

October 7, 2009

Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Title: Wasila: The Ladder to Allah (swt)

DVD title: To Transform the Nafs and Ascend the Ladder to Allah (swt)
Seek the Means (Wasila) of the Prophet (sal):

Bismillah ir Rahman Raheem. Much discussion has gone on amongst philosophers and scientists and neuroscientists about consciousness and self for many decades. I'm not going to get into that discussion directly today, where some people say there is no such thing as the self. Recently a book has been written on the subject. I find that most of these authors have a deep, abiding problem with spirituality. They live in this either / or world. We are on a path (or at least I'm on a path, but I don't know if you are on my train or not) where a priori we accept on one level the self/*nafs*. On another level, we have to learn a tremendous amount about ourselves, so we don't accept anything about the self until we experience it from a Sufic point of view. To do that, we have to resolve relationships. We have to resolve our relationship with our self, with our *shaykh*, with our Prophet (sal), and with Allah (swt).

That's the short-speak way of saying it. The more in-depth way is that we have to investigate this thing we call the *nafs*. For the Sufi, this subject is not terribly complex: whether or not the *nafs* exists. We breathe; therefore, it exists. The brilliance of Islam lies in the simplicity of it, or in the complexity within the apparently simplicity, the simplicity of submission, of the message of *tawhid*. At a certain point, one begins to connect with that eternal self that transcends the limitations of the physical world, and begins to have direct experiences of truth. Often they come in the form of awareness,

confidence in one's perceptions, intuitions, insights, which in the outer world of ego would be arrogance, since everything has its analog. In the inner world, it's not arrogance. It's actually the opposite; it's humility.

At a certain point, realizations become inseparable from a person's character and the way a person lives. It becomes clear to a seeker that human beings are not just slaves to their desires or instincts. We all have an urge to express a higher set of values and a will/*irāda* that is – unless there is some terrible dysfunctional physiological aberration – capable of controlling and directing our actions . All of us have to unlearn and relearn certain things, and we all have something to overcome. As seekers or students begin to see the Divine Presence in everything, that Essence of Truth in everything (*dhat*), then a person becomes better able to grasp the meaning of life—the meaning of your personal life, the meaning of a collective concept of life, the destiny of humanity. The narrow, ego-centered points of view begin to change. One develops a much broader perspective, and more and more our thoughts and words becomes '*ibāda*.

As we approach this state, we develop more consciousness of it and we desire to do more good, to do things not for our personal advantage or out of external pressure. We do it *fit sabīli-Llāh*, because it's the right thing to do. Sometimes there are difficulties and questions about that. What's the right thing to do against the value system you are operating in? I had a very touch decision to make today, and I may have made the wrong one. I don't know. I was invited to have lunch with the vice-President of the U.S. tomorrow, and I decided not to do it. The conflict is around our work: it may have been beneficial to meet the people who attended. The question arises, is this the *nafs*? Is it selfishness? Am I being true to my beliefs or is it selfishness? I don't like the discomfort of doing something that maybe I should do for the benefit of our work, and our livelihood. These conflicts exist, even on high levels. Decisions have to be made. Part of it has to do with understanding what your role is, at the right place and right time.

Eventually, what happens is, even when you have those questions like that, you have to resolve it back to knowing that ultimately you have to have the *yaqīn*/certainty that everything is by the Will of Allah, including mistakes and errors that you can learn from. In doing that, you learn to rely on Allah. You learn to be patient, to be accepting, not accepting certain circumstances or behavior, or attitude as if it's okay. But you learn to become accepting of what comes to you so that you can learn from it and develop.

Through these practices we do, one can find many interesting affirmations and confirmations about very deep subjects (such metaphor and analogy). Through the *baraka* of these practices, one can begin to find assurances about things most people concern themselves about. We don't do it for those assurances; we do it for knowledge's sake, so we can find assurance that there is life after death, for example. That's not why we do the practices. We recognize that the world is preparation for another dimension. In recognizing that, one tries to live their lives better, or gain more knowledge, or serve better, or be a more refined human being. Those are moral equivalents or results of the practices. But again, that's not why you do it. It's what you learn from it.

Nobody goes out and commits a crime to learn from it. People commit crimes because they are criminal. Some people may learn from it, if they have repentance. But that's not why they commit the crime. It is the same thing; we don't do good just to learn from it, but we do learn from it. This path, this *Tasawwuf*, is a journey from the inner to the outer, and from the outer to the inner; from the *bātin* to the *dhāhir*, and from the *dhāhir* to the *bātin*. As we come to know ourselves, we truly come to know Allah because our perception and vision changes, our understanding of Allah changes. Our definition of Allah stops defaming Allah by anthropomorphizing Allah. And through realizing this Divine Reality, the seeker, the *murīd/a* becomes selfless. When you become selfless, you

overcome your narcissism, you overcome your selfishness and your “I” ness. You overcome the greed and desire nature that drives you to do acts or say things that are self-destructive, or at least are tremendous distractions. The clock is ticking all the time. Time is going on: getting older, getting older. Things change in us. Step by step, moment by moment, “I” becomes transformed. The *nafs* rises through different stages, until the *nai’ma* (grace) of Allah allows us to attain a state of awareness of the Divine that eclipses the selfish fixation on our self. That’s called *fana*. Having lost ourselves in that awareness /selflessness, one returns in a sense as a purified being. When *atazkiyat* has been achieved, we have learned a great deal, and we are now applying it in our lives. We have experienced some aspect of unity, of being overwhelmed and consumed by the Truth, the Divine. The truth in all its forms (some are delicious, some not; some you are allergic to, some not) consumes you. When you become consumed in that Divine truth, and are abiding in that truth, you are aware of something much greater: Almighty Allah (swt).

Yet, that experience is not the final experience, at least in the way we look at it. The person who attains that stage returns to assist others. Why? Because this is what makes a human being human. Even some animals help each other. We are in this world with Allah, and at the same time, we are translating that nearness we feel to Allah into service to Allah’s creation and creatures. You feel nearness to Allah, respect for Allah, and humility before Allah, and you begin to translate it to others. This happens progressively. It’s not that you have to attain this high state before you can help others. That’s why it’s from the *dhāhir* to the *bātin*, and from the *bātin* to the *dhāhir*. What you learn from service to others also refines your inner self and brings you to that *maqam* faster.

You have to keep yourself attuned to the duties and responsibilities Allah has presented to you or me in our day-to-day existence in this sheltered workshop called life. We understand the benefit, and who goes to the sheltered workshop. We are in one, comparatively. At the highest stage of awakening, you have this seeker who is working

very hard, striving to fulfill their role in the best way they can, actively relying on that mercy, on that *bāraka*. What is that *bāraka*? *Bāraka* is a very subtle energy, as we have spoken before. It's stronger in the human being. The more purified the human being becomes through the *latā'if*, the greater the flow of the *bāraka*. That *bāraka* can be so overpowering that you become overwhelmed by it in certain sacred places.

There are these places that are spiritual places. They are different for different people: the Vatican for the Catholic, the temples for the Hindus, the Bodhi tree for the Buddhists, Mecca or the four major *masajid* for us, [as well as] the place of the *shuyukh*, the tomb of the Prophet (sal), the artifacts of the Prophet (sal) in Topkapi (such as the hair from his beard). These are place of *bāraka*. Because these places exist, we can move from one place to another. We can actually move through the corridors, through the *barzakh*, through the spiritual isthmus, the partition between these two worlds, between this world and the Hereafter, between the outer and the inner—the ‘*ālam al-mithāl*'. It's very important that we spend a little time in that intermediate *barzakh* every day.

It's important to go into your meditation and drift in *ghunūgi*. As you move through it, you become aware that you are drifting, and come to the state of *adraq*. You realize you have moved from here to there, and you find comfort there. It's like having a favorite place to go for a little snooze during the day. Go get in your hammock and swing. Leave your worries aside, and go into this state, this timeless place, this *barzakh* between the outer and inner world—your dreams. *Barzakh* is something that separates two things, never being one or the other. You don't know where you are going to exit the *barzakh*, but you can prepare to exit it in a good place. But you don't know. So much depends on the Will of Allah. It's like quantum tunneling. You go from one place to another place instantaneously, and actually be in both places at the same time. Or like Schrodinger's cat, you don't know if the cat is alive or dead until you open the box. [You are] moving

through space and time, but you don't know exactly everything. So you have to rely on some laws you are not in control of, that have been placed and are set, and are tuned to you or me.

This *barzakh* is also a barrier between the known and the unknown. What is known may be known in the unknown, but what is unknown is not known in the known, by definition. On the “other side” so to speak, you can know of this world. But in this world, you cannot know of that world. This subject of imagination/*khayāl* is the penultimate *barzakh* in that it is neither this nor that. It is both this and that. It is very quantum mechanics. I talked about the realm of *huwa la huwa*. That supreme *Barzakh*, the *Barzakh al-Allah* is between Allah and nothing. *Al-khayāl al-mutlaq*, it is called. It is non-delimited imagining. Remember I spoke of imagination and imaging. Why is that important? Imagination is the greatest gift of Allah, because we are made in the “image” of Allah, the imagining of Allah. It is not black or white, green or yellow, tall or short, fat or thin, or like an Arab or whatever. The Breath of Allah is the breath of mercy. It is transforming. The Real (through Whom this whole creation is created), the *al-haqq al-mutlaq bihi*, or the Truth or Universal Reality leads to a kind of understanding of the perfection of the human being.

The Naqshbandiyya Order that we are primarily a part of, though we are part of many Tarīqah, gives us the means not just to understand this intellectually, but to begin to develop these capacities. These were refined by Hazrat Abdul Bāri Shah (ra), who died quite young, 41 years of age (1859 – 1900). He was a great saint, *insani kamil*. He was Bengali. His father was a theologian. You can read about him on websites. He was an alchemist. When Abdul Bāri Shah (ra) was only 6 years old, his father passed away and his mother raised him. She moved to Hoogli, near Calcutta. Hoogli is near a bridge. Some people are born, live, and die on that bridge and never leave it. (I've been on that bridge.) She was a spinner of thread. Her life was a very model of sabr and gratitude, and

he was considerate even at an early age. He tried to contribute to the family income by doing a little work. But once when he was a child, some boys came to him and asked him to help them steal coconuts. He refused, but they insisted. He was supposed to be the lookout. It happened that the coconut trees were near the graveyard, and suddenly he saw a dead person coming toward him. That person said, “You are a good boy. You weren’t born for this purpose.” And he left there and returned home.

These are the kinds of people in our Order. He was, in our eyes, a *qutb madar*, and also the *qutb irshad*—not only was he the pole of the universe, but a pole for guidance. He said something that was very, very important. He said to his students, “There is no need for you to go anywhere. Don’t think I am speaking from my ego. I am selfless, and whatever I am saying is for your betterment.” He would compare himself to Jilani (ra) and say, “He and I are like this (two fingers). Where he is present, he has asked me to join him there.” I think it would benefit you to read the story.

As one becomes more and more a servant of Allah (swt), one becomes more aware of their self. We say the person achieves *al-wasila*/nearness to Allah. *Al-wasila* is the name given to the highest station in Paradise. We say it in our *durūd* from the Naqshbandī line: *wasila ti alaik*. This highest realm was promised to the Prophet Mohammed (sal). He is the possessor of the means to the mercy. This is the place of intercession, the office of the mediator. This is the point where the Prophet intercedes for your goodness. He is the means. *Wasila* indicates the means through which a person comes close to Allah. Close to Allah means close to the Divine Presence in everything, close to understanding **“Wheresoever you look, there is the face of Allah.”** Allah says in Qur’ān, **“Seek the means of approach to Him.”** (5:35)

The only *wasila* is the Prophet Mohammed (sal). There is no other means to ascend. The

Prophet is the ladder. There is no means to ascend from this physical universe, this *dhāhir*, to the Divine Presence without a ladder. I told Abu Bakr today, two more light bulbs are out in our ceiling. Our ceiling is 18 feet high! You need a ladder to do that. As *murīds* we have to travel the first stages of this journey of returning to Allah through the journey of awakening to the Divine Presence. With the direct aid, and under the direct protection of someone: our *murshīd*.

These are the stages of the spiritual struggle, *mujahada*. It requires a kind of asceticism, or spiritual discipline, and a certain level of *war'a*, refraining or abstinence. Through the name of Allah (swt), the *murīd* and *murīda* attain to the state of *fana*/annihilation. In the old days, it was *fana fi murshīd*, or *fana fi shaykh*. We don't follow that. We move to the *fana fi Allah* through the love of the *shuyukh*, through the love of the Prophet (sal). Not love like, "I love you and you love me." It's all conditioned, and you and I know it. The love of the Prophet Mohammed was shown when the Bedouin came into the *masjid* and urinated there. Everyone got all upset and wanted to beat him and throw him out. Not only was it bad behavior, but *nargis*. The Prophet (sal) made an excuse for him because he loved him. He understood where he was coming from, and that he needed to be educated, *tarbiya*. Such is the love of the *shaykh* and the Prophet. Then what could be the love of Allah?

There is that kind of love, and also another kind. There is the love that comes from the person who is selfless. It is not the kind of love you just want response for: you kiss me, I kiss you; you hug me, I hug you. It's the love of Allah that is shared. What is that? You are both seeing. You don't make the sunrise any more beautiful by sharing it with someone, but you share because it is human nature to share. If you are not being selfish, your nature is to share. Since you know you can't own the sunrise, it's much easier to be selfless about the sunrise than it is to say, "Here, I have \$5000, here is \$2500." To realize

that no one comes into that resonance or that harmony with Allah before meeting Prophet Mohammed (sal) is a simple way of saying it. It's just like saying there is no way to put a lightbulb in the ceiling without the ladder. There just is no way. There is no way to get the brain to operate without the heart, and no way to get the heart to operate without the sympathetic nervous system. The brain can be nearly dead and the heart will still operate. But there is an inter-dependency, a co-dependency in the positive.

The *murīda* or *murīd* can't get any further towards that resonance with Allah unless they travel near to or with a *wasila*. Prophet Mohammed (sal), the *wasila*, left some of that with the *sahabah*, and with the *taba'ain*, and with the *taba-taba'ain*, and with the *shuyukh*. Traveling back to the Prophet (sal) (to the ladder), in order to put the light in the ceiling is very important. The lover doesn't reach that state of resonance with Allah only through being a lover, but he/she reaches that state through being a beloved of Allah (swt). There is only one beloved of Allah (*Habīballah*), and that is Prophet Mohammed (sal). The only way is through him, within him, with him in that Presence. Because the Reality of the Prophet Mohammed, al-Haqiqah Muhammediyya, has been shown to us, the true followers are those who find their means through the Prophet (sal). But the Prophet (sal) is not a person only. He is character, walking *aqīda*, walking *akhlaq*. The Prophet (sal) is ever-living in that sense that the means remains with us.

Just like if I pass on, the knowledge I gave to you remains with you, if you absorbed it. If you grasp it, use it, apply it, I may no longer be here, but the knowledge is left with you. The Prophet (sal) left some of the means, *wasila*, through his *shuyukh*. There is no way without a means. There is no way for you to get here without the means of your feet or cars. There is no means to get from here to California or the Middle East or anywhere without a ship or a plane. There is no means to get from here to there. I met someone the other day at a luncheon, who had been burned so badly that he had no fingers, but

could still manage to eat a sandwich with his hands. I can't say to you that you can't eat without fingers, because you can. I can't say that you can't walk without feet, because you can. There are ways of adjusting. But there are no means to Allah, to that resonance, without the *wasila*.

The *latā'if* are the means for understanding the means. If we only talk about that, then we only talk about process. That's why I jump back and forth from process to *khayāl*. Because the means behind the means is what Allah has bestowed upon us to be able to see and interact with the Divine Presence everywhere—our consciousness, our self, our imagination, the active metaphor. We don't disagree (hopefully) about the truth that is in Qur'an. There is a lot of discussion on the semantics and meanings of Qur'an. I want to talk soon, *inshā'a-Llāh*, about *majāz*/metaphor. The majority of people have agreed on its existence in Qur'an. The Qur'an is filled with metaphors. Although a couple of Shafi *shaykhs* say that their doubt is based on the belief that metaphor/*majāz* is similar to lying. A metaphor is not the truth, therefore it can't be in Qur'an. But that doubt is not easily substantiated. Before I talk about *majāz*, I have to yet go somewhere else.

I have to go back and talk to you about *latā'if*. I have to make sure that you understand what these *latā'if* are. But that won't be tonight. And I have to talk about the self. There was a text written in Farsi, which talks about the attributes Allah (swt) gave to human beings, and about the human ego, the *nafs ammāra*, that settled into the heart of Hazrat Adam (as). I would like you to hear my talk on this subject, because I went into depth about Hawa (as) and Adam (as).

I think it's important, that as we struggle with our *nafs* every day, it's important to understand what we are struggling with, and we understand the power that we have. I'm trying to go from the mystical, the practical, and the historical to the same place. This entrance doorway where you should believe if one of us goes through that doorway, the

rest of us benefit. Do not think of your life as only a struggle to learn something that is unlearnable, or to attain something that's not attainable. Think of your life as attaining step by step, deeper and deeper understandings, so that the process itself is engaging and rewarding. Don't look at the end game, because it will come by the will of Allah. It will come at the time appointed. Try and make it at the right time, and try very hard to live your life not thinking it's a big struggle to be a spiritual person on the spiritual path, having to give up this and that. Look at this life as step by step awakening, step by step clarity, step by step understanding of what is truth.

Remember the television game show “To Tell the Truth”? What was it based on? It was based on a lie. You had a panel of three people trying to guess which contestant was telling the truth about the work they did. Whoever could spin the greatest story would get the vote from the panelists. To find out the truth, you have to distinguish from the untruths. The stories we weave in our lives are often self-deceptions. We tell ourselves lies that we believe are the truth. But when you start to see the truth, it becomes clear. We will come back to the subject of *nafs*, and Adam and Hawa.

When you refine the *nafs* through meditation, you'll see it. You might not like what you see, but you'll like the fact that what you are seeing is the truth. Then you'll overcome the dislike, because you'll become very enamored of the honor and the blessing of seeing the truth. Then you'll feel great compassion and mercy, because sometimes what you see is very ugly and painful, and self-destructive. But you will be grateful, because you'll realize there is *bāraka* in your seeing. Just the fact that you see, and articulate, and think compassionately—this is the alchemy, the way Abdul Bāri Shah's (ra) father transformed one thing into another. But as long as you say, “Not me! I don't want to become some kind of absorbed goody-goody thing. I like my resistance, nastiness, and temperament.”

Don't over simplify. Try to live your life in the way I've just said, not bemoaning, but improving, grateful. *Alhamduli-Llāh*. How bad could the outcome of that be? *Asalāmu aleikum.*