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Thursday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Your Nafs Is Your Truth](#)

DVD title: The Struggle between Nafs Ammāra and Gaining Knowledge
Be Aware of Spiritual Materialism

The fact is most people – the vast majority of people – especially people who have a lot of worldly means, have little desire to have spiritual growth and advancement. You hear it in all kinds of ways. You see it from the stories that very few people learn from—stories from the Torah, from the Injīl, and from the teachings in Qur’an. What happens when there is greed? What happens when the Whisperer, Khannās, whispers in your ear? From the time of Hazrat Adam (as) and Hawa (as), when Allah created them in order to procreate, the battle had begun, and you needed reinforcements. So Adam and Hawa (as) created others to carry on this battle against the Whisperer, Shaytan.

The Shaytan manifests in many ways, not just in terrible, bad ways; but in ways that are ostensibly good. But they are material ways, and undermine the spiritual growth of the human being. They are distractions, distortions. We see it up until today. The more successful people are materially, it’s not that they turn away from spirituality all the time. That’s one group of people; they just become materialists. I had an interesting meeting with Chogyam Trungpa many years ago. He wrote a book and called it “Spiritual Materialism.” Now we are living in the midst of the world of spiritual materialism. You are, my dear friends, anachronisms. You are the last vestige among many others who try to strive, at least, have a taste of some traditional Tasawwuf—not just in America, but

Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

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especially in America. The Shaykh Ibrahims are gone. The Shaykh Hazrat Rasools are gone. The Shaykh Ahmed Kaftaros are gone. The Shaykh Osman Sirajuddin an Naqshbands are gone.

Spiritual materialism takes the form in Islam of people who are not Wahabis or Salafis or Hizbul Tahrirs, but as young people who are now making \$150,000 a year, five times the salary of people here, young men your age. A pharmacist begins at \$140,000 out of school. Doctors, lawyers, engineers—and they are sincere people. They are good people. But they are being influenced to want to pick and choose spirituality that reflects their upward mobility, spirituality that has the face of success, spirituality that has the patina of their new-found place in society. After all, many of them, unlike you though they are the age of the young people here, are first-generation Muslims. They came out of poverty. Their parents worked hard: they drove taxicabs. Or they were the first generation to be educated. But maybe they still have some taste of the old world; those are the ones who are saveable. Or their parents may have been the first generation living in the US: doctors, engineers, academics. They grew up in \$400,000 houses, four cars in the garage. What is religion to them? What is Islam to them?

Some of them are very sincere. They want to know things. But what do they want? They want to pick and choose what they know, and they don't want to make much effort. They want to be flashy, and in the company of good people. But they are more "*fiqhi*" than Sufi. They want to concentrate on little tidbits of knowledge. They want expertise in certain things. Some of them become expert in Arabic language, or knowledgeable about *fiqh*. But their hearts are not alive, because they know nothing of being among the *fuqara*. They don't know what annihilation is. They just came out of ambiguity into modernity. They came out of this place of collectivism: collective poverty or second-class citizenship, and they are trying to become first-class citizens in the US. We saw it

with Judaism in the 50's, and we see it now with Islam in the 21st century. This is the real curse on Hazrat Adam (as). You might say it is a blessing. This is the Jihad al Akbar.

The Prophet (sal) saw it happening in Mecca with the Jahaliyya. People had become more and more corrupt. That was a very obvious thing. It was corruption against something non-corrupt, Islam. Now, you find people very, very fixated on little things. They are fixated on good little things: a *tafsir* of Qur'an, something in *fiqh*, laws or *madab* or something like that. It becomes a kind of social gathering around the *alims*, around the *shuyukh*. Of course the great mistake [to avoid] is, as we say in the Naqshbandī Order, not to give people what they want, but what they need. This has to do with the most important thing in life: decisions. What are you going to decide?

Religion, spirituality, practices become an accessory. We all get caught up in our accessories: my BlackBerry and its applications, my Iphone and its applications. Accessorizing is ornamentation. It makes you look more beautiful, more rich, but it's all spiritual materialism. Who really wants to spend the time doing the practices to open up the *latā'if*? I sit and get excited and give these talks, but who really, really – even among you – really want to grasp it? And you are anachronisms. You represent what is going extinct. You represent a dying race. So go drink the well water, because you are going to die, and Tasawwuf will die with you.

It's the truth – unless you pass it on, unless you keep it going in some way. It may be the reason why you see such few people here. They come here, get a taste and get interested. All of a sudden, the reality hits. It's much easier to meet *shaykh* this and *shaykh* that, and visit Hamza this and Hamza that. They are good and knowledgeable people, but what is being promoted (unintentionally perhaps – I can't believe it is intentional) is giving people what they want instead of what they need. This is the story of Hazrat Adam (as).

Everything tells you the same thing: “**Wheresoever you look, there is the face of**

Allah.” But who tells you how to open up the knowledge base to get to the key for this?

It’s the poor people for the most part who want to spiritualize their lives. They work hard all week. They come and sit, like you sit. You work hard for good reasons: to help humanity, to educate the children. If you are working hard only to put food on your table, okay. They want to get a little bit of spirituality in their lives. They remember what it was like, the benefit of living a simple life. They could be wealthy, but [still live] a simple life. You can’t buy your way to knowledge.

As the self becomes refined it seeks knowledge, but along with that comes power.

Knowledge is power/*qudrat*, force, wisdom, *irāda*/will. You get insight. If the power you are getting is getting to an unregenerate ego, and if the wisdom being sent to you, you are picking and choosing from; and if the will that you have is not a will for more spiritual knowledge but for your own ego and your own successes, then what you are listening to and looking are serving the wrong purpose, the wrong master. You are serving Mammon.

The human ego which finds its home in the heart/*qalb*, in the center, in this *barzakh* between this world and the next world, has to be refined, because the heart is where everything gets refined. It is where the blood is oxygenated and the carbon dioxide goes off to the lungs, and you have fresh life. The Sufi knows the means to do this. All the lectures, all the *tafsir*, all the whatever will not do much good at all. It creates the form of Islam, and a face of Islam—perhaps a very wealthy, well-educated face of Islam.

A lot of good can be done in the world; but to know yourself, to know Allah and be free is for a very few people, I’m convinced. Everybody gets basically what they want. When Hazrat Adam (as) leaves this earth, then Iblis is free. He starts to influence human beings, and encourages their inclinations toward desire. Consequently, it’s pushing people away from the good things, the right way toward infidelity. Allah sends in each

age a *nabī*/prophet to struggle against these influences, to speak the truth, to show the power of good, to speak wisdom, and to put people back on the *siratal mustaqim*. These prophets gather companions around them. Out of these companions, they make *pīrs*, living spiritual masters, to help others escape from the darkness, from the confusion, from the desire nature, and to find their way back to Allah (swt). It's not something we can find in our own way; we need a guide.

The proof that we need a guide is people will become very eclectic, and turn to many people for this tidbit of knowledge, and that tidbit of knowledge, and feel good about their “religion” without having to make any great effort in their spirituality. (I don't want this to come out wrong.) It would certainly be a better world to have good Christians, good Jews, and good Muslims who followed some principles of behavior in life, and had fear of God. But for those people who find their ways to the door of Tasawwuf—however you find your way there: you marry into it, you trip over it, you work for us, and suddenly find out you've stayed for 25 years—you found your way here because Allah put you here, because of your destiny.

Then there is a critical choice. Will you revert back to the comfort zone of post-modern spirituality, or will you make the effort to find out what the truth is and live it in your life? Are you going to avoid failing by being financially successful, socially acceptable and religiously active in the *masjid* or wherever? Or are you going to do whatever it is you do, live your life, work hard, keep in the company of good people, and just seize every bit of spirituality you can when it comes to you in between your job, the raising of your children, and putting food on the table?

That's the choice: living in the comfort zone of religion, or growing in the garden of spirituality? 95.5723168% of people choose comfort zone. The comfort zone is a tool of

Shaytan. *Astaghfiru-Llāh*. I'm sorry. The negative side of our self uses, and has always used religion and the truth, as a weapon against the truth—always. Why should we be surprised it is happening in the world we live in today, the 21st century? We shouldn't be surprised. The problem is we don't teach people about their own ego. We have to know about this *nafs*.

What is *nafs*? Kashani in his treatise says, “*Know that your nafs is your truth.*” This ego is placed by the Divine Spirit, which I'll talk about, in your heart, in the true heart. The true heart has several different capabilities. It has the attribute of talking, of hearing, of smelling, of life, of knowledge/*hikma*, of *qudara*/power. These attributes are characterized in the *nafs* of Hazrat Adam (as). They also characterize the *nafs* of each human being. We are not reducible to our *nafs ammāra*, our animal nature only. We are also given human identity. There is a struggle between the human identity and the animal nature. The animal nature has many different levels to it. The struggle between the animal nature and the true nature of the heart that thinks, the heart that knows the truth, the heart that identifies through reflection, *tawajjuh* (paying attention), struggles with the things of this physical world that draws out only our desire nature.

This is again the struggle between the attraction to the outer and the attraction to the inner world. But if our minds are reduced only to physical accomplishments, or power, or eating, or a job, or building a beautiful house or a beautiful *masjid*, or rejecting the historical Islam and accepting this post-modern Islam, what happens is you begin to side with the animals. You begin to have more and more of your animal nature come out.

If your thought is oriented toward the truth, toward Allah, toward wisdom (*hikma*), then you are drawn more toward purity and divinity. Here lies the rub. If you spend your time studying Qur'an, studying *fiqh*, reading books, books, books you should be more inclined

toward purity and the Divine. But if you see those things as material accomplishments; if your ego is unrefined and you see those things as a collection of knowledge or information, then you get these very strange juxtapositions where a person goes to the mosque all the time, is *hafez* of Qur'an, knows all the inner or outer things, but goes home and beats his wife, or cheats the *kāfir*, or hates the Jew, or doesn't trust the Christian. The person who gets involved, and never misses a thing at the *masjid*, never misses a *khutbah*, totally doesn't identify with their own children, tells them, "My job is put food on your table, to educate you, and now you are on your own."

I've heard so many Muslims say that. Can you imagine your parents saying that? No, because you are from Egypt, and because you come from traditional family. Can you imagine your Indonesian parents saying that? No. We can't imagine it in our community. "Marry a so-and-so girl from this village." This is what they are told. But they are filled with information, filled with Qur'an, *du'ā*, this and that. I am very stupid compared to them. I'm also very broke compared to them. How would they understand the writings of Ibn Masheesh (ra), or Askandari (ra), or of the Daqawi that talk about abasing yourself? On what basis? You can be wealthy and understand it. It's not about money; it's what money does: new-found power, new-found status. So the animal nature wins.

There are beautiful animals; not all of them are grrrrr fierce. There are purrrr animals and tweet-tweet animals. There are all kinds of beautiful little animals. The little frogs are chirp, chirping every night. Not all animals are horrible things; most of them are very beautiful. So this competition occurs between these two worlds. What's going to get the upper hand? Truth has to win. What is truth? The more you apply certain principles and abstain from certain indulgences, the more you seek real knowledge, the more you develop your *taqwa*/piety, turn inward, do your meditation and the practices, you'll become a wise person. You'll become a humble servant. You will be a trustworthy shop

keeper. You will be a farmer who produces more and gives to his neighbor. You'll be a creator of new ideas and things for humanity.

The more you eat and sleep and cater to your desires, the more you pick and choose what you like, then the more you become a person who is dependent on those things, and the more the obstacles, the veils are set between you and Allah. They have a saying in Farsi: *Know that you will not be able to break the stone of the heart on your own, as long as there is no stone breaker.* After the *ambiya*, there were stone breakers—the Khwaja Khwajagān, the Masters of Wisdom. This *jihad al-akbar* that the Prophet Muhammad (sal) taught the *sahabah*, the struggle with the ego, with evil, with the distractor, with the Whisperer is an inner struggle. You will not be able to do this on your own, we are told by the Khwaja Khwajagān. One needs a good direction and someone to direct them.

Khashani in his treatise points out that these are the Khwajagān. He called the people who are among the Khwajagān “*tabiban il haqiq ilalahi.*” They are the doctors of wisdom, the *hakims* of Allah, those who could cure the spiritual diseases. In a previous talk, I gave his metaphor of a horse. What is it you are asking your horse to carry? What is it you are loading your horse up with: desires, money, things? How far will your horse be able to go, carrying all this heavy weight of the world? Your horse will carry a lot. If you feed it and take care of it, it will like you; and if you have trained it really well, it will carry until it drops. It will be your best companion. Any horse person will tell you that. But is that the point of life? Do you want to just weight yourself down and down until you drop, and what have you accomplished? And all you are carrying is the weight of worldly existence: name and fame and power and gold.

The cause of all suffering is the ego. Allah created this horse to carry something else: to carry the *rūh*/spirit of the human being. When we look around the world, it's a very

strange irony. “How heretical can you be, Shaykh Rashid? Is it really possible to weight yourself down with religion?” The Prophet (sal) said you could. He said that day will come when the only thing left of Islam will be its name. Is it possible you can weigh yourself down with information, even knowledge about your religion, and have nothing of the spirit to fight the *jihād* with? How many supposed *alims*, *hafez* of Qur’an, and people who are knowledgeable about *fiqh* have picked up the sword and fought what they call a “*jihād* against the *kāfirs*” when those people were not the *kāfirs*? How many? What about the 11 or 12 people who flew the planes into the World Trade Center? Who are these people who “die for Allah,” and a week before they are in strip joints? Why, to build a good cover in a place where there is no cover (except the cover charge)?

Khashani and the great teachers are always distinguishing these things. They tell very simply that you could possibly weight yourself down with too much knowledge, too much information, if you don’t know how to use it. Allah has given you the way to use it in your *latā’if*, in your *muraqabah*. What are you going to do about it? No one’s going to see you sitting there among another 500 devoted religionist Muslims, sitting there at the feet of the great *alims*, being told things. No one will see you if you are just sitting in your *muraqabah*. They are not going to see you in your *muraqabah*. They will not see you sitting in a small group of 8, 20, 70, or 100 people. It sounds like Yom Kippur when I was young, or Easter Sunday: dress up, be seen in the place of religion, and be respected for being there, for being a “respected leader who understands some of the insights of Torah,” or a deacon of the church, or whatever. I’m not being facetious; these are not bad things, but they are veils.

When the non-Muslims talk about how terrible it that women are oppressed who wear *hijāb*, they should see the *hijāb* they are wearing. When the Muslims dress up their women in *hijāb* because this is what the acceptable thing is, and then they go home and

beat them, or demean them, or lock them in the kitchen or nursery—this is Allah’s idea?

Then who is Khadija and who is Aisha? Who is Umm Salma? They are the *ruhas*. They are the exception that proves the rule. “But no, Shaykh Rashid! My wife has a degree in this or that. My wife is a lawyer or this or that. We are free.” What are you doing in your soul?

We have to remove this harmful ego from us, and each *shaykh* sets up a path of practice (*tarīqah riazat*). That has to correspond to the time, the place, and the people. The path and the practices are designed to weaken this ego. For those who have succeeded in controlling it, they learn something very important. You have to feed it a little; that’s how you control it. You have to give it a little food. If you starve it, it gets very angry. What happens when you are feeding your *nafs ammāra* knowledge that it will use against you, that will lift your ego up, or give you pride or status in the *masajid* or in the local community? What happens then? Will you deny the Qur’an and Hadith? Will you deny yourself an understanding of Shar’iah? That doesn’t sound right. That would be pretty heretical. “Listen, you know so much Qur’an and go to all these lectures, and look at your status in society. But look, you and I both know your ego is such!” “Yes, oh, yes, Shaykh, you got through my head. I’ll stop reading Qur’an and Hadith.” No, no! That’s not the point. Start doing something else.

Start doing the things that humble you, that make you reflect upon yourself, that awaken your *latā’if*. Start doing the things that are not seen in public, so that when you are in public, you feel humble. When you learn something, you realize how much you don’t know. That takes a lot of effort and trust. “On the one hand: I’m gaining all this knowledge. On the other hand, there a whole bunch I don’t know anything about, and only you know about that. I’d have to surrender to you, and trust you to teach me that. But this bit of knowledge over here I can read about in books, sit with my friends, and

bring *shaykhs* in, and talk about it.” That is great, but what is going to contain it and make it meaningful? That’s where you are, right there. That’s the crossroads, except for those of you who don’t give a damn.

For those of you who don’t really care, it’s not a problem. You do practices, and that’s it. You don’t study that much Qur’an. You don’t read that much Hadith. You don’t really love Islam that much. You don’t find this to be a problem because you are not that committed. So where are we, then? You have these people who have a new-found wealth and social status, a new-found capacity to hire people and create a conference and bring in all these people with all this information. They sincerely want to know about their religion on one level; they just don’t want to submit to the way it becomes a real spiritual awakening. Then you have the people who just sort of practice it on a cursory level, and don’t have any great desire to study Qur’an or Hadith or anything else. They, (or you, us, we) miss out on something very important. But we have the inner part okay. I’ll leave you with that conundrum. Both groups of people have to look at their *nafs*. This was a talk on *nafs*, by the way.

I’ll come down on the side of the people who haven’t yet discovered all the treasures in the Qur’an and Hadith and all that, because they/you have already learned how to look at your *nafs*. Now all you have to do is add the other element. But the other people, if they never learn how to look at their *nafs* or reflect upon themselves, they will spend a long time in the grave repeating over and over again the ‘*āyāt*s that they know, but they will not have gained anything internally to get them out of that grave faster. (Not a good metaphor, sorry.)

A better one would have been... you can go to your grave a frustrated songwriter, singing all the songs of the other people, but you never wrote a song in your life. Or, you can be

like a person who walks through a museum of modern art and looks at a splash of paint on a white canvas and say, “What the heck is so great about that? Anybody could do that! I could have done that!” Then you turn to them and say, “But you didn’t.” You didn’t think of it. And you didn’t starve for 20 years before you were discovered. You didn’t have that commitment. You didn’t think of putting paint all over your body and rolling on the canvas. Someone else thought of it. Someone else thought of taking a giant ruler that becomes a red line and then a blue line and then a green line. Someone else thought about making cubes, or pictures that look like Campbell’s soup cans. Not that it’s great; it’s a metaphor. Sure, you could have done it but you didn’t do it. Our ego says, “I could have done that! I could get a welding torch and some rebar and melt it all together and call it ‘journey to mars’ and paint it red.” But you didn’t do it. What else is it you are not doing? edit. 57:30

Question: Isn’t there something inherent in Islam that overrides the nafs? I never saw it as a person having that much control over it.

Shaykh: You have this whole analogy of the creation, of Shaytan, and the *nafs ammāra*, and the need to overcome these influences on you. Shouldn’t you use the clues given by the Prophet Mohammed (sal)? I’m not saying don’t read the Qur’an; the answers lie in the Qur’an. The question is what are you seeing? That is why I gave the example of people who go home and cheat each other or lie. This *nafs ammāra* is so deeply ingrained in all of us that we have to open up new capabilities, new insights. We have to use the tools Allah gave us. Those are told to us in Qur’an. Inherent in Islam is the way to confront the *nafs*, if that is your question. But that’s not really the point. I guess you could say, which Islam: the patina, the surface; or the depth? I began by saying that a lot of good is done or presented by these people, but there’s a problem. Unless people are willing to turn toward themselves and towards developing their capability, they will be

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caught only on the surface. They will never see. I guess it's the difference between seeing the land by riding on a railroad, in a balloon, or in an airplane, or from outer space. It's contextual. You need to be a *faqir*. You need to ride the train, not just be in awe of the big blue marble, because you can't see any detail. You have to see details. If you read the Qur'an and are in awe, that's great. But read it down to earth so you can see the details. I really don't want to be heretical. Yes, it's inherent. But you have to be able to interpret it and apply it.