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Thursday

Title: [The Voluntary and Involuntary Process of Awakening](#)

DVD title: Approaching the Practices through the World of Bāraka:
The Voluntary and Involuntary Process of Awakening

Many people have described their experiences in the *khanaqah* of different *shuyukh*. The world of *bāraka* is not the world of normal, everyday logic and reasoning. The person who approaches these practices only through the mind, logic, and reasoning misses some very serious and important things. Even though we talk about the interlocking circles and systems of things, we are not talking just about a functionalist point of view. Nor are we talking about a view of conflict where we can only see the *nafs*; that life is somehow only a form of conflict resolution where the *nafs* is the enemy.

Even though there are underlying structures that are very important that we work through, whether they are social or physical structures, we are not only talking about a structuralist point of view that has no heart to it, no human sensitivity. Allah has given us examples of these different approaches to understanding life. For example, the angels are pretty much functional. There are signs; they perform a function, and that's it. What Allah (swt) has done in the spiritual realm is taken these certain principles and shown where they meet, and [shown] a balance between them. Allah has elevated in society certain things like consensus/*ijma*, has shown something dynamic and changing like *ijtihad* and *tajdīd*, has made requirements structural [in such] practices as prayer and fasting; and functional [in such practices] as *zakat* and *hajj*. Allah made them deeply personal and transformative, like the *shahadah*. It's personal, a relationship.

The rules that are created around these different forms that human being have discovered

and put forth over periods of time don't hold, totally. For example, you can't say that a society has needs in a functionalist mentality. But you can say that in a spiritual form. You can say that a society has needs, because Allah has introduced the concept of the *ummah*. The *ummah* is not just a group of individuals. It has a life of its own. How do we know that? Because it is called "*um-mah*." It has life, *umm*. It comes from the mother, and it is feminine. The more you dive into Arabic, either through just study or in the distorted and perverted way I have through *kashf*, the more you understand how exact, how transformational, and how pragmatic it is. How defined and yet how flexible it is. I don't mean just the language, but the meanings. The proof is that most people don't get it. Just look at the world. You could not possibly have tyrants, extremism, destructive tendencies, prejudice and bigotry, or even a hierarchical way of thinking if people understood what they were saying and reading.

We live in a time of great ignorance and assumptions. Allah (swt) from an ideological point of view puts out a Way, if you will, an epistemology of change. There is a Plan, a structure for how to unstructure, how to defunctionalize to some degree what is functional, and reform things that are formed and make it dynamic. How does He do it? He does it not by creating some kind of being that always stays one age and doesn't change, but manifests all that in the human being: unconsciousness, yet life; consciousness, but low control; functions that are automatic, but then a choice; structures that are always changing and growing and then degenerating; powerful and weak, old and young. It's like a flower opening up (unless there is an acute disease, which is also part of the plan). It's like trying to take a picture of a morning glory. It opens very quickly, but you can never see it open, even if you stand and stare at it. You turn around, and it's open. Yet, it's dynamic; it's happening.

But you can slow down the process and perceive it is happening, if you have the courage

and the insight, and the means. You see what of structure is important, and what is not; what is needed of function and what is not; what is collective and what is individual, which is a part of Islam also. There is the *jamat* and the individual prayer: the *fard* prayer, the *sunnah* prayer, and the *nafle* prayer. It all starts to make sense. **“Wheresoever you look, there is the countenance of Allah.”** It’s not a face, not a thing, but a totally internally consistent, externally explicit, clearly dynamic reality. So we are charged to fit our life, our thoughts, our actions, and decisions into that in some way that is balanced and harmonious—not disruptive. We fit all these things in our life and our decisions with a clear understanding that we are seeking harmony. You cannot do that with a narcissistic attitude.

It cannot be achieved when you are putting “I” before everything else. Hence every spiritual, mystic path deals with the *nafs ammāra*, the *ahamkara* (as the Hindus call it)—the ego. And the defensiveness that surrounds the ego is like the shell on the black walnut. When you take the shell off, you have to cut through the outer shell which smells really bad. Finally you get that off, but the only way to do that is to drive your car over it numerous times – then you have a hard shell. You have to take a hammer with a chisel to open that up. Then you have these tiny little pieces of meat in there. It’s a delicacy. A black walnut pie would be tiny! It stains, and the Indians used to use it as a dye. That’s the nut of the ego to crack. That’s the narcissistic “I”, the unregenerate, untamed ego (*nafs ammāra*) that most of us befriend and follow like a dog following its master. This master has a plastic bag in his hand, like in New York City, to pick up the dog’s excrement. How perverted our society has become when human beings follow dogs around picking up their excrement. But that’s how we live.

People don’t see, so you have to open the *latā’if*. Many people don’t desire to see, because they sense that if they see, things have to change. So they think, “I don’t need

that. I don't desire that. I don't yearn for that," because they fear. They have already lost themselves to Shaytan. What did Shaytan tell Allah? "I'm going to spend all my time until the Yawmi Qiyama trying to distract Your people." It has no real power over anyone, just the power of distraction, desires, arrogance, of the ego, and deception, veiling. "Good" Muslim women wear *hijab*, and Shaytan wears *hijab* also. A woman wears *hijab* to protect herself from many things that are Shaytanic, but the irony is Shaytan wears *hijab* also. Shaytan is disguised as desires, curiosities, anger, fear, doubt, and all kinds of things are served at the table of Shaytan; hence, the concept of, "If you sup with Shaytan, make sure you have a long spoon."

Then some people come up against this experience. The irony of the experience is, when they have the experience of *wajd*/ecstasy, it's not in your control, either. Allah has balanced things. It's not under the control of Shaytan, and not under control of Allah, either. Even those moments are *hal*, not *maqam*. They are a gift of Allah, an experience. But you need to open up and awaken the *latā'if* to make discriminating choices to turn and make *tawajjuh* toward Allah (swt). People got confused at times, and reported very interesting things. I'll read the report of someone who went to a *khanaqah* and what they experienced.

When I first came here, I was repulsed by the conditions. They were much worse than they are now. We had no bathrooms, and we had to go out into the fields to go to the bathroom. The khanaqah was small in those days, and it was so crowded, you couldn't even sit on the floor. At night we slept together shoulder to shoulder on the floor. I woke in the morning, covered with insect bites. I was so repulsed by the conditions, not to mention the food, that I went back to Pakistan resolving never to return. But I came back, six times in all. Each time I felt close to a nervous breakdown from

the stress of the conditions, but nothing happened. Everybody seemed to be getting it but me. I began to doubt I would ever get it. Then one day, I was sitting in a small room performing suhbat with a few khalifas. Tthen all of a sudden the next thing I knew, I was thrown to the floor in wajd. Once you get someone else's tawajjuh, all you want to do is share it with someone else.

There are voluntary things, and involuntary aspects of life. Allah has shown us that too: voluntary aspects of our system, and involuntary parts. You don't have to get up in the morning and say, "Breathe, breathe, breathe. Heart beat, heart beat, heart beat." You do have to get up in the morning and say, "I will be a good person today, a noble person. I will act in a certain way. I will eat food." That's voluntary. There are involuntary correlatives to that, how you digest it. In our Tariqah, we distinguish between those things: the ones we purposefully make, like "*la illaha il'Allah*," and the ones that come out when you go, "Allah!"—ones you don't purposefully make. There are the movements you make when you are remembering to move, and the ones you make because you can't stop yourself from making them. We abjure the voluntary ones, and we wait for the involuntary ones.

As we awaken the *latā'if*, we also make voluntary choices. We have to own those choices, because we get deeper insight, even if you don't know we are getting it. We have more and more responsibility with that insight. We have to voluntarily make choices to stay in the flow of this developmental process, and not claim, "I didn't know what I was doing. I couldn't control myself. I didn't know" That's baloney; we cannot hide behind our *nafs ammāra* while we are moving to change our *nafs ammāra*. We cannot hide behind the *nafs lawwama* while we are taking the time to reproach ourselves. We will stop our growth and development. Worse, we will lose everything we have

gained in the world and in the inner—in the ‘*ālam al amr*, and in the ‘*ālam al khalq*. You can say, “Well, I’ve got all the time in the world. I’m young. My genetics tell me I will live to be 93.” Who knows? Only Allah. You don’t have to be obsessive about these things; you just have to surrender, accept, obey, and follow the guidelines. You find, lo and behold, you are not constrained; you are free. The *latā’if* are opening; you are seeing things differently. In fact, you have to deal with another level of *nafs*, because you have become expert in things. You have *bāraka*, and if you misuse it, the fall is great, because you will never get to the *maqam* until you can’t fall from it.

Previous people have reported on what may happen during these times.

A person may groan, sigh heavily, laugh, weep, hyperventilate or scream. One murīd always laughed hysterically during the sema. The somber members of the jamat considered it sacrilegious under those circumstances. Equally dramatic are the physical reactions, such as uncontrollable jerking of the limbs, or sudden spasms of the torso, and weeping and shaking. When asked why some disciples responded more violently, the khalifa replied, “It is their way of responding to the magnitude of what they are witnessing.” But no one takes much notice of these displays, and any attempt to discuss them is flatly dismissed. Occasionally, the shaykh will evince a smile of amusement when a disciple who has taken his hand will be thrown violently to the floor, rolling backwards so uncontrollably he would seem to be a leaf thrown on the wind. The shaykh’s smile conveys his pleasure at this outward validation of his spiritual power and authority.

That’s their opinion! This response is because the *latā’if* are so subtle, like Homeopathy is subtle. The higher the potency and the more subtle the material, the more powerful the

remedy. A remedy that is 1m is much more subtle than a 6x, but it has a deeper effect and must be used more prudently. Then there is DM and CM, etc. As the *latā'if* open, though they are *subtle* organs of perception, they have tremendous capability. They have an effect on the character of the individual. Since most of us don't know the depth and breadth of our spiritual nature, we don't necessarily perceive our progress, or don't understand what is happening to us in those moments, but it is directly linked to our spiritual character. Most of you would say, "I don't get those kinds of reactions." It means you are going through a process that is slightly different. It is a maturing process. It is not that the person who gets it is mature (that's another story). It's like a purging of the dross, a melting down of the matrix in order to extract the gold.

Indeed, often what happens is if a person doesn't dive deeply or sincerely enough into their practices, they may have very much more uncontrollable and involuntary actions, than a person who does dive deeply into it and receives that *bāraka*. They may have some involuntary experience, but at the same time, they are able to watch it. They are able to direct it. I won't go into the structuralist theories about it too much. Some people with a structuralist mentality would say that it's hard to tell if a person is creating, as opposed to receiving the transmission, in order to draw spiritual attention to their own self. But a legitimate expression of ecstasy is different. It is the result of the opening of the *latā'if* in a certain way, when the person is not expecting it, or [when it is] under certain circumstances. It demands of us, as everything in life does, that we take our knowledge, our energy, our insights, our capabilities, our special training, whatever it may be, and we use it in a productive way. Isn't that another thing we expect in life? We don't expect it from a child, but from adults.

As you get older, you realize how important that maturation process is. Sometimes, even more than one *latīfa* is activated at a time, but I won't get into that. The practices you are

given are not secondary. They are not supplemental. They are not something you should contemplate even deciding what to do or not, quite honestly. Each one is part of a whole system which, when done even minimally at the right time under the right circumstances, opens the *latā'if*, moves you forward, and allows you to develop a familiarity with the Divine Presence, with Rasulallah (sal). Those practices, like the breathing practice of *lā ilāha illa-Llā*, or placing the tip of the tongue behind the teeth at the roof of the mouth, or the breathing exercises, or the recitations in the *sema*, or even the recitations of Qur'an before or after; all these different aspects, when they are done with sincerity, patience, and perseverance are the keys to that door I talked about a few *darus* ago. You start to see that in your life, in your choices, in your attitudes, in the things you are working on, in the things you worked on before a hundred times, all of a sudden change comes about.

You make a *niyyat*, and that *niyyat* makes sense. It starts to manifest itself. You don't get as angry. You don't get as frustrated. If you do, you have a different means or methodology you use. You look at things different. You are more empathetic, more compassionate. You may be very put-off by something someone does, but you see the trail that led them to that. As a result, your *latā'if* begin to direct certain *bāraka* in such a way that you continue a transformative process, and you actually create an atmosphere of *suhbat*. This is the Naqshbandī way. You realize that every prophet that came, from Adam to Prophet Mohammed (sal), has a presence, a spiritual character (*mashrab*), an inner attitude. So you have the Adami *mashrab*, the Mohammedan *mashrab*, etc. When your heart is dominant, you have the receptivity to (for example) Hazrat Isa (as) or the Prophet Mohammed (sal).

These *latā'if* are opened by the practices we do, which lead to remembering of Allah (*wuqūfi qalbi*) in your heart; remembering Allah in your day to day life through the *dhikr* we do, and cleansed through the practices until, with the permission of the *shaykh*, one

reaches a later or last stage where *muraqabah* dominates your process. Originally, in the Mujaddidī Order, there were 36 transmissions. Abul Bari Shah (ra) changed that and made it not as intensive a process. You can think that this is pretty intense! Look at all the years it takes, but imagine what it was before. And in these practices we do, hopefully in the morning and evening, and at other times, there are pitfalls. We have to go into *ghunūdgi* instead of falling asleep. We have to prepare ourselves to sit, and not just go sit down and drift off somewhere.

The person who sits contemplates for a period of time—a number of days, weeks, months—certain transmissions, because you can't proceed from one to the other without either the transmission or the sincere practice of those transmissions. This system, this reality we call *muraqabah* and meditation has really unparalleled, profound effects. But isn't it interesting that you are allowed by Allah, your Creator, to choose not to have those effects, and to live in a world where you assume you have knowledge and insights; and indeed, you may. But you have not anywhere plumbed the depths of your capability, and along the way you may have left chaos. This is very serious. I will continue just a little more on this subject. I hope that what you learn from all this is how all these things are interrelated, and how the systems are operational. It's not like you are sitting in nowhere deciding, "Should I or shouldn't I?" That's not the way it is. You are in the process. Every decision and effort you make has a profound effect.

When you were in ignorance, you were on one track in a different time frame. With knowledge, *bai'at*, and practices, by merely beginning the process, you took the plastic thing off the battery and it's working. It's either running down and getting charged up, or running down. It's not like you are still in a decision mode, whether you think you are or not. When you are in *suhbat*, in contact with the *shaykh*, and in the context of these practices, you are on track. Like it or not, understand it or not, that's the way it is. It's

like walking into a convenience store to get a bottle of water, and you find yourself in the middle of a robbery. Now, getting a bottle of water becomes, “How do I save my life?”

That’s what it is like. I like that analogy. Asalām Aleikum!