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Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Objective of Tasawwuf / How It Is Attained](#)

DVD title: The Objective of Tasawwuf and How it is Attained:
A Look at Conscious Breathing

Dinner blessing: O Allah, we are so very grateful to You for all the *rizq*/provisions that You give to us, and the opportunity for us to meet people who love You and who serve You. We ask You, Allah, to send Your Blessing upon this world that has much strife in it, much difficulty in it. We ask You, Allah, to send Your Blessings upon all those people how are striving to be good and positive people. We ask You, Allah, to end the oppressions around the world, to give safety and security to all people no matter where they come from, or not matter who they identify themselves with. We ask You, Allah, to give us the opportunity to serve better in our work, in the world and with each other and with our families. We are grateful for those who have returned safely from their journey, for our new friends, and for our relatives to be here. We hope and pray, Allah, that we are worthy of the blessings You send upon us. *Amin*.

Suhbat: *Allah Hu Akbar. Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm.* One of the more unspoken aspects of Tasawwuf is its dynamism, very much entrenched in the ethics of the foundations of Islam. It's important that one realizes that the practices themselves are not only designed for a transformational effect on the individual, but there is a certain internal adjustment that takes place with the practices that makes them relevant to the time and place: *zamān, maqam*. Sufis are people who should behave according to the needs of the

time. Hence, you see the reluctance and resistance among Sufis to be drawn into political movements like the Salafi movements which try (in their eyes) to recapture what happened 1400 years ago, regardless of what is happening today. But I don't want to speak about politics. I want to speak of the dynamism.

One looks at “religion” from the Sufic point of view, not as something that hinders spiritual progress but as something that must support spiritual progress; and not bound by the shackles, balls and chains of religious ritual, but sees ritual as a dynamic process of evolution. It's more than just an attitudinal difference. It's something that is experiential and more than a semantic difference. From the point of view of Tasawwuf, as you well know, the greatest aspect of religion is the love of Allah, the love of humanity, the human being's love of and respect of life, hence, the importance of not doing any harm to any human being or any living being, not hurting anyone's feelings, having proper attitude, and good behavior (*adab*), and understanding that this is a very legitimate means for evolution, for evolving one's own character, and for renewing (*tajdid*) one's self—and renewing society, for that matter.

The objective is to somehow evolve out of this physical reality [into] what one would call a complete human being, by improving one's character and conduct, and understanding the principles and practices that are utilized to create this complete human being, and by revolving around a central theme of this dynamic evolution of the human being over this short, brief period of time we reside here. Although we abjure terms like self-realization and enlightenment because they have many associations and meanings, we can use them in the lower-case [meaning] of realizing the self, realizing the realities of one's day to day existence, and the levels of self/*nafs*, so that one has a baseline for understanding one's evolution and development. Moreover, it is a process of self-renewal, of adaptation.

The idea is that there is an inherent biological process of renewal—an evolution. It goes back to my analogies, as you can see, that I’ve been making over the least few months.

To complete or fulfill this journey, one has to find certain characteristics within themselves that are necessary. Just like to complete a chemistry experiment, you have to have the proper elements to get the proper results. And you have to have certain knowledge to come to certain conclusions about things. For the Sufi, what one has to find within one’s own self – and I say this with a great deal of trepidation, because it’s a term that is used off-handedly and unscientifically and improperly, yet we are all familiar with it – one has to find love within oneself. One has to find the heart that is purified through the passion and fire of love. The distance between here and there is like the distance between birth and death. It can be covered just in time, or in the acquisition of knowledge, or in the acquisition of good character, or in the acquisition of good acts. One can refine oneself, or just live that period of time through, in a very materialistic way.

Yet at the same time, the distance between ignorance and knowledge could be traversed in a second. Think of our sojourn in life, if we are lucky enough to live 90 or 100 years of life, against the reality of eternity. It is less than a blink of an eye. We shouldn’t have any problem understanding that this *tajalli*, this unveiling, can happen in a second. *Tajalli* has the implication of irradiation, transmission. Actually, transmission is different, *tawajjuh*. *Tajalli*, to be understood, is sort of self - disclosure. *Tajalli* means Allah (swt) unveils that truth, and one begins to see (*basīr*) with insight. One’s eyesight becomes trained to be able to see the water in the glass, the face of the person, or the beauty of the plant or the fruit as a reality, as real as Allah. This self-disclosure—meaning Allah reveals “Himself” to His Creatures (excuse the male terms here), reveals the Reality to the one who sees—these Divine Self-Disclosures are not repeated, [yet] they are never ending.

If your attention is clear, and your actions are refined, and your practices are done with sincerity, wisdom (*hikma*) and yearning (*himma*), every time you look, even at the same thing, you see something different. The reality of that is proven in the Qur'an. Every time you open the Qur'an you see something different, if you are sincere and not looking for trouble or things to criticize Muslims about. You can say this about the Torah or the Injil. You are looking at the same thing, but you see something different. These are called the lights of the unseen. The lights of the unseen are unveiled to the hearts of the human being. I don't mean it in a metaphorical or poetic sense, only—though that, too—but in the *latīfa* of *qalb* there is a capacity for seeing. These lights illuminate in the heart whatever is brought before the heart. It's not just what you see with your eyes (*basar*) but what you see with your insight (*basīr*), the sight inside of you.

We see things with our eyes all the time and we define them and name them. They are familiar to us. Other people use the same names for them. It doesn't matter which language you use; as soon as you make the connection, you know you are saying the same thing. But this is a different kind of sight. This is a sight that uses the eyes only as a means, as a track to another level of seeing. These are the '*āyāt*/signs that Allah (swt) has placed inside of ourselves in order that we may "see" Allah. Everybody in this room but our guest knows what I mean when I say that. Seeing Allah does not mean we are seeing a being, person, or entity somewhere out there. But we are seeing that Divine Presence everywhere. **"Wheresoever you look, there is the countenance of Allah."**

Each *tajalli*, each self-disclosure pours more and more *nūr* (light). We hear Christians and Jews say it: light upon light: *nūr i nūr*. It's never exactly the same. Each *tajalli* pours more and more light on whatever or whomsoever it falls. That goes on forever, eternally. Just think about it in terms of astrophysics. (Okay, you've done that. Now we can move on!) Look at the sky tonight, at a star. I like Betelgeuse, or Orion's belt.

You'll see one star. You know you are not seeing the same light tonight that you saw last night; it's a reality. Not only that, you are seeing light that emanated from that star long before there were dinosaurs walking on this planet. So you are looking into the past. What we are seeing now is the past. It's never the same; but it looks the same. It's in the same place in the sky every night. We move; but every year on this date, it's going to be there. What we are looking at over my "forty-five" years of life has changed.

The mountain of *nafs* (self) is destroyed in the *tajalli* of Allah. In other words, it means this self becomes totally transformed. The differences that occur on the different paths/*turūq* don't indicate differences in agreement or argument among the masters or whatever. Each human being is unique. Each *Tarīqah* is unique. Each process is unique. Each *tajalli* is utterly unique, and no two people experience exactly the same *tajalli*, though it is the same force that is affecting them. Those who have the *dhawq*, who have tasted it, know. Those who have not tasted, do not know. He who knows, knows. He who knows not, knows not. Sometimes, therefore, this *tajalli* is beyond words. It cannot be described. Some people call this "*haira*" bewilderment or bedazzlement.

There are many kinds of *tajalli*. We should understand what they are, because as one experiences them, one can understand exactly what they are experiencing. At the root of it, we have to understand that to complete this journey and to find this love within ourselves requires a certain high level of trust. It requires a kind of submission. The analogy is you want to travel the path as desperately as a drowning person wants a breath of air. Who really among us is prepared to make that kind of commitment and sacrifice? Not many of us; therefore, it takes something to rouse that in us and to stimulate the possibility. Prophet Mohammed (sal) felt very strongly that one of the things that encourages an individual to that state of yearning is knowledge, the seeking out knowledge from the cradle to the grave, the yearning to know more. You realize that as

you look, you see something new and realize you are seeing something new. It increases your yearning. If I open up the Qur'an and see something today, then open it tomorrow to the same 'āyat and see something different, what more could be seen? This book has 144 'āyāt in it, a thousand pages long. This is yearning for knowledge.

[When something is stimulating you], then the sacrifice isn't so much of a sacrifice. It's not: "I'm doing practices because I have a goal. I want self-realization and enlightenment; therefore, I have to do all these austerities. I'm not going to eat shellfish anymore, and I'm not going to be able to drink beer. I'm going to miss my favorite tv show because I have to pray at a certain time." All that craziness goes away, because you have found something that is stimulating you, something that is fulfilling you, if you are honest and if you can deal with the habitual patterns you have to deal with. The other thing is, sometimes somebody, the *shaykh*, can arouse the interest in a person, the desire in an individual, a longing that keeps the fire burning inside of them. The principles and practices that are adopted by the people of Tasawwuf are aimed at achieving this objective.

There is another aspect. One of the problems we see in religion, creeping into Islam, in Judaism and in Christianity—it happens in many religions and philosophies—is that people become obsessed with rules and regulations, and the heart becomes hardened. If the heart is hard, this alchemical transformation cannot take place. That's where it takes place. It has to take place in the heart of the believer. Allah says in Qur'an, "***You find Me in the heart of the believer,***" not in the hardened heart of the believer. The heart has to stay flexible, and open. I don't mean in the esoteric sense. It has to function properly. You don't want hardening of the spiritual arteries, because then you have to undergo spiritual surgery, and that's difficult. Some of the practices that have been prescribed by almost all religious teachers to purify a person's heart are to be followed: to be more

silent, to fast, to seek some solitude; and to keep your heart alive and pliant by giving charity, alms; to offer your prayers, because every time you pray, it is different.

Though most people consider religion to be devotion and faith where reason and intellect play no role, that's not true of Tasawwuf. Faith can be considered a state of mind where one considers what is before them through the lens of faith and belief. One can also understand that the objective of religion in general is to enhance the human experience, so that the principles you follow in your spiritual beliefs and practices guide you in a way that makes the path of understanding more open, more realizable, and keeps us more responsive to what is happening around us, more responsive to what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears. If we use our senses to gather, to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste, that's one level; but then there is the level of the internal senses that we have been talking about for so many years—the level of the senses of the *latā'if*.

If we regard those as real, if we learn not only their apparent location but the function of these senses, then our heart becomes more pliable, more responsive and our sight increases. One needs to understand that the methodology we use is a means of effectively understanding the underlying guidelines, or the underlying universal rules/realities/laws that govern all of humankind, creation, all of the planetary realities, and all the universes. They are all part of this vast system. If we understand the truth/reality in that: that there is a kind of automatic benefit that comes to us as we become resonant with the system, with these *latā'if*, with love, care, concern, peace, tranquility, compassion, mercy, justice, patience, perseverance, beauty, majesty, etc., automatically what was religion before now becomes truly the way of life. It is not just your or my way of life; but the way of life itself. It's the way of existence. Certain conclusions can be drawn from it.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that Tasawwuf is based on personal experience.

There is no other way to realize truth, wisdom, knowledge except through one's own experience. All the practices are aimed at gaining that capability. Every practice is to enhance the completeness of the character of the human being, and the completeness of that experience. To what degree religious practices add or help us to this realization, *that* is the degree of their worth. Indeed, we should know our own worth. We are the most valuable of creation, the axial point of creation. If we know the worth of everything else, but not our own, then that person (if that's what I am) is a fooled person and a foolish person. Therefore, we have a guide and teacher that helps us know what our real worth is and leads us to the realization of the truth of our own worth. The guide sometimes is showing us what is worthless in us; sometimes reflecting to us our character and personality so we can see its value; sometimes admonishing, sometimes encouraging, but always with the intention of uplifting and putting us in a position where we can have that personal experience. That's the responsibility of the *shaykh*: to lead the seeker to this understanding, and [help them] develop the capacity in themselves to see the truth.

Khawaja Abdul Ghujduwānī (ra), who was one of the early founders of our Tarīqah, outlined the basic principles of the Naqshbandī Order. One day, while reading the Qur'an, he came across this 'āyat: **“Call upon your Sustainer humbly and in the secrecy of your heart.”** (7:55) Up until that time the *dhikr* was done *jahri* (aloud). He inquired in his own self, “What about the silent *dhikr*?” From that time on, he was the first one to use silent *dhikr*, *dhikr khafī*. He coined the phrases that were later added by Bahaudin Naqshband (ra), who enunciated the eight principles of the Tariqah. They were written down by Mohammed Parsa later. What were they? You remember; we'll start on them. First was *hosht dar dam*. What does *dar* mean? It is an opening, a doorway. *Hosht dar dam* is conscious breath. The goal of breathing, other than to sustain our lives, is to be alert that we never take a breath devoid of remembrance of Allah. How is that possible? It means to strive to be conscious every moment that you are in the presence of the

Every breath that we take consciously we say is a breath that has life in it. Every breath allows us to live, brings in oxygen, transfers the blood, lets out carbon dioxide, and keeps us alive. That's one aspect of breath. When you breathe conscious, aware of the Divine Presence, every breath is alive with spiritual potential. Every breath that is taken without that awareness, heedless of it, is considered a breath that has been lost. Though it may be keeping you alive, physically, you have lost an opportunity. Even the youngest among you here have lost a lot of opportunities, so you can imagine how we feel. We should try to ensure that every breath we take is meaningful. One way of doing that is, if I'm doing a good act, am I breathing during it? Sure. If I'm doing an act that is a bad act (in religious terms, a sinful act) am I breathing? Sure. If I'm indulging in something that is beneficial, am I breathing? If I'm indulging in something that is destructive, physically, mentally, and emotionally, am I breathing? Sure. We won't get into the fact that you are probably breathing differently, because you are.

Did you ever get scared and hold your breath? In moments of passion, your breath changes, for the two or three of you who have experienced that passion. Every breath taken consciously is alive, and every one not taken consciously is lost. One way to insure your breath is alive is to not indulge yourself in doing something wrong. Don't indulge yourself in wrong actions that you know are wrong actions. Shah Naqshband (ra) said, *"This order is built on breath. One, therefore, must safeguard his breath in the time of inhalation and exhalation and in between."* Khwaja Ubaydullah Ahrar (ra) said, *"The most important mission for the seeker in this Order is to safeguard his breath."* Others went even further. Shaykh Abdul Najmuddin al-Kubra (ra) said, *"Dhikr is flowing in the body of every single living creature by the necessity of their breath."* Even without any will power, just the fact that you are breathing, is the necessity for remembrance. This is

Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid
a sign of obedience, of being a part of creation, breathing together.

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It's necessary to be in the presence of the Divine with every breath. In order to realize the essence/*dhat* of the Creator, one has to be conscious of one's breath. It's hard to do that. It's hard to bring your breath away from heedlessness to attentiveness. If I say to someone, "You're drinking alcohol and this is very harmful to you; stop doing it." He's made a living for 30 years telling people to stop doing drugs and alcohol. But saying, "Stop doing it" is not very successful. How do you think it's going to be if he says, "I want you to rescue your breath from the wrong actions of drinking or drugs"? But the seeker has to learn how to grasp his breath and move the breath away from negative thoughts, actions and commentary. How do you do that? Every religion tells you. It's very much focused on Islam and Tasawwuf. One of the primary ways you do that is you make *tawbah*, you repent and seek forgiveness. You take your *tasbih* and *misbaha*, and say "*Astaghfiru-Llāh*" with sincerity and reflection, with shame, with love, with hope, with piety, with a sense of hopeful change.

Then your breath becomes purified. Think about that for a second. What is the point of making *dhikr* aloud? What is the point of saying on your out-breath *lā ilāha* and on your in-breath *illa-Llāh*? What is the point of saying, "OM," if you are a Hindu? What is the point of saying the name of Allah: "Allah, Allah, Allah"? Just to drill into your mind the name of Allah? You fill your breath with that name. You purify your breath. Not very many people have the audacity and stupidity and empty-mindedness to commit a major sin while saying, "Allah, Allah" or "Jesus, Jesus." Not very many people will do that. Isn't that right? Even if you say it's just a cultural phenomena, that you do it for cultural reasons, that you grew up associating those names with good acts, even if that is your explanation for it, a very secular explanation, it doesn't matter. If you make *dhikr* on your breath, and make a habit of it, how are you going to enter into other acts that are

wrong? How lost must you be to do that? Just take it as a phenomena. If you want to look at it from a spiritual point of view, you can say that those names, that repetition, that sincerity sanctifies your breath, and that it is preparation for other insight.

That is just one small explanation of one of the eight rules: *hosht dar dam*. Bahaudin Naqshband (ra) added three more to them. Remember we started with *tajalli*, self-disclosure. How does Allah (swt) reveal “Himself” to you? You know, after sitting with me all these years, that this is a constant process. You know that when you walk outside and see all the beautiful leaves, that’s Allah’s disclosure to you of His Divine Presence. You see the vastness of the mountains, and you see the *Jalal* and *Jamal* of Allah. You know when a kind word is spoken, when love is exchanged, when charity is given. You know when hospitality is extended. These are all Divine Expressions, and this is all self-disclosure.

Sometimes, indeed, even in the midst of all of that, we don’t see it. Or we see it, but it doesn’t register with us. We say, “Isn’t that beautiful?” “Yes, yes. What time is it? Oh, I have a meeting.” Are we carrying that beauty with us? Are we carrying that awe with us? There is no bedazzlement, no *haira*. Try, if you can, to remember this. The outcome of this is renewal/*tajdīd*, transformation. This is how the human being becomes renewed, and how society becomes renewed. Mutual respect comes about as a reality in society. Differences are accepted, and definitions of differences are transcended. Put that aside for one moment. All of this creation and everything we are talking about is also a metaphor. We are, ourselves, a metaphor/*majāz*. Where we need to live is in that corridor between the outer world and the inner world; the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*. In that corridor, that place, we can dispatch our responsibilities in the world and in our work. We can have our love and attraction to this world, and yet at the same time, understand that it is necessary for us to spend time in the inner world, to renew ourselves in the inner world.

That renewal does not just take place at a Ramadan retreat, or on a mountain in *khilwa*, or a formal retreat somewhere. It's a renewal that has to take place every day, because every moment there is renewal taking place. Just like the star we see differently every day. It looks like the same light at the same place, but it is new. This is the renewal of creation in every instant. Are we part of creation? Yes. This is an incessant, continuous outpouring of Divineness into the manifest realm of this physical world. If we are prepared to receive that outpouring, if I know how to receive it, then we receive that perpetual, continuous irradiation of essence, realizing that this is ever-renewing. It's always something new. There is always some revelation that is coming to us, a constant renewal within ourselves, verification of the truth. The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed over 23 years starting 1430 years ago, but it's being revealed every moment because you are looking at it with new eyes. When you open it, it is sitting on a page, but it is dynamic, alive. That revelation is constantly renewing. Consequently, as you or I receive it as renewed, it renews us.

This renewal also takes place through breath. *Tajdīd al khalq bil anfas*, the renewal of creation with each breath. Through the mercy that is Allah, and the compassion that is inherent in each human being; through the breath of the All Merciful/*nafas al Rahman*, an overflowing/*fayyād* of *afada*/beingness, an overflowing of Divine Presence is constantly flowing into the cosmos. You can't miss it. You can't be too late for it. You can't say it was here but it is gone. Whenever you are present, it is present. Whenever you receive it, it is there. Why is it called *tajdīd al khalq bil anfas*? Can anyone tell me? Because wherever you are, no matter what you are doing, whether you are in the closet, outside, in this room, doing a good or bad deed, what is happening? You are breathing.

There's the metaphor, and there's the reality. Wherever you are, Allah is present.

Whenever you are receptive, that presence will be part of you, wherever you are, as long as you are alive, the air is present and you are breathing. No matter what you are doing the air is there, whether you are doing a good thing or a bad thing. Sometimes, one understands that *nafas*/breath and the Divine Presence are so close, that a transformational event takes place. I'll close with an example. Did any of you watch the news today? There was a report of a man who went in to rob a store. He was caught on the security camera. The lady fell to her knees and started to pray. He fell to his knees and started to pray. And she embraced him and hugged him. He left with \$20 from the cash register and went and turned himself in. If that's not Divine Presence, what is? What do you think her attitude was? She had an attitude of piety that permeated the whole room. It touched this young man. He fell to the ground and prayed. She hugged him and patted him on the back; he took \$20 and went and turned himself in. What happened? Inside of himself, he found piety, repentance, Divine Presence, and love, a sense of justice. Even this has a transformative effect, this breath