that they have ego or arrogance, if a person finds the root of sincerity in themselves, they find the means to overcome that arrogance and that ego. If you are ostentatious, showing off, or arrogant, it detracts from whatever action you perform, even if it looks to be a good action. An arrogant person doing something in the name of truth, or religion, or another value devalues what they are doing because of their arrogance or their pride. The life-breath he is referring to is the existence of sincerity in one's actions. One's actions are forms and shapes.

We have a whole art form based on it, dance: the expression of ideas in form and movement. Since the things we can form can only be formed by our awareness or our consciousness, in a way, you can say that we are limited to some degree by our experiences or our contact with descriptions of others' experiences. We make assumptions based on them. Allah's Messenger (sal) said, "***That which I most fear for my community is hidden shirk. It is showing off, ostentation.***" He also said, "***Fear is hidden shirk. It creeps like an ant.***" ***Someone asked him, "What is shirk?" He said,***

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

“Showing off, ostentation.” It takes the character of the human being and puts it into a form that is not pleasing. It is not humble. It is insincere. When he was asked about sincerity, the Prophet (sal) said:

“Not until I ask Jibreel (will I speak about it).” When he asked Jibreel he said, “Not until I ask the Lord of Might.” When Allah Swt was asked, He said, “It is one of my secrets that I have entrusted in the hearts of those of My slaves who love Me. No angel sees it so that he records it, and no Shaytan sees it so that he can corrupt it.” One of them said, “This is the station of ihsan, that you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him.”

So the sincere person’s heart is deferential. A sincere person’s heart begins to see shapes and forms in this universe, or in words, or in actions that have an effect on this world and on our actions. There are many levels of sincerity: the level of the average person; the level of a person who is of the Elect (one who has knowledge). Then there is the sincerity of a person who is of the Elect of the Elect, a person whose knowledge totally drives their action, and makes them move in certain directions, and create certain things, certain forms and manifestations that construct circumstances and forms that are positive, constructive. The sincerity of the common person is the one I spoke of before. They are sincere in intentions, but they have removed themselves from understanding the Divine Presence.

Sincerity is to accomplish things in this world: to create manifestations, forms, content out of actions that are very limited to this world. We are all familiar with preserving health, money, power, providing for yourself, having things and property that one owns. The sincerity of the Elect individual is to do certain actions for the sake of gaining the Hereafter, and preferring the Hereafter to this world. In so doing, one is turning their

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

back to some degree on this world. The sincerity of the Elect of the Elect is to remove all the differences between this world and the next world so that in this world one is working for the sake of the good, and tries to fulfill the requirements that Allah Swt has asked us to fulfill. But at the same time, one is not doing it for any goal other than the pleasing of Allah Swt and the creating of harmony and balance within one's own self, as I spoke earlier today on *mīzān*.

When we become so engaged in our apparent physical reality—I spoke today about our health and physical body—when we neglect our sou, and we neglect our spiritual heart, when we neglect our inner development, we move further and further away from not only our own sincerity, but [we move away from] being able to recognize sincerity in another human being. It's not that everybody is exactly the same, and one person's modality of sincerity has to be exactly the same as yours or mine, but you can recognize sincerity if you, yourself, are sincere. If you deny yourself the opportunity to be sincere, if one continually constructs and re-constructs what is familiar to them, what motivates and pleases them only in this world, and one doesn't bother to make a linkage between the things they are constructing in this world and what is good and beneficial to other human beings, or good in the eyes of Allah Swt, one becomes insincere. Even though they, themselves, think they are being sincere, they are creating structures and actions that cover the heart, and make them intolerant, immoveable and intractable in their attitudes and ideas.

Imam Ali Abu Talib said, *“Sincerity with the sincere is to remove creatures from one's dealing with the real. The first of creatures is the self. Sincerity among the lovers is not to do an action for the sake of the self; otherwise, it is affected by looking for compensation or inclining to the portion of the self. For the unifier of sincerity is to remove creatures from dealings with the Real by not seeing them in actions and not*

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

relying and relaxing with them in state.” He is saying that if you make your actions strong, based on honest sincerity—not fear, not doubt, not mistrust, not overriding preferences, not fear of loss, or strictly greed or desire—but if you make your actions sound or sincere by being free of trying to control every situation, free of trying to exert only your power, free of trying to just convince others, free of trying to construct things that are merely safe and secure for you, then your sincerity will elevate you and your words and actions. Elevate the forms of your actions to mostly beneficial.

To make it practical: take for example our gardens. They take a lot of labor. They take a lot of love. From the very beginning, you know they can’t feed everyone everything. It’s obvious. Yet at the same time, a few people put a lot of energy and effort into them. You can say that Mustafa loves gardening, so that’s why he does it. Like Isa loves cooking, so that’s why he does it. That’s fine. But that doesn’t make it free of frustration or effort. We all know that love takes a lot of effort, a lot of challenge, and sometimes a lot of confrontation. You can make the metaphor: when the ground has become frozen over the winter, you have to take a big machine and cut into the ground, and turn it over and coax it to be ready to grow—because in the mind there’s a vision of the garden. The vision is not based on the fact that everything in the garden will feed everyone everything, and otherwise it’s not worth doing it. There is not an evaluation going on like that. “It’s silly to grow a garden that will not feed everyone.” No, that’s not it.

Or conversely, you may grow too much of one thing and it will rot, because people won’t eat it. And you haven’t made arrangements to give it to the poor. You haven’t made arrangements to sell it in the market place. So you will till it under saying, “It’s okay, because it will put nitrogen in the soil and come back next year as something else.” What you construct in your mind around the garden is very important. You can sincerely want to grow a garden; that’s fine. It takes form. You sincerely want to feed as many people

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

with that garden as you can. That's another level. That's the Elect level. You encourage people, "Come, eat from this garden. Look, it's blossoming. There are fruits now." There shouldn't be one thing that rots in the garden. Of course, you didn't see the cucumber on the very bottom under the straw. But you know what I mean. Nothing should go bad in the garden.

The form is there; the intention was there; everything was done sincerely, but it has to take cooperation from other human beings. "Look, everybody, we all have a stake in this, even though only some of us grew it, it is for all of us." If the some who grew it only did it for themselves, we'd have one terrace, not five. We would have one garden, not three separate areas of garden. You have to come and participate in it. You have to come and eat from it. You have to convince people to do that. "Aren't you hungry? Don't you like fresh fruit and vegetables? Don't you taste the difference between a home-grown tomato and a store-bought one? There's a big difference. Can't you taste a fresh cucumber or bean? Don't you want to graze in the garden?" "Yes, of course." "Well, you have to come and participate in it." "Yes, I will, tomorrow."

So you pick some of it and put it in the walkout. Sometimes it's gone, and sometimes it sits there for a long time. Instead of dying on the ground, it dies in the walkout. Maybe someone doesn't know how to make a dish with an onion, or turnips. One year we grew Brussels sprouts. So you say, "I'm going to give you a recipe." It takes a form. Now you've made it even easier for the person. "Here, follow the recipe. You'll have a delicious lunch or dinner, and it will come from our garden, and I even picked it for you. Next time you come and pick it." "Okay, I'll do that." This is just the level of the Elect. There's the person who grows it, and maybe picks it, and tries to convince the people to use it, and gives them the means (the recipe) to do it. What's the benefit of it? Not just that's it's our garden and we eat it. Your health benefits from it. You feel it is part of our

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

ummah, and we are taking what Allah Swt gives us and adding to it, and doing something with it. This is just one example. What's the other example?

The other example, obviously, is your spiritual practices. What's the difference? Consider this a garden. Consider your prayer mat a terrace. There is no difference. I don't have to spell this metaphor out step by step for you, do I? If I do, you can be lazy and have the excuse, "Later, I'll think about this metaphor." "Later, I'll go to the garden." We're sitting with the Shaykh now, and he is providing the food for us, and reminding us that there is a recipe. We can follow the recipe. He'll even walk us through the cooking of it: "Bismillah, 3 times. Sūratu-l-Ikhlās, 9 times. Darūd Sharīf, 10 times, etc. etc, this transmission and that transmission." He'll walk us through it. But as soon as we eat from that little dish, we go and don't eat again, until he walks us through it again and again, on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday nights. Is there a difference? There is no difference. We let things rot.

We don't do it (the spiritual practices). We have the sincerity at the level of the common person; trying to get sincerity at the level of the Elect. If we operate on the level of the common person, things rot in the garden. We only take what "I" need. Only do what "I" want to do. The forms we create are imperfect. They cannot sustain the need, like creating a pot that has a crack in it. It will carry some water, but a lot of it will leak out. You have to make more trips to the well, and get tired easier. What is the difference? The garden is only one example. I can give you the example of the buildings, or of the work. I can give you the example of volunteerism. I can give you the example of paying bills on time, or of putting up the Ramadān lights. I'm not doing this to be critical.

There is the example of your fixation with your physical health, but no regard for your body. "I'm concerned about being sick, but I don't take care of my body." Or, "I take

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

www.circlegroup.org

care of my body only when I'm sick, and never when I'm well." It's the same metaphor. Why? Because it's all consistent. So someone says to you, here's a good diet for you. If you eat it, you won't have to be so concerned with your body. Your body will heal itself. You won't have to run to whatever doctor all the time for many different treatments—not that you don't do that sometimes. It's part of the constructive program, not the destructive program. I'm not anti- going to get an acupuncture treatment. I'm talking about forms create in your mind by your sincerity. "Oh, I sincerely care about how I look and feel." Then it should manifest in the form that sincerity and caring would manifest in. Who wants to go look in the mirror?

You could do things like Allaudin and Jamila do: they grow the sprouts and have fresh eggs and are careful with their diets. Who would know they are 85 years old? They look just in their 60's! This is not a conflict between the principle and the action. Allah praises them by giving them a reward of the results of the form. They create a good intention, the form is a good form. Do you think that all of you cannot benefit from *suhbet*, from knowing them, from that example, from the example of the garden and the people who work in the garden, who pick and can [the tomatoes], and do this and that? Dare I talk about the elect of the elect? It takes physical effort for them to till the garden, a lot of sweat. She weedeats, knowing the weeds will grow again anyway. They are going to keep growing. The bamboo keeps shooting up. With all the physical effort it takes, there is no question, *insh'allah*, anymore that they love it and do it. Isa says, "I love cooking in the kitchen." He doesn't say, "I love cooking in the kitchen, why don't you pay me for it?"

You achieve the level of the elect of the elect in the garden, but you may be rotting in your spiritual life. They are not transferable. But the qualities you learn from one are transferable to make the other, because the horizon of being able to stand behind a tiller is

only relatively a few years. Eternity is a lot longer. You can hide behind the fact that you are not so sure there is an eternity, so why get concerned with it. But the analogy still holds. If you have achieved the level of the elect of the elect of knowledge, you help people just out of generosity. That's your nature. "Why do you help people all the time?" It's your nature. You realize your nature, and you're not happy doing anything else. "I'd rather you be unhappy and be like every body else, than be happy and stand out from the rest of us." That's ridiculous, isn't it? We wouldn't have a garden. Or we'd have one that didn't have a good vibration. We'd have to change the gardener every year. "Oh, I did the garden last year. It's your turn to do the garden this year."

The elect of the elect of health? You live your life a certain way, and you don't get sick very often. I don't get sick very often. *Alhamdulillah*. If you have to, you go to the doctor, finished. Musa can tell you: if you turn your life over to those people what they can do to you if you don't watch them very carefully. It's not that they are insincere people trying to kill you, just that they are ignorant. They only have limited knowledge. Do you want to talk about health care in the US? How much corruption are they not talking about? An estimated 30 billion dollars lost to corruption in the health care industry. How much money would you save in prevention? Hundreds of billions of dollars are saved in prevention.

Do I have to run through the whole metaphor again for you about your spiritual life? But if I don't, you'll be too lazy to do it and you'll say, tomorrow I'll do it. It's the same story again. If I don't give you the recipe and sit down with you, are you going to follow it? You get up and say, "The Shaykh really touched me tonight. I'm going to do all my prayers and sit in the morning and evening, instead of once a week when I'm with the Shaykh." But you won't do it unless you have the right *niyyat* in your head. You won't create the form and fill the space. The space is with you. You are carrying the space with

you. It's in your heart. "I want to know God. I want to know the Truth."

There is a cook on tv who is not really a cook. She makes it all up; she has no training. She created a form, performs an action, helps people cook (and that's fine), gives them recipes, but her recipes come from nowhere. Some of them are good; some of them are not good. It is not that I am against creativity, but any good music comes from a *maqam*, a form. There is improvisation; but it has to have a form. Raise yourself from the common, and come to the stage of the elect—and the elect of the elect? He loves doing the garden. It requires physical effort, but no mental effort. He doesn't go home complain about the garden, unless a deer or groundhog or fungus gets in it. You know that every year there might be that; and you compensate for it. You catch the groundhog and drive him over to the neighbor's land and let him off. You are not punishing yourselves by eating sprouts and good food, are you? No. You love it. The teachers love to teach. You love to cook. You have to transfer it to your spiritual life. *Asalaamu aleikum.*