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Saturday

Title: [Faith in the Unseen](#)

DVD title: Our Faith is a Subtle Relationship with the Unseen/Ghaib
A Look at the Stages and Transmissions of the Latā'if

Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem. Faith is much more than just saying you believe in Allah, and is much more than believing in the angels, the Yawmi Qiyama, in Jannah and Jahannah. It's a much more refined reality. Once you develop real faith in the unseen, you really do have fear (*taqwa*). Piety is a kind of fear. If you are intelligent enough, you try to begin to direct your life's journey toward the next level of it, the next stage of it. Part of that is this faith in the unseen I've been talking about—the other dimension or reality that we call the unseen world, the *ghaib*, from which the commands of Allah emanate, like the rays that emanate from the sun or like the streams of unseen gamma rays. They are very powerful, and effect change in us (called a sunburn).

This relationship between ourselves and Allah (swt), and the relationship between ourselves and that which we cannot see is the same. The relationship with that which you cannot see is very refined and subtle. In a way, Allah (swt) provides for us the unseen and the proof. We interface with it in waves of tv and radio broadcasts, and in unseen rays of light that give you sunburn. In a sense, this is another way of Allah (swt) telling you that Allah is present, that His Power is present, that His Force for change is present. His Beauty is present. Allah (swt) gives us the capability to have faith in the unseen through these different agencies, so that we can feel more comfortable with our relationship with Allah, and more aware that we are in the presence of Allah. At some point in your life, you realize there is no place you can go to eat the banana (where Allah is not).

So we say, **“You alone do we worship. You alone do we ask for help.”** (1:5) In that, we show that Allah (swt) is hidden, and we seek the guidance and assistance, and believe that all the power is in Allah. In our *du'ā*, we ask for help, and to strengthen us in body, mind, and to give us clarity of thought. We do all these things and have to wonder what it is for, because still most people who do it don't see and don't hear. They have faith; they have belief. Sometimes, often perhaps, to have faith is more important than to have knowledge. People embrace ignorance, as we see in the world today, and think they can get away with ignorance. Unfortunately, you can—at least in the physical life, but not beyond that. Since there is no “god,” no reality apart from the realities of the universe Allah created, there is nothing to contemplate outside of that reality.

How do we contemplate it? We have to refine the senses and the perceptions that allow us to develop belief and faith in the unseen, not necessarily to pursue seeing the unseen, which is a bit of an oxymoron. You have to have faith and belief in the unseen, which is living “as if” you are seeing the unseen, knowing that there are things not to be seen. But you live as if you are seeing them, because you know the Reality of the unseen world is seeing you—is present, *ihsan*. You have proof of the unseen, and you look as if you are seeing, but there is still the reality you cannot see it. Allah is seeing; therefore, the relationship we need to develop (should want to develop) is the relationship of *ihsan*. Act as if you are seeing Allah; even though you are not, know that He is seeing you.

“Know that Allah is seeing you” means that the reality we call our self is in plain sight. If you know that, then you are seeing yourself as Allah sees you. That part of *ihsan* is not talked about very much by very many people. You realize you cannot see Allah in everything, though you can act that way and try to. Eventually, you become at peace with knowing that, and you see yourself in the totality differently than you see yourself now, because you begin to imagine how Allah sees you. This is the most that most people can

do.

The reality of any religious or spiritual pursuit is the relationship between the Creator and the creation, between the seen and the unseen, and between us and the unseen. This inclination therefore is to act and make an effort. Because we have a unique relationship with Allah, somehow we are helped through our attempted communication to reach a goal. If we are charitable, if we supplicate, if we surrender, if we live a life of trustworthiness; if we live a life of nobility and virtue, any prayer we utter or supplication we make is somehow fulfilled. The most basic prayer is, “O Allah! If you allow me to do this, then I’ll do that.” It takes many forms, but that is basically the prayer. “You give me this, and I’ll give you that. I’ll do this if you’ll do that.” This is the basis for most prayers. Or it is, “O Allah, forgive me. **If you don’t forgive me, surely I am of the lost.**” (7:23)

What does it mean to be of the lost? It’s not that you find a compass and find your way out. Lost is lost. At the same time, we cannot sit and beg for assistance from the unseen world, because there needs to be a noble, mature, honest, sincere relationship with Allah (swt). In the Qur’an, Allah speaks to the Prophet Mohammed (sal), saying: “**Remember Allah’s blessing upon you when you were enemies. He brought your hearts together so that by this blessing, you became brothers. You were upon the brink of a pit of fire, and He delivered you from it.**” (3:103) Why? This is assistance from the unseen world, the *ghaib*. You feel that if you follow certain means given to you by Allah, you will receive some hidden assistance beyond what you think you can gain, beyond what you know you can elicit yourself; beyond what you are even able to conceive of. Something beyond what you or I can understand. That kind of faith or belief gives us a kind of strength, and more of a footing in life.

Once the seven *latā'if* are identified in the first part of the teachings, and opened through *tawajjuh*/attentiveness and *dhikr*/remembering, and cleansed through the *nafsi ithbat*, with the permission of the *shaykh*, one can begin to deeply understand and undertake the last stages of the practice, the repetition of the *muraqabah* or the special contemplation of the circles. It is in this way that one can become at ease with the unseen, receptive to the transmissions from the unseen (if you want to put it in a linear form), or aware of the Divine Presence (if you want to put it in a non-linear form). Originally, there were 24 transmissions, then there were 36. Then there was a further adjustment from Abdul Bari Shah (ra). These meditations are advanced exercises to guide us through the higher realms. Usually as you know, we do them for 40 minutes to an hour. In many *khanqaqs* they do them after Asr and before Maghrib. They can be done at any time. You should come to them purified. You have to remain contemplating these for a period of time. Only when the time is up or with the *shaykh's* permission, do you move forward to another transmission.

The transmissions build our awareness of our state. They assist us with our repentance, with our humility, with our journey through these seven stages of the *sair ul suluk*. Believe it or not, they are very fulfilling and transformative. In many of the Tariqaqs, one begins with contemplating *ahadiyat*/oneness, and then contemplates different attributes of Allah (swt). In the process of doing this, the *murāqib*/meditator's work is to invite or attract the *bāraka* from the source of each *latīfa* individually, by the means of having a relationship not only with the *shaykh* but with the *silsila*. The point is to return each of the *latā'if* to its origins, and achieve a *fana* (annihilation) in that *latīfa*.

Going through the first four *latā'if* is usually known as *waliyat al shukra*, the realm of lesser sainthood. In that, a person who is very sincere will tend to not be very attracted to the world, or experience a lot of ego awareness, and will eventually overcome the worst

of the *nafs ammāra*. One recognizes that one's *shaykh* has come to that stage or that role not just by the fulfilling of certain practices or standards at the hands of his *shaykh*, but that what he has accomplished or experienced has been affirmed or attested to by his *shaykh*—not by any external institutions, or forms, or groups of individuals. It doesn't matter whether there is public recognition or not. The inner truth and accomplishment will depend on what the role that individual either chooses to direct their attention to, or is placed in.

The station of the lesser saints is not a very balanced or secure state. Sometimes you see outbursts of ecstasy, or feel anger. Sometimes you find a lot of ego. The lesser *latā'if* are *qalb, ruh, sirr, and khafee*. When the remaining *latīfa, akhfah*, is stimulated and absorbed, one enters into a state that some refer to as the *waliyat al kubra*, the unity of essence. In that state, one finds growing calmness, peace, unity with a sense of Allah. The term usually used is *baqa*. This is a place where the perceived perceptions through *akhfah* become perfected and the heart is expanded. The benefit that comes from working hard at that stage is that one becomes free of their bad habits, free of their “demons” or worldly desires. That person returns, in a sense, back to the world changed, exemplary—a person of *akhlaq*, virtue—perhaps even a guide for others on the journey.

This state goes back and draws from other activities and practices. One returns to a state of *dhikr*. Now *dhikr* is something else. It is not just the act of saying and remembering Allah in the normal sense. It is the place where the rhythms of the universe, the internal and external systems come into harmony, resonance. *Dhikr* is the place like an attractive magnet, where all the things of the inner and outer find their unity, their balance. So a *dhaiker* of that stage is transformed. They transcend the limitations of form. It's not that you fall over at that stage, or jump up and down. It's that you enter a state of tranquility, *sakīna*. This *dhikr* is no longer just a ritual that is done somehow to distract us from the

physical world, or to be a kind of salve that one applies over the harsh realities of life. It's no longer a proof of being a believer or Sufi, or some kind of rite of passage to another dimension. It has nothing to do with one's social or emotional state or status.

This *dhikr* now is going on all the time. It's no longer a ritual. Of course, it may be done in a way that appears to be ritualistic; on the same day each week, or in the same ways, but that is not the focus of the *dhikr*. The focus is a tranquil heart speaking to the essence of all existence. In the old days, one would ground themselves contemplating the form of their own *shaykh* and repeating just the name of Allah, putting their attention on *qalb*, *rūh*, *sirr*, or *khafee* or *akhfah*., and doing that either independently or in a group (*jamat*). But the structure, the format under which this takes place is not what is important. Even within that structure (let's say the *hadra*), the form you use is not important. It's the receptivity to transmission. It's the achieving of the state of *sakīna*. It can only be achieved if you cleanse yourself, *atazkiyat*. You purify yourself. This is why it is called *zakah*, purification. It's not charity. You cleanse yourself. A lot of energy has to go into that cleansing, perhaps. There is a kind of dynamic flow of *fayyāz*, of energy in this *dhikr* that you get on and follow the current of it. But you have to go back.

I'm describing something that happens, all in the context of telling you how to effect that process; otherwise, it is just about something, and isn't it. You have to go back and re-find *adab*, submission, truth, love, perseverance, mercy, and forgiveness. The problem is, every time you find it and lose it, it becomes harder to find. Because when you lose it, it's only because ego has gotten more strength back. Something is feeding the *nafs ammāra*. If you starve the *nafs ammāra*, nothing will happen. If you are feeding it and starving it, at the least it stays at a level where it is still active. We need institutions and we need symbols, and we need a sense of *ummah*/community. It is absolutely necessary. One cannot dare to have the ego think that this is a journey one makes on their own. And we

all try to do a lot of things on our own. Also, we have to seek the way through non-familiar structural means. We have to take our attractions and desires, our habits and patterns, and direct them toward our practice. Some people have to do it almost obsessively to clean themselves of the *nafs ammāra*—otherwise, there is no hope. Some people can do it on a part-time basis.

You know this is true. In the Catholic Church, they have monasteries and convents. Not just anyone who walks in there becomes a monk or nun—only those who need it. Then among the monasteries, you have ones like the Jesuits (who teach) and Franciscans that are very outward and socially active. Then you have the Trappists who are silent. You have the cloistered nuns, and the teaching nuns. People got the idea that the Sufis were like the cloisters and the Trappists. It isn't true. As long as you take your obsessions with your own desires, wants, and habits—we all have them. We don't call them obsessions (the American Psychological Association would have too many clients!), but we all have our obsessions. We have to turn that obsessiveness toward Allah through institutions that are created by Allah for the purpose of focusing on Allah. Like what? Like prayer, fasting, service, marriage, parenthood, justice, governance. Those are the things we have to focus on. Those are the only things that help us overcome our *nafs ammāra*. They have the imprimatur of Allah (swt). If you don't believe it, go find a time in the history of humanity when these didn't exist in some form.

Allah gave us symbols, also, to represent these things. Symbols are initiators, identifiers, like the Christians have Jesus on a cross. That doesn't just tell the story of Jesus on the cross. It's a symbol of sacrifice. Allah provides us with the means of the Qur'an, how it is written, how it's presented; prayer, recitation. In other Orders we contemplate the *shaykh*, the life of the Prophet (sal). These are symbols. They are keys that open doors to the unseen world, or at to least things that are not seen easily and are not familiar, veils you

can see through now. These are more than just cognitive processes that you think about. They are more than just practical actions you take to fill up time, or do what you are supposed to do. They are, really more than anything, devices or means that free us from the limitations of our thinking and our habits, limitations of the structures that we have created for ourselves that we can't break out of: little prisons or big prisons. They have a physical, psychological, and social effect.

When we pay attention to our *latā'if*, and allow ourselves to begin to move through these open *latā'if*, and see through them; when we make serious *muhasabat* and seriously repent; when we seriously turn in love and serve; when we hold ourselves [to the *du'ā*], “O Allah, do not leave me to myself even for the blink of an eye,” and repeat that over and over again with our tongue and minds, we move very quickly to a universe, a world, a life of fewer distractions, deceptions, and distortions; or we move beyond them all. When we begin to see where we are, and translate that to ourselves in an honest way, then we can come to the stage of transforming ourselves to a new being, moving higher and higher by leaving behind things we would normally have carried with us.

Just think about language. Language is constructed in such a way that from the point where you are in the present, you can re-live the past by putting things in the past tense, and you can go to the future by putting things in the future tense. Even when we construct language, it is not language that is telling us what I am doing right now. You say, “But it is memories.” Yeah, but without language, what good would memories be? We wouldn't be able to express them. No one would benefit from them. As for the future? No one can see the future, but you can plan the future. At least, you can think you can plan the future. And you can express that plan in the future tense, linguistically, semantically. This is no small miracle; this is a big one.

From wherever we stand, there is the past to deal with and the future to plan. But most or many people keep reliving their past as time moves them into the future. As much as we don't like it, when President Obama says, "We have to look forward not backward," there is a profound understanding in that, even though we would like to see those so and so's get punished for what they did in the past. You make the case that "If we don't punish them, what will make them stop from doing it again?" The answer is a change in values. That really is what the answer is—not tolerating the old standards and values. Who is supposed to do that? Is that supposed to be something that is declared by Congress and legislated by Congress and therefore we all get it? That is why you need a populace person, a person who lives by those standards and enjoins others to do that—*maruf* and *munkar*.

[We should try] to free ourselves from our limitations of our habits and past in this world by redoubling, quadrupling our efforts spiritually. Only by critical inquiry, only by true inquiry into the realm of spirituality can we make any progress. But first we have to disengage ourselves from the activities of the world that take us into the other direction, [such as] the concepts that we hold near and dear to our hearts that are destructive, [and] our emotional state that drives us to maintain our ego. Ego is maintained by emotion, not by intellect. What all the great teachers found was that the most basic way of doing that was *dhikr*/remembering, over and over and over again, the name of Allah. It functions as a way of quelling and silencing one's attraction to the world. That is why Hazrat used to say *dhikr* makes you less worldly and *darūd sharīf* makes your way easier. That is what he would always say.

When you get to the point when the structure does not matter anymore, for a moment even, maybe just for a brief moment, you will find that ego has become quiet, because it needs time, it needs space, it needs venues through which it has to act. When you close

down those venues, it has nothing to do by retract. Let me stop there, because I will talk about the practices next time, hopefully, *inshā'a-Llāh*.