

September 2, 2009

Wednesday

Title: [Systems and Latā'if: The Dynamic System of the Latā'if](#)

DVD title: [Approaching Latā'if from A Systems Point of View](#)
Ascent through the Dynamic System of the Latā'if

Dinner blessing: O Allah, the face of Your moon is half, almost, and we have a lot to accomplish in this month yet—a lot yet to accomplish. We pray, O Allah Swt, that You enable us to fulfill our *niyyat*, and encourage us to review it every day and to renew it every day. [Enable us] to understand and dive deeply into our *muraqabah* and our *muhasabat*, and to sustain the good relationships we are establishing and re-establishing and renewing in this community. Protect those who are traveling... mostly, keep them from traveling during Your month. For those who have to travel, have them return home safely, keep their fast and direction turned toward You, O Allah. You have only asked of us one month out of every year. Give us the strength to turn toward You in every instance. Fulfill our deepest yearnings and desires, and don't bring us challenges we can't meet in this month, O Allah Swt. Relieve us of our anxieties. *Amin.*

Suhbet: Let's go back for a few minutes on systems. As you listen to this, you should try to understand the interrelationships. Some of you might find it interesting to understand what happened in Western philosophical thought to almost in a way stop the development of systems thinking. What I'm trying to convey to you, not for philosophical but for very practical reasons, is an aspect of systems theory, which is called in the field "system dynamics." It is a method for understanding the dynamic behavior of complex systems. We certainly understand that we are a complex system.

The basis of this is recognizing that the structure of any kind of a system is comprised of many circular, interlocking and interrelated relationships that operate on multiple dimensions and in different time frames. For example, we have a solar calendar and a lunar calendar. Things are happening in both dimensions, but they are calculated in different ways. That's probably not a very good analogy, because it is something that can be perceived easily. There are many relationships among the components that may not be equal or apparently equal, or even apparently similar.

For example, you have hearing, sight, taste, smell, and feeling but they are significantly different than *qalb*, *ruh*, *sirr*, *khafee*, and *akhfah*, the other organs of perception. It requires us to shift the paradigm of association and understanding to think about the subtle organs of perception or these *latā'if*. You can't think of them in the same way that you think of hearing, taste, and smell. Yet, they interrelate with one another in this thing called the human body, and in the multiple systems of the human body that are very complex. I don't need to describe to you the complex systems of the physical body. As a result, we turn our attention to the behavior or way in which the individual components operate. That is, we try to unlock our perception, or try to perceive *qalb*, *ruh*, *khafee*, *sirr*, *akhfah*, *nafs*; earth, air, fire, and water. In doing that, we find that they don't operate by the same rules and laws. As I told you, time is not relevant to the *latā'if*, but space is to some degree; therefore, we have to change the foundation of our understanding. I gave you the example of letters, which are significantly different than words, though words are comprised of letters.

Any system is a dynamic and complex whole; because of that, it interacts in some kind of structural and functional way. At the same time, there are elements in it that are not easily perceived or understood in the normal ways of perception. People who deal with this in terms of physics or philosophy, organizational or social theory understand that you

are talking about different energy, different material, and different information that is flowing. That's exactly what is happening when you are contemplating through your *latā'if*. There is a certain type of energy: we call it *fayyāz(d)*. It has a material effect on us; but not only that, it is designed for us to unlock and transmit certain information. The other thing is to see that this physical body of ours is like a community of individual components that act together, yet separately, and don't overlap in their role. At the same time, they are inter-dependent on one another for the functioning of the whole, which is much different than the totality of any of its component parts.

The concept of community or *ummah* is very, very basic. It's not just a sociological descriptive concept. Community is a constant set of reflective realities within the human being and outside of the human being, in groupings of human beings. You will even find astrophysicists talking about communities of solar systems. We are participating in something, consciously or unconsciously, that is reflected throughout the universe. The key to being able to perceive what we are participating in has been given to us and lies within us and these *latā'if*.

The other thing one can learn from the analogies of systems theory is that systems are composed of different entities that are seeking equilibrium, *mīzān*/balance. But in that seeking of equilibrium there is an inherent kind of chaos sometimes. There is dynamic behavior that may oscillate or be chaotic. It's complex; it's non-predictive in certain ways. Just like a human being displays different types of behavior. You have the sum total of all these systems operating, including our knowledge and consciousness, our genetic disposition—we will leave aside for a moment the concept of destiny—but that too. This gives rise often to unpredictable and chaotic behavior. Most often, you cannot look at one thing as the causal factor. Aside from the fact that someone here ought to be thinking something like, "Of course, there are certain things that are acceptable socially

and ethically, etc. which also add to the complexity of the system.”

But in terms of the holistic reality, you have a group of interdependent parts acting in time and space that are, themselves, composed of something else. Some of the things they are composed of are not acting in time and space; hence, you get concepts like quantum mechanics and quantum events, simultaneity in the universe, non-locality (things that happen here and appear there), things like that. Every time before I talk about the *latā'if*, I am trying to reframe it, getting you used to thinking from a more systems point of view, instead of a literal “Memorize this. This is what that *latīfa* does, and that is what this *latīfa* does.” Understand we are dealing with a dynamic reality, and that the practices we have are extremely unique. They are extremely relevant to understanding our capabilities and potential, and developing *kashf* insight, ability, and intuition. Moreover, they are very relevant to being able to accept that there is such a thing as Divine Presence, and that there is such a reality as Allah Swt, the dynamic attributes and expressions of the creative force in reality.

You don't have to go through all kinds of intellectual gymnastics to understand this; but at the same time, you should be true to yourself and ask yourself the relevant questions, like: “If I did understand this, and I really did grasp this, and if my faith was really profound faith, then why wouldn't I be taking advantage of everything that has been given to me and doing everything I could to be aware of that Divine Presence? Why do I allow myself to think that if I do certain ritualistic, formalistic practices in a limited structure, that it is sufficient?” When you put up the argument: “I really don't know if I'm making progress. I really don't experience anything. I really don't think I'm a very good student,” why don't you see that as basic narcissistic behavior, or self-destructive, or self denying behavior?

If you really understand, and if you are going to accept on face value faith and practices, then you have nothing to complain about. You cannot then legitimately say, “I don’t know if I believe or not,” or “Yeah, I believe, but...” and have all these equivocations and qualifications that most people have. At least, you would be true to something. If you have faith, do your practices; put your head on the ground, make *du’ā*, read Qur’an, and that’s enough for you; if you don’t raise any other questions, and don’t challenge Allah Swt or any of the realities, and accept what you are given, then that’s it, finished. But we don’t do that, do we? We play both ends. If you want to understand a deeper level of faith (remember the relationship between *iman*, *islam*, *ihsan*, and *muraqabah*, *mushadadah*, *muhasabat*), and you want to make that progress, then you have to shift the paradigm of your thinking. The tools are there to do that, but you have to use them.

That’s why I keep returning to this, to remind you of what we are talking about. That’s why each *latīfa* is more than just a thing, and more than an organ of perception. Within its own self, it is comprised of different elements and constituents, just like your blood is comprised of cells, which are comprised of hemoglobin, which are comprised of etc., etc., until you get down to the molecular level. By the way, today they took the first picture ever of a molecule, one million times smaller than a grain of sand (I didn’t ask which beach). You have to realize that a *latīfa* is not just a monolithic thing, either. It has dynamic constituents within its own existence/reality; and its reality is not physical, though we look at it in terms of where its placement is in the physical body. It, in and of itself, is not physical. Just like I could tell you that energy is not physical, but you certainly can feel energy in your body. Love is not physical, but you can feel love in your body. Anger is not physical, though it may manifest physically, and you can feel it in your body. So we shouldn’t be surprised that the *latā’if* are not physical.

We say, “My heart is filled with love for you.” We have no problem with that statement.

But when we say, “My heart/*qalb* is a *latīfa* and it has a certain color, association and function; though it’s not really in the heart, that’s where we look for it.” You have no problem with that, do you? When we do certain practices, we also direct them through the *latā’if*, for example, the fourth transmission of the second circle on *rahmat*, or the first, second and third transmissions of the first circle on *per ser al faq*, *tajalli al faq*, and *per ser an fus huwal al batin*. We have no problem when it comes to things we are used to; but we have problems with some things that are introduced to us that are new, and that raise all these questions. Questions are fine, *alhamdulillah*. It’s fine to do a crossword puzzle, but every once in a while you flip to the back pages to see what the answer is. Each *latīfa* has a particular set of moral injunctions and contemplative practices that are necessary in order to illuminate that *latīfa*. *Qalb* requires humility for enlightenment.

I’m not going to talk about destiny/*qadr* tonight, but keep it in mind as an element. Destiny is the intention of Allah Swt for you, in a sense. *Qalb* requires, for it to be enlightened, prayer, long prayers, and *istighfar*/repentance. *Ruh* requires that we overcome distraction, and not to be distracted by the world. Fasting is to awaken *ruh*. Your spirit, your soul becomes more attuned to its origins when you are fasting. You know that’s true; you’ve experienced it. For people who don’t fast, it’s harder. As you become more enlightened, brightened and awake, you see things differently. You might call it a vision, but you see with the eye of insight, *basīr*. A vision is not like some angelic fantasy, but can be you seeing something very clearly with your vision. In the world or circle of *sirr*, the seeker must follow more and understand Shar’iah. They must be persevering and steadfast.

In *khafee*, one has to avoid things that are maybe permitted to other Muslims, but you, yourself understand them to be distractions. Also in *khafee* you should do a lot of *dhikr la illaha il’Allah* and allow your heart to expand. In *akhfah*, one has to follow not only

the outer Sunnah, but the inner Sunnah, and develop what some call the Mohammedī mentality, the attitude of the Prophet Mohammed (sal), not just the actions of the Prophet (sal). At that stage, you find great people like Imam Jafar Sadiq (ra), Zein al Abedin (ra), great people who wrote *du'ā* that just came flowing out of them. This is the state where in their *akhfah*, they are constantly making *du'ā*. This is the language of Hazrat Adam (as). It's also where you gain real knowledge and wisdom – *marifah*. We say a person who has entered the stage of *akhfah* is a *wali*, has a saintly awareness.

What is also unique about our path – and people find it very strange sometimes – [is that we have five different approaches]. “You’re the *shaykh* of five Tariqahs? How do you do you become a *shaykh* of five Tariqahs?” Naqshbandī teachings come from the Khwaja Khwajagan. What these Masters of Wisdom realized, and what any of us who do cross-cultural work also understand, is that every grouping of individuals, and any grouping that individuals come together under has its own unique culture. In any culture, there are certain principles that operate. According to Naqshbandī belief, each Tariqah has its own unique characteristic methods, means of ascent through the *latā'if*.

For example, what is unique about our Tariqah is that we have these five different approaches: Naqshbandī, Mujaddidī, Qadirī, Chishtī, and Shadhilī approaches. The Chishtī approach is to go beyond your own “I-ness” through love. Lose yourself in the beloved, for example. Among the Chishtis you see the *qawwali*, ecstasy, and out of the body experiences, a lot of *sema*, a lot of *hadra* and things like that. You see this in other Tariqahs also. If I give you the Qadriyya practice, for example, [you would see] that [it] has a tendency to be very, very rigorous and ascetic for the person who responds to that—long prayers, fasting, struggling with the *nafs*. Notwithstanding the *fadl*, the blessing and *nai'ma* that flow through Sufic Orders, we begin with the Mujaddidī line because we feel that it is very difficult to just struggle with your *nafs*. You live in a society where it is

very, very difficult to be in ecstasy all the time. Struggling with one's lower nature on a constant basis really takes a kind of asceticism, as the Catholic Church found.

These activities take place mostly in the '*ālam al khalq*, the world of creation. Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) believed that this kind of asceticism could refine the *nafs*, the lower self. But they alone cannot lead an individual to the '*ālam al amr*, the world of command, because you become so involved in the world of creation, and the struggle with your own self and your ego. This is a lifetime struggle, as Nuradeen can tell you with his clients. We all know this is true. When someone has antisocial and psychological disorders, it's very difficult to think of something outside the world of creation.

From our perspective, balance is the most important thing. The danger, of course, is to become too worldly. The more dynamic of the Naqshbandī teaching is put forward as a much more balanced and rapid developmental process that looks at the systems that a person is involved in, and coalesces the dynamism of the systems, and deals with the complexity and chaos through the illumination of the *latā'if*. I could say to Nuradeen, here's a tool for your clients who are drug addicts or alcoholics. They can look through this magic glass and see clearly what their problem is. This will end their addiction because they will begin to have control over their own choices and their own self, which is very important. We actually have that tool. It's something that stimulates the *latā'if*.

The goal is not to do what most other orders do, which is to try to have some kind of mystical experience. In Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī Tariqah, we get a *dhawq*/taste of that mystical experience, especially at the beginning of the journey. *Indirajun nilhayat fid bidayat*: we include the end in our beginning. The mystical experience is tasted at the beginning, the end that everybody else is searching for. It could be great love, a deep

commitment, a feeling of “I’ve found the path,” a clear understanding of the role of the *shaykh*. You see from the very beginning. Then you get into the distortions, because of the *nafs*. You have to awaken the *latā’if* to make that experience extend and become your normal perception.

This is the cornerstone of Naqshbandī- Mujaddidī teaching, the idea that we include the end in the beginning. This taste of what is beyond our potential occurs because of the meeting of two specific elements that form the real foundation of Naqshbandī Tariqah. One is the *bāraka*, or the irradiation, the projection of the *nai’ma* (translated as grace in this case) through the *shaykh* to the *latā’if* of the student. The second thing is the effort on the part of the *murīd/a* to attract that *bāraka*, that permanent state of being in remembrance of Allah Swt. The *shaykh* can transmit, but you also have to throw out your net, so to speak. You have to have that *jedhb*, that attraction, to attract it to you. It is through the synergy of these two elements that the *latā’if* are activated—the transmission and the attraction.

If I sit and give you a transmission, but in your heart you are not reaching out and trying to receive it, you might just have it just brush past you. You might just have a sense of it. You have to capture it. When you do, that’s when the *latā’if* are activated. Traditionally, first what happens is the *shaykh* transmits the *bāraka* at the time of the *bai’at*—or in our case, at the time of the transmission before the *baiat*. But at a certain point, the *bai’at* has to be there, because the transmissions in the *latā’if* become more and more relevant, focused and powerful, meaning more condensed. There are ways it is done, like the *shaykh* touches you with four fingers (and there are reasons for that) on the heart. We do *wuqufi qalbi* three times. Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) claimed that the heart in this process is imprinted by fixing the *naqsh*, the sign of Allah Swt on the heart. That’s why in the *sema*, when I walk by you, I write Allah’s name on your heart, either with one finger

or four fingers. It's not just some cultural tradition. It's a means.

Symbolically, the heart signifies ardent desire, love, intentionality for something that you seek. The lover seeks the beloved—Majnun and Leila. At the time of *bai'at*, or around that time, the new *murīd/a* learns the proper way to perform the *dhikr*. What is the proper way? When the *dhikr* is done correctly, it attracts the *bāraka* of the *shaykh* and the *shuyukh*. It attracts the *madad*. It's like a magnet. *Bāraka* is positive; the magnet is negative, and it attracts. It seems complex, because different people are at different stages. You can sit here and get one thing out of this talk, and another person gets something else. Yet, it applies to you and them at different levels. At some point, the emphasis moves toward the adapting of oneself to the Sunnah of Rasulallah (sal), to the behavioral qualities and mentality, the way of thinking of Rasulallah (sal). At that point, as one studies, talks about, reads and hears the stories of the Prophet (sal), one begins to realize that just that process itself, in the *muraqabah*/meditation quiets your *nafs* and consequently makes you more open and aware of that Divine Presence. In so doing, the heart and each *latīfa* takes one into a much deeper, meditative and contemplative state.

The *shaykh* always begins the work with the heart. It is our understanding and belief that until the heart is well developed and open, it is very hard to make other progress. The meeting between one's intention and sincerity [with] the transmission to the heart by the *shaykh*, and the opening of the *latīfa* of *qalb* is very dependent on a person's sincere, continued, positive effort in using the compendium of practices that are provided: meditation, *dhikr*, Qur'an, prayer, service, etc. Most Sufis consider *ikhlas* (developing sincerity) as the first step. When the *qalb*, which is the most important *latīfa* at this point, is opened; then one by one the *shaykhs* in our Order initiate each *latīfa* when the person is ready for that. Sometimes that's done over distance, and sometimes directly like we do here. Sometimes it's done in order, and sometimes it's not done in order, depending on

the individual.

There is a story about one Pakistani *murīd* who was given *qalb*. Then after a period of time the *shaykh* felt his heart had been illuminated, and he gave him *akhfah*. The *murīd* said to the *shaykh* that he was surprised that the *shaykh* had forgotten *ruh*, *sirr*, and *khafee*. The *murshid* said to him, “Don’t you remember? I gave them to you in a dream.” As soon as he heard this, the *murīd* recalled the dream and immediately went into a state of *wajd*/ecstasy. These kinds of transmission take place in the ‘*ālam al mithal*, the world between the waking state and the sleeping state, between the ‘*ālam al khalq* and the ‘*ālam al amr*. You have the world of command, and the world of creation. Where is the horizon/*afaq* between those two? There is some point where the world of command ends, and the world of creation begins. It’s called the ‘*ālam al mithal*. It is not just a little dot. It is a world in and of itself.

How do you know? Because you go to sleep every night. You have sleep and wakefulness. What’s in the middle of that? Your conscious sleep, called the dream state. You are awake, but you are asleep. That’s called the dream. You are often extremely insightful and sensitive in that state. You are not distracted by what’s going on outside, or a noise in your sleep when you are having a dream. You could be on a train or an airplane, and you are asleep and having a dream. How is that possible? The senses of the ‘*ālam al khalq* are closed, and the senses of the ‘*ālam al amr* are open, but you are in a semi-conscious state. Do you see the spiritual analogy? Everything that is in the physical is also in the transcendent.

In the transcendent, the *shaykh* [in that story] sent the *murīd* the transmission in the dream. What’s the analogy we can relate to? The sleep, dreaming and wakefulness that we go through every day. Allah Swt always provides a way for us to understand. You

can read text upon text on what are the qualities of a true *shaykh*. What are the qualifications? The most essential qualification of the *shaykh* is his *bāraka*, that he possesses the *bāraka* and can transmit it as a catalyst for your own transformation. Originally, the term *bāraka* appeared in the Qur'an, but only in the plural, signifying blessings. Sufis use other terms to describe this blessing, like *fayyāz(d)* (Divine Effulgence) or *tawajjuh* (effacing). They have different meanings, but refer essentially to the same capability of the *shaykh*, as well as their *khalifas*, to be able to project that power, that Divine Effulgence into the body, the heart, and the *latā'if* of the *murīd*.

It is also found wherever the focus is on these *awliyā*. That's why Sufis go to the tombs of saints to receive the *bāraka*, not because there is something physical there. *Bāraka* is not limited by time and space. How do you know? My father passed 40 years ago, but he left an impression. If I would go to his grave, I would remember him more, because I'd be thinking about him. What are memories? They are also a form of *bāraka*, if they are blessings. Without that *bāraka*, a person who aspires to make progress makes it very slowly through their own self-effort. For this reason, the Naqshbandī Order values this *tawajjuh*, this turning, facing and transmission, the ability to project the *bāraka*. That's the reason for traveling and visiting the *shaykh*.

Some people are collectors: they go from *zawiya* to *zawiya*, *khanaqah* to *khanaqah*, getting some *bāraka* from the *shaykh* there. But they don't do the practices. They collect the *bāraka* and feel uplifted, and sometimes go into a state of ecstasy. But nothing sticks, so they have to keep going back again and again. They move from place to place, and never commit themselves to any one practice. As important as *bāraka* is, and I'm sitting here telling you about *bāraka*, but you never hear me talking about my *bāraka*. You don't hear *shaykhs* talking about their *bāraka*. You either get it or you don't. We don't talk about it. It's not that there's a rule about it; it just makes no sense to talk about it. It

would be like me talking gibberish to you.

This *bāraka* comes through the *khalifas*, the *shuyukh*, and through the beauty and majesty of Allah’s Creation. It can be transmitted and focused by the *shuyukh*. You go to the mountain, the river, the ocean. You see the flowers and the animals. You feel the *bāraka*. You are there collecting it, but it has to be transmitted to you, to your *latīfa* for it to lift you to the higher states. Every day there are distractions, things that would drain that from you. Understand that the *shaykh* serves merely as a conduit for that transmission. I’ll end with a little story I have told you many times.

About a year or two before Hazrat (ra) passed, he and I were in London. You know that I never doubted his word until the time he gave me my *ijāzah*. I told him that at the time (in a different way), and he said, “One day you will understand.” So I was sitting with him that day in London, after Maghrib prayer and before Isha. I was talking to him about sincerity. It got animated, and I said, “After all, all we are is conduits for the transmission of the *fayyād!*” And he said, “Aha. Finally you understand. Now you understand why I made you the *khalifa*.” It was a simple thing like that. It came in the midst of a conversation. It didn’t come as a question, but a declarative statement.

What you have to understand is that *bāraka* is being transmitted all the time, or its being blocked. It’s not coming from me, but through me. If you block me, or something before me, it’s being blocked by your attitude, fears, doubts, questions, or overriding mental gymnastics. I gave you the talk months ago about how you submit to the taxi driver and to the doctor and all the rest of it. This is why we have to start again talking the next time about *tawajjuh*. *Asalām Aleikum*.

