

November 14, 2009

Saturday

Title: [The Purpose of Self-Reflection](#)

DVD title: At-tazkiya/Purification: The Means to Find One's Self

Dinner blessing: Ya Allah, You continuously shower Your Blessings upon us in the *rizq* that You give us. We ask You to make us worthy of all that You give us, and to be clear in our hearts and minds, and moderate in our actions, and balanced in our thoughts, in service to all of Your Creatures and Creation, and to be the people of *taslim*, the people of peace and security, until the world sees us that way. We ask You, Allah, to give calmness to this world, peace, *sakīna*/tranquility to this world and the hearts of our leaders. We ask You, Allah, to heal the ill and uplift the people. *Amin*.

Suhbat: On the subject of *at-tazkiya an-nafs*, Allah says, “**Those who prosper who purify themselves and glorify the name of your Lord and pray.**” (87:14-15) He also says, “**And whoever purifies himself does so to his own soul's benefit, and to Allah is the journeying.**” (35:18) The implication here is that the process of purification is the *sair ul suluk*. So everyone who is participating in this process of *at-tazkiya* is really on the *sair ul suluk*, the journey. There is a more profound depth to this in terms of Tasawwuf. We can see that Tasawwuf is the means or the way, the science of purification of the self. If a person claims to be a Muslim, and is not undergoing this purification of the self, they can say they are purifying society (or whatever); but if they are not undergoing the process of purifying the self, then they are not following what Allah (swt) is saying in Qur'an. It's that simple. It clearly states the necessity for purification.

It's ridiculous to say there can be any Islam or Taslim without purification of the *nafs*. The question isn't whether a person is completely [purified], or how successful they are in this attempt and pursuit [of purification], but it's the necessity for every believer, every Muslim, to pursue it. There are many, many 'āyāt in Qur'an on this subject about purity and purification, and the profit that comes from them in terms of knowledge and teaching. Allah says, **“What could tell you that perchance a person may grow in purity, or that he might receive admonition, and the teaching might profit him?”** (80:3-4) Or, **“If it was not for the Grace and Mercy of Allah on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But Allah purifies (*yuzaki*) whom He pleases and Allah is the One Who Hears and Who Knows all things.”** (24:21)

There is this conscious awareness and effort, and the results are clear to us. If you look at the word *at-tazkiya* in all its meanings, *zakah* means “was clean.” *Yuzaki* means “to clean” or “to be purified.” *Zakah* also means cleansed. So *tazkiyya* means to purify, cleanse, and clean. And *zakat* means the tax that is due so one can be charitable to others. It doesn't matter how many definitions you have of this word, one can't really express a dynamic process. At any given moment, it has different manifestations, meanings and signs. Those signs are found in the Qur'an, or Hadith, where Allah tells us who the purified people are, or what happens to those people who are purified, or what steps purified people have to take. For example, Allah says: **“For the mercy of Allah is near to those who are good.”** Or, **“For Allah is with those who restrain themselves, and who are good.”** (16:128) It gives you the means. Then it is taken out of the realm of *dunya* in Sūratu-r-Rahman: **“Is there any reward for goodness other than the good itself?”** (55:60)

Here, *ihsan* is translated as goodness. Good is a strange word: an extra “o” in God. What is that goodness? **“He rewards those who do good with what is**

best.”(53:31) Or there is the famous ‘*āyat*: “ **Allah commands justice in the doing of good (*ihsan*), and giving to kith and kin, and He forbids all indecent acts and deeds and evil and rebellion, and instructs you that you may receive admonitions.** (16:90) In this understanding of Tasawwuf, Allah is giving us good guidance about goodness. Yet, it poses a tremendous challenge for most of us. When you hear, “**Whoever submits his whole self to Allah is a Muslim and his reward is with his Lord. And they should not have any fear and will never grieve.**”(2:112) Submit your whole self? Okay, go ahead and do it. Has everybody done that, now? Well, the fact is, we have; but we interrupt it with our fears, worries, desire, control and all the other stuff. Not one person here – unless unfortunately they decide to take their own lives, which is a great crime in Islam against your soul—no one here can predict the moment of their death. So we are in submission to Allah. Then everything else interrupts that—the idea that we are not [in submission], being the biggest one.

To consciously submit oneself to Allah takes us into a whole other realm of self-reflection. The only way you can see yourself is if it is reflected on something, right? The simplest way is a pool of water that is standing still. That was the mirror for millions of years for people. Can you imagine going through life, not seeing yourself at all? You know the old story about the dog who was dying in the desert, trying to find water, and he drags himself to the oasis. He pulls himself right to the edge of the water, then jumps back because he sees a horrible looking mad dog there. Finally, he gets so thirsty he dives in, fully expecting to fight the dog he sees there. But there isn’t one; it is just the reflection of his own self. Can you imagine the first time some Neanderthal saw himself? Can you imagine going a day without seeing yourself, just passing by a window? Can you imagine what that’s like? How would you girls put on your makeup? Every man here has tried to shave in the shower without a mirror. Ouch.

Allah has created a means for us to see ourselves. Then it becomes very complicated when we try to see ourselves in the way people respond to us or react to us. It creates barriers in order for us to reflect upon ourselves. The barriers we come into contact with in life are means of purifying ourselves and reflecting upon ourselves. Those barriers seem to be impenetrable; but when you realize that when you are holding a mirror seeing yourself, your holding the mirror is the only way to know who that is [becomes a very important reality]. The fact you can turn it in another direction is a very important reality for you, if you have never had a mirror before. Otherwise, you will be like the dog, thinking someone is in the thing in front of us. Allah provides barriers for us also, so that we might reflect upon ourselves.

Not all the barriers are difficulties, necessarily; they are just barriers in the physical world and in the spiritual realms. Then Allah says, “**Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, and does good in the way Allah likes?**” (4:125) The recipe is there, if we care to look at it, and to attempt to follow it. This doing goodness, *ihsan*, is a very deep subject. But it is based on *adab*, like most things. We can talk about *adab* all the time and never come to the end of it. There is an interesting line between understanding *at-tazkiya*, *zakat*, and *adab* in this sense. There is a story that Abdur Rahman Sulami (ra) told; actually he was repeating a story that came from Razi.

I was in the mosque at during the Friday prayer and I observed a man going around saying, “Show me charity.” (He was using the word zakat/ at-tazkiya). I was a Sufi, but I became weak. I offered him some sadaqa, but he told me, “Go away and leave me alone! This is not what I asked for.” And he refused the donation.

What was he asking for? He was asking for a means to find himself again. The means to find yourself is purification of the self. He felt he had become impure. Who was he asking? He wasn't asking anyone there; he was asking Allah. Even with the Prophet Mohammed (sal), it is said he observed the manners, *adab*, of everyone in his presence. In observing the *adab* of the person, he was fulfilling what I read in these 'āyāt of Qur'an. It was reported that the Prophet (sal) said, ***“Whoever does not know his obligations to Allah (may He be great and exalted) and fails to comply with Allah’s prohibitions and commands is barred from adab.”*** Who doesn't comply with the prohibitions and commands is barred from good manners. And he said, ***“Allah (may He be great and exalted) has instructed me in good adab. His instructions were perfect and excellent.”***

This is another way of looking at *adab*: it is not just courtesy and good manners. Think of it as a combination of all the best character traits. The person who has good manners – and the children should be hearing me tonight if they are here – is a person who has combined in themselves all the good character traits. So you get the word 'm'adaba' which means the gathering of all the well-mannered people. It was reported that Abu Ali Daqaq (may Allah be pleased with him) said, *“The servant of Allah reaches Jannah by being obedient to Him, and he reaches Allah by means of his adab.”* You reach Jannah by being obedient, and you reach nearness to Allah by good manners. He said:

I saw someone reach with his hand toward his nose in order to pluck something from it during prayer, but his hand was stopped. The master said he must have said this about himself, for no one else would have known his hand was stopped.

The master, Abu Ali, made a vow one day that he would not lean against anything. One day, I met him at a gathering and put a pillow behind his

back because he had nothing to lean against. He discreetly moved away from the cushion. I thought he was wary of the cushion because it was not covered by a cloth or a rug, but he told me, "I want no support whatever." And indeed, I kept watching him and he never leaned against anything.

Isn't that great? This *adab* means you try to do good deeds. You treat that Divine Presence properly, inwardly and outwardly, within your own self respectfully, and outside of yourself. If you do that, then you are an *adab*. You don't have to be an Arab to be an *adab*; you can be an American. The way that has been traditionally taught to us is to be doing what we are doing right now, to be in the company of good people. The great *shaykhs* all said it. Imam Shafi (ra) said, *"I love from this life three things: first, to leave behind bad attitudes, to show kindness to others, and to be guided by the way of Tasawwuf."* That's not bad. That's good. He said to his son, Imam Ahmed, *"O my son, you have to keep the association with the Sufi people, because they achieve more than us in knowledge, in watchfulness, in fear of Allah, austerity, and intensity of their devotion to reach the state of excellence."*

What is watchfulness? *Muraqabah*. *Muraqabah* is the place where you witness the meaning of the outer and the meaning of the inner. When you are in *muraqabah*, and your *nafs* has been set aside or you have transcended the lower states of the *nafs*, because your own state is sublimated and you are seeing with some clarity, you get a greater and greater state of sensitivity and you begin to see what is opening within your own self. The knowledge you have and operate with up until that moment is like post-its on a wall. You've got them all organized, and you've been operating fine with all that "knowledge" there that's totally accessible to you, and under certain circumstances, things key other things, etc. All of a sudden, a door opens and you go into a room where there are no post-its on the

wall. You are in a strange place, and things are happening, but you don't have any ready reference, because your references have been taken away from you.

The more you practice *muraqabah*, there is greater and greater sensitivity, and the ability comes to you to see the opening within your own self. Of course, the Sufi would pursue this in *khilwa*/retreat and just do practices and practices until the mind gave up all those references, and you would find yourself in another state. In that state, the only thing you become aware of is yourself. You watch yourself. Where am I? How did I get here? You go through that process. Some of you may have had that in *khilwa* when you went for 3 or 4 days. You practice and practice, and in between that, you find yourself in a space where you become aware of yourself and you ask yourself very important questions. You are almost in a kind of timelessness where within yourself there is no need, and no way, to misrepresent yourself to yourself. Does that make any sense?

We often misrepresent ourselves to ourselves, even if it just in our expectations, even if it's in a semi-positive way. We have certain expectations of our self. That self-watching that comes through *muraqabah* is really the beginning of awakening, enlightenment or self-awareness. It's the beginning of the light that comes to you—progress. All it means is a person is more and more aware, more and more conscious all the time (if we use the term “conscious” in the commonly accepted way it is used). Yet, at the same time in *muraqabah*, this state is often achieved because you are doing repetitious things. There is no need for your mind to go here and there.

By doing repetitious things, they become like a background to you and they open up other doorways. That's the standard way of doing it. In that process of that purification, if you have the right *adab* in meditation, you humbly pay attention to what is happening inside of you, and you humbly take with a grain of salt what is

happening outside of you, even if it is a distraction. You let it be. You don't seize it as an excuse for not being in a state of *muraqabah*. You don't pretend it is not there, because that engages you in it. You accept with a grain of salt what is happening outside of you, and you pay attention humbly to what is happening inside of you.

In a sense, it's a denial and an affirmation. Something disturbing you? You deny its effect on you, and you affirm what's happening internally in *muraqabah*. In other words, *lā ilāha illa-llāh*: denial and affirmation. When you go through denial and affirmation in this sense, something happens. It attracts to you another dimension of understanding. Your *adab* is good. You are involved in a process of *at-tazkiya*, refinement. You are accepting where you are but you are denying the influence of the external, and you are affirming your intention internally, and *jedhb* comes. It's like wrapping a wire around a magnet, increasing the field of this Divine Attraction. If you persist in this *muraqabah*, this *tawajjuh* (facing and turning to Allah), you come to sense that there are other realities present.

Those realities may seem to be alien to you: angelic presence, for example; a higher level of knowledge. You are able to see other things, intuit other presence. Some people are able to travel distances while sitting in *muraqabah*. Distance viewing, they call it in parapsychology. Things that you are not used to happen to you, and they are very real to you. Because what has actually transpired is you are traveling in the *mulk al-malakut*. It becomes possible to do certain things. How many times have people said to me, "Shaykh, you are reading my mind!" Or, "I was just thinking about you and you called me," things like this. You can enlighten your inner state with the light of the guidance, with the light of the power of Allah, with the light of persisting in *muraqabah*, the light of *tawajjuh*, of being able to stand back and gather your thoughts and not just scatter them all over the place.

There is a continuous acceptance that comes from a heart that is sincere, that comes from the kind of continuous feeding or purification that comes from doing good acts, good deeds by gathering/*jam* (the Sufis call it the *jami-jam*), and by accepting who you are, where you are, and what you are doing. Hence you get the stories like I told about Junayd, and what he learned from watching the cat watch the mouse. Everything we do sincerely with our self as a sincere act of purification/*at-tazkiya*, with a sense of goodness, *ihsan*, surrounded by performing good acts and good deeds, which habituate us to good acts and good deeds, and creates that kind of mimetic behavior that continues, that will also break down all kinds of barriers: cultural barriers, hysterical barriers, fears, desires. Performing good deeds and good acts do that.

What happens is, by doing that, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, *inshā'a-llāh*, by making *mahasabah* and seeing it, by paying attention to yourself, and seeing what kind of deeds you have done and what kind of company you keep and the effect of it, that's when you get an 'āyat or statement that says, this is the way your sins are erased, or you are uplifted to another level, or Allah forgives you. You are accounting for yourself, and cleaning the slate. This is a form of *at-tazkiya*. This is real purification. *Mahasabah* is very important. *Muraqabah* is a means to what is transpiring, and *mujahadah* and *mushahadah* are the striving and witnessing of that process. I'll end with a story.

Ibn Araby writes and says, during the time of the Meccan conquest, the righteous people of those early days and centuries of Islam, used to write down or commit to memory everything they did and said every day. Then they sat and made *mahasabah*. They criticized themselves for any wrong or evil thing they said or did in their acts or words, and then they asked for Allah's forgiveness for that. It was like they were giving themselves an inoculation against the virus of those

errors, sins and behaviors by touching them again in the form of memorization or writing them down. Then they would seek forgiveness, and their immune system would resist it in the future, if you want to use the metaphor of the winter H1N1 virus. These practices work. At the root of that is the *safar watan*, the journey in one's homeland. That is the movement from the blameworthy actions to the praiseworthy qualities. When you make the *shahadah* or recite the *kalima*, it's like looking at one side of the moon. There is a dark side of the moon. The light side is the *kalima*, *lā ilāha illa-Llāh Muhammadan Rasūlullāh*. The dark side of the moon is all those errors, sins, and other things that are hidden by it, so one makes *muraqabah*.