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Wednesday

Title: [The Meaning of the Two Seas](#)DVD title: The Two Seas Meet in the Human Being
Transcending the Nafs Ammāra the Two Seas Mix

Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm . Ibn Ata’la al-Iskandari (ra) said that there were two deep seas between Allah and His ‘Abd. One is the sea of Qur’an and one is the sea of this world. He said that the sea of Qur’an is the sea of salvation and the sea of rescue. The other is the sea of this world, the sea of aging, of death and destruction. Ibn Araby picked up on this and said that Allah has let free two seas, meaning together, one is the salty sea, the *hayula* of physical existence. The other is the fresh water sea for the souls who have no physicality. These two seas meet in the human being, in the *wujūd* of the human being. Between these two seas in the human being is the *nafs ammāra*. By transcending the *nafs ammāra*, these two seas mix. The person in physical existence can also have the transcendental experience while still alive.

He quotes Qur’an and he says, “**Beyond them is a barrier which they do not transgress.**” This *nafs* forms one barrier that does not allow the entrance or penetration of the purity of the soul and the immateriality into the material world. This partition, which we struggle to lift, uplift, enables us to see the reality, this physical reality, but at the same time experience a Divine Presence. Many, many years ago, I remember my Yoga teacher, Paramahansa Yogananda, would say: “*Dive, dive, dive deep into the sea. Dive to the bottom of the ocean and find the pearl.*” This pearl was referred to by the Sufis as the quli ‘ilm. Quli ‘ilm means universal knowledge, truth, reality, the *marifah*, the Divine Knowledge that pervades this universe.

Sometimes there is something else. Sometimes you find coral in the sea. Coral is known as the *juz 'ilm*, the knowledge that is partitioned, separated. That knowledge is the knowledge that benefits us every day, like *khuluq*, knowledge of behavior, and the knowledge of Shar'īah, of the prophetic ways, of guidance, laws and rules. The Sufi is the one who is described as sailing very smoothly on these seas, whose ships are as lofty as mountains, but still glide very swiftly and smoothly over the seas. The *tarīqah*, the paths are like the currents, or the *tarīqah* can also be likened to a vessel that the *sālik* travels on towards the destination, towards a Divine Reality. In short speak we say towards Allah.

What makes our journey smooth is when our yearning and our comportment are held on a very high level, when we comport ourselves with a certain *'ilm*, a certain attitude of peacefulness, a certain high mental and emotional state. The traveler who seeks refinement or perfection is a person whose destination is found in the attainment of comfort in the Presence of Allah. Of course, we are all in the Presence of Allah. I dare say that we are all not comfortable. Every day we have discomfort. So when we sail on the ship of *tarīqah*, and when we see the way of behaving, the way of lifting the veils of the *nafs*, and when we realize the overflow of knowledge that is coming towards us, a person begins to develop a very high level of skill in this journey. Still in all, there are barriers that are not transgressed.

In Qur'an, Allah speaks of water that was sent down from the sky. Does it mean rain water? We always take it to mean rain water. It might not have been rain water. It may actually be both literally water from the sky, from outer space, molecules of hydrogen and knowledge; and knowledge, which comes from something non-corporal. See the balance is there. If we think of this water, water is physical. But the water of this planet did not come from this planet. If He meant rainwater, he would have used the Arabic word for rainwater. He did not

use the word rainwater. He just said water. It doesn't say rain water. If Allah meant rainwater, why wouldn't Allah reveal it as rainwater?

These chemical reactions that take place, these atomic reactions that take place, did not come from reactions from this earth. There is more and more evidence, astronomical evidence that the water we drink came from outer space. You know that if we never lose water, we never gain water. There are incredible reservoirs of water in the cosmos. These bodies of water in outer space do not mix in the emptiness of space that serve as a barrier—have the analogy now?—that serves as a barrier between those different areas of the cosmos, those different planets, galaxies, universes. Space acts as a barrier.

Think about this as you think about *wujūd*/beingness. It was determined by astronomers, using iodide, that there was water vapor in the Orion nebula. We all like to look at Orion's belt. Maybe on his belt he has a little flask. They detected a larger amount of water than was previously measured in other inner stellar clouds. How much water? First of all, the scientists knew that there was water vapor in other clouds, close to other star-forming areas like Orion nebula, but they had no explanation for why there should be such an enormous concentration of water vapor in Orion nebula. They believe that they have discovered, through spectrographic analysis, that there is this huge chemical factory and it generates enough water molecules in a single day to fill the earth's oceans sixty times over. How is that?

This discovery tells us a lot about the origins of water in our own solar system. How amazing! Allah is telling us about water in a cosmic way. It is not just rainwater. In the Qur'an, He talks about the ships at sea, with the ship being the *tarīqah*, the boundary between the two seas. This is all *ishara*, pointing, hinting at something. These are hints for the eyes that can see it. Where else are there two

seas? In the heart: one that is oxygenated and one that is not, the veins and the arteries. Where else? The sea of *khawf* and the sea of *rajah*, of fear and hope. There is the sea of *qabd* and the sea of *bast*. Everything tells us of constriction and expansion—even a boa constrictor, when it opens his mouth and swallows the whole thing. Everywhere you look: constriction and expansion.

There is the sea of *haiba* and the sea of *uns*: the fear, the dread/*haiba* of Allah; and *uns*/ intimacy, nearness, friendship. We all know how pearls are made and we know how integral coral is for the eco system. This extraction of pearls and coral from the sea creates momentary states/*hal* of the heart, momentary realizations. Some even say, looking at the ‘*ālam al-amr* and the ‘*ālam al-khalq*, there is a sea of *nafs* and the sea of *qalb*. The heart is the fresh water and the *nafs* is the sea water. “**Between them there is a barrier which they do not transgress,**” which means that Allah (swt) protects one against the other so that no constriction comes in expansiveness. No fear enters hope. No hate enters love, real love. The Shi’a like to say that the two seas are Imam Ali and Fatima.

But over time, people have forgotten what this means. They take the barriers to be actual instead of metaphorical or symbolic. They are actual also. There are the actual physical barriers in the body. If we look back and look back and we think a little about Arabic linguistics, we cannot help seeing that people had a hard time understanding these metaphors, because, for example, *lulu* and *marjan* are not really Arabic words. What we are left with is an abstraction, which also represents us. Until we understand ourselves, we too are an abstraction. We do not understand the origin of our own meaning. We call ourselves by a name. We name ourselves. We try and give our children names that are meaningful, but you have to attain to the meaning. You have to move beyond the abstraction. Even the concept of pearls and coral are an abstraction, linguistically. It may mean nothing on one hand; but on the other, it sort of does mean something.

It seems that out of things that are mystical, not easily understood, mysterious, if you will, the most precious elements emerge. Water from the cosmos, the origin of which we do not know and we do not understand, is something we cannot live without. We cannot live without it. We can say that it is composed of two molecules of hydrogen and one molecule of oxygen. We can describe it that way, but we do not really understand the origin of that. It is something mysterious. There is a barrier beyond which we cannot transgress. There is a point where we embrace the mysterious. We embrace it and we understand how integral it is to our own being-ness/*wujūd*.

[There is something that] brings us together and that allows us to embrace the sublimity and the truth of something – in Sufism, we use the word *jam*, togetherness. When the eye of discernment/*firāsa* accompanies the soul, when the potential of seeing, of discernment opens and you begin to understand where you stand on this border, on this partition, on this barrier, the meaning of *jam*/togetherness is Allah (swt) causes the experience or the feeling, or the awareness of our self and what we are observing.

In other words, as human beings, we experience, what Ibn Araby would call our being-ness. We experience our own being-ness. How? Through our self, our *nafs*. If our self is at its lowest level, our human being-ness is experienced only at that level. We do not see anything higher. We see greed and destruction, war and acquisitiveness and possessiveness, hate and jealousy at the lowest level. As we lift the self up, we naturally find a distaste, a disgust, an embarrassment, a shame associated with those actions, activities, that level of awareness (or lack of awareness) of the self. These qualities now start to emerge: piety, fear of Allah, *taqwa*, humility, humiliation, and repentance. Allah says, “***I will be his hearing,***

and vision, and hand. By Me shall he hear, and by Me shall he see, and by Me shall he act.”

We, who are used to being directed by our *nafs ammāra*, now become more and more directed by a higher vision of our self, a higher seeing of our own self. In other words, we start to harvest the pearls and the coral from the sea. The Divine Light that Allah has always sent, we can say from the furthest reaches of space (the unseen mysterious places), begins to illumine our knowledge, our self, our ‘*ilm*, and our ‘*āqil* (intellect). With this capacity of the intellect, we now see that this ‘*āqil* is the most unique, Divine Capability that Allah has placed within us. We can understand through the intellect and through this consciousness what is transpiring. We can make decisions and we can even begin to see what we do not understand. We can articulate and comprehend that there are things that are beyond our comprehension, which no other being in creation can do.

This *qabd* and *bast*, these apparent opposites, these *hal* (moments) which are really moments in the heart, not only have meaningfulness, but they have actually a rhythm to them, like the heart, like the waves of the sea, like the rhythm of the moon rising over the earth, like the comets that pass by at a specific interval. We see there are these rhythms in the universe, as there are rhythms in our own body. Hence, the Sufi, like the mystics of all time, discovered how to come into resonance with these rhythms as you learn how, for example, to breathe properly. You find out that you are breathing in rhythms that are consistent with rhythms of the universe. They actually become a means/*wasīla* for coming near to Allah.

Science has proven the value of breath, of meditation, of certain movements. There has been analysis of *salat*, and how when we are performing *salat* the movements provide us with peacefulness and tranquility. Some see even the Arabic letters in *salat*. All these things are incredibly consistent. Why would we

choose to pay no attention to them, once we know that all around us is this affirmation, this encouragement, the symbols/'*alam* of a totally Divine Consistency? Why do we resist it, or not choose to submit to it? Why would one not choose hope over fear, expansion over contraction?

Even Allah has provided on this earth the comparison between plenty and emptiness, desolation, like the Sahara desert. People can have desolation in their own souls, their own hearts. Then you read some of the poets. In describing the desert, they say, "*The only living thing in the desert is Allah everlasting, Al Hayyu Al Qayyum.*" Nothing else lives there. No other concept of life applies, *alhamduli-Llāh.*

This Sufic journey we are on (perhaps you can see) is one from which we are getting the *madad* of Allah everywhere. The universe around us is assisting us. Whatever you choose to study or investigate in depth will again prove to you, again and again, this consistency, from the furthest reaches of space to the innermost reaches of our own self. Allah gave us this '*āqil*/intellect. Prophet Mohammed (sal) said about the intellect: "**Allah said: sit, so it sat; speak, so it spoke; be silent, and it became silent.**" Allah confirms in Qur'an, meaning the '*āqil*: "**With you I will praise, and with you I will endow, and with you I will take, and with you I will give.**"

We must use our intellect in a way that is beneficial for this journey we are on called life. We can choose a career, a way of life. We find something that really fulfills us. But do we see where this Divine Imperative, this Divine Will is coming from, this Gift of Allah that is flowing to us all the time? How can we see it? The only way we can see it is by following these *hal* until they become *maqamat*. This journey of ascension, this process of awakening, this process of enlightenment allows us to see, wherever we look, wherever we turn, this beautiful

consistency. Then will we not be seeing the beauty of the universe with different eyes, and the phenomena of our own beingness with different eyes? Will we not appreciate our own self in a different way? Will our goals not be something far beyond the salty sea? I hope.

With our meditation and with our journeying—*sair illah, sair fi-illah, sair min-illah, sair adiniyyat*—our being is just following the trail of the essential elements that created us, back to its Creator. We are responding. We are turning our attention. We are returning. That can happen daily.

He has left two bodies of flowing water, meeting together. Between them is a barrier which they do not transgress. Out of them comes pearls and coral, and his are the ships sailing smoothly through the seas, lofty as mountains. (55:19-22, 24)

That's you and me.