

October 25, 2009

Sunday



Title: [Mahabba, 'Ishq, Gratitude](#)

DVD title: Tasawwuf produces Refined Love
Distinguishing between Mahabba and 'Ishq

Last time I ended talking about love. There are two ways one speaks about love: *mahabba* and *'ishq*. It is love that is short of not burning. We don't want to say lukewarm, because we see an awful lot of passion that is called love, but love that is limited, momentary and not complete. One moment it is there and the next minute it is gone. It is like a breeze, it comes and it disappears. Even if there is intensity to it, it does not last. We call it passion, but real passion is not there. It is like a flame that can burn you, but it cannot transform you. It is something that if it needs to be, it is still under your control and you do not become totally possessed by it, although you can come pretty close to that.

The most important thing in that kind of love is that you don't lose yourself in it totally. There is still some conscience happening, questioning. Of course, the other kind of love is what we call *'ishq*. It implies the kind of love that is total and complete and one can become possessed by it and, indeed, some people say that you can go mad with it. But again, we are in this realm of metaphor. Allah gives us enough of the *mahabba* that we get a taste of the *'ishq*. But we find that there is no way to guarantee the love of the beloved or the love of the lover. It is fickle—or can be fickle—but not *'ishq*.

'Ishq is the realization that everything is always the love of Allah. If you allow yourself to become possessed by it, you don't miss the other, and you understand the limitations of

the other. The limitations themselves are not negative, certainly. There is a positive aspect to it. One forms strong relationships, but the relationship with Allah transcends this. We say the realization of Allah is the love of Allah. You get a taste of eternity from exactly what you are searching for in the world, or in another human being, or in the things of this world, but you can only get a taste of it. Or if you have it, it is only a taste of what you can get in '*ishq*. But it is also a love that possesses you in the sense that in that state of trust/*tawakkul*, in that state of surrender, you are the possession of Allah and only of Allah.

The *khanaqah* is a place where one should feel attraction towards Allah. Everything should be turned towards that attraction. That attraction/*jedhb* towards Allah is not a love for a being, but a love for a state, a love for an attitude, a place where one finds safety and security. That is why we call it *taslīm*. It is a love for Islam; therefore, it is a love for that eternal sense of safety and security. It is where people who love Allah meet. This is where the poets, especially the Persian poets, called the inn where one becomes intoxicated, where you meet others who are in love with Allah, who have the love of Allah, but also who understand that love is by Allah, for Allah and by Allah.

This is why in Islam it is important to say that *shirk* is comparing anything to Allah. There is no comparison to that state or that state of capability. Every prayer that is prayed or every supplication that is made is an entreaty to Allah to shower us with that love and that attraction/*jedhb*. Only those who are able to be ignited by that love, if you will, find themselves at peace; and only those who have the capability for that love, find themselves always feeding the flame of that love. I can give the example of that state of *jedhbh* and that feeling of gratitude that comes with it, tonight, with these young people here. I am

sure that many of you, like me, felt gratitude for their coming here. While I was driving to my office, I thanked Allah and said, “I love introducing people to You.” That is what I said. Just like the lover says, “I would like you to meet my beloved.” “She is really beautiful.” Or “He is a handsome fellow.” You love to show off the beloved.

We had the opportunity to introduce people to Allah—not Allah, some God sitting on the throne—but the Allah that is our hospitality, our kindness, our love, our appreciation, and our thankfulness. This is what we introduced the people to tonight. Did they meet that Allah. Yes, of course. They said, “Oh, thank you. Thank you very much.” Then Dr. Sachidina said, “They needed this experience. They needed this experience.”

When one allows themselves to be in love in that way, there is a great fulfillment in that, which you cannot get from anything else. You can share that love with someone else, with others in the *khanaqah*, among Sufis; but you cannot get it from anyone else. You only get an image of it, a reflection of it. You get a taste of it in *mahabba*. *Mahabba* is very big, it is very wonderful, it is very important. But it leads to *‘ishq*. It leads to this contentment. When you move to this *wahshat*, when you move away from Allah, when you experience the loneliness and the estrangement/*wahshat*, when the lover is far from Allah, far from that intimacy/*uns* with Allah, when that loneliness comes from seeing other than Allah: distractions, circumstances, pain, suffering, loss, grief, fear, doubt, embarrassment (all the things that make you feel distant from Allah/*wahshat*) you allow for the concept of other than Allah.

It is an experience of an intense state of *qabd*/contraction. There is no room in the heart for anything else. It has been contracted, frozen, shocked. Something has contracted the

heart. During that *wahshat*, that is the time for the lover to invite the state of ecstasy. That is the time to invite *tawajjuh* like in *sama*. In the midst of this contraction, if you have the inclination and the courage to be open and invite that higher level of love into your heart, then one experiences that nearness/*qurb*.

You go from *qabd* to *qurb*, from contraction to nearness, to intimacy; therefore, it is said that Allah gives us these experiences of contraction only so that we can yearn for expansion/*bast*. He gives us these moments of closing so that we can strive for opening. Sometimes we can get so lost in the opening, we don't fear the closing. We don't think it will ever go away. But when we close, we fear that the opening will never come again. We [must] become used to opening and closing, opening and closing. What else opens and closes? The heart. Ba boom, Ba boom. There is the metaphor. It is just like our heart: it is about the heart; it is about love. Ba boom, ba boom, ba boom. It opens and it closes. It contracts and it expands. It contracts and it expands. Where does one find Allah? In the heart of the believer.

When one wants that kind of love, Allah shows us in one way or another that we have to be willing to risk everything for it, and that love is called '*ishq*. We all know *mahabba*, but we also have to know that it is mostly an emotion, a sentiment. We know the harsh reality: one day you are in love and the next day you are in hate. One day, it is an embrace; another day, it is a pushing away. Of course, there are all the semantics of it, making things difficult. People speak different languages of love. Not only do they speak it in different languages, but they speak different languages of love. One moment it is so beautiful and so nice, and the next moment it is so ugly. You see in the same person, beauty and ugliness: attraction and repulsion. Then you know that is not '*ishq*.

Ishq has depth; it transcends. It is a passion for Allah. It is the *dhat*/essence. It comes, not from your mind, not from your desires, not from your fears, not just from your attractions, but it comes from the core of your being, from the center of your being. It comes from the very core of your being, arises inside of you and it possesses you. It is not in your control, hardly at all. That is why the poets used to say that they were mad, they were intoxicated, drunk with love. The Sufis have found a way to create that *'ishq*. That is the whole alchemical reality of Tasawwuf, how to create it so that you can float on the ocean of it. It is the love story of Leila and Majnun. It is a very interesting story, because Majnun never gets Leila. He always sees her in the crowd or senses her, but he never gets her. Yet the passion is there. One has to learn how to live that journey. One day in seeing Leila, he had seen all that was worth seeing, and what was the worth of keeping his eyes open anymore. He decided that only when Leila came, would he open his eyes; otherwise he would keep his eyes closed. To him there was nothing worth seeing except the beloved.

That is a metaphor for insight/*basīra*. You don't allow your eyes to settle on the things of this world. Only you let your inner sight, your *basīra* look only for Allah in everything. In other words, you look for Allah in everything. You see the beloved in everything. You see the Divine Presence in everything. You don't allow duality to come about. Nothing is more worthwhile and nothing is more valuable than that. When you really love as a Sufi, it is the unconditional love that we look for in everything else. It is the unconditional love we hope for in everything, and the love for the sheer joy of it, the love for the absoluteness of it, the love for the totality of it that come out in great feelings of warmth, service, kindness and *adab*.

We see how the world makes us forget this all the time. Even in the good work that we do (good work that helps so many people around the world), we have tension and we have fear and anxiety about it. It makes us tired, or I should say, we allow ourselves to become tired by it, tried by it, tested by it. Yet, there is no joy like seeing the results of it, seeing how many people benefit from it, and how many lives have been changed by it. Those of us who do that kind of work, we feel that way. When you love and you really love, there are no conditions to it. It is absolute.

This thing that we call Tasawwuf is a laboratory in which you create the greatest product, the greatest natural remedy for everything. We can construct the most refined love, you know 100% refined. It is transforming. Once you have touched it, it transforms you. But then fears come, anxieties come. “How much am I giving up for this?” “What will I have and won’t have?” “How much is this going to cost me?” Therefore, the Sufi always talks about *shukr*/gratitude, gratitude for whatever comes. Be grateful, be grateful and that gratitude itself turns into love. That gratitude itself cannot be destroyed. It cannot be compromised in any way. You can call it love. You can call it consciousness. You can call it awareness. You can call it Divine Presence, or you can call it knowing yourself. *“Know yourself and you will know your Lord.”*

If you drink from this cup—as the poets used to say, “Drink from the cup of love”—you become intoxicated. You don’t become drunk in the sense that we think about alcohol drunk. The goal of every drunk is to get to that state, but they cannot do it because the alcohol kills them. It is temporary, but the goal of the Sufi is to become intoxicated with that love and that sincerity. With that love and that sincerity and that gratitude, it is

unending love.

This is the path of Tasawwuf—not a path of dogma or just philosophy. Even Dr. Satyadina was talking about Shar’īah versus Tasawwuf. We are a people of process, the process and method of Tariqah. We are a people whose path leads to *haqiq*, to the Truth. There is a big difference between *shari’ah* and *tariqah*, *tariqah* and *marifat*, and *marifat* and *haqiqah*. These are the stages. We don’t strive for the stage; we strive for the attitude. We don’t ask for the thing; we ask to be worthy of that thing. That is a big difference. This is the meaning, therefore, of real spirituality, real religion, real theology: thinking about Allah, thinking about God, contemplating, thinking about, speculating about Allah.

But that is not we do. We don’t just think about and speculate. We try to come to a state and understanding of how everything is reflective of that Divine Presence. We try to remember. We try to remember when so much is happening around us to make us forget, to deviate our minds and our thoughts, to close our hearts, to make us feel contracted, even amidst all this Fall beauty and the beautiful faces of the young people who came tonight. Just take the gross energy that could be so easily misguided and misdirected and harmful and turn it to use it for something very subtle—very subtle. Fire can burn down the forest and the home, or it can reduce the dross and leave only the gold. It can extract gold from the matrix. That is what fire can do. That is what passion can do.

The real *‘ishq* can extract the gold, the purity from our heart. That is the Divine Energy we need. The Divine Energy that we need to do that lies in our meditation, in our service, in our kindness, in our love, taking the *mahabba* and raising it up and raising it up and

raising it up. The way to do that is through the Sufi Tariqah, the way, [which is] the path of harmony and balance with the whole. The basic requirements for that is to try to keep things as simple and as egoless as we can. The Prophet ‘Isa (as) said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*” It is to keep oneself in that state of poverty, no matter if you have wealth. To stay in that spiritual state of poverty does not mean material poverty. It means spiritual poverty, to be a beggar at the door of Allah, to seek the Divine Truth in everything.

If we slowly, slowly dissolve that idea of separation from Allah in the fire of that love and that kindness, then one day, the ultimate result is that we become one with that Truth. We lose ourselves in Allah (*fana*) to find ourselves in Allah (*baqa*). You lose yourself to find yourself. That is what the Christians often refer to being re-born, born again; but not born again in an ideology, not born again in anything that excludes anyone. For the Sufi, born again means to be born into the understanding that it is all Allah, it is all the Truth. There are many different faces to that. This is the essence of that aspect of what we have been talking about.

I go back to the song written by Oscar Hammerstein, “You have to be taught to hate.” Hate does not come naturally to us. We have to be taught to hate. Circumstances and identifiers have to be put there to say, “They took your land. Hate them. They killed so and so. Hate them. They believe differently than you. Hate them.” You have to teach people to hate. You don’t have to teach people to love. But to love, you have to remove the barriers to that love. One of the greatest barriers is the company you keep. If you are in darkness, you don’t know who is standing next to you. But if you are standing in the light, you know who is with you. You stay in the light, in the Nūri Mohammed, the light

of God, Allah.

The second thing, after poverty, is of course *dhikr*, to remember. When we were making *dhikr* in the *masjid* tonight, we were giving them a good example of that. I explained to them that you fill your mind and you fill your heart with remembrance, so there is no room for anything else. “How do you do that? How do you do that? That is impossible!” Well, when you fell in love with somebody, there was not anything else. Everything reminded you of that. Everything was obsessive—obsessive, possessive, then reality came. If you remember Allah, you will see that Presence everywhere, even in your enemy. What does Allah say? (Response: recites *hadith* in Arabic and English.) “The enemy becomes as if the nearest and dearest friend to you.” And you say, “I don’t want that! I want the enemy to stay the enemy.” Why? Well, if you go to embrace the enemy and the enemy goes to shoot or stab you, then, of course, keep him the enemy. But if through your love of Allah, the enemy becomes as near to you as the dearest friend, then you have to accept that. It is a parallel with other things in Islam.

Islam says that if the enemy seeks peace, you must give him peace. If you are in a battle and the enemy asks for peace, you have to give them peace. Even if you know that they are using that time to rearm themselves, you still have to grant them peace, because you can only fight a defensive war. You cannot fight an offensive war. When you are offensive, you are offensive. There is no end to being offensive; therefore, you have to trust in Allah. You trust that if you do the right things, the right things will happen to you. The lessons you need will come to you. The truth will become self-evident. Even the Founding Fathers of this country knew that. Self-evident was all men are created equal. It is very contrary to certain Christian thought. These were Christians who

said, “All men are created equal,” but they were holding slaves. George Washington had slaves. Thomas Jefferson had slaves. So those people (slaves) were not humans. They had to dehumanize them and not make them people, because they meant “all free men are equal.” They had to take another step: all human beings are created equal. This is a statement that we are all created for the good and the equal good.

Dhikr is another way of saying that you sound out a statement of remembrance and it comes back to you like an echo. You say, “*lā ilāha illa-llāh*,” and it comes back to you. That is why the architects of the *masājid* built them so that the sounds would reverberate back to you. “Your call is My reply.” “Your call is My reply.” “Your call is My reply.” That is what Allah said. “**Remember Me and I will remember you.**” “Call Me and I will call to you.” This is the heart of the real beloved: the echo, the echo. If you go to the *masjid* and you are all alone, and you call out, you hear the echo. That is why I had it made as a dome. You can go to the largest *masjid* anywhere in the world, and if you stand at one end of it and call out, you hear it

It is the same thing in your heart. You call out to Allah and Allah responds to you. Will you hear it? Or you won’t hear it. Will you chant the melodious song, “*Lā ilāha illa-llāh*” or not? Blood is circulating in your body. The cells are going around, splitting. We circle around, and the earth circles the sun, and the sun circles the universe, and the galaxies are spirals. It is a dynamic reality. So too, the sound that you put out comes back to you. Every sound that we utter, every sound that you ever spoke is endless. You just can’t hear it anymore. Every word you uttered is endless, and somewhere at the farthest reaches of the universe, if someone had the means, they could hear it. Just as we have the means to see back into the past through a telescope, just like we can see the past

by looking at the stars (by walking outside, we can look at the past), so too you could hear every word that was ever uttered if you had the tools to hear it.

One of the tools to hear that is knowledge. You go into my library and there is “The Conference of the Books.” He sits in his library and he hears the books speaking to him. Those words are endless. You think that they are just sitting on the page? Allah tells you that the Qur’an is speaking to you. Every stroke of the pen is speaking to you. And it is endless. It is speaking to you right now. Right now! The revelation did not happen 1,429 years ago. It is happening right now. The core of this lies in love.

I was very, very happy. I was driving to my office. I was thanking Allah (swt). I drove up to my office to get my papers and I thought, “Where is my phone?” I couldn’t find my phone and I walked out of the office without the papers. I found the phone in my car. Do you think I remembered my papers? No. I drove down here and I didn’t have my papers. I had to send someone to get my papers. We forget so easily what our purpose is. I was so happy thanking Allah for those young people coming. I was very grateful, very, very grateful for those young people coming, and I got distracted with that happiness. What I was going to talk about was not so important, *alhamdulillah*. It makes me very happy to see those young people. Why are they taking a course in Sufism? Only three of them are Muslims and the rest are not. They are curious, but they were all sincere people. It is not to make them Muslims at some point. It is to make a future where people have love and affection and care for one another. I will settle for the *mahabba* between us. I will be very grateful for that, actually.

If imagination/*khayāl* is one of the greatest gifts that Allah (swt) has given us, can you

imagine what it would be like when you focus that imagination on something beautiful, on something wonderful, on something Divine? The Hadith Jibrīl says that perfection is to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, so imagine that you see Allah. Another *hadith* says that Allah is the *qibla* of the person who prays. Both these *hadiths* point to a necessity and ask the necessity to activate the faculty of imagination, perception, making a dynamic. So imagine the very best you can imagine, and strive for the very best you can strive for, and then watch your *mahabba* as it develops into *'ishq*. Or fixate yourself on your problems, because I don't know that there is much in between.

A little subjective tonight. Any questions?

Question: Tonight you said gratitude cannot be destroyed. I have a hard time reconciling that statement with my experience of gratitude being often very hard to hold on to and needing a lot of refreshment.

Shaykh: I believe it was in the context of *'ishq* and in the context of *mahabba* that I said that. So you can understand the example when you have love between people and that love is very strong. You are grateful every minute for it. You may not use the word gratitude, but you are grateful for it. Isn't it so? So when one turns their attention toward the beauty and the majesty that is in front of us, then the gratitude is unending. You find that you attend to that *maqam* of *shukr*. You cannot lose it, because once you start to see that all of this is an expression of the Divine Beauty, the Divine Love, you are in a constant state of gratitude. Just like you have that temporary state of gratitude and love of the human being, you have that continuous state of gratitude in love of Allah. Now when you merge those two [states of gratitude] and when you have the company of other person

or persons who experience that same love, then you are surrounded by that gratitude. When yours wanes, there is still more coming towards you. That is called the *fayyād*, the Divine Effulgence. It comes in the form of light. That is why we use the word enlightenment. The darkness you may find yourself in will be lifted, and the first thing that you will feel is gratitude for that. Gratitude may not be the words you use. You might feel relief. You may feel peacefulness. You may feel a respite from your worries, but you feel it. It is there. It is always at the point where the light has shone on something, where you get this epiphany.

In every religion, when this epiphany comes, a person becomes very humble, maybe falls to their knees, puts their head to the ground or weeps because they are overwhelmed by the realization of that Divine Presence. That is gratitude. It is a form of gratitude. You don't have to say, "Thank you very much." I am driving and I say, "Thank you Allah for providing these young people today." That is one way. But the feeling that precedes it is gratitude. The circumstance that precedes it is the foundation for gratitude, so it has gratitude within it. The opportunity that allows you (or allows us) to be selected for that experience is also, if you understand it, one in which you feel gratitude for it. It is present. Just like we are hardwired for compassion, we are hardwired for gratitude—if we don't block it, if we don't create shirk. If we don't let something stand between us and Allah, if there is no *shirk*, then there is gratitude. Does that make sense?

Question: You spoke about how one can have passionate love (*'ishq*) for Allah, and I understand loving a person, but how does one love a "system"?

Shaykh: Well, I have been hoping that I have talking about this a lot without using that

term. As you see the interrelationship between things, the love you feel for that realization... let me go back. The reason I do not use this terminology a lot, as you know, is because we get stuck on the human concepts of passion, but it is also the same reason that you should use it, because it is analogical. If you can imagine the kind of fixation that one has on a human being, or if you can imagine the love you have for a human being, they are different. Fixation is different. The love you have for a human being, that capability is provided for us so that we may see something that is a transcended love. It comes from somewhere; it is directed towards someone, but it is greater than that. It is a capacity that each one of us has. In the love that one has for another human being there is an individual freedom, which the other individual can encourage or grant you.

You have heard me say this for many years that love is permission. If you love me and I love you, it is because you give me permission to love you, and I am giving you permission to love me. It doesn't seem to be permission. It seems, "I love you. I feel love for you and you feel love for me." But it is really by your permission that there can be freedom of exchange for that love. Without that permission, it is conditioned. Allah gives us permission to love Him. But you have to break away from, "How do you love Allah?" back to the world of, "Allah is not a 'being' to love. Allah is 'everything'." He is everything, so you have to break away from this idea, "How do you love Allah with passion?" You don't love Allah in the same way that you love a human being. What you love is seeing Allah everywhere, just like Majnun was seeing Leila everywhere, seeing her everywhere. If he sees someone with the color of her hair, it is Leila. If he smells her perfume, it is Leila. If he hears the footsteps, it is Leila coming. If someone brushes past him, it was Leila.

The green of nature, the beauty of the night, the *suhbat* that we are having right now [is that passion]. Passion does not have to be crazy, intense, like physical intense. It can be deep and profound and peaceful. A person who is present is present. You see the Presence of Allah and it is *mīzān*/balanced, harmonious. The analogy of Majnun and Leila is fine. But the Sufi, the lover of Allah, the one who remembers Allah, knows that Allah is remembering him. It is not that Allah is somewhere over there, but that Presence is there for me. You are here for me and I am here for you: the story of Mulla Nasrudin. “Why are you here, Mulla?” “I am here because of you and you are here because of me.” That is a very, very profound understanding. Don’t confuse the passion for Allah for the physical passion. It is a metaphor for something else. But it is not the same.

When we talk about Paradise, as I said tonight, we talk in human terms. But does Paradise have rivers as rivers and lakes as lakes and sunrises and all that? The point is we only understand things in the terminology and the language we speak. So there are limitations to that, but our heart knows no limitation. The passion for Allah, the love of Allah, you can have in a person. That is why the Persian poets and all the other poets write about that. Some got into trouble writing things people thought were questionable. So don’t mix it up.

Different religions do austerities, but it is not a way to love, but the metaphor is there: the bride of Jesus [for Catholic nuns]. What does it mean? Jesus’s body isn’t there, even in the wine and the wafer (transubstantiation), but the idea is to personalize that relationship and to see that kind of love is a transcendent kind of love. When we went to Prince Alfred’s wedding in that small chapel in the palace, there were these glass cabinets. On either side there were skeletons of nuns in bridal gowns. When they died, they were

dressed in bridal gowns and put in these glass boxes. They disintegrated, and their skeletons are in the bridal gowns. [These are present] while the wedding is taking place. That is reality for you. The bride is wearing a wedding dress, and there is a nun here and a nun there [on either side of her] in bridal dresses as skeletons. There is reality for you. There is definitely something to be said for that. How many weddings did those nuns oversee from their skeleton? So you love her? This is what she will look like later. Here is reality. Edit to end