

September 16, 2009

Wednesday



Title: [The Relationship between This World and the Unseen World](#)

DVD title: Dhikr from A Systems Point of View:  
and Its Relationship to the 'Alam al Amr

Dinner blessing: O Allah, tonight is perhaps Laylatul Qadr. In a time of waking and understanding what the new dawn brings and the new awakening brings. We ask You, O Allah (swt), as we move towards Eid and we end this month of Ramadān, and we bid farewell to our friend, we ask You, Allah (swt), to give us memory, heartfelt memory and striving. Lift us to levels of forgiveness; lift us to levels of repentance. Lift us to levels of compassion and mercy. Lift us to levels of truth. Lift us to levels above those of the Angels, as you promised us You would do if we made the effort. So give us the strength, O Allah, give us the will, the *irāda*, to make the effort. Give us the *himmah*. Send Your Healing Blessings upon those who are ill among us, those who we know in our heart, especially Neelam's mother, may she have rest and peace. We ask You, Allah (swt), to send us light that we might see through this darkness. *Amin*.

Suhbat: *Salām aleikum*. But I believe where we ended last time was that I began to speak about *dhikr* from another point of view. It is from the point of view of the whole system, which I have been discussing with you—the relationships of all our thoughts and activities, predilections and our experiences in this sort of temporal world of symbols and images—and its relationship with the unseen world, the '*ālam al-amr*. I have been trying to go back and forth between the sort of factual material and things that are a little easier

to grasp. I am trying to help you, indeed all of us, to remember that the assistance that comes from the unseen world, from the world of command, from the ‘*ālam al-amr*’ is real. It is not a metaphor, and it is not just real because religion tells you it is real.

I gave many examples over the past week or two of unseen forces in our lives that we accept as real. They manifest in the ‘*ālam al-khalq*’, but they originate someplace else, like love, anger, fear, joy and peacefulness and tranquility. We are all familiar with these characteristics. Yet for a human being to really have belief that something real comes from the unseen world when it has to do with spirituality [is hard to grasp]. It is as if we have had no experience with spirituality, because, it is as if spirituality is something other than love and peace, tranquility and happiness, also balance and harmony (which sometimes comes apparently as negative forces). Still and all we have a hard time grasping it.

We establish goals and we establish purposes in our life of the material world, yet we have our superstitions. We knock on wood or whatever, we use “*inshā’a-llāh*” as a superstition, as if somehow it is a magic key. (It is a magic key if you say it correctly and believe in it). Sincerity and spiritual belief... religion has its very, very important place and it does not need to be turned into some kind of superstitious activity. Just like love, it has its profound reach. It does not have to be objectified all the time. We can learn to live with tranquility and peace and love and wisdom without objectifying it. As it becomes objectified, as it applies to things in the physical world, we can come to understand its origins in the transcendent world, in the unseen world.

We feel that if we follow a certain goal, purpose that we attribute to Allah—we say, “This is given to us by Allah.”—we are going to get some hidden form of *madad*/assistance, some support beyond which we can think we can gain in any other way, something

beyond what you or I can understand. It is true. There are things in this world that we can use that we don't understand very well, like electricity or even things like calculus, which are very, very difficult things to understand. But you can use them. Certain laws in nature, certain laws in the universe we feel perfectly comfortable with. Well, some of us don't feel perfectly comfortable with calculus, but we feel perfectly comfortable using these things and entertaining ideas like "You can never arrive at 0," which is a transcendental reality. You can never arrive at the point of origin.

Yet we feel comfortable using what has been provided to us. It is that step with translating that back into our spiritual awareness, our spiritual life that should properly be called *imam*/faith. The method of attaining that faith is Islam, submission or obedience, and we should do that with a sense of security, a sense of safety/*taslīm*; but there is something unseen about it all. There is something that is un-seen-ly, and that is *ihsan*. How do you know what you can't see, or hear, or feel? Well, Allah (swt) gave us, bestowed upon us—and these phrases are very limiting, such as, "He did this to us"—this quality of *ihsan*, this capability to see. That is why it is said, "Act as if you are seeing Allah in everything and if you are not seeing Allah, know that Allah is seeing you." That is not just a leap of faith.

If you or I develop the *latā'if*, we *can* see; but to do that, you have to do a very simple thing called remembering to do it. Remember. That is why it is (or should be) the cornerstone of Islam. Some people think the cornerstone of Islam is Shar'īah, or something very bounded by concept. I don't say that with any disrespect towards Shar'īah, because Qur'an is Shar'īah, Hadith is Shar'īah. But we can do that with other organs of perception, capabilities. To remember *dhikr* is to not just remember in the mind. To remember is to know that you are seeing. If you are not seeing, know that what you are not seeing is present, and in that sense, perceiving you. Again, it is problematic

because it is dualistic. It is you and it; but it is the way that we express it.

This kind of understanding gives way to a kind of strength, a belief, a form of belief, more like a sure footing. There is a story of a *shaykh* who was very, very virtuous, very authoritative and knowledgeable, and people wanted, of course, to emulate him. He was an example of Rasūlallah (as), at least in the minds of people. He had a great deal of trust in Allah (swt) and he was a kind person. You may think that all those are different attributes, but they are all the same. They are the same. [Take for example] *akhlaq*. What does it mean to be a person of virtue? What are the signs? How should we be coming out of Ramadān with a sense of virtue?

*So people wanted to emulate him and he had a great deal of trust in Allah. He vowed that if he was cured after an operation that he had, he would make pilgrimage to one of the Holy cities, to Medina or Mecca and to the holy sites. He told this intention to the people who were his followers and asked who would like to go with him. They discussed it and didn't think that it was wise to make the journey. After all, he had just had this operation, and they thought it would be very difficult for him. So the people around him said, "Ya, Shaykh, why don't you wait a year or two?" The next day, he repeated the question, "Who would like to come with me on this pilgrimage/hajj?" Someone said to him, "O Shaykh, you are just recovering from this illness. It is too soon to go on a journey."*

*Now this is a real ethical dilemma; [and they responded] out of adab, and also because they were concerned for his well-being, and his health. Also, they were afraid that on this journey, with so many people on hajj, he would not be given the right treatment, the right care and respect. They would not be able to care for him properly and no one would give him the right care. So the real reason was adab. He understood this and so he said, "Allah (swt) has for eighty years blessed me, not because of what I know or what I am,*

*but because of His Mercy. I always thought that my duty was to serve Allah. I don't care whether it is above or below my dignity, or whether it is to do what needs to be done, or whether I will be served correctly or not, or whether my health is going to be taken care of or not, when I have the blessing of Allah (swt).” He said, “You must look at yourself as a servant. What right do you have to make me see myself as anything else by a servant? If I follow what your concern is, I am setting myself up above my service to Allah. If Allah chooses to forget me, then alright; He chooses to forget me. He has not forgotten me for one day of all these eighty years. So who is going with me?” They all went.*

This is a nice story, *alhamdulillah*, but the essence of the story is about knowing yourself. “Know yourself and you will know your Lord.” You can't know Allah until you know yourself. It is not about ego. It is not about knowing yourself. It is about remembering your position, remembering how you got to where you are, and remembering your relationship with Allah (swt). You might find yourself (as we often do) in situations with expectations of others, or in situations that we did not plan for, or trying to influence somebody else's behavior. But we have to be concerned about our own behavior. The understanding of our own belief in the unseen lies first in understanding how important it is to remember/*dhikr*. [It is important] to remember our Islam not just as rituals (as I began tonight); how to understand our *iman*, where it comes from; and how to understand *ihsan*.

The only proof that we are going to have that we are on the right path, that we are refining and refining ourselves, is when we learn to see through these *latā'if*, these organs of perceptions. We see ourselves and how we are acting, how we are speaking. This is the real essence of the stage of *nafs lawwāma*. It is not just criticizing yourself, rebuking yourself; it is seeing yourself. It is seeing yourself and understanding what you are seeing

as horrible as it may be or as beautiful as it may be. That is an act of *dhikr*/remembering. Allah has given us this capability. And when I say that Allah has given us this capability, it is not doling it out like gold coins or something. This is in the system. It is inherent in the *fitrah*.

Truly, “**Wherever we look, we are seeing the countenance of Allah.**” We see the trail. We see the shadow; we hear the echo; we feel the Divine Presence, until it becomes absolutely foreign to us to consider any situation real, unless some element of that perception is in it, until some element of what can only be known through the unseen, and seen through the *latā’if* is evident. This is on a personal level, and it is on a social/political/global level. Whenever human kind is in real danger, like it is today, Allah (swt) provides some agency, some means in which human beings can be helped. It might be resisted. Goodness is resisted. Sincerity is resisted.

As I have said before, the jury is out on the new President, but we will see what he represents. There is always somebody, something. In our tradition of Tariqah, we always have the *shuyukh*, you always have the Prophet Mohammed (sal), the *ambiyā*. The jury is not out on that. In general, I would say, most Muslims do not appreciate the blessings of our predecessors, the blessings of our ancestors, the blessings of the *shuyukh*, the *ambiyā*, and the *awliyā*.

I read an article this morning, a very interesting article. It was in defense of weapons of mass destruction. It was not written by an ideologue; it was just statistical and factual. Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there has been no major destruction by any use of weapons of mass destruction—the deterrent theory. That is very interesting when you really think about where humanity has come. Then you start with these moral and ethical questions. “Was it worth it for that amount of people to die, in order for 60 some years of

there to be no more use of these weapons? Every instance of a possible confrontation, the people have backed down, whether it was the Cuban Missile Crisis or the Kashmir/Pakistani border dispute. They have backed down. It brings up some very interesting ethical questions.

But it is also a metaphor for something else. How do we deter ourselves from acts of self-destruction or that are destructive of others? Must we scare ourselves? Must there be that point of annihilation, self-annihilation? Certainly every spiritual path speaks of *fana* in some way—annihilation. But they also talk about *baqa*, a return from the state of annihilation. The whole idea of annihilation is nothing new—annihilating the *nafs ammāra*. Yogis used to say, “Kill the self. Kill the ego.” Sufis say, “Refine it. Let it develop. Let it die of its older state and be born into another state, a higher state: seven levels on the *sair ul suluk*.”

But what are we actively doing? If we are not in an active state of remembrance, what are we doing? By definition, we are forgetting. A priori: if we are not remembering, we are forgetting. Then why are we astounded by what goes on around us? Something shakes us on the news and we get a moment of clarity and then we go back into this drunken stupor, again. This is the reason why intoxication is bad. It is not just socially bad because a person makes a fool out of themselves, and they slobber over everybody. That is not why it is bad. It is not just because you might become addicted over something, and you will want to take it over and over again. In most cases, it won't harm anyone. Who is it going to harm: smoking weed every day? It is not about that. That is only an external manifestation. It is this other. It is this stupification, this endless, endless, depth of being off course, off course.

Not remembering is forgetting, and forgetting is greed. Forgetting is greed. It is

narcissistic. Forgetting is the utmost narcissism, because you have no responsibility; you have no ethics; you have no morality; you have no sense of purpose. Forgetting is forgetting: “I want to get, I want to get.” “I want to get” is forgetting.

So the rituals of *dhikr* that we do and that Sufis do, either *jahri* or *kafi*, are more than some kind of relaxing exercise. They lead to a more awakened, cognitive, more advanced mode of experiencing the world, experiencing yourself, experiencing your life. The symbols that we use are to invoke certain understandings. [There are] the images that we create and the capability that we have to create images and to transmit those images, whether it is video images or transmissions heart to heart. And [they are] images that are done with love, images that are transmitted with concern. Our brother can make programs on sports if he wants to, but he is not making programs on sports unless it is some sports figure who is conveying some value. Images filled with value: these are remembrance. Don't say we are not walking around with images in our mind. Some of them are horrible, destructive, painful.

This *dhikr* is very, very important, and not because it is some Sufi practice, something that all good Sufis do. It is not to get you in a state like a *majdhub* so you can stick a thing through your cheek, you know, like a Rafaiyya. This is not it. That is not a proof of anything. It is not to get off, but to get on and get in—not off. Off is off—get on, get in. If you are not getting anything out of it, it is because you are not putting anything into it. Allah (swt) is not telling you, “I will meet you half way.” No. He says, “If you take a few steps towards Me, I will come running towards you.” You are not going to meet halfway.

The contemporary practices of our Orders are cleansing, excavating the consciousness, taking your awareness down through the different levels of your mind and of your dreams

and thoughts, until you get beyond the levels of sleep and dreams into the world of vision, *ru'ya*. It uses the same tools as sleep and dreams, but you get a momentary glimpse of what is transcendental, of another domain or place, a *hal*. Finally, you come to the point that you see “**wheresoever you turn, there is the countenance of Allah.**” You get to a point where everything reminds you of a greater truth. Everything reminds you of where you are and where you aren’t, what you have and what you don’t have, what you have achieved and what you haven’t achieved. It’s okay to be reminded of what you haven’t achieved: that is *dhikr*. You are remembering, seeing. That’s okay. It doesn’t have the worldly values imposed on it [that make you say,] “Oh, I’m not doing so well...” It’s okay to see what you haven’t done, but you have to act on it. You have to change.

The world goes on while you are changing. Sometimes you miss the train and have to wait for the next one. You start off the journey with this friend... how many of you had a good friend in high school or college? Where are they now? Are they still your good friend? Rarely, because you move at different speeds, or you can get left behind. You might miss the last train out, and that’s it—and you end up wandering around in the empty bowels of the subway station. Do you understand that this *dhikr* is not just saying, “Allah, Allah, Allah?” We have to be able to transition from the ‘*ālam al khalq* to the ‘*ālam al amr*. That means we have to move through this realm of mythical images and visions, the ‘*ālam al mithal*. It’s the gateway.

You sit in meditation and go to sleep; then you go beyond sleep into the world of vision, and beyond vision into the world of reality (*adraq*), the world of *haqiq*. It’s all good to talk about, but we all have these experiences. We have these harsh awakenings of reality, and responsibilities. We have love, feelings of anger and hate. We have feelings of forgiveness. We have these experiences, and then they haunt us: “I can’t get this out of my mind. I dreamed about it last night.” We walk around with these visions, which are

nothing new to us. We must stop segmenting them, and remember that this is Allah. This is the system you want to have in resonance: you want to have the voice match the video. All the videos inventions we can make, and all the software we can create might solve that problem, but then there is the problem of meanings.

You have to take very, very seriously these practices. They should not be called practices. I dislike calling them practices, but I don't know what else to call them. They are not techniques. Our brother Tayie was saying yesterday, you have to feel the story and be creative with it. It's not just holding the camera. You have to know what you are doing with it and what you want to accomplish with it. There's *bāraka* in that. You have to choose the right words and form, and understand your subject. Don't you see, this is all a metaphor? Do you have eyes? Can you see that? Bring the same thing to everything. You know what stands in the way. A little oodgy here, and this there, and you don't prefer this or that. Then there is the whole realm of illness and all the rest that comes along with that. Then there's the realm of preferences. We have all these realms. At the end of the day, the reality is you and Allah. In fact, the Reality is *ilallah*: only Allah, only the Truth.

That's enough. It almost brings me to the end of this subject. Try to allow and encourage yourself to really embrace these practices and see what it is. It is not just about enjoying. Sometimes when you take your glasses off, you can't see very well, but when you put on your glasses, sometimes you see things that are not so pleasant. There is a price to pay for clarity and hearing. Allah gave us hearing, but there are things we have heard that we all wish we had never heard. There are things we have seen that we wish we never saw. Occasionally, there are things we tasted that we wish we hadn't. And we won't even get into smell. That's the price you pay for clarity. Just because you can see doesn't mean everything you see is pleasant. The reward of seeing is Truth/Haqq. You have to deal

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with it. What are the tools you have to deal with it? What kind of a person deals with it?

What is the result of a person who uses this capability? You'll hear me talk about this on the weekend: tune in to Soul TV, the Community channel! *Asalaam aleikum.*