

September 9, 2009

Wednesday

Title: [Reducing the Hegemony of the Narcissistic Self](#)

DVD title: The Siratul Mustaqim:  
Perceive the Unseen through the Latā'if  
Reduce the Hegemony of the Narcissistic Self

*Dinner blessing:* Bismillah. O Allah, thank You for the “cold” dinner tonight! Thank You for the warm-heartedness, and a President who can articulate. We pray Allah that You lift the ignorance and darkness off the minds of the politicians. We ask that we all be protected by Your Shifāt. We pray for all of us to be exemplars of citizens, of Muslims, and of Sufis. We ask You, Allah Swt, to shower Your Blessings upon the President of the United States, and upon members of Congress who are wise enough, or politically wise enough, to do good for the rest of humanity. O Allah, we ask You to protect and guide us in these last ten days of Ramadān. I thank You, Allah Swt, to have me here, instead of at the Capitol tonight in the *iftār* where I was supposed to be, but here to share this momentous time with our own families. O Allah Swt, we ask You to send the blessings of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (sal), our *wasila*, our means to You, upon us. *Amin.*

*Suhbat:* I'll make a political analogy for you. What we see in social/political realms throughout at least the history of modern times is a group of essentially core nations that compete with one another for access to world resources for economic dominance, and for hegemony over secondary nations and their resources. Because of that, many other things follow, which I won't get into. The point of saying that is there are derivatives that come from that, that include production, dominance in GDP, trade, financial marketplaces, currency, and military power. All of this takes a lot of energy, however you may call it, to

maintain the level of dominance.

If there are parallels, and the inner and outer systems have relationships and are analogous in some way, the ego/*nafs ammāra*, which is the lowest stage of development of *nafs*, has this kind of hegemonous characteristic. It is difficult to shift the global paradigm toward equity, balance, equality, security for everyone, and divest of its biases and prejudices at least at the level where they cause suffering, death, wars, and genocide. Take another analogy and look at cancer. You can make the same case for cancer. Cancer drains a lot of energy, grows wildly and is very hegemonous. It draws from the resources of the rest of the body. In so doing, it weakens all the systems until eventually they collapse. You can say cancer is greedy. You could say social, political, and economic systems are greedy and arrogant. You can also say the *nafs* is arrogant and hegemonous. We can see that everything becomes narcissistic, I-centered.

Narcissism leads to all kinds of psychological and emotional disorders and violence, excuse making, justifications. Many psychologists say narcissism is at the root of all psychological disorders. It's easy to see the relationship between narcissism and the ego. You have to develop very complex systems to deal with the financial, social, political, and economic dominance mentality and hegemony. You have to develop, and continue to develop (which we have not yet been able to do very well) systems that control cancer without doing tremendously invasive procedures that try to ensure survival. There are justifications based on philosophical ends. The naturopaths come from one way, the homeopaths from another, the allopaths another way. Everyone is sort of right and sort of wrong. Resources are developed to end certain cancers, and some cancers are more easily treatable now than they ever were before, and there are much better recovery rates. It's a very complex and expensive process.

What is the complexity and expense of training the ego, of liberating the *nafs ammāra* from its limitations? It can become a very deeply complex and philosophical issue if you read something like Ibn Araby (ra) or some of the classic writers. They talk about the initial breath, and what comes after. Some of you who like Arabic will find interesting *ta'yyun*, which is the discussion of femininity and masculinity morphology. The three things that the Prophet (sal) loved the most are what, and in which order? The order is very important, because the masculine is sandwiched between two feminine words. [This points to] the dominance of the feminine in human society. The straight path, the *siratal mustaqim*, is the way through the complexity. It's the means Allah Swt has provided to deal with these conflicting attitudinal, behavioral characteristics of the unregenerate human being. One is driven by the ego. The *siratul mustaqim* is the straight line segment that bisects the shortest distance between points. Geometrically it is true; ethically it is true, and even linguistically it is true.

When we say, "That guy talks to you straight," it means he's truthful. "The forked tongue" means he's a liar. A "straight shooter" means they are trustworthy. *Siratal mustaqim* means you don't deviate from the way of Rasūlallah (sal). This line comes from *ghaib* and returns to the *ghaib*. We say, "the unseen of the unseen." It passes through a portion of life we call "seen," from the world of command, to the world of creation, to the world of command. That intersection is *qalb*/heart. Again, Allah Swt has taken the reality of community (Ummah), reduced it to an active process called *jamat* (people joining together), and in so doing has created methodologies for us to affirm the means of the *siratal mustaqim*, like *dhikr hadra*, the communal *sema*. It takes place in the presence of the *shaykh*, and it follows a fairly undeviating, customary course. It has also its form; a triangle. I sit at the front in *muraqabah*, and you look back from that point, and it all goes out like this, a curvilinear triangle. That is an indication of something very profound for us, which is a circle.

The *khalifas*, those who have the most *fayyād(z)* in the traditional *khanaqah*, sit closest to the *shaykh*. This circular formation with the *shaykh*'s back to everyone doesn't signify the turning away from the world, as some people have stated. But it allows the *muridīn* to face (*tawajjuh*) the *khalifas* and the *shaykh* in order to get the full force of the *bāraka* or the *fayyād(z)*. I'll stop there for a moment on form, and go back to the unseen. The forces that are necessary to change society, to deconstruct years, centuries, eons, eras of human error or human greed or human arrogance, to find a cure to a destructive disease that attacks the immune system or disrupts it in such a way that [the disease] can grow unrestrained, have to be very powerful, very consistent, and very constant. These forces are by nature, hidden by the circumstance, and not easily seen by the average person. It is just like in the field of psychology where people have psychological disorders that may be more easily seen by others, but not by themselves. Labeling them doesn't help you to cure them, just to identify them.

In the same way, using spiritual terminology doesn't enlighten anyone. It may explain or delineate parameters, but it doesn't cause enlightenment. Allah Swt has provided us with these *latā'if* to allow us to have a deeper belief in the unseen world, and access to that unseen world from this world, the *'ālam al khalq*. There are many Islamic and Sufic philosophers who say you cannot know the unseen world. It's true. You cannot know it intellectually or see it through your eyes. You cannot articulate its composition, but you can experience it, and it can have its effect on you. The interesting thing is it has an imperceptible effect on you if you cannot use your physical senses. For example, the television in this room will not have an effect on us until we turn it on, and we use our physical senses. Immediately, our eyes and ears can give rise to our emotions or feelings.

Whatever is happening that the television can receive is happening right now, but we are

not feeling it. So we are not responding to it. Hence, people who do not awaken their *latā'if* appear to have no need to awaken them, and no response to what is actually happening in the universe around them. We construct our lives, empty of that very profound reality: that Divine Presence. Or we construct as some kind of hagiographical apparent reality, some kind of mystical, historical, customary way, some conception we can deal with. Allah Swt helps us to do that. Speaking for Allah Swt (which is very heretical), Allah is saying, "I'm not going to leave it to you, O creation, to construct whatever illusion you have of whatever it is you want to construct. I'm going to construct it for you. And I'm going to construct it out of terminology and images that you can relate to, like gardens, and rivers, and milk, and gold and beautiful faces, and beautiful boys and girls. Because if I leave it up to you, who knows what you will construct?" And hell, too.

I gave the example that a dog hears different decibels than we do, and their olfactory sense is much more refined than ours. But it doesn't make the dog any less a dog. An ant can find its way back to its nest through an olfactory sense. Those powers are not related to the unseen world, only to the *'ālam al khalq*. Belief is necessary to open up the doorways to the unseen. It stands to reason that something that is non-material is the way to open up the doorway to something that is non-material. Belief is not material; though it manifest in material ways. Love is a way of finding the unseen world. We have all experienced many examples of love, but it's not something we can quantify. "How much do you love me?" "A lot!" You answer question like that with a non-empirical answer: "A lot!" How much is a lot?

It does admit to us there is something beyond, admitting in the world of existence that there are certain facts we cannot distinguish, certain realities that we don't understand or see clearly that are right in front of us, 'right before our very eyes.' There are some things that are just not available to us, that are available to other people. (Like broadband). It's

just not available to us. We don't qualify! Those transmissions are totally imperceptible to us, and unless we have some instrument to stand as an intermediary between our senses and those transmissions, we're just not going to get them. Our senses cannot perceive them unless we have that intermediary translating device called television, radio, Bluetooth, or whatever—and they are invented by human beings. Many things are perceived because people invented things to see them with, based on certain assumptions. We are still not seeing really what we think we are seeing. We are not seeing people, but images of people. We are not really seeing people, but light. We are not seeing just light, but photons in a certain pattern. We have an interpreter in our brains. We also have an interpreter through our senses and in our hearts. I can carry out this analogy: forms, colors, sounds, inability to distinguish beyond our physical senses. But we learned from science that just because we do not perceive something right now, does not mean it does not exist. Like black holes, or the way particles act in an accelerator.

The greatest mistake made by perception (and remember that these *latā'if* are subtle organs of perception) in human beings is to suppose that all the senses we have are adequate for understanding everything that exists, and to negate what is not distinguishable to us. That includes the subtle intellectual effects of understanding and reason, or derivatives of that, like concepts of justice, security, and moral and ethical principles. You can sort of say that Islam can exist in some forms outside of reason by a person who does not understand Islam; but you cannot really say that Islam and especially Sufism exists outside of reason. Unless it makes sense in some way, it is not real. How do you make sense of it? Unfortunately, you need to have talks like this every once in a while. All things that a human being “should” believe it or relate to, that are inherently made reasonable sense out of, are expressed in Qur'an. They are all expressed under the term *ghaib/unseen*.

If we cannot distinguish these things through our senses, then how are we supposed to accept them and distinguish them? We do have other senses: the *latā'if*, and there are means. Allah tells us to keep remembering, *dhikrullah*, then that *fayyād(z)* will come to you. You will receive it. We know that there are other things placed at our disposal that will allow us to believe in the unseen. What human beings really want to do and love to do is prove that something exists, or to see it. Seeing has its misuses, too. For example: the xray machines they have at some of the airports that see through your clothing. They say, "Don't worry about it. Men will be looking at men, and women will be looking at women. It's not a problem." If everybody here in this room is absolutely totally comfortable with unseen people looking at you naked through a machine, raise your hands. No, you don't feel comfortable with that, do you? But it's happening.

I submit to you that someone in thinking this up is still operating within the paradigm of wanting to see what's not seeable. What is not, under normal circumstance, permitted to be seen. Under "normal" circumstances, Allah Swt does not permit certain things to be seen. Yet, periodically, people get a glimpse of the unseen. The exception proves the rule, someone like Mansur al Hallaj. He sees something too early, and says something too soon. As a result, he is diced up into piece and killed, because he broke the rule, unknowingly. It's one thing if you are looking for bombs on someone, and another to look for the sake of seeing. I guess that's the difference between pornography and art. It seems to me that people can be very distracted.

Allah gives us means to see correctly through images, through our *latā'if*. If you see through them, they have built-in guidance systems. You cannot see incorrectly through the *latā'if*. You can only perceive the subtleties they are designed to perceive. Each *latīfa* and each circle focuses on certain aspects or qualities, names, attributes of Allah Swt within a context. For example, [a *latīfa* focuses] in the context of the *al faq*, over the

horizon, or in the context of the self, the *an fus* (which is also the breath, the fact that you live), or in the context of the irradiation that comes to us, the *fayyād* (tajalli), or in the context of *rahmat*. These are just some examples. There is no incorrect perception though the *latā'if*.

How would you like to be able to see things clearly, and know that what you are seeing is true and right? Sure, where do I sign up! You have already signed up. The only thing is, it's like someone giving you something valuable you never look at. We are guilty of that. Abu Bakr gave us some beautiful, valuable mineral things and we don't look at them enough. We don't appreciate them enough. Allah gave us the oceans, the mountains, the seas and the lakes, and we don't look at them enough. Allah gave us the hearts of others, and we don't look at them enough. Why? Because we get distracted by the other senses, and we don't look at these things enough. We have been given these things to look at or through, which is more appropriate to say, but we don't through them.

Here's an example. I have a little telescope on my desk. It sits there and sits there. Then, two days ago, I looked down and saw a hawk sitting on a branch. Guess what I remembered? I remembered I had a telescope. I put it on my desk and watched the hawk. It looked around, did this and that. What did I get for that? 25 points? A coupon to Lenscrafter to get a bigger discount on my new eye glasses? I became part of a continuum. I extended my sight. I got a moment of pause: time pause. I remembered Allah: *wuqufī qalbi*. I was here and I was there. I was near and I was far at the same time. If I put it together, which *alhamdulillah* I did, I was able to see not only through my eyes but through my *latā'if*, something of the *'ālam al khalq* through the *'ālam al amr*, by something created by human beings that are analogous exactly to what happens inside of us systemically—and outside of us, systemically.

Allah Swt brings us closer to Him, the closer we get to the *shuyukh* and the Prophet (sal), just like the *khalifas* sit closer to the *shaykh*. The nearest to Allah is Rasūlallah. How near is he? Two bows lengths. These (eyebrows) are the two bows—eye bows. (Someone misspelled them one time and they became brow) Ibow. It is the letter “I” and b-o-w. Ibow: I bow down. When you bow down, you put your eyebrows on the ground.

Now, I’m going to take you to another world of function. We are sitting around in a circle in Turkey on one of our trips to see Shaykh Osman Sirajuddīn an-Naqshband (ra). In this case, we were facing each other in the circle. We were handed stones, round marbles. They are aids in counting for the Hatim Khwajagān. The *hatim* signifies the complete recitation of Qur’an. The recitation of the Khwajagān, the Masters of Wisdom, is used by Naqshbandiyya to signify a partial recitation of Qur’an as embodying the whole Qur’an. When you are sitting and reciting some Sūratu-l-Ikhlās, you are embodying the whole Qur’an. You are not reciting the whole Qur’an, but you are representing the whole Qur’an. By what? Ahad/One. All the Qur’an is in the word “*ahad*.” I know what Sūratu-l-Ikhlās means, from the point of view of history, but this is the *ahad* point of view.

In the traditional Naqshbandī circle, you have a *qari*, a recitor. He sits near the *shaykh* and begins the whole process with a beautiful, melodious, sweet recitation of Qur’an. That leads into the *dhikr*. In some of the circles, the *shaykh* is sitting and the *khalifas* are sitting. When I am sitting and my back is to you, you will see me look around some times. That is because I am directing my gaze to the people in the room. The *khalifas* are then instructed to do the same thing, because they have *bāraka*. If you are facing each other, like we were in Turkey, the *khalifas* were put near the *shaykh*. That’s why when he brought me near to him, it was a great honor. He always kept me near to him. What do you do when you are sitting there? You are looking out at the *jamāt*, gazing at them.

When they came to greet the *shaykh*, they came in a counter-clockwise way. I'm sitting to the left of the *shaykh*, so what had to happen? They weren't interested in greeting me, but in greeting the *shaykh*. There was a press of 3-400 people, and they had to physically, literally, go over me.

You think he didn't know what he was doing? He motioned to me to sit at his left side, not his right side. I was always told where to sit, and I was always at the left of him. This is how absolutely planned out all this stuff is. Is this written in a book? No. Does the teacher tell you this? Rarely. Sometimes it's documented as observed, but hardly ever documented as an instruction. It's passed on like this. Then what happens when this thing is moving? Hu Allah! Ya Allah! [from all different directions]. Almost as if the energy is coming [around in a circle], and when there is a gap, it jumps the gap, like electrical energy sparks. Then some people are weeping and laughing and crying or whatever. It's very disconcerting for some people. Some people jump to their feet. Some people resist; and you see them pacing back and forth, trying to control it. Sometimes the heart closes, and they feel inner pain in the heart. Sometimes it opens and flows out, and they have no control, *majdhub*. Some literally crawled over me to get to the *shaykh*. Some were very proper and bowed.

All of this is a form of *dhikr*/remembrance. All of this is the line between the '*alam al amr* and the '*alam al khalq*. Something of the inner is coming out, being translated to the physical world. It's trying to ground itself in the *shaykh* and complete the circuit. As some of you know, you can fall over and bang your head and not get hurt. Some of you know the story of the first time it happened to me. I felt my head bouncing up and down on the slate floor like a rubber ball. It was at the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. Some of you know exactly that feeling. That *wajd* is the connection between the unseen world and the seen world. It's not a necessary experience. Another kind of experience is

the *dhikr* like we have on Saturday evening, which is exclusively for the sincere *murīds*. Others may or may not be open to the public. That form is very carefully supervised. In that form, the *shaykh* may spend a lot of time working on the hearts of the *murīds* that are not fully opened.

When I was in Bosnia, Shaykh Khalil kept the young students always up front. He was sitting at a table like mine, on his knees. He had his notes. Everyone sat in a certain place, and he was transmitting to those people to have their hearts open during the *dhikr*. The rhythm has to be exactly right, because if it is not, you do not get entrance. It has to be right, and for a moment you get entrance, and the rhythm or the tone or energy changes. How do I know all this? Do I have a book downstairs that tells me this? You know it because your *latā'if* are open. You know it because you have a goal and a purpose. You want to end the hegemony of the *nafs*. You want to end the dominance of the ego. You want to end the greed. As you change the world, it becomes symbolic of changing the inner world. If you achieved peace in this world, you would definitely have the foundation for peace inside human beings. Or, if you could find a way to make peace inside of human beings, it would naturally lead to more peace in the outer world. There is a relationship [between the inner and the outer]. It's clear. We write songs about it. This is the subtlety of the *latā'if*.

The other meeting place between the world of the seen and the world of the unseen lies in congenial loving gathering and discourse, like this—*suhbat*, companionship. That refers to this. What we are doing right now took place at the time of Prophet Mohammed (sal) when he sat with the Sahabah in *suhbat*—congenial companionship, informally. We do *dhikr* like this. We repeat the names of God like this, when we are sitting in *muraqabah*. (In the old days, they used to make *tasawwur* of the *shaykh*, to keep the gaze on the image of the *shaykh*. We don't do that.) There is this kind of discourse: *darus*, where there may

be *murīdas* and *murīds* and visitors, questions and answers. Many things are discussed. It may seem at times to be idle talking, but it has its purpose. Young novices are encouraged to come to these informal sessions, because it speeds up the opening of the *latā'if*. Then you have these major *suhbats*, like Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday nights. If you come to my office, it's a minor *suhbat*. If we stop along the road and talk about something that has a principle behind it, or gratitude behind it [it also is a minor *suhbat*]. When I stop and talk to Mustafa about the garden and how wonderful it is, this is *suhbat*, the praising of Allah. When I talk to Ayla (the baby) about how beautiful she is and it makes her smile, or the boys—this is *suhbat*. It has a spiritual purpose.

When you remove yourself from that kind of environment (*suhbat*), you are in an undifferentiated, uncontrolled, undisciplined and complex world with very little direction. You have to draw from your resources until you become so tired and so depleted that you begin to drink the well water. You begin to become one of them. Nobody ever thinks it will happen to them, but it does; because the companionship is very important. Can an oppressor be a good companion of someone they have oppressed? Of course not. That takes care of hegemony. Can a slave owner be the compassionate friend of their slave? No. The Prophet (sal) knew that and arranged for the manumission of slaves, slowly, under certain circumstances that no one could avoid. No one could avoid making the errors that forced them to free slaves. Even Thomas Jefferson knew that, though he didn't follow through with it. It's all consistent.

When the President stands up and draws the line and gives all the financial reasons, you feel and hear a moral and ethical argument there. He's standing on high ground, in a swamp. He's standing on a rock that's one inch above the cesspool, and it's a long stride to the bank [of the cesspool]. You hear the moral and ethical principle there. You can look at economics and how we have used or misused our resources. These are all

analogous to the capability in our own selves to refine and purify ourselves, to find the cure for cancer, to find the cure for the cancer of the soul. It's not just a mere being together. Every name of Allah Swt has a vibration. Every name has a meaning, and every meaning has a functional reality to it. Every functional reality has an effect. Every effect is positive if it is effectuated correctly. Everything you don't see is not necessarily to be seen right now. Everything we don't here is not necessarily to be heard right now.

If you have the capacity to see and to hear, and you are scanning through the instrumentation Allah Swt has given you, the chances you have missed something are much more reduced than if you don't know there is such a thing as seeing and hearing, and you don't know where to look, and you are in a very complex and chaotic situation. I come back again to the point I've made many times, which is why wouldn't anybody want to have that capability? Why wouldn't you want to dedicate a very small portion of every day to developing it? That takes us right back to the "I" again, unfortunately, and this inherent narcissism. That's where I will leave you until the next episode in this ongoing drama, where I take totally unrelated things and make you think they are related.

*Asalaam aleikum.*