

November 26, 2009

Thursday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Comprehension, Apprehension, and Responsibility](#)

DVD title: Transcending the Attraction of One's Self to Look Within:
Idrāk: Comprehending Reality and One's Self

Thanksgiving Dinner Blessing: Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. On this day, Allah, that is designed to remind people around the world of thankfulness to You, especially in this country, we remember all the great gifts You have given to us, and we look upon the table for the colors. We taste the taste and smell the smells, and feast our body on the bounties You have provided. We ask You, Allah, to make us at some point worthy of all that You have provided for us. Give us a sense of repentance, a sense of gratitude, a sense of love and sharing, and to fulfill all the good wishes that we have for our families and our community and for humanity. End those behaviors and attitudes that deviate from that wish, O Allah (swt). Protect our leaders, protect their lives and well-being, especially our President. Give him the heart, the patience, and the tolerance to weather the storms around him. Give us, O Allah, the means to You through our Prophet Mohammed (sal).

Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. It was one of the Persian Sufis, I can't remember who, who put forward the statement and concept that as soon as Allah created human beings, at that moment, attaining to Allah became impossible; hence, the eternal search begins. That's when the mirror we talked about last night was placed between creation and the Creator. The human being became enraptured in looking at their own self. In that attraction to one's own self, the seeker had to transcend that attraction of one's own self to one's own self, to look into their own heart. Only in their own heart would they see the reflection of the Divine Light of Allah. Any looking outward would only be stimulating their own attraction to

their own self. Only by looking inward would they find, if you want to say, the way around the mirror that was placed before them. Because Allah says that you will find Me in the heart of the believer.

As soon as He created human beings, the impetus is to look for Allah, Who cannot be found. You have to look and find yourself within your own self. Allah (swt) created the *ambiyā* and the companions of the *ambiyā*, and the servants of the *ambiyā*, the *shuyukh* to open awareness, to make us aware of certain realities within the human being, and to begin to comprehend, and in that sense, apprehend, one's reality: *idrāk*. In comprehending reality, that would be the only way to achieve or attain to anything. *Idrāk* is a big word: to attain, to achieve, to reach, to understand, to reason. It has the same implication of *firāsa* (discernment), also. Allah placed physical reminders of that comprehension so human beings could grasp things and hold them, through opposition.

In opposing one's *nafs*, one could transcend it. Apprehending something means to understand something, and also to grasp or hold it, apprehending a criminal, for example. To reach for something means to move from your own self, outward. Anthropologists and others studying animal behavior were amazed when a chimpanzee took a stick and stuck it in a hole, and got ants on it over and over again. It comprehended something, and in so doing, apprehended his prey. (People called it prehension, from which we get the word prehensile.)

To avoid political correctness, and the traps of not wanting to appear to be different, I'll just take the jump and say, "Sufism is different." It's fed by the water of the revelations of Allah (swt), and it is illuminated by the light of Allah and Prophet Mohammed (sal). For that alone, there should be enough humility and gratitude. But to fall into the trap of religion as opposed to Tasawwuf is a big trap; nonetheless, one has to sit under the shade of the tree. If you don't understand

why, well; I'll turn for a minute to a friend of Sidi Abdel Hādi's: Simnani. He gave an example that if someone has fertile farmland, with the potential to harvest a thousand kilos of crops, and because of his own fault, negligence and carelessness, he obtained only 900 kilos, that hundred kilos of potential food is now taken out of the mouths of hungry people. On the Day of Judgment, he will be asked about those hundred kilos. Now you understand why I get upset when the garden is not used.

In the same way, just like we all waste food, we don't fulfill the potential of the garden in our own self. The *ambiyā* were sent to teach us the way, or to remind us, or to question us, or to keep us on the *siratal mustaqim* for the sole purpose of finding what is within us—the only doorway to that Divine Presence, because a mirror has been placed between us—not a wall, a mirror. It is said that if you from here look to Allah, you will see the 99 Names of Allah, the Attributes. If you look outward from the physical being, you will see the 99 Attributes of Allah everywhere. **“Wheresoever you look, there is the face of Allah.”** If you could see from the position of Allah, all you would be seeing is *tawhid*/oneness. You wouldn't see any differentiation.

The prophets were sent for a number of reasons, and their cohorts, and our *shuyukh*, to this day find themselves in the position of certain responsibilities. Remember, the only way is to look inward—keep that in your minds—to open people's eyes to their own personal faults against the backdrop of what is perfect. Now we need Prophet Mohammed (sal); now we need to be able to see the perfection around us. This is all aggregated into something called Islam. Don't mistake it for a religion, but in the world we have had to live in over the millenniums, it becomes that.

They had to assist human beings to open their eyes to their own cruelty against the backdrop of *al-‘adl*/justice, and to open the eyes of people to their own personal ignorance against the backdrop of the Divine *‘Ilm*— not just the intellect, but what the intellect grasps: *marifah*; and to open the eyes of the seeker to their own personal obeisance against the backdrop of the Divine Greatness, Magnanimity; and to open people’s eyes to their own mendicancy, (their own poverty – not in the sense of *fuqara*), to the unawareness of their own wealth against the backdrop of the Divine Wealth and Affluence; and to open our eyes to our own personal incapacities against the backdrop of the reality of the Divine Beneficence; and to open our eyes to our limit-ness, evanescence, against the backdrop of *al-Hayyu al-Qayyum*, the Ever-Living and Ever-Lasting.

It came down from Allah, from Hazrat Adam (as) to the Prophet Mohammed (sal), through all the *ambiyā* and the *shuyukh*, down to any and every *shaykh* with an *ijazāh*. The insistence is that the sincere seeker, who is in this drama, the lover – Allah has put love in the heart of His Creation. Allah creates human beings, and it is out of the love in the human being’s heart for the beauty of nature and creation that the human being accepts the *amanat*, the responsibility. Deep in the heart of the human being, there is attraction to everything that is good and right and beautiful—deep in the heart. Even though you don’t see, you act as if you see, we are told—*ihsan*. Inside us there is an attraction to the beauty of nature, and the magnanimity of the universes, and the interrelationships of the animals, and all the phenomenological apparent realities that are there. We are attracted to them. That is love that is put in the heart of the human being. That’s why the human being is the lover. He/she is the beloved of Allah, but the lover of Allah; hence, all the beautiful poetry. Everything was created.

I’ll read you some advice from Shaykh Simnani that dovetails with this. He says,

The Sublime Deity, the Haqq/ Absolute Truth / Reality created this soil and vegetation with boundless wisdom and sincere true intentions so they are cultivated, benefiting the people. If only the people could comprehend (idrāk) that the cultivation of this world is for the worldwide benefit, and for the generation of wealth, and consequently should never be directed toward extravagance or intemperance. If they could visualize the rewards of such production, they would never halt fruitful development, since forsaking and forestalling or holding back cultivation begets sins. And people equipped with that knowledge will never allow for the withering and deterioration of the earth.

The *murīd* begins to open their eyes to the sight of these meanings, of these alternations of reality: incapacity versus beneficence, or transiency versus everlastingness. The more the sincere seeker attempts to prove himself or herself, or their perfection, the more the *shaykh* becomes resented, he tells us:

Since the shaykh endures all the sufferance (I can talk about this because I'm quoting it), the student shuts the pompous eyes to his own self and opens his eyes to the Divine Perfection. Alas, the student opens every moment a new eye to his own personal admiration, and the shaykh each moment attentively stops him, to make him aware of his gazing upon his own false graces while blind to the Divine Perception, since the fundamental characteristic of the nafs is self-worship.

Just imagine standing before Allah (swt) and answering about a few pounds of seeds and fruits and vegetables, and quivering with fear and regret. How can we comprehend the responsibility we have for what's going on in the world today? Ask yourself: If we're going to be questioned, even if it's just a possibility that we are going to have to account for a few pounds of seeds and fruits before Allah,

how in God's Name are we going to account for all those people who were killed in Iraq, all those soldiers killed in Iraq, all those children killed in Gaza, all those people killed around the world, all the children dying from starvation—not because the world doesn't produce enough food, but because it doesn't get transported to the people! How in God's Name can we face that?

We have to remember that the people who murdered those children, those adults, those soldiers, or those innocent people; those crazy bombers who in the name of “religion” destroyed – pick a century and then pick a religion—it is not just the people who pull the trigger or dialed in the code for the IED to go off on the road. What about those who stirred up all the trouble and fanned the flames, on all sides, for what, the sake of power, money, hate, and self-aggrandizement; and what about the journalists and how it's reported, and how the cable news networks play it over and over again; what about the Wall Street brokers who make money on it, and the scientists who develop the weapons, and the clergymen and women who push people to battle for their own personal name, fame and fortune; and what about the local leaders who salute their flags and worry about re-election, and maintain their political identities and parties? And we shouldn't forget us, who by our silence let it happen, or by our collusion, turn a blind eye.

What does this have to do with what I started with, love? A lot. If you pray five prayers a day every day, and a few extra *sunnah* prayers, and a few *nafl* prayers, and every night you pray and then you fast for Ramadān; if you meditate for hours upon hours, and make *dhikrullah*, and give *zakat*, are we looking into the mirror in front of us, or are we turning to our heart? Do we do all this and then look in the mirror to see how good we are, how great we are, how divine we are? The truest guide, the truest teacher, the *pir o murshīd*, the *shaykh*, the *awliyā*, the *ambiyā*, every one, moment to moment, every day, year after year, battle the self. There is no doubt about that. In battling the self, they are also battling the self-

aggrandizing *murīd*. That's why it takes a village. It takes a *khanaqah*. It takes *suhbat*. Hazrat Hajji Abdullah Ansari (ra) said,

Righteous friends are better than righteous deeds, since the righteous friends remind you of how low-bred and weak you are, while being aloof and worshiping may cause arrogance and self-deception. Look at yourself, man, how religious or spiritual you are becoming. When you glance upon yourself with admiration, you have lost the eyes to glance upon the Divine Beloved. Eyeless you glance upon the Divine Beloved, and let your self, lost in this blinding darkness, smash the idol of your self long before the death shattering that idol came for you.

I think Allah (swt) created Sufis as a kind of hybrid. Among these great Sufis—the Ibn Arabys, the Ibn Atala Iskandarīs, the Simnānis, the Ansaris, all these great scholars (excuse me for not naming them all)—these are people who in one step learned how to traverse the distance between this earth and the other world. Allah (swt) sent a *nidā*/calling, like the young lady in Iran, Neda, called the people by her life, which enabled her to die, and by her death, to action. The person could be you, could be me, if it is our *qadr*, who has that step that needs to be found within us. Shaykh Kharkani, a great Naqshbandī *shaykh*, said,

Man can travel the corners of the cosmos but cannot traverse out of his own nafs. The powers entrusted upon the Sufis are only there to indicate to them that they have no place to go other than towards Hu in spite of all the power they have. During the day I used to fast, and during the night I used to perpetually worship in hopes that I would reach the destination. Then I found that I was truly the destination. The lover who seeks that Beloved shall find Hu. No where in no moment of time shall find its beauteous

guiding Nūr within his own being, because had that Divine Light not shown upon him, he would not exist.

These are the words he uses to talk about his dialogue or his narrative with Allah (swt). That's his words. He's not telling you they are yours or mine. But he is telling you about the legacy left to him, the endowment left by Allah, by Hu. You can tell people about *tawhid*, but you can't describe *tawhid*, because nothing can hold what cannot be held. And if you try to do that... you can't do it. None of us can carry the weight of human kind, but we can carry the weight of our own self. If we understand we are carrying the weight of our own self, we *are* understanding: **“if you save one being, you are saving all humanity.”** If you are the being you are saving, you are saving all humanity. That is not to say that one shouldn't do the kind of work that we do, for example, to try to help humanity. You have to understand that you are helping yourself. You are not doing it to help yourself; you are doing it for the sake of Allah. The only way you can know Allah, is to turn toward yourself.

That *nidā*, that calling out, if you comprehend it (*idrāk*), you [can] grasp it and apprehend the truth as it is passing by you at any moment. The Sufi has to learn how to what? Seize the moment. Grasp the moment. Isn't that the term? *Waqt*: you seize the moment. It's always there. Something is always there. You seize the moment of beauty; you seize the moment of truth; the moment of love; you seize the moment of pain. You seize the moment of being told that you are on the wrong track, and hopefully you develop the subtlety to be able to hear the message without it being told in gross terms.

Allah calls out, **“O My ‘Abd! If you come to Me with sorrow, surely I will give you happiness. If you come to Me with need, I am surely going to fulfill your need.”**

As long as you wash your hands of your own kind, because you don't have any hope of help from any of them. **“I shall subjugate the air and water and whole creation to your will and put it in your control.”** This is the amanat.

Philosophers tell us that our minds can understand this through reason and logic. But realize that though we think we can grasp all these complex thoughts and philosophies, our minds are totally blind to our own essence. How can we know what's out there if we cannot put any attention to and know what's in here? Though others will create ideas, philosophies, computations and theories that are correct, they won't understand them until they understand themselves, fully. The people who can make contributions to all those fantastic ideas, thoughts, philosophies and whatever you want to call them are the people who understand themselves. They are also the people who will bother to take the time to learn the other language.

Most people get stuck in their own language: the language of mathematics, the language of finance, the language of war, the language of peace-making, or whatever it is. Most people just get stuck in that one language. The mystics were always able to talk in other languages. Read Ibn Araby and Iskandari and Sulami. How were they speaking everyone's language. Think about it: we can't even comprehend our own neural network, but we going to comprehend the universe? The beauty of it is, if we comprehend our own neural networking we probably will comprehend the universe. The only path toward Allah is this abject discarding of one's own being—I go back to the vacuum tube—until you create a vacuum, and nothing but Allah exists. Kharkani (ra) says,

All treasures of the earth were presented to me that I might glance or look at them, and I did not. Instead, I cried. Deceived is the person who is

deceived by these material things. The nidā came from Allah, O Abul Hasan. There is no assigned portion for you in this world, in both worlds. I alone am yours. My Lord made my life a sin in my own eyes.

He would not want to look at his own life, since the end result would be nothing but a sin. So he diverted his eye from his own life to Allah. It causes too much pain to look at your own life. He diverts his eyes to look at Allah.

He (Kharkani) asked the Sufi, “Do you wish to speak to the Khdir?” And the Sufi replied, “Of course I do!” And the Shaykh asked him, “How old are you?” And the Sufi replied, “60.” The Shaykh replied to the Sufi, “Restart your life. The current one is wasted. Hu created you. Why do you want to deal with Khdir? As long as my companionship is with Hu, how could I desire others companionship?”

This is him—not me, not you. But it has some resonance, right? He goes on.

Once Allah the Sublime opened the path in front of me, the way of the path was ever changing. Each year it seemed I would go from disbelief to prophethood.

Don't we get taken up with our own epiphanies and knowledge every once in a while? You are sitting in ignorance, and you read something, maybe this. And it stirs some great understanding in you. How far from ignorance do you travel in that moment, and how near to prophethood are you? Because the *nafs* is still there.

The Divine Path has daraja, (degrees, gradations). When one successfully goes from degree to another, the feeling of elation is such that one was in

disbelief, and now is endowed with prophethood. The higher stage to the lower stage compares as if the person was in disbelief all along.

This is all an introduction to where I wanted to get, because I wanted to talk about *mahabbat*. I wanted to talk about the love Allah created us with (where I started), and the responsibility of that love. We have to come to love humanity. We have to come to love the responsibilities we have been given, and the capabilities we have. We have to come to love the garden we plant, the food we harvest, the children we raise, the words we use. Without loving it, we are not seeing. We are not seeing. We are picking and choosing what we see, and we are looking at the backside of a mirror that is only looking at us. I'll end with another quotation of his:

I became sick of my nafs. (That would be a great step for all of us.) I threw my nafs into the waters, and it didn't drown. I threw it into the fire, and it didn't burn. I starved it by not feeding it food, and it didn't die. Thus I placed my head upon the altar of helplessness, and Hu (he, it) opened the gate for me and I found myself some place I cannot describe. There was no way to destroy the nafs. Even if one kills oneself, the lingering effects of the nafs' previous history continues to haunt mankind. If you don't believe it, think about anybody whoever committed suicide, and how that haunts the people who loved them and knew them. So extend that. And the consciousness of helplessness in the presence of Hu is one sure way to deal with the nafs.

I am not an 'abid/worshiper. I am not a zahid, an ascetic. I am not a scholar or a Sufi. O my Lord, You are One, and my being one stems from Your Oneness. When you say, "I am one person," the very concept of that I and the oneness of this pronoun are the echoes of the Divine Oneness of Allah that is the foundation of the cosmos and of humanity. I did not find

ikhlas in my deeds until I saw nothing but Hu. When I saw the reality of everyone being nothing but Hu, then the ikhlas appeared within me. When I observed its needlessness, the entire creation amounted to nothing but a wing of a mosquito in comparison. When I observed its mercy, people amounted to few birdseeds. What can these last two statements beget? There: most of what we do is for the sake of people's eyes to be pleased (This is his epiphany, the comprehension/idrāk.) and to approve and admire our doing, when the murīd performs acts solely for its (Hu's) eye to see. Then the murīd is in the state of ikhlas. If one could combine the needlessness and the mercy of Allah, then one is transported to the other universe.

I feel that if I talk on the *latā'if* and the practice and the necessity for it, at least periodically, we ought to talk about this and put it into this context. If we grasp any of it, *inshā'a-Llāh*, we will be much better people. One of the ways in which we can look at our self, look inward, is to question ourselves how we do, why we do, and what we do. It can be how you do your prayer, your *wudu*, or how you speak to whoever you speak to. This is very serious stuff. Just think about those seeds and fruits we might be questioned about. The side I didn't talk about tonight—because I don't want you to leave here thinking I'm saying we all should become activists and march for peace in front of the White House tomorrow—is at what point does the sincere intention create change. Again, I'm going to go back to intuition and insight to end.

Many times this week, and I told you some of them already, I think of something and a phone call comes. I was driving back from the Thanksgiving service today. I didn't say anything to my wife, or to my children, or to Grandma in the car, but I had this thought of someone, who I hadn't heard from in a long time. And I had felt bad about it. I thought, I really need to call her and talk to her. There was a

question in my mind: I must have done something. It's been almost a year and a half, at least. I felt it so strongly. I thought, "Tomorrow I'll call, it's the Eid." I was pulling up to lunch today and my phone buzzed as it does when a message comes in. It said, "Dear Brother Shaykh Abdur Rashid, asalaamu aleikum wa rahmatullahe wa barakatuh. Eid Mubarak! Myself and so and so send our greetings for the Great Eid to you and your family and the whole community. I am writing to you from Washington. I have come Tuesday evening and will leave next Wednesday Dec. 3. It would be great if you would be around Washington and we could see you during this time."

This is when there is love in the heart, and this intuition comes, and you have to learn to act on it and to trust it. It will not happen as profoundly or as deeply if when you are looking in the mirror, all you are looking at is yourself. I can be concerned about the person. I don't want to belabor this, but it's really important as it happens a lot. You can be concerned, and wonder, what have I done?

Muhasabat. This is all legitimate. If you have real love in your heart for that person, then you can engage with the person. If you don't have real love in your heart for that person, and your love is for your own self, then it is a helpless and hopeless situation. The reason I bring that up is, if you turn inward, you will develop real love, deeper and deeper love for humanity. The sincere *niyyat* that comes with that, the yearning to speak to that person and resolve a problem if it exists, to see that person again, can expand to large groups of humanity, and resolution can come. I believe it, but I've believed it for a lot of years. *Asalāmu aleikum.*

Any questions?

Question: In the recitations section of the weekend vigil of reading Qur'an that we do, one of the recitations I have a question about. "*O Allah, make me insignificant in my own eyes and significant in the eyes of others.*" Isn't the second part, "*make me significant in the eyes of others*" asking Allah to make you full of pride?

Shaykh: It doesn't say, "Make me significant in my own eyes, and insignificant in the eyes of others," does it? Come on, you know the answer to that question. It's not hard. Think about it. What do you think it means? Why is that a legitimate *du'ā*? Why is it clear? Ask yourself who is reacting to it. Read it again. If you are insignificant in your own eyes, then what? What would be significant in the eyes of others, if they were looking at someone who was insignificant in their own eyes? Humility. What's the beauty of all that?

Remember the story I used to tell about the holy shadow. *There was a man who had this karamat. Wherever he would walk, he touched anyone who had a need, and they would have that need fulfilled. (This is a supposedly true story.) So Allah sent a messenger to him who said, "Allah wants to reward you for all the good you have done in the world. What would you like?" He said, "I don't want anything." The messenger said, "God is giving you a reward; you have to take it!" So he said, "All right, I want this: I want to always walk with my face toward the sun with my shadow falling behind me. Let the healing or whatever happens come from my shadow.*" Meaning, keep me always walking toward the light. Isn't it like that? If you are insignificant in your own eyes, what is significant to other people? One doesn't really know, but something would be. So say humility, and make it easier. Any other questions?

Question: Why is it "Who knows his self (*nafs*), knows his Lord," and not "Who knows his heart (*qalb*) knows his Lord"?

Indirāj an-nihāyah fi'l-bidāyah. We are in this world and this is a process that takes place here, and the doorway to there is here. Remember the story about the rolling stone in front of the cave. You have to stay awake. Don't fall into the trap that *nafs* means ego all the time. It means one's self. It has seven stages of *nafs* in the *sair ul suluk*, according to the way we look at things, if you want to talk about numbers and dimensions. The seven valleys. Each stage is a refinement of the self. If you want to take this *hadith quds* and look at it: "He who knows himself knows his Lord," [you have to ask,] which self? Eventually the self is *insani kamil*. What does *insan* mean? Human being or self. He doesn't say, "Allah" or "Lord," he says "Hu." The word itself is both specific and abstract. It can be uttered and transforming, and it can be understood, but it can never be described. There is abstraction and there is absolute.

The implication of that word, in the opinion of some, and in my opinion also, is that it has a possessive quality to it. You can say, "He who knows Hu," is possessed by Hu, and owned by Hu. Then you have completed the circle of 'abd and abad. I'm certain not a linguist, but this is what my *kashf* tells me from many years. When you say Hu, there is a possessive quality to it. To be possessed by Allah is to return to that state from whence you came. That can be done in submission. You can't become Allah; but you can become possessed by Allah. That's what I think Ahmed Farooqi Sirhindi (ra) was trying to communicate. There is a bond between *wahadat wujūd* and *wahadat shuhūd* at this point. The two apparently diverse philosophies are not really diverse. Where are you looking at it from? You can be possessed by Allah but you are not Allah, because you are coming from the greater to the lesser. You have returned. Now you can say "qalb." At that point, you are no longer the self. Now it is *qalaba*. Now you have turned and returned and made *tawajjuh*. That's why you make *mutawajjuh*; turning and returning.

It's interesting to talk about it, but doing it is a lot better. You have these realizations, and the realizations transcend what you are talking about and what you are thinking about, but they give rise to other thoughts. Then you think about those and have another realization. In that whole dynamic process, you are ascending to other levels until you finally drop off the thinking part of it and you are into being.