

November 12, 2009

Thursday

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Title: [The Path of Tasawwuf: How the Heart Speaks](#)

DVD title: The Science of Tasawwuf: A Transformation Process of the Heart

Last night I was asked the difference between intuition and insight. My mind went to something else; it went to instinct instead of insight. I heard “instinct.” So I didn’t give the correct answer. The correct answer is, there is no difference in the way it is used. In the way I was using it last night, there is no difference between intuition and insight. I was giving the difference between intuition and instinct, which is very important. Instinct has both biological and cultural or environment aspects. We were speaking about intuition in another way: *firāsa*, through this influx of light. It’s a minor point, but not a minor point. It depends on how you look at it.

Just to clarify the use of the terms I was using last night, both *firāsa* and *basīra*. *Basar* is the outward eye which perceives the world, what is visible, as compared to *basira*, which is the inner eye that perceives the world of the unseen. The linkage is when we are told that Allah says, when He loves such a slave, He Himself becomes the eye with which the ‘*abd* sees. It is the eye, and Allah becomes that eye, that sees Allah everywhere in the outer. This stage of seeing is something I want to talk about soon. It comes from meditation. At the same time, there is the *basar al haqq*, the Divine Sight, the observation of things known by Allah, where Allah is the sight through which you see the cosmos. He’s the viewer.

Now that we have that all clarified, I do want to talk tonight about the subject of Tasawwuf in relationship to what we talked about in Charlottesville last week. I want to be very basic for a few minutes. There are a lot of roots to the word Tasawwuf. The first is *safā*, which refers to pure, like a crystal is pure, transparent. The person who is *saf* is a person who is clear, pure, transparent, who has lifted many veils from their self. We say in English: you get what you see and you see what you get. You are seeing clearly what that individual is. It refers to also what the poets talk about, a heart that is cleansed or polished. There are a lot of explanations for the word Tasawwuf, but also people say it is derived from the *ahl al-suffa*/the people of the bench. I think I had mentioned this to you before. These are the people who lived in the *masjid* of the Prophet (sal) during his life. They were mentioned in this verse of Qur'an:

**O Mohammed!... Keep yourself content with those who call upon their Lord morning and evening seeking His Face, and let not your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of life. Nor obey any whose hearts whom We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us. The one who follows his own desires, his case has gone beyond all bounds. (18:28)**

These are the *ahl as-suffa*. This is about the people who, being believers, kept themselves in a state of *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) on their tongues, in their minds and hearts. This is a goal of the Sufi. People interpreted that to mean people who are away from the world, and people who were so involved with just the formal practices, and in a sense, people who were disdainful of anything of the world. But many people reject that explanation. The Sufi is a person who is in the world and not of the world. The people of the bench could be considered sort of a monastic type of individuals who removed themselves from the world, and as a

consequence, don't have to deal with the things of the world. This is not the traditional meaning.

Another root of the word that some people put forward was *as-sifa*, the characteristics and attributes of caring goodness, and turning away from wrong. This is much closer to the meaning. Then others put forward the idea that it is from *sufat al qafa*, a soft sponge. It comes from a noun that is derived from a word that is like a sponge (*saflaqah*), [describing a] heart that is very soft and absorbs whatever is around it. That's why the Prophet (sal) is showing concern for his *Sahāba* in order to purify their hearts and show them how to improve themselves. It's based on the whole idea that the diseases of the heart and the internal disruptions of the heart are to be cleansed. It reflects *saf* also, purity. Then the other idea of it is *sūf*, people who wear wool.

What's important is that we understand that Tasawwuf is an active and a dynamic reality. Through [this reality] we understand that what is in the Qur'an, and in the Sīrah, and in the Hadith has profound meaning because it is linked to something we are very familiar with. It's called our own life, our own reality. It's all living and dynamic. The core of that lies in understanding the value and the purpose of the heart.

You remember, of course, in the *hadith* of Prophet Mohammed (sal), “***Surely there is in the body a small piece of meat, which if it's good, the whole body is good. And if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupted. That is the heart.***” What does it mean? In another *hadith*, he said, “***Surely Allah does not look at your bodies, nor at your faces, but at your heart.***” What does it mean Allah looks at your hearts? Is Allah sitting somewhere with a big microscope looking at your

heart, saying you need quadruple bypass surgery? What does it mean? Is Allah the consummate cardiologist?

Prophet Mohammed (sal) seems to be saying if the heart is at peace, in good condition, is healthy – however you want to describe it – but mostly in terms of *adab*, [then the rest of the body is well too]. A person of good heart is a person of good *adab*. They speak, act, dress, and serve with good *adab*, good manner. As many, many Sufis have reported, a person whose heart is good in the inner, their outer behavior is good. A person whose outer behavior is good, is a person whose inner heart is good. So to have a perfect healthy heart, Allah tells us very clearly that what is most important for anybody: **“The day when neither your wealth nor sons will prevail, but the person who will prosper is the one who brings to Allah a sound heart.”** (26:88-89)

These are definitions of a Sufi and of a Muslim. But when we look around the Muslim world today, Allahu Akbar, what can we say? I know I’m being very subjective tonight, as opposed to be analogical and objective as in previous talks. Try to accept the fact that this thing that is beating in our chests has a very profound consciousness attached to it in the world, in *dunya*. It’s not just a metaphor. It’s in pain when it is upset. It beats joyfully and provides us mentally with upliftment when it’s happy and fulfilled. When the mind is worried, it causes the heart to be contracted. The science of the heart is the science, the reality of Tasawwuf. To know the diseases of the heart and to be able to treat them preserves the beingness, the essence of the human being.

Up until recently there was no such thing as heart transplants. Every one of them failed. It’s still a very tricky operation, with some interesting little nuances in it. Like the man who got a heart transplant reported he never went to McDonald’s his

whole life, until he got a new heart. Then he felt a craving for McDonald's. He found out the man whose heart he got always went to McDonald's. Deal with it. Who knows? The science of the heart is a very profound science, not just an analogy. If we know the diseases of the heart, like jealousy, envy, excessive pride, and we are given the means to heal those diseases, we are operating on a very subtle level.

It's very difficult to change a personality, have you discovered that? Even a young person who has a habit they may only have had for 5 years or 10 years, [will find] it's very hard to change those habits. They become repetitive habits. The repetition of those habits re-supports them. It's very hard to break that rhythm, that pattern. It must be that the means to do that is a very powerful means. But it has to be preceded by a desire, and the desire has to be preceded by a recognition. The recognition and acceptance of it has to be preceded by perception. The perception of it means you have to look; something had to draw your attention to it for you to perceive it. You have all these steps to go until you start to act. Then how do you act to change habits? The more important question is why would you?

There are certain self-destructive habits in the world, like drinking, smoking, taking drugs, or things that are more subtle like cheating, lying, and deluding oneself. But why would one want to change? It's not as simple as saying, "Because in Qur'an Allah has listed the shameful and forbidden things, and you can't keep them secret, because wherever you go, Allah is seeing them." Maybe some people are motivated by that, but most people can talk themselves out of that. That's the truth. Just because it's in the Qur'an and it tells you "don't do this," is not necessarily a magic pill that will make people stop doing things. Maybe it makes a person feel sufficiently guilty, or a person literally feels they

will go directly to hell if they don't change. That's a possibility. There are a group of people who feel that way, but most people don't.

When the Prophet Mohammed (sal) says, for example, “***No one will enter Paradise who has even an atom of pride in their heart,***” [the response may be]: “Okay, I give up! Want to go to a bar and get drunk?” What does he mean by that? Does it mean everybody is damned? This science we are trying to practice, and the knowledge one has to gain by learning how to purify oneself of these veils and distractions, darkness, pride and arrogance, jealousy and greediness, or excessive fear or acquisitiveness, or any of the ones you want to list, they have been presented to us from Sidna Musa (as) up to the most recent admonitions from some *katib* on a Friday giving a *khutbah*. For the Sufi, it is all designed to look at your self. To look at your self with sincerity is the means to purify yourself, *tawajjuh*. It's not complicated. It's not easy, but it's not complicated. It's not memorizing a lot of rules and inflicting a lot of fear. It is *tawwajjuh*: to place your sight on yourself. This is why this topic of *basīra* and *firāsa* is very important.

What the Qur'an and Hadith tell us is what happens when you do, and what exists when you don't. There are instructions in Qur'an: “**Remember Me and I'll remember you.**” In *Hadith Quds* there is guidance. Every line has guidance in it, but to the Sufi, it is the process of turning attention to oneself inwardly, and outwardly it is putting on the dress to adorn oneself in the attributes of Allah (swt). To cleanse the heart, for example, one begins with *tawbah*/repentance; or to become aware of that Divine Presence, *taqwa*; or to keep on the straight path, *istiqama*; or to embrace the truth of what you are seeing; or to be, most important, sincere.

I remember when I returned from England a few years ago. I had had a long conversation with Hazrat. He said, “When you go back, just talk to people about sincerity.” We had a discussion about the Asmā’ al Husna. He said to talk about sincerity because with sincerity, the love a person feels becomes expanded, and the truthfulness becomes expanded, and a person’s piety becomes deepened. A person’s reliance on Allah is not a weakness, but it is a realization that every breath you take, the blood flowing through your veins, the power in your ability to move, the capability to think, to speak, to act, to understand the languages Allah has surrounded us with in order to reveal that Divine Presence to us, are based on our sincere and continued effort to pay attention. There are too many things to mention.

This science, and I call it a science in the traditional sense, is that if you do certain things, the phenomena of awakening, realizing, expanding your view, and understanding the Divine presence occurs. It’s repeatable. In that sense, it’s a science. Even if we use the word science just to say that it’s a transformative experience that comes from applying one’s intellect and effort to a problem, or to something that needs to be transformed, that’s good enough. [Though] Islam may be being practiced by millions of people unconsciously, when it is practiced consciously, with the intention for the purification of the self, there is a realization of the heart’s capability to see, panoramically, that Divine Presence. I was in Best Buy today—you know, the men’s toy store—looking at the toys.

Sony has produced a panoramic camera. There was a promotional ad that showed how you hold the button down and turn around so you get a panoramic view. From a Sufic point of view, that’s very interesting. Wherever you are, you see that you are surrounded by the Divine reality. I said it last night: we are sitting in the same room, but we are each looking at it from a different perspective. Sahar is

seeing me from the wall there, and seeing everyone else in the room from behind their backs. I'm seeing from this side of the room, from the front. But we recognize we are in the same room, seeing the same things, from a different perspective. It's a very deep thing where Allah has placed us. Allah could have placed eyes all around our head, or ears all around our heads, and we could be listening in surround sound. That's not what happened. There's another process that has to take place. Our eyes are in the front of our head for some reason.

All of us are in a select group of individuals. There are a lot of problems in this. Somehow people realize they are in a very select teaching called Islam that has very deep and profound meaning. Then, all these people go wild and they want it to be what they want it to be. They don't want it to be what Allah wants it to be. They want it to be something they can manipulate and use in order to do very worldly things in the name of religion or belief; whereas, from the Sufic point of view there is a correlative. You want to do things in the world that reflect the Divine Will. You want to do things in the world that include and embrace, panoramically, that allow people to understand that they stand in the center of a tremendously profound, Divine Revelation.

That revelation is coming to you. It is not something that is to exclude, but include. It is not based on any type of coercion. It is not based on the condemnations of anyone. It is the total inclusivity that allows the human being to optimally operate. It is, for example, the heart beating in the chest of the human being that sends the blood through all of the capillaries and all of the cells that keep people alive and allows everything else to function. That's why it's a science of the heart, not a science of the brain. The brain functions because the heart is beating. The brain can be dead, and the heart can still be beating, and the rest of

the body keeps living. But if the heart is dead, the body is dead, finished. That's it, other than keeping someone alive on a respirator. The being is gone.

The science or practice of the heart, Tasawwuf, really includes all those speculations of the origin of the term. Part of us has to be the people of the bench. Part of our life has to be a constant cleansing and purification of our self. With every beat of the heart, the blood is being cleansed. You have the venous blood and arterial blood, and it's being cleansed with every breath. Oxygen and carbon dioxide. Part of us is that; we have to spend some time in that cleansing process. So we go take a shower at the end of the day and we feel different. Part of us is the person who retreats from the world, etc.

One of the most important things that takes all of these factors together, which I ran through very quickly tonight, Allah says in Qur'an: **“O you who believe! Fear Allah, and keep company with those who are true to their word.”** (9:119) *Suhbat* with those believers. Keep in the company of good people, not just true to their word in the outer world, but in their word to Allah. The *sādiqīn* are the ones who are mentioned in the quotation. This verse is the attestation, the imprimatur for the need to accompany and associate with the people who are *sādiqīn*, people who are near to Allah, who are the *awliyā*. These are the people Allah refers to: **“These are the friends of Allah. No fear shall come upon them, and neither shall they grieve.”** (10:62) They are the ones who, among the believers, Allah says: **“They are the men (and women) who have been true to their covenant with Allah.”** (33:23) Then He tells us something else: some of them have died, and some of them wait, but they never change their determination. Life or death hasn't changed them. Then there is a long verse in Qur'an that talks about when Sayyidina Musa meets Khdir.

**They found one of Our servants on whom We had bestowed mercy from Ourselves, and whom We had taught knowledge of Our Own Presence. Musa said to him, “May I follow you on the condition that you teach me something of the higher truth you have been taught?” And the other said, “Surely you will not be able to have patience with me.”**

I quoted it in my talk in Charlottesville. What do we see here? Despite the fact that Musa (as) was a prophet, and was the only prophet to speak directly to Allah in that sense, Sayyidina Khdir had knowledge Musa (as) didn't have. Musa (as) wanted to obtain that knowledge, because Khdir was receiving knowledge directly from that Divine Presence. Khdir was who? A beloved of Allah. Even the Prophet Musa (as) comes and wants to receive this knowledge he didn't have, and what was he told? That he was not going to be patient enough. What happened? Eventually, he became wise and received the transmission. We know the whole story. He achieved the highest state he could achieve spiritually, but was denied something in the physical world.

Allah said, **“Those who are striving in Our way, We will guide them to Our paths, for verily Allah is with those who do right.”** (29:69) Wherever we look among the *awliyā*, the *sahabah*, the *taba'ain* and the *taba-taba'ain*, among the *shuyukh*, we find people who were practicing *atazkiyā an-nafs*, trying to reach a state of this cleansing and purification of the self. All of the people who were practicing Tasawwuf, who spread Islam from Malaysia to Indonesia to Central Asia and even to the West here; all these people made it attractive because of their good character and knowledge, and because their hearts were made pure. Their hearts were made pure because their sight had become pure. Their sight had become pure because they paid attention.

With all the distractions we have every day, and all the requirements, and all the demands placed upon us, and all the things we promise to fulfill, whatever contract we make—with the school to study, with a job to do our work, with our families in marriage, we may give our word to our children—all of them can be opportunities to fulfill our contract with Allah (swt) if we pay attention, if we turn our attention deeply, inwardly, to ourselves for just a small period of time every day until we start to see that panoramic view, until we start to realize we are seeing. When we realize that we are seeing, what is the *adab* we are going to bring to that?

So we are guided to see there are two main factors: humility and gratitude for whatever comes to us—humility, which sometimes comes in the form of humiliation; and gratitude for whatever comes to us, because it is a way of saying, “Wake up!” [It is like saying] I’ve given you this as an opportunity to realize who you are, where you are, what choices you have been making, why you have been making them, how you have been making them, and what you are doing to fulfill whatever your obligations and hopes are, whatever your desires are. How are you operating? I’m reminding you: **“Remember Me, and I’ll remember you.” “If you walk toward Me, I’ll come running toward you.”** Who is the “I” that comes running to you? Those attributes. You take one step toward Compassion, all the compassion comes running toward you. You take one step toward the Truth, and all the truth comes running toward you. Then you have to learn how to deal with it.

How do you deal with it, when you start to see? You don't deal with it in always the same way. If you know this person and that person very well, you know you speak this way to that person, and another way to the other person, because you want to communicate in the best way possible. You know all three people need your advice for something. Do you give it in exactly the same way? If you do, you are foolish. You take a person who is very quiet, and another who is hard to communicate with (and you have to speak loudly and strongly), or you take a person who is fearful, and you want to communicate the same thing to each one. You don't say it in the same way. So Allah has "Ninety-Nine" different ways of communicating. Who comes running to you when you take one step of love? Who is the love that comes running? How do you see it?

Allah says, "**Follow the path of those who have turned toward Me.**" In Sura Luqman. This is not an admonition from me, and I don't think it's from the Qur'an either, to become a religious zealot. This is a subtle, simple guidance and promise. If we have to keep our word, then Allah keeps Allah's word. I don't like to anthropomorphize God, so how does Allah keep His word? If you keep your word, Allahu Akbar, your word is made greater by Allah's Presence. If you give love, then love flows to you. Now you have turned to this channel of love. If you give compassion, then greater than your compassion comes flowing to you. If you give patience, then greater than your patience comes to you. Why? Coming from where? It is present. Use the filter example. We have different filters. How do you see color? All the other colors are filtered out. Or combinations thereof. Everything is filtered out but mostly what passes through that veil is compassion, or what mostly comes through is love. Each veil has a different permeability. So the way to Allah is through the heart. The heart is purified through atazkiyā an-nafs, and the wisdom that comes to us comes through that.

I give you this in the context of what we have been speaking about in terms of *basīra*, those things that develop your intuition, your insight, and the ability to see through the veils, and to remember that the most important organ you have is this heart and how you treat it every single day. How you use it every single day is really the key, not only to happiness and contentment in this world, but it is the doorway to contentment and happiness beyond this world. Whether you think of beyond this world in religious terminology, like most people in the world do, or whether you think of beyond this world in the sense that everything continues, we are part of a dynamic, continuing reality. The consciousness that we develop in this world is directly linked to our heart, and how our heart speaks, and when it becomes silent, and the words it uses, and the words it rejects, and the patterns it develops and the patterns it overcomes, and the repetitive behavior that influences it for the good or for the bad.

That's the most important thing. It's a simple message, but one I feel many of us forget on a day to day basis. The analogy has been made by Sufis that the *nafs* can be like a wild horse, you have to control and break. At least the little I know in my studies of natural horse training, you break the horse with your heart. You train the horse with love and affection and respect, not by threatening. It brings its own character to you and it builds trust. We have to do that with our *nafs*. We turn our *nafs* toward our heart, and our heart trains our self. I'm just encouraging again when we talk in such detail that we don't forget where it comes from. It comes from the science of the heart, from Tasawwuf, the path of the heart, *inshā'a-Llāh*. *Asalaamu aleikum*.