

September 3, 2009

Thursday

Title: [Systems and Latā'if: How the System of the Latā'if Functions](#)

DVD title: [Approaching Latā'if from a Systems Point of View:](#)

- Characteristics of an Adaptive System
- Transmissions, Bāraka and the Latā'if

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. A number of years ago, I was in Mexico with Huberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, his student (South American philosophers who were the most knowledgeable people in cybernetics and complexity theory) when we were having the conferences on science of consciousness. I often wish I had a conversation with them on this level, but I never did. The only person who picked up on something and got some vibration from these Sufic teachings – it wasn't on this subject of the *latā'if* at all, but on the subject of the transformation of the *nafs* – was Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel laureate. My concepts were brought to him through his Greek chief assistant. I met Prigogine in London at a conference. Afterwards, he asked me to please write paper on the subject and give it to him. I told him I'd be happy to do it if I could share the Nobel prize he would get for it! That was just to establish my bona fides on the subject, which are not very much.

Most of us – in fact, all of us I should say, except a very few – are used to interacting with systems that human beings created on a conscious level. Most of us don't pay much attention to interacting with the systems that human beings didn't create, like our bodies. like the universe around us, like nature. If you think about it, we are unconsciously interacting with systems we didn't create, but we are obsessed with interacting with systems we do create. All of which, I think we can agree, are faulty, like the stock market, the banking systems, industrial systems, manufacturing systems and institutions

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we think are flawless because they've been around a long time. Most of us are obsessed with dealing with systems we can control or human beings created; consequently, I wish I could sit here and say that whenever there is any fault in them, they are corrected. If that were so, we would be operating on the same principle as *ijtihad* and *tajdīd*.

The Prophet (sal) told Mu'azz if he made a mistake, don't worry about it, we'll correct it. He would make a decision in Yemen, and if it was found to be contrary to the Sunnah or the Shar'īah it will become evident, and it will be adjusted or corrected. In shortspcak, that's what happened. He was concerned, as governor of Yemen, about how he would make decisions that were consistent with the Prophet (sal). That was more than *taruf* or *mujamala*; it was a serious consideration. It is not like my saying to you, "Go open up a group in Washington." You might think, "I'm not qualified," and you might feel that; but you'd go ahead and do it anyway. Unfortunately, we can see that many of the systems created by Allah Swt (however you want to articulate the Creator) are self-regulating to a large degree.

Just when you think something is going to go extinct, it doesn't; it adapts. One of the most important concepts within systems theory, and complexity, and cybernetics is the adaptive capacity of an entity, or the resilience of the system in the face of what science calls perturbations or disturbances. Why? Because we see that nature tries to minimize the loss of functionality in individual systems. Our bodies do that. There is a tendency for the human being to try to do that. We have an adaptive capability. When human beings create systems, though, they tend to not be very adaptive—like the health care system that started with Harry Truman. Truman failed, and Kennedy failed, even though he ran on health care change. Lyndon Johnson finally did something, and had Harry Truman on his deathbed saying it was finally done. Here we are, in 2009, and this whole thing started in 1946 or so. Systems don't adapt.

Another characteristic is called allopoiesis. Allopoiesis is a process through which a system produces something other than the system itself. Where the systems give way to things like autopoiesis, a process where the system regenerates itself through self-reproduction of its own elements, or through a network of interactions, or renews, repairs and replicates itself in a flow of matter and energy, which Maturana says is a very essential property of biological life. For those of you who are creative, and following what I'm saying, you can start to see some relationship between this and the *latā'if*. You can begin to see that if this is a characteristic of biological systems, it must have an analogical reality somewhere else; in the spiritual realm. There must be a bridge between the physical, biological reality and the spiritual reality. The human being is essentially a spiritual entity, if for no other reason, [because] it tries to understand its own origin, consciously or unconsciously.

Unconsciously, people try to understand their own origin by thinking and acting like they are going to live forever, not contemplating death—death being a transformation. In religious terminology, it's a step, a transformation. The *latā'if* are in relationship to the *bāraka* that is transmitted into the system. What is very important is that we are talking about the *latā'if* as if they are in the body, i.e., [as if they are a] biological form, but saying they are really not biological entities. You identify them through the physical body. You relate to them through the physical body, but they are not part of the physical body. They are something other than the system itself (allopoiesis). Do you see how consistent the system is? We are identifying these *latā'if*, saying they are two fingers underneath the right breast, and in the sternum, and in the '*arsh*. It's not just us, the Hindus and the Buddhists identify the chakras. They are not part of the body, but they transcend the biological reality. They are outside the system, but they are in the system.

I try to avoid shortspeak in talks like this, because it throws everyone back to the structuralist functional paradigm, back into the traditional way of thinking, but you could say, “Allah Swt was very clever when He created this universe.” Now I have masculinized and affirmed this God that is anthropomorphized: “Allah, He did this.” In the system Allah Swt creates, Allah’s Presence is present, but Allah Swt is far beyond the system. We approach Allah Swt through our physical life, through our meditation, which is trans-physical or non-physical, but involves the physical body. Indeed, breathing, focusing, *tawajjuh* and other things are as well. There is a presence we call Divine Presence. But that presence, though present, is somewhere else outside the system; but it creates the system. This is perhaps what Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) was trying to say when he talked about *wahdat ash-shuhūdi*, as opposed to Ibn Araby’s *wahdat al-wujūd*.

I want you to become more and more comfortable moving between these apparent concepts. But they are not just concepts; they are realities. When you are on the train from Lynchburg to Washington, on the subway from Manhattan to Brooklyn, you don’t have to be looking at every stop as it goes by to know you are on the train or the metro. To get to your destination, sometimes you have to get off and switch from the red line to the blue line. Each train is very important, to get you to that destination; each has its function. Each *latīfa* has its function. You have to move from one to the other to get to your destination. The destination is not so much a place, as it is an understanding or awareness of your own self and where you fit, and where you came from. I left from the Alexandria King Street station and wound up at Union Station in downtown DC. Where you started and where you end up—it is the realization of the means to arrive.

Just like other things that are analogous in life, you buy into certain systems in order to maintain or regenerate your well-being and your health. You go to the doctor, and the doctor tells you that you need an operation. You get into that system and have the

operation, and *insh'allah* it's successful and you recover, and then you have health. It's not like we are not familiar with entering and exiting certain systems. It's not unfamiliar to us to understand that we take the advice and guidance. We have to be receptive; hence, that's why I talked to you the last time about receiving the *bāraka* and the transmission. These experiences of *bāraka* are not limited to being a Muslim or a believer. I gave the example of a German man who heard the tape of Saif Rahman, and he went into ecstasy. If you want to change and adapt the system, something has to be introduced into it.

Look at what the Prophet (sal) did. He introduced this very bizarre series of transmissions that he received from Allah Swt through the Archangel Jibreel (as) to people who, for thousands of years, had been stuck in another kind of system. It was, in reality, not so much a religious system as it was a socio-economic system, using religion as a means to gather people in a place in order to make money and have power. It's not that they believed so much in those gods as it was they knew how to market them well. Mecca was branded. People came to Mecca to trade goods, and these gods were in the Ka'ba. How are you going to change a thousand years or more of that mentality? Then you do things that are very anti-social, like not killing baby girls anymore, and freeing them; talking about compassion and mercy and equality; attacking the monetary system itself by outlawing interest. This is pretty brazen stuff. Behind it is the biological and spiritual reality that systems have to adapt and change.

We are sitting at a major place in the world where systems have to adapt and change, and there is tremendous resistance, which is dangerous. The Prophet (sal) projected some of what he received into the hearts of his followers, this *bāraka*. He turned to them; he faced them; and he transmitted to them. This is *tawajjuh*. He forcefully projected that *bāraka* into the receptive being. If you were Ibn Mu'azz and you were in Yemen (the

frontier), he told people they had to change their ways. That was the message from the Prophet of God. He was the governor of Yemen. It is not like being Governor of Virginia with all the systems in place. No systems were in place except the old system.

Let's go back for a second, to your birth. You come into this world with nothing but a biological program. You will have blue hair and [other things] determined by these genetics. As far as knowledge goes, it's a clean slate. Because you will be exposed to all these different physical and social systems; you will become conditioned. Whatever the Prophet (sal) had to do in Mecca, and then in Medina, and all the noble *khalifs* after him had to do was nothing short of re-programming people. This wasn't done through some kind of social political action, in a well-thought out plan in the back room, while smoking date leaf cigars. This was a projection of *bāraka*. That's why we have the reality of being in the company of the people who were in the company: the *taba'ain*, and the *taba-taba'ain*, the *shuyukh*.

However poor we are who have that title and that *ijāzah*, some remnant of that *bāraka* remains with us. "This is my great-great grandmother's china cup. We only have one left. My mother had four, but three broke. My grandmother had the whole set except for one. Here I have the proof they existed in one cup and saucer." It's not very functional, unless you set the table with all different tea cup sets, which collectors do. It's not a great analogy, but you understand. Some of that *bāraka* is left. It is maintained in certain ways. Throughout the Muslims world, a person like my mother-in-law who is a *sayyida* gets some level of respect because of that, especially around Ramadān or the Eid or the Hajj. People come and visit the person who is the *sayyid* or *sayyida*, who then make *du'ā* for the [one who visits]. A lot of people say they are *sayyids* and *sayyidas*, and there is no proof of it. But if you can see into the hearts of those people, they tend to be very pious people.

One is in the line of the Prophet Mohammed's family by the *bāraka*. This forceful projecting of the *bāraka*, if you are open and receive it, you can feel coming to you. "Oh, Shaykh, I never felt it." "Well, you're not open! Open your heart to me." No, that's not it. Reduce your *nafs*; become aware of the system by spending some time in it. Become comfortable with the understanding and concept. Become comfortable with the life Allah Swt has given you. Be grateful. Practice sincerity. Practice compassion. Be a kind person. Allow yourself to yearn for that harmony, that resonance, that receptivity; because you've got a date, and you have to catch this train and make this connection in order to get to your destination.

That destination is called *mowt*/death. You want to arrive there prepared. "Oh, Shaykh, that's a bad analogy. It doesn't matter whether you catch the train or miss the train; death will come to you even if you are in lofty towers." That's right, it will. You can live the last part of your life with Alzheimer's or dementia, or you can live it up to the last minute conscious, awake, aware, and making contributions to humanity and the world. We all pray to have our minds whole. If that [does] not [turn out to be] the case, it [will] not [be because] you did something "wrong." But you didn't do everything necessarily in the best way it could have been done. Or it could have been a case of not being in the right company, or not caring for your body properly, or many other things.

Tawajjuh means to face, to turn. It also means to confront. It was originally used in terms of turning toward the Ka'ba. Then it was extended to mean turning toward the *qibla*, which turns toward the Ka'ba. The Qur'anic basis for this term is a statement: **"Truly I have faced my face toward Him who has created the heavens and the earth, and I am a truthful, upright and just believer. I am not from the polytheists who associate others with Allah."** (6:79) This is the statement by Sidna Ibrahim (as). In

Naqshbandī Tariqah, *tawajjuh* signifies the *khalifa*'s projection of *bāraka* in order to awaken the *murīd*'s *latā'if*. It is the essential exercise for awakening *dhikr* in the heart of a *murīd*. Not only do the *shuyukh* perform or project *tawajjuh*, but it happens even when you are sitting with advanced *khalifas*, or even really advanced people who sit for *muraqabah*. For me to make that transmission, I envision in my own *latīfa* the Nuri Mohammed via the *silsila* of our golden chain, the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī, Qadriyya, Chishtiyya, Shadhili *silsilas*. Then I direct that toward you. That's how it is done historically.

I can also focus inwardly on the *latīfa* the person is working on, and focus my *latīfa* on that. This can take place any time, any place. It's not formal. We may sit and do it where we do it because it is easier for you, and because this is where you come to put your attention on the practices. I can transmit to you while you are sitting at your desk at work, or while you are cooking in the kitchen, or while you are doing whatever you are doing. If you are a receptive human being and you have established your attraction to the process (everybody is attracted to the process, if they allow themselves to be), then in a public or private conversation, something can transfer. This transmission can take place, and something can transpire.

There is a book that not many people recommend, which is too bad. It contains many things in the book, some of which are purposefully false in order to weed out the people who could see the myth from the reality. The author himself said this. In The Sufis, by Idries Shah, you can see this point being made over and over again. Sitting in a group of people, having a casual conversation, some transmission takes place. Enlightenment comes, or some level of awareness. I recommend to you that if you haven't read the book for a while, especially the young people, you should read The Sufis and understand the historical milieu you are a part of, and the systems that have been touched by Tasawwuf.

There are times, for example, if you are in more than one order, that I might concentrate for a period of time on one *latīfa*, and then another, and then another, to stimulate more than one *latīfa* at a time, because just like everything else in the world, you can get green by mixing blue and yellow. Some things are not so cut and dry. If this person needs to have this kind of understanding, they need to then have the capabilities of these two *latā'if* working together. Think about what an ethical principle is. If you are trying to teach a student what an ethical or moral decision is, it's not a black and white situation. You bring in many different elements. If you do this, that might happen. Do you believe that this is a better way of thinking or not? What if this happens when you are thinking in this way? What will you do? Systems are complex.

Sometimes you need the ethical and moral lens of more than one *latīfa* for any given situation. Therefore, if you have gone through a process where your *latā'if* are awakened, then the *shaykh* (and eventually, yourself) can draw from the different aspects of these *latā'if*. Like, it's fine to make a consommé with some beef in a thin, watery gravy. Put it in a bowl, and it's consommé. But a chorba is really nice, especially during Ramadān—a nice, hearty, soup. It has a lot of stuff in it. It's delicious, a meal in itself. A salad is not just a plate of lettuce, despite what some of the cheap restaurants say. A painting is not just one color, usually. A piece of music is not just one note. Allah Swt gave us things: shades of colors, different tones, and different tastes. A sommelier can tell you that it comes from this vineyard in 1973, and they used a very special cork that day. People can do that: tell you the vineyard, the year. People can do that because Allah Swt gave us these subtle perceptions, and that's with our physical perceptions.

What is the word for subtle? *Latīf*. This whole thing starts with Abu Bakr n-Sadiq, in the cave with the Prophet (sal) in their *hijra* from Mecca to Medina. They were searching for

them, and Ali was in his bed. Abu Bakr and the Prophet (sal) were in the cave. *Ankabūt*, the spider, covered the cave mouth with spider webs. The Prophet (sal) said to him, “*Lahadatu samt, dhikrullah*. Be silent and remember Allah.” We believe as Naqshbandis that this was the beginning of Tasawwuf. Later on, Bauhaudin Naqshband (ra) asserted that he received *dhikr khafee*, silent *dhikr*, directly from the no-longer-alive spirit/*ruh* of Khwaja Ghujduwāni (ra). There are two kinds of *dhikr khafee*: the first is the *dhikr ism al-dhat*, where you just pronounce one of the names of Allah. You say Allah, Allah or Hu, Hu, Hu. It’s Allah and Hu usually, because that’s the essence of all of the Names of Allah Swt. The second is *nafi wa ithbat*, a more advanced practice. This *dhikr* is also attested to in many ways in Qur’an:

Remember Allah with frequent remembrance, and glorify Him morning and evening. (33:41-42)

This is an instruction for *dhikr*. The early Sufis used this over and over again to avoid distraction. This *dhikr* brings awareness to a point of very, very refined concentration. So we sit as we sit, cross legged, and hold our hands like that. We try to sit straight, and not lean against anything (like I have to sometimes), not recline, not rest on anything, and try to stay straight up. Or you can relax and drop your head down towards your *latā’if*. Clear the mind and open yourself up to the *fayyād* coming through the *shaykh*. Ideally, you do this in the presence of the *shaykh*. That’s why we do the *sema* in the presence of the *shaykh* or a *khalifa* who has the *fayyād*. When you are not in the presence of the *shaykh*, in some cases we focus on the mental image of the *shaykh*. In our Order, we don’t do that much, *tasawwur* of the *shaykh*.

The best thing is to sit as we sit, and try to sit as close to the *shaykh* as possible. In some Orders, you’ll find that it has become a tradition to just squeeze against the *shaykh*. [You

might see] a hundred people just squeezing up against the *shaykh*. You'll see that in Shaykh Nazim's group. It's for the *bāraka*, the *fayyād*. One does that while one recites silently Allah, Allah, concentrating on the heart usually. Or it is done by writing the name of Allah on the heart, like I write it with my hands. You sit and write it over and over again on your heart, in Arabic.

I want you to remember in terms of how I started with Maturana and biological systems, understanding that this is all natural. A person's resistance to it, their anxiety about it, their reluctance about it, is like saying you reluctantly admit that your circulatory system, your reproductive system, your digestive system, and your respiratory system are somehow connected. It's the same thing. This is not about a person. It's about finding that commonality where these systems are united. **“Wheresoever you look, there is the face of Allah.”** (2:115)

I will tell you a little anecdote. Tonight on Keith Oberman he was reporting a long segment on a Fox broadcaster named Glenn Beck, who was seeing in all the symbols on Rockefeller Center (where NBC is, i.e., making them the demons) all these Communist symbols: strong men with metal rods, industrial revolution. Beck was making all these crazy statements. Of course, Oberman was going crazy making fun of Beck making fun of these things. In one segment, Beck is saying, “You walk past these things all the time and you don't see them! You hear the words and you don't hear them! People have eyes but they don't see. They have ears but don't hear!” I thought, “Ah, you idiot. You Islamaphobe crazy person, you are quoting the Qur'an!” He said, “Even there are times when good things are found in evil symbols. I have on my desk a photograph about beating swords into plowshares. It's from the USSR!” The message is lost. Don't be the kind of person on whom the message is lost. There is no reason to resist what is natural, except all this conditioning.

Some of it, unfortunately, is religious conditioning. A true Muslim would never, ever turn away from self-reflection, from remembering of Allah Swt, from repeating the Name of Allah Swt, from accepting *bāraka*. What true Muslim would do that? Never. All they are looking at is the institutions, and the fear that their institution may be taken over by some other institution, or that their power may be usurped by some other power. After all, whose power should you fear the most? You should fear the one the most that comes from Allah Swt through the Prophet (sal), and through the Prophet to the Ahl al Bayt, and through the *taba'ain* and the *taba-taba'ain*, and through the *shuyukh*. Why? It's the light of Prophet Mohammed (sal) and Allah Swt—*quwwata qahhar*. Why fear it? This is the *nafs ammāra* and the mind's conditioning—control, control, control.

Don't forget *mowt*. Don't forget the scheduled train. At least be grateful you are sitting in the company of good and sincere people. Not many people stay in one place for 30, 40, 50 years, their whole lives, not in the world we live in today. We travel here and there, but you know what I mean: to accept where Allah Swt has placed you and take what Allah Swt has given you. To not use it, or not accept it is a very serious and egregious error. I agree with you that you might find it hard to take it from me. If you find someone better to take it from, fine, but take it. Allah Swt says in Qur'an: **“Those who believe in the unseen and perform *namaz*, and spend of that which We have provided them.”** (2:2) That's the very basic thing. There's a lot more.

Asalaam Aleikum..

