

September 5, 2009

Saturday

Title: Learning to Trust the Perceptions of the Latā'if.

DVD title: Qalb is the Link between Worlds and Doorway to the Latā'if

Dinner blessing: Bismillah. Ya Allah, Your Face is shining down upon us from the man in the moon, and You are warning us. We have only 14 or 15 days left [in Ramadan] and we have a lot to accomplish. We ask of You the same thing every night: to give us the strength and insight and capability to accomplish what we set out to accomplish. We ask You for continued sustenance of our life and livelihood, our work and our community, and for us to all awaken to the reality that we are all a part of, to feel in the flow of your *fayyād*. We ask you Allah Swt to send your *shifāt* to those who are ill. You are, after all, the Healer of all healers, and the Completer of all things that need to be completed, and the Ender of all things that need to end. We ask You, Allah Swt, to send Your special blessings upon those poor souls who are living under oppression, and those who find themselves surrounded by war, poverty, and hunger, and on those souls who have lost their way in their life. Keep us on the *siratal mustaqim*. Keep our faces always turning toward You. *Amin*.

Sohbet: I hope you find yourself contemplating some of the things I have been talking about. And I hope that, *insh'allah*, you hear these things as more than informational, technical statements; rather, the intention on my part is that the words act as a transmission and evoke a sense of urgency. Understanding Sufism is not understanding some "thing". It's developing a perspective, a point of view that pervades and permeates your perceptions and your understandings, and by its nature, reduces your sense of "I"

(hence, the focus on overcoming the *nafs ammāra*), so that our reference is the reality of

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the Divine Presence, and not our preferred interpretation of it. Think of the Names of Allah Swt as operant dynamic realities/attributes. For example, think of Ya Hafidhu, the Protector. As the *nafs ammāra* is reduced, one depends more on the protection of Allah Swt, instead of one's own self; or [think of it] in terms of al-Adl, the Just. We can also put ethics in that, too. Instead of you or I determining what is the absolute, ethically correct thing to do, Allah Swt reveals what is ethically correct. It is trans-cultural, not limited by our own cultural preference.

Of course, it is a long process. It's a process of divestment and investment. So we become more comfortable relying on those "things" (a terrible word) that come to us from the *ghaib* as opposed to what we depend on in the '*ālam al khalq* (world of creation). We become more comfortable with the perceptions that come through the '*ālam al amr* (world of command), and how they allow us to perceive the world of creation, as opposed to our understanding of what comes from the world of creation—that is to say, our conditioning, our preferences, our desires, our excuses, our rationale, our opinions that reflect our physical world experiences, our culture, our preferences. Of course, this is what we depend on most of the time, because one has to make an effort to develop the sensitivity to the '*ālam al amr*.

The key, as you know, and as I've repeated in every one of these talks, lies in *qalb*, the link between the two worlds. Analogically, if you just grasp that little bit, you'll understand why we say, Rabbi-l-Ālamīn, the Lord of the Worlds. It means Lord of all the solar systems and galaxies, but it really means the Lord of the inner and the outer, the '*ālam al amr* and the '*ālam al khalq*. Where is the Lord of the Worlds to be found? In the heart of the believer. What is the heart? The heart is the link between the '*ālam al amr* and the '*ālam al khalq*. It's the only *latīfa* that has both qualities in it. It's the only *latīfa* where you can have something that is non-physical like love, and physical: the

blood and the beating organ that keeps you alive.

This is also why in the Naqshbandī Tariqah we describe the heart as being a piece of flesh. If you didn't wonder before, you can wonder now for a minute and have the answer right away. I wondered for many years about that until I realized what that meant. This is the *raison d'être*, the reason it is described as a lump of flesh.

The love that we experience in creation is only a limited taste of the love that is Allah Swt, Ya Wadūd. We can become very distracted by it. If we remember that the heart is the doorway to the other *latā'if*, the doorway from the world to the inner (the *dhāhir* to the *bātin*), we should become intimately familiar with the heart. The quality of love is more important than the objectification of love. Without the objectification of love, one would not be able to express the qualities of love; hence, religions objectify God/Allah Swt. You have a cross, or a Jesus on the cross. You have objectifications of God that one can direct their love to, but not in Islam. It is purposefully non-objectified.

What Islam provides to us and through Tasawwuf is means, a process if you enter into the flow and you learn how to perceive through your *latā'if*, and you encircle that belief with *niyyats* that are transmission, which are constructed to focus the unique characteristics and qualities of each *latīfa*. The heart, which is a doorway that purity comes out of, and impurity comes back into, is a metaphor for life. If one submits to the reality that there is another dimension (called *bāraka*- the dimension of blessing), [one sees that it] is as real as the physical world, but doesn't operate by the physical rules. Just like in astrophysics, certain observable phenomena have to be named or labeled to be discussed. So too, certain phenomena had to be named and labeled in order to effectuate this interchange between the *'ālam al amr* and the *'ālam al khalq*, the *bātin* and the *dhāhir*.

Just like in the physical world, we look for proof through our senses. We say, “If it looks like, smells like, and tastes like, it must be.” There are also means through which we identify the things of the *bātin*. And we use the attributes of the *latā’if* for that. A few of the things are essential: eyes that see, ears that hear, a tongue that tastes, a nose that smells, and skin that feels. One has to realize that gratitude, compassion, submission, trust, obedience, faith, and love are the tools of the *latā’if*. These are the means through which we perceive. Just like something smells like something [else familiar to you], you say, “That’s it!” But we have to develop the sensitivity, the subtlety of being able to use the *latā’if*. Ya Latīfu. The subtlety pervades the *latā’if*. That’s why they are named that. These are subtle organs of perception.

They are subtle compared to the physical world, but they are real. They are no less real than the taste of your pie or the sight of the flower, or the sound of my voice in your ear, or the smells in the kitchen, or the hard floor against your backside after sitting here for 2 ½ hours. It’s real. But you have to submit to realize the reality. You submit to your senses. Don’t you submit to your sight, to your olfactory sense, to your taste buds? Don’t you depend upon your taste buds to tell you what you are eating; your nose, to tell you what you are smelling; your eyes, to tell you what you are seeing; your hands to tell you what you are feeling? “Oh, hot! That feels hot, but it might not be.” “It looks like a blister, but it might not be. I don’t trust my eyes.” “Hmm, flesh burning smell. Might not be; I don’t trust my sense of smell.” Don’t we submit to our senses? What is so hard about submitting to the *latā’if*? You have to learn how.

First of all, you have to believe they exist. “They exist because the *shaykh* told us they exist.” That’s not why. They exist because Allah Swt told you they exist in Qur’an. That’s good enough for most people, but what Tasawwuf says is, “Okay. Allah says it exists, but like everything else, we want to experience it.” It is not because we doubt it;

but if someone tells you there's an ocean, you'd really like to see it. If someone tells you there's a mountain, you'd really like to see it. Something inside of you drives you to want to experience it. Yet, these two worlds have to come together in order to really experience it. You can't experience just the *ghaib*, because we have a physical body. When we die, that's another story. We can't just experience the *physical* world, because we have a sense of right and wrong, good and bad. We feel compassion and peace and love. We're not automatons. We have names for these things. Allah Swt gave us names for things for the specific purpose of understanding, articulating, and affirming what we are sensing through these *latā'if*. But they are undeveloped. I gave you the example of the sommelier (wine taster) before.

We have to understand that these two worlds come together in the center of our being (Shaykh indicates the heart). It's protected; Allah put ribs around it, because it's the most important organ. Allah Swt says in the Holy Qur'an, "**Those who believe in the *ghaib* and perform the prayer and spend of that which We have provided to them.**" (2:3) Believe in the *ghaib*, do the prayer, and spend what you have. There's a formula. As Sufis, we look at that in a certain way. We don't look at the Qur'an the way most people do. We don't hear it the same way most people do. We don't read it in the same way other people read it. I gave an example once: it's like discovering that the telephone book is some form of prose. The Qur'an uses these words with a different intention, a different meaning for the Sufi. Who's a Sufi? A person who has Allah Swt in their hearts, a real *mu'min*. Many people are called *mu'min*, but Allah Swt is found in the heart of the believer.

To the Sufi, believer means something different than the average Muslim. Unbeliever means something different also. Do you believe me? Do you believe what I'm saying? Why do you believe that? What do you mean that you believe it? Do you accept it?

Having belief or lack of belief in religion has a lot of different implications. We have to consider belief not only in our intellect, our mind and religion, but it's a matter of the heart. Allah Swt says, **“You believe not. Rather say, ‘we surrender,’ for belief has not yet entered your hearts.** (49:14) Until belief enters your hearts, you surrender. Don't say you believe if you don't yet. Just trust. Then if you surrender, the belief enters you hearts. You do the practice. You do the things that make belief happen. You have to believe enough to do that. This is a subtlety of the Qur'an.

Why is it a subtlety? It is a subtlety, because it is seen through the *latīfa* of someone like me. I see it clearly. But it's like telling someone, “Don't you see that ghost?” “No, I don't see a ghost! You're crazy!” It's like saying, “I saw an atom!” “How can you see something that doesn't exist?” “But I saw it. I have an instrument through which I am seeing it called an electron microscope.” Can I see it? Sure. But unless you believe the system you are looking through, and you believe there is such a thing as an atom, you won't know what you are seeing. I'm naming it for you, “There's an atom.” “Oh, yeah! I saw it.” “How do you know it's an atom?” “He told me so.” I could have called it a blatom or a zatom, but no one would know what I am talking about. How do I know it's an atom? Because this phenomena was named this, under that circumstance, for this reason, and it's consistently accepted as this. People use it as a frame of reference. Is it an atom? It's a nothing. It's whatever it is.

Allah Swt gave names to things. He taught Hazrat Adam (as) the names of things. Why? To give reference to things. What makes it real is the experience of it. That's *rahmat*. How do you know? When this or that happens, it is called compassion. Fine. When it looks like this, smells like this, and tastes like this, it's an apple. What's an apple? A name. It's not a reality. We accept it as a reality. What is your belief? Allah Swt says to believe, you have to surrender; because in the context of the *‘ālam al amr*, your

experience is different than the *'ālam al khalq*. All these names are a bridge to the creation for that which was created: human beings. But before human beings were created, there was the *ruh*. Did Adam (as) exist before he was Adam (as)? Of course. Did he know the names of things before he was taught them? No. Why was he taught the names of things? Because he was created to be on this earth as a link, a *bab*/doorway.

There's a story. Evil came to the door and knocked. The person said, "Who's there?" "Evil." The person said, "I'm not going to let you in!" So evil camped out by the door. Then good came to the door and knocked. "Who's there?" Good is here. "Oh, open the door and come in!" Guess who came in with good? That's the story of Adam and Hawa. Evil came in with good. Snuck in, just like the cat. It hangs out by the door, and as soon as the kids walk in, the cat zooms in. As soon as the cat runs in the door, he relaxes, stretches out on the carpet, lies down, very quietly. "I'm in now, and now you have to get me out." Open the door, "Here, kitty, kitty." No. "Here's some food." No. You have to grab the cat and throw him out the door. That's your *nafs*. Evil came in with good.

How do you see that? Do you see it with your physical eyes? No. But I'm telling you, and you're hearing it with your physical ears, so you will see it with your physical eyes to some degree. If you have a cat, every time it comes into the house, you'll think of this. Something transcendental was explained to you in physical terminology, which has no meaning other than it represents an event, an experience, which was basically what Adam (as) and Hawa (as) had, an event or experience. It's through the *latā'if* that we see. Most people don't know that they can see other than through their eyes. Most people who hear that you can see other than through your eyes, don't want to. Or they might want to, but they don't want to make any effort to do that. Fortunately, you have to make an effort. If you don't, you don't get anything. "Here, kitty, kitty." The cat's not going to go out of the house, so you have to surrender. You are not surrendering to something of the *'ālam*

*al khalq*, you are surrendering to something of the ‘*ālam al amr*’.

There’s trust in the world, and then there’s trust of Allah, of the Dynamic Reality. There is love in the world, then there’s the transcendent love. Because things have to be of the eyes and the ears in this world, it becomes a book. It becomes written, and transmitted. This transmission, this Qur’an, has to be approached. How do you approach it? You have to use your eyes and ears. The words lie flat on the paper. You can’t feel them. You can smell the ink, but not get the meaning from it. You can taste the ink, but not get the meaning. You have to use your eyes and ears. “**Iqra bismi rabbika!**” *Iqra*, read! *Iqra* means more than read. It also means to attend to, engage, embrace, surrender... to whom? Rabb/Lord. Rabb is another word that describes something you can’t see. It has analogies in the social world, especially in the middle ages. But you can’t see “Lord.” What does it mean?

**This is the Book wherein there is no doubt, a guidance for the God-fearing who believe in the unseen. (2:2)**

This is a guidance for those with *taqwa*, who believe in the *ghaib*, the ‘*ālam al amr*’, the world of command. What does it mean, “to believe in the unseen”? How can you believe in something you don’t see? You can see it, but not with your eyes, but with the *latā’if*. Allah Swt gave us the organs of perception to perceive what cannot be seen. What we can see with our eyes is only a reflection of what can be seen (i.e. experienced) through the *latā’if*. How do you know what’s happening that you can’t see? What just happened? He flushed the toilet! How do we know that? We heard it, and everyone has experienced the toilet flushing. But how can you prove that what you heard is what happened? You’d have to go in and do it yourself. Do you trust that’s what happened? Yes, because we can relate to it on a very personal basis. If I heard a sound I had no way of relating to, I

wouldn't be sure what it was. If I was sure of what was happening behind that [bathroom] wall, is that faith in the unseen? I don't think so!

So what is the unseen (*ghaib*)? In this world, there are things we understand mostly through our senses. There are things we understand through our experience, which always involves our senses. We [identify] things we are able to perceive with our senses by saying, "I know." How do you know? "I saw it, I heard it." It's the story of describing the elephant. But there are things we cannot hear that dogs can hear. A tiny ant can find its way home through a trail of pheromones, smell. They can find their way through a complex maze, but these are not related to the unseen world. They are only analogous. We can find our way also, but only when we use the senses of the *latā'if*.

If you don't practice it, how are you going to make it work? What if we decided not to talk to [the baby] Ahmed anymore, or teach him anything. He will grow up and see things, but won't have any names for them. He can hear, but we will keep him away from people who name things. How impossible would that be? I say to him, "Ahmed, where have you been?" It's a very subtle concept. Children have a sense of time and space, but no sense of causality in time, not cognitively. [By asking him that question,] I'm training his mind. He thinks it's cute and funny. Where – have – you – been? None of those words has a real meaning to them, except for "you."

*Dhikr* and the process of *dhikr* in the *sema* or the *hadra* is a means for moving from this place to the other place. It's a vehicle through which one moves from the realm of mentation to the realm of experience. For some people, it's difficult if it's *dhikr jahri*, but [there is] *dhikr khafi*. It's remembering Allah Swt. What about Allah Swt? I will leave you with that question, and the idea that *dhikr* is a constant process. All true, honest seekers have to strive to be constantly in the remembrance, just like we hope our *shuyukh*

are. Because *dhikr* is a dynamic on-going reality, it's designed to overcome the appetites of the *nafs*. It's designed to activate the *latā'if* and thereby refine those perceptions that only the *latā'if* have—only the quality of ethic, or morality, or essential meaning that each *latīfa* has. [Each *latīfa* has] a certain quality to it. Allah tells us in *hadith quds*,

**If you remember Me, I will remember you. If you speak of Me, I will speak of you in a better company. If you come walking toward Me, I will come running toward you. (All these analogies) You will find Me in your heart, if you love Me.**

What does that mean? It means you are no longer dominated by the '*ālam al khalq*. You are now dominated by the '*ālam al amr*. The '*ālam al khalq* (everything in this world) is serving to remind you. This is *dhikr*. Usually in the Naqshbandī Tariqah, we don't do much *hadra*. We move from side to side. We usually don't have musical instruments, just a drum. Usually, there is no dancing or jumping or things like that, but sometimes we do that because we are also Qadirī and Shadhilī and others. Usually there is some recitation of Qur'an, as you know. And very important is the use of the word "Hu." Who can tell us why it is important? What is the [grammatical] form? It comes from Allah Swt. It is like a possessive. It belongs to Allah Swt. It is a form of submission, surrender. When you say "Hu" you are saying, "I belong to Allah Swt. Aside from that, the energy, the exuberance of that recitation or *dhikr*, silently or aloud, is transformational. *It awakens the latā'if*, especially *qalb*. *Asalām Aleikum*..