

December 9, 2009

Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Attributes of Sincerity](#)

DVD title: Sincerity/Ikhlas: its Relationship to Loyalty and to Suhbat

Dinner blessing: *Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm*. O Allah, we are so happy to see beautiful faces of beautiful children who look with beautiful eyes at beautiful things. We are very grateful, Allah, for all the nature that You give us, except for the black bear at Rabia's house. We are very grateful for the food You give us, and the love You shower upon us. That's why You force us to eat together so often so we can praise You and thank You and remember You. We are so grateful for the community you have created for us. We pray that those who are ill, immediately get better. We pray that those who are getting ill, don't get ill. And the children wear their hats when they are out playing on the basketball court so the mother doesn't call me three hours later and say that they are sick. We thank You, Allah, for all the benefits You give us; and help me to make the decisions I have to make this week, Allah, because I'm going crazy. *Amin*.

Suhbat: There have been many interpretations of *ikhlas*/sincerity. There are a number of *hadith*, and a number of our predecessors have spoken on this subject. I think we all think we know what sincerity is. I came back from a trip to see Hazrat in England, the one where we were talking about the *Asmā' al Husna*. He said, speak to people about sincerity. I attempted to for a while. We will speak about it again.

Maybe some of you wonder why *ikhlas* is a topic that goes along with *suhbat*. Perhaps you wonder what the relationship is. I think we all *think* we know what it

is; we use the word a lot. We say, that person is a sincere person. We assume it has something to do with truthfulness, *sidq*. If you go back to classical or older texts, they put *sidq* after sincerity. We use the word in a number of ways: “He’s a sincere person,” or “that person really made a sincere effort.” It doesn’t necessarily mean a truthful effort. But if I asked you to give me a synonym for sincere effort, what would you say? (Honest. Real. Focused. Earnest.) But contextually, it has something else. Usually, *ikhlas* is translated as sincere, but it also has the implication of pure and upright. Islamically and Sufically it has many other contexts to it.

In terms of *suhbat* with the *shaykh*, and talking in terms of *bai’at*, *ikhlas* has to do with loyalty also. If you go through the Rules of the Order or the Guidelines for the *shaykh* and *murīd*, or guidelines for *murīd* to *murīd*, or discussions on *tarīqah*, loyalty is very important. Loyalty makes a lot of demands on us. It also has to do with lack of ostentation, showiness. Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, ***“There were three things that prevented the heart of the believer from being unfaithful: being sincere to Allah in his actions, counseling those in power, and always holding onto the community of Muslims.”***

Abu Ali Daqaq said, *“Sincerity means making Allah (praise be to Him) the sole object of one’s worship.”* By that he meant seeking the nearness to Allah to the exclusion of other things. He also means not making a show of your piety, your religiosity, or your knowledge; not taking delight in the praise anyone would give you; or not getting distracted by praise. *Ikhlas* is seen as a protection, also. It is seen to be a protection from one’s good actions being observed by people, and then [from the] praise following it. There are many levels of this that we will probably get to.

Perhaps the most important statement about sincerity is a *hadith quds* where Allah (swt) said, “***Sincerity is the greatest mystery that I have deposited in the hearts of those servants of Mine whom I love.***” “***The greatest mystery***”! But we take sincerity for granted. “Sincerely, I want to tell you this.” “I want to be absolutely honest and sincere with you.” *Sidq*, truthfulness is said to be cleansing the heart, or cleansing oneself, or being aware of oneself. The sincere person is a person who is free from that ego, and the truthful person is one who is free from glorifying themselves. Dhul Nun, the great Egyptian mystic – he was the one who figured out how to find the treasure by shooting the arrow. People were told the treasure was where the arrow falls, and so everyone would shoot an arrow and dig where it fell. He simply held the arrow and let it fall at his feet and dug there. The treasure was there. Do you remember what the treasure was? Implements you could use for farming that would make the real treasure grow.

Dhul Nun al Misri said, “*Sincerity is only perfected by being truthful in it and by constant forbearance. As far as truthfulness, it is only perfected by being sincere and constant in it.*” As long as you notice sincerity in your sincerity, you are in need of sincerity. Dhul Nun said, “*Sincerity has three signs: when the praise and blame of the common folk become equal in your eyes; when you become oblivious of your good deeds as you are doing them; and when you forget about your reward for your good deeds in the Hereafter.*” Abdur Rahman Sulami said that he heard Uthman of Maghribi say, “*Sincerity is something in which your lower soul never finds pleasure. This is the sincerity of the ordinary folk. As for the sincerity of the elect, this is something that happens to them without them knowing it. They show acts of obedience to Allah while remaining unaware of them, nor seeing nor counting them. This is the sincerity of the elect.*”

Again, you have another parallel. You don’t see the result of *suhbat* easily, but it has an invisible benefit to it. Then when you see it, you realize that by doing X, Y

happens. But to try to do Y, you cannot make it happen. Being sincere, certain things will take place. Truthfulness will come. Trying to be sincere is an endless process. But being sincere, performing acts of sincerity (what are those?), they come from *suhbat*. They come from the practices. They come from the company of the *shaykh*. They come from the company of the brothers and sisters. It comes automatically.

I was thinking of someone yesterday a lot. Then last night I had a dream about that person. I decided that in the morning I would call. But then in the morning, I thought, “No, I’m not going to call. I want to see if that person thought about me.” It wasn’t a test; it was just my *basīra* and my *firās*. I went through a mental process. I wanted to depend on my insight and intuition. It’s very important to do that. I was sitting in a meeting, and what happened? The person called me. I said, “I was thinking so much about you, and was going to call you this morning but wanted to see if you would call me.” She said, “I was thinking about you a lot in the last few days and wanted to call you.” I said, “I was very concerned about your health, and some other things.” Yes, she said, “I wanted to give you the latest report on my health, I went to the doctor...” and so forth. It just happens.

It comes from love and it comes from selflessness and service and sincere concern without being concerned about your sincerity. I wasn’t concerned about my sincerity, nor was I trying to be sincere. It comes naturally from you when you live a life in the companionship of good people. Yes, there are plenty of good people in the world. There are plenty of “good Muslims” in the world, but I don’t mean just good people. I mean people who are in synchronicity, people who are synergistic with you, people whose lives are for the same purpose of yours, whether you know it or not. But you are doing certain practices and you are in certain company that, even if you don’t see it, will uplift your heart and soul. Not

just any group of Muslims or any group of good people; no. There is a destiny in that.

It is very important to understand what is a distraction and what is not a distraction. What is a distraction is to be showy or ostentatious in your piety, or very worldly in your goals, even in your spirituality (your practices, your worshipping). But [it is important] to realize that you will become a servant of Allah and a servant of others because it is the will of Allah, and the Will of Allah is not the will of that distant god somewhere, but it is the will to make things harmonious and to strive for balance and to have love, care, and concern for one another.

Sincerity is one of the most significant qualities of the faithful people, as the Prophet (sal) said because of loyalty. Real sincerity comes from loyalty. If you are disloyal, however you want to define that term, you can be not trustworthy and disloyal, or secretive and disloyal. (There are reasons to keep secrets of course, but only the good ones are good. The other ones are not.) You can be selfish and be disloyal. There are many ways of talking about loyalty and disloyalty. But think about it: sincerity comes from loyalty. There was a *hadith* that was a metaphor, ***“Sincerity is like a spring that springs from the tree of loyalty.”*** The Prophet (sal) said, ***“The one who drinks uninterruptedly from this water for 40 days will find channels of wisdom open from his or her heart to his or her tongue, and such a person will always speak wisdom.”***

Forty days of sincerity that comes from the tree of loyalty: loyalty to what? To Allah, to the prayer, to the *wudu*, the fasting, the five pillars, loyalty to the Prophet (sal), loyalty to the *silsila*, loyalty to those who are loyal to Allah, loyalty to the trustworthy people, maybe your parents or your grandparents, maybe your *shaykh*. Nothing can take you from that. If you accomplish that, nothing will take you from

it. Indeed, it could be said that loyalty is the primary attribute of the *ambiyā*. Think about it. Was there a disloyal prophet? Any level of disloyalty or disaffection with Allah was serious. Musa (as) could not enter Canaan. There was one little tiny bit of what? What would you call it? Selfishness, doubt, questioning? But in truth, it is innate in all the prophets.

Every prophet's lesson is a lesson to everybody. We try as human beings to obtain what Allah placed in the hearts of the *ambiyā*. The Prophet (sal) always gives the example of *ikhlas*. Standing in prayer all night, being repentant when he doesn't have to be. These are examples of *ikhlas*. In Qur'an, Allah tells us that the Prophet Musa (as) was made sincere. **“And We make mention in the scripture of Moses. Look, he was chosen and he was a messenger.”** (19:51) It is not a good translation. The implication was that he was chosen and made into a messenger.

Faithfulness and sincerity are inherent and intrinsic to the prophets just like air and water are to our lives. Faith, sincerity, and this level of *sidq*/truthfulness are the most important part of the insight and *bāraka* of the prophets. Every prophet, I think one can safely say, was certain they could not take one forward step (make progress) if they were not sincere. Thus, we have to understand that any representative of the cause and intention of the prophets—that is to say, for peace, for justice, for compassion, for mercy, or for love, or for tolerance—has to believe that we cannot achieve those states (reconciliation, peace making, conflict prevention, justice, legislative equity) without sincerity.

Sincerity comes from loyalty. We know how human beings feel about disloyalty, right? A soldier became disloyal on the field of battle can be executed for it. A team player is disloyal to the team and gives the plays out to someone else. A friend is disloyal to a friend, a husband to a wife, or wife to a husband, brother to

brother, sister to sister. These are very, very serious issues. They are issues of disloyalty. “How can I ever know you are sincere if you have been disloyal?” The Prophet (sal) said, “***Surely Allah does not consider your bodies or your appearances; rather, He considers your hearts.***” This sincerity is a gift of credit from Allah (swt), if you will. You know what happens if you go over your credit limit or mess up your credit, you have to go bankrupt and start all over from go. Most people who do that have a bad habit. It’s not always a question of a circumstance, like the financial situation in the world today and not their own doing. But when things are normal, it’s usually because a person is not disciplined or focused or loyal.

Those who have a pure heart are given not only their measure of sincerity, but they are given a means to expand it. If you are given a little bit, you can make it more. Or if you want to make the analogy that if you are given a shallow amount, you can make it deeper. When a finite amount is put in a human being, the reward is infinite. What is it you can get with this? It’s very valuable. You can purchase the most expensive thing on the market in the world with money, and you can get the greatest rewards in the Hereafter. This reality of *ikhlas* caused the Prophet Mohammed (sal) to say, “***Be sincere in your dīn/religion. Little work with sincerity is enough for you. Be sincere in your deeds, for Allah only accepts what is done with sincerity.***”

If we consider a good act to be a body, then the soul of that body is sincerity. If a good act were one wing, then sincerity would be the other wing. As we know, a body without a soul is not worth anything, and a bird with one wing cannot fly. Rumi says, “*You should be sincere in all your deeds so that the Majestic Lord may accept them. Sincerity is the wing of the bird of the acts of obedience. Without a wing, how can you fly to the abode of prosperity?*” Bayazid of Bistami said, “*I worshiped my Lord for thirty years with all my strength. Then I heard a voice that*

said, “O Bayazid! The treasure of Allah is full of acts of worship. If you intend to reach them, see yourself as small at the door of Allah, and be sincere in your deeds.” Abul Hamid al Ghazali (ra) said,

A certain man in the middle of his prayers heard about people who worshiped a tree. He went out of the house to cut it down. Iblis came to him and said, “If you cut down that tree, they will worship another tree. So don’t bother cutting it down, just go back to your worship.” See how logical and reasonable that was? This is Shaytan saying this to him. But he said, “It certainly should be cut down!” And Iblis argued with the man, but the man wrestled him to the ground. Iblis said, “You are a poor man. Return to your worship, and I’ll place two dinars under your pillow every night. Allah willing, I will send someone else to cut down that tree. What do you care, as long as you, yourself, don’t worship it? Why do you care?”

So the man acquiesced and went home, and the next morning found two dinars under his pillow. And on the second day, he found two dinars under his pillow. But on the third day, he didn’t find any. When he saw this, he went out again to cut down the tree. Iblis confronted him, and this time they wrestled and it was Iblis who wrestled him to the ground. The man said, “How did I manage to overcome you the first time, when you overcame me the second time?” Iblis said to him, “The first time, your anger was for Allah’s sake; and the second time, it was for the sake of the two dinars.”

The argument was logical and reasonable. Here is a similar story. *A man went out to fight in a the lesser jihad. Along the way, he bought a nosebag for his horse. He saw two angels in a dream, and one said to the other, “Record so and so as a mujāhidīn, a fighter for Allah. And record such and such a person as a tourist.*

Then record that person over there as a show-off.” Then the angel looked at the man and said, “And record this one as a trader.” The man said, “Ya Allah! I left as a mujāhid, why are you putting me down as a tajiran?” The angel said to him, “You bought a nosebag yesterday intending to make a benefit from it.” The man said, upon hearing this, I began to weep. So the angel said to his companion, “Record him as a mujāhid, except he bought a nosebag on the way in order to gain from it, until Allah judges him.”

It is said that when Adam (as) fell to the earth, wild animals would come to greet him. He would make du’ā on behalf of the species for whatever would benefit that species. Once, a group of gazelles came to him, and he invoked on their behalf and stroked their backs, and upon doing this musk-sacks appeared on their backs. Another group of animals asked them for the reason for this, and they explained, “We visited Hazrat Adam and he invoked on our behalf and stroked our backs.” So this second group went to him and he made du’ā for them and stroked their backs, but no musk came on their backs. They returned to the gazelles and said, “We did just as you did, but nothing good came to us.” And the gazelles said, “We visited him for Allah’s sake, and you visited for the sake of musk.”

Do you see the difference between sincerity and loyalty to Allah? It comes in so many forms. Many of the *shaykhs* hid their capabilities and powers. They were just simple folk. Some people, you never see them doing their *nafle* prayer, and you think maybe they never do it. You don’t know. They hide it, because they don’t want to show any ostentation. For others, it doesn’t mean anything. They don’t care whether others see them performing good deeds, for they are not attached to those good deeds. They don’t see their own good deeds as good deeds. For some, it means just being involved all the time in *ibāda* or in *khidma*, or in giving *sadaqa*. When you ask them, “What did you do today?” They don’t

remember. They do the deeds without any memory of them, just automatically. You ask them for something, they do it immediately and they do their best. We find that.

I tell you, these things come automatically if you do the practices. I told the young doctor tonight, and the person on the phone today, and I tell you again: if you do the practices with sincerity, intuition comes. The insight comes. I got some beautiful cards for my birthday from you all. You said thank you for this and for that. I thought, did I do that? Then I thought, *alhamdulillah*, if I did that. It's nice to hear. Then I thought, Hmm. I don't want to get too caught up in thinking how nice it is to hear that, but *inshā'a-llāh*, I'll forget about it by tomorrow. I attribute that just to my bad memory.

There is also a relationship between sincerity, *muhāsabat* and *muraqabah*. I say to you, "Look, if you just do the practices sincerely, all these things are going to happen." Now we are talking about what "sincerely" means, and that will slip through the fingers like water also. If you can hold onto it, if you understand sincerity, you will begin to understand why *muhāsabat* is important and why *muraqabah* bears the fruit of it. Because *muraqabah* is meditation, but what does it really mean? To supervise yourself. A truly sincere person does not consider what spiritual value is going to come from something, or what material value is going to come from something, or what is going to ensure your way into Paradise, because this is a mystery that Allah has placed in the hearts of people. This is a mystery between Allah and His 'Abd.

What did Allah say? He said He put it in the hearts of those He loved. If the heart is awakened, then the sincerity is awakened. If the heart is awakened and you are sincere, you don't care whether you are praised or you are not praised, whether you are exalted or debased, whether you are aware or unaware. You can

be aware of your good deeds and you can say, “*Alhamdulillah-Llāh*. I was able to do that.” Somebody called me on the phone. He called me for a remedy. *Alhamdulillah-Llāh*, I am grateful if the remedy works. I am glad if it helps. It is not like you are some neutral zombie, but you understand, this comes naturally. “Hanan is sick today, Shaykh, can you help us?” “I don’t know. I have a busy day today. If she is still sick tomorrow, call me.” That is like the allopathic doctors. “Take an aspirin tonight and if you don’t feel better tomorrow, call me.” That is allopathic medicine.

Somebody comes to Nuradeen for help. Nuradeen schedules that person. He thinks, “Ah, I am tired of speaking with people....” I am sure there are psychotherapists, counselors who do that. Our Nuradeen does not do that, do you? He does not do that. Somebody comes and says to Mustafa, “Do you have space in the school for one more child?” There are 22 students and that is his limit. He goes to the teacher and asks if he can take just one more. The people really need the help. There is always room for another. Remember that story? Mrs. Malone used to take in all the stray animals. She would take in any stray animal brought to her, until her house was filled with birds and dogs and snakes and cats and mice and everything. Every time someone came to her house with another animal, she would say, “There is always room for another.” And all her life she took them in. One day, Mrs. Malone dies and goes to the pearly gates. (This is a Christian story.) Mrs. Malone sees all these lines of people going to the pearly gates. She gets up there and she looks and she says, “Can I come in?” St. Peter says to her, “There’s always room for another.”

Some people do not want to be praised and so they hide. Some people want praise, and they don’t get the benefit of the sincerity. Some people get the praise and it is fine. They understand the praise, where it comes from, and where the good deeds come from; that is fine. Not everyone is the same. What is the same

is that the person will act the same under those circumstances. *One time Abul Hanifa received some merchandise. Some merchandise came to him, looking to buy that merchandise from him for a certain amount. Abul Hanifa said to them, "Wait until the sun rises." Other merchant came looking to buy the same merchandise, offering him a higher amount for it. Abu Hanifa (ra) said, "I have made the niyyah to sell it to the other people."* That is loyalty—not to the dinar.

The Amir of Anushawan went out to hunt one day and he became very, very thirsty. So he saw a garden in the midst of the wilderness and there was a young boy sitting in the garden and he asked him for water. The boy said, "We don't have any water." He said, "Well, give me a pomegranate, then." The boy gave him a pomegranate and the Emir tasted this pomegranate and he found it sweet beyond sweet, so pleasurable, so wonderful. So he made the intention that he would appropriate that garden. He asked for another pomegranate. The boy gave him the pomegranate. This time he bit into the pomegranate and it was bitter. "Didn't that pomegranate come from the same tree?" the Emir asked. "Yes," said the boy. "Why is it so bitter?" The boy replied, "Perhaps the intention of the Emir has changed."

That is how delicate *ikhlas* is. We use that term all the time, all the time. So I will end. That is why we always say to do your practices with sincerity. What do we mean? You approach them and you divest yourself from the thought, "I have to do this, "the thought of being forced from the outside. You embrace the idea and the intention that you do this because just the availability is a gift from Allah, just knowing it is a gift from Allah. You say to yourself, "I am going to do this, not for the reward of it, but because in doing it, those things in my own self, my own character, what ever capacity I have, whatever possibilities there are for me, in this world and in the Hereafter will become manifest. I will begin to understand what it

is that I have been given: all this knowledge, talent, capability and capacity, understanding and sense of justice, compassion and mercy, love and sacrifice, selflessness and strength, a sense of beauty and knowledge. I will begin to understand why I have been given all of this. Then I pray to Allah to allow me to utilize it, allow it to be my character.”

You allow it to be useful to you by using it in the proper way. That is why. That is how you come to it. On the one hand, you do it just because you do it. You don't do it just because “I'm supposed to,” unless it is the supposed to that comes from Allah. You do it because you are loyal, because you begin to understand loyalty. When you we get back to the subject of *bai'at* and *suhbat* series again, (and we will), you will understand why there are statements like, “*I am a friend of the friend of the Order and an enemy of the enemy of the same.*” Because without that, you have what happened in Medina with the fifth column. You have what you read in Qur'an about the hypocrites who say one thing and do another, and try to undermine the teachings of Allah. “*I am a friend of the friend of the Order and the enemy of the enemy of the same.*”

This loyalty goes very, very deep. That is why we have to understand little things. What appears to be the hypocrisy of the *murshid* or the *pīr* is better than the sincerity of the beginner. No one knows why one who says *basīra* will say one thing and do another and will appear to the uneducated as being hypocrisy/*nifaq*. The person appears to be *munafiq*. But it isn't *nifaq* because the Truth that is behind that is greater than the appearance. Just like a person who operates from appearance seems to be the most pious person, because you don't see the person who is pious who doesn't operate from appearance. Do you understand? You don't see that person. Or you see them and think, “What kind of Muslim is he? Do you ever see him do his prayer, his *nafl* prayer?” “No, I never have. I guess he is not a good Muslim. But that person there they are praying all the time. They

have their head on the ground all the time. They have a big bump on their head and everything.” That other person, we have no idea. He could be a *wali*.

So what do you show and what do you hide from your friends, your brothers and sisters? It is not that everybody should hide. Some people naturally can show things. But they are not attached to what they are showing. Some people cannot show anything. But they don't show it out of fear. Some people don't show anything, because they don't feel they have anything to show, but they are doing good things. Loyalty and sincerity. So I would like you to think about loyalty in as many ways as you can, because undoubtedly in a *khanaqah*, in a *tarīqah*, it is always tested. *Asalām Aleikum*.