

December 10, 2009

Thursday



Title: Muraqabah and Ikhlas

DVD title: Muraqabah: The Most Important and Direct Way to Reach Allah

Last night and Saturday we talked about *ikhlas*, and how sincerity grows out of loyalty. Tonight, I would like to just continue that and talk about *muraqabah* and sincerity/*ikhlas*.

Of course, *muraqabah* has been defined in many different ways as watching and meditation or it also means, implies supervising, controlling, directing, and in living, I think that it is important to realize at some point that *muraqabah* means submitting to the control of Allah. It is not that I am meditating, but that I am at a state of acceptance in the control of Allah (swt). I have come to this action that I am performing, when I realize that everything that I am doing is under the control of Allah (swt), meaning that wherever I look, whatever I do, whatever action I perform is all by the Will/Irāda of Allah (swt). If you want to go back to the systems way of looking at it, it is to realize that what I perceive myself as doing is only part of a much larger continuum.

As Sufis, we take it even a little further by defining it as setting one's heart solely on Allah (swt)—abandoning, leaving, and turning away from any attachment to anything other than Allah. The average Muslim or believer of any faith takes that as being “you focus only on God.” To the Sufi, it means, “**Wheresoever you look, there is Allah.**” So if you forget that, or if you think that there is anything other than that, or act as if there is anything than that, it means that you are

attaching yourself to what is other than Allah. In the same way, when you hear comments like: denying yourself things that are of your *nafs ammāra*, or desires of your carnal nature, it means that you realize, and you are sufficiently aware and obviously aware, that there is no where you can go to eat the banana where you are not being seen. Therefore you do not do things that are forbidden by Allah, because it would be like doing forbidden things in full view.

Of course, the Islamic equivalency of these things lies in the punishment for things like adultery or homosexuality. The Prophet (sal) is making a very large distinction of what is allowable and not allowable, but also what is seeable and not seeable. That does not mean that it is allowable if it is not seen by human beings. It just means that there is a distinction being made between the mentality of the Jahiliya and the mentality of the post Jahiliya at the time of Islam. It means, of course, that Allah is seeing everything, but it is saying that Allah is empowered over other things. If you turn the power to other human beings, there will be problems. If you do turn over the power to human beings, you have to do so under the context of some guidelines or laws; otherwise, you have anarchy and opinions and other things. So things have to be observed by four pious individuals who see some act performed. It is not saying that it is okay if four people don't see it. It is saying that there is a parallel here. There are things that are seen by humans and things seen by Allah.

The other aspect is that a person who acts with the *yaqīn al-ilm* (certainty of knowledge or the intellect) knows that “**Wheresoever you look there is the countenance of Allah,**” and therefore lives within those Divine Commandments. Again I will give an example. We create certain social laws, rules and guidelines, which if a person would flagrantly break, would be “seen” by everyone; therefore, they would probably lose their sponsorship of golf clubs and golf shoes and golf balls and whatever else, because people would associate the products with the

immoral behavior. And Tiger would never get out of the woods. So that is when we start to associate ourselves with what is good and what is right.

You can also interpret *muraqabah* as being whatever is the Will of Allah, and leading your life with absolute and unwavering sincerity, and in the constant and conscious awareness of Allah's Supervision over our life. That position is only possible when we, or the '*abdallah*', knows that what is said, what is done and what is thought is hearable and seeable. If we have sight, it is only because Allah has sight. If we have *basara*, it is only because Allah has *basīr*. If we have *sami'a*, if we have hearing it is only because Allah has hearing. If we have feelings, it is only because Allah has created feelings. So, in other words, if I pluck the C string, every C tone resonates. If I see, then what I see is being seen. If I hear, what I hear is being heard. If I think, what I think is being thought.

When a person comes to this conclusion, and it is not just a philosophical thought, and you have come to this conclusion out of practice and sincerity, not out of fear and angst, you realize that your seeing is by the Will of Allah, and Allah sees through your eyes. Your hearing is through the Will of Allah, and Allah hears through your ears. Your movements, your actions are by the Will of Allah, and Allah moves through you, your will and actions. It says this in Qur'an, but the Sufi understands what this means. You are in the company/*suhbat* of Allah (swt). This is *suhbat*. Remember, the greater topic is *suhbat*. The relationship with the *shaykh*, with the *shuyukh* is another example of that.

If I am sitting and my Shaykh is asking me what I am hearing in this tomb, and if you have heard Shaykh Noorudeen tell the story that he was told to put his ear on the tomb and he heard the Sahaba saying, "*lā ilāha illa-llāh*," even if you don't believe it (even if it was his imagination, he was hearing it) you come to the point where you feel secure in the knowledge. You are in the company of something

greater than yourself. But everything in your life distracts you from that: your friends, your coffee time, “Meet you at Starbucks, “ lunch over discussions about work, worries about this and that—distractions, distractions, distractions.

Distractions become your reality, and only occasionally you get a sense of something. Even that occasional sense of something, that Divine Presence leaves you. It becomes superstition, some kind of historical relationships of stories and culture. It becomes something that you are not sure of, and when it happens, you are not sure, because you moved away from a state that was a very precious state.

It is not that a person becomes a monk. *Muraqabah* is not a state that one is supposed to be in all the time in the formal sense of one sitting in meditation all the time. But one can do their work, do their job, raise their children, teach school, go to school, do their business in that state or not. You cannot do all those things and try and discover that state accidentally. You have to put the time in. People put in incredible amounts of time for their preparation for school, to teach, or to do their homework; they travel incredible distances. Musa just came back from the West Coast. In what context? Is it *subhat* or is it not. You see, this is what is important.

So the attitude of trying to understand what the will of Allah (swt) is, and how you live a life of unswerving sincerity is only possible when you know that Allah (swt) is aware of all you say and all you do. I am using the short speak. You do know what I mean. I don't mean what most people mean. Like it says in the Qur'an, Whatever state you may be in, whatever part of the Qur'an you recite, whatever actions you do, Allah says, “**We are witnesses over you**” when you are deeply engaged in that.

And whatever condition you find yourself and whatever portion of Qur'an you recite, you do not perform any action but that We witness

you when you are deeply engaged in it. Not even the weight of an atom in the earth or in the sky escapes your Lord. Neither what is less than that or is greater, but that it is inscribed in a Clear Book. (10:60)

What is the next statement that comes?

Surely for the friends of Allah, there is neither fear nor grief. Those who believe and guard themselves for them good news in this life and in the final life. There is no changing the words of Allah. (10:61)

You see, from the sincere person, you don't fear. You don't fear, because it is obvious, it is clear, what the reality is. Allah is a witness over everything, as deep as it may go. Why? Either you swim at the top of the ocean or you dive to the depth of the ocean, you are going to get equally as wet. It is that simple. Wet is wet. Allah is everywhere. So why would you think Allah is not everywhere? The issue is are you aware of that when you do what you do, when you say what you say, when you think what you think, when you are working at what you are working at, when you are traveling back and forth? It is not that you have to sit in *muraqabah* all the time. It is that you have to *be* in *muraqabah* all the time.

If *muraqabah* means that you seal your heart or you close your heart to all that displeases Allah (swt) (which is another thing that is said), or from everything that separates yourself from Allah (swt), and you open your *rūh* to receive the *tajalli*/irradiation, the *nūr*/light, the *fadl* (the gifts, favors), the *nai'ma*/bounties of Allah, then you have to close what you have to close, and you have to open what you have to open. Now what do you do first? Do you close first or do you open first? Most people say, you turn away from the things that are bad and evil, and you open. We say that you open your heart first. Why? Because if I keep pouring

all this water into this smaller cup it is going to overflow. Eventually, the color of the tea will be gone, and all you will see is the clear water.

One of the very first steps of *muraqabah* lies in opening, and accepting what Allah (swt) has said is beneficial, is good, is worthwhile, is great. In doing that, you accept that what Allah (swt) has said vis a vis the Qur'an: what you see in the world as worthless is worthless; what you see as detrimental is detrimental. And what you see as good is good. And you turn your attention to what is good, not what is detrimental – in any situation. Lo and behold, what happens? What happens is you begin to prefer what you put your attention on. If you like ludovisk, and you put your attention on it, you will like that stinky smelling rotten fish. If you put your attention on what is bad, you will come to like and desire it. If you put your attention on what is good and beneficial, you will come to desire it.

As obvious a statement as that it, it is a very important statement. If you prefer “His Will and Desires” over your own, His Will and Desires will be your will and desires. When we say, “*Ask of your Lord and He will answer you,*” I bet most of you have discovered that what you mostly probably say is, “*O Allah, I ask if you for me to accept what You will for me.*” And lo and behold, you might find yourself with a new sports car, or Honda Pilot, or an entrance to graduate school, or health for your child, or forgiveness, or safety and security. Then you have to ask, why is that what Allah willed for me? How do I accept that? Is it His Will or my will? The way you can tell is His Will is all written down here. If it fits in here (holds up the Qur'an), it's in here; otherwise, it is ancillary. Now, if I need a new horse or a new car, or a new house, you might need it for the reality of your life, but how do you make it in line with His Will? How do you use it for submission? How do you understand it to be something of this world and not of the next? In other words, how are you conscious of where you stand and how you are? Otherwise, you lose.

Of course, *muraqabah* also teaches us a great deal about the Rahmat of Allah: the Mercy and Compassion of Allah (swt). As you follow the Will of Allah in the way I have been talking (not in the standard way that most *imams* talk about it), and if you study this tonight, tomorrow, the next day and you really catch it, then you will realize that Allah's Mercy increases, strengthens and deepens your love for Allah. It strengthens and deepens your desire and happiness and your joy of *ibāda*/worshiping Allah. It increases your *taqwa*. When that happens, you lose your appetite for the things that are not good for you. You live your life in a more care-full and less carefree way.

Muraqabah is not just a practice that gives you peace and understanding, and somehow opens the gates of heaven for you. It also leads women and men and even children who love Allah, who sing the praises of Allah, who have *taqwa* to discard anything that disrupts your worship, your service—anything that distracts your thoughts from what is consistent and harmonious with that will, [such as] your actions which deviate, and even your intentions when you are alone. [But with *muraqabah*,] your intentions change, and your consciousness comes about where you are in a state of always observing your state—continuous observation. Not only are you saying “**Wheresoever you look there is the countenance of Allah**” as if it is a fact, as if it is a theological statement; but you are saying it *and* you are seeing it. Everything is reminding you.

Muraqabah brings you to a state of remembrance, a reminder of perception. It is one of the most important, if not the most important; and the most direct way of as people say, reaching Allah. Reaching Allah is the most direct way of knowing that when you are wet, you are wet. That you do yourself, but the guide has provided you the guidance on how to do it. You do it yourself, but you have the

madad/assistance of the *awliyā* and *ambiyā*.. You do it yourself, but you realize you are in the company of others in *suhbat*.

In a way, each one of us who accomplishes this becomes a Divine Messenger in a way. Why? The guy on the bicycle in New York City or Washington DC did not create the message; he's just delivering it. He got the address and knows where he is going. In that sense, each one of us at the lowest level is delivering the Divine message. Each one of us who becomes deeply and sincerely engaged, loyal to Allah, loyal to the message of the Prophet (sal)—that is to say, you see its reality, you see its important and efficacy—loyal to the guidance of the *shaykh*; each one of us who has that can turn to Allah at any time, in any place, and under any circumstance. Not only are you uplifted by knowing you are in the presence of Allah, you are also aware of your own helplessness, your own destitution, your own place in the *fuqara*.

Because you are humbled by that and knowledgeable of that, it's like you get a private audience with Allah. Your need is immediately responded to. ***“Ask of your Lord and He will give to you.” “Remember Me and I will remember you.” “Praise Allah in an assembly, Allah praises you in an assembly greater than that.”*** Whether you are looking at the ocean or the mountains or the snow falling from the sky, or whether you are looking into the eyes of the beloved or the eyes of an enemy, you know that you are seeing something of the Divine Presence and avoiding what is other than Allah. You are deaf to all the sounds that are distractions; your hearing is perfect for all the words of truth. What you see and what you hear are those things that praise Allah and express the beauty of Allah, and what you don't hear and see anymore are the opposites.

It's useless to think about, let alone mention, anything that is not concerned with Allah. As a matter of fact, if your own eyes don't remind you that Allah is seeing,

and if your own ears don't remind you that Allah is hearing, and if your own tongue doesn't remind you that there are words to be said that are uplifting, then your eyes, and your ears, and your tongue are just organs of flesh to keep the body going, and everything else is meaningless. Mevlana Rumi said,

God Almighty described Himself as the All-Seeing in order to warn you against evil. He described Himself as the All-Hearing in order to admonish you not to say anything bad. He described Himself as the All-Knowing in order to inform you that He knows you, and therefore to exhort you to be alert to corrupt thoughts and corrupt considerations.

This brings us to an understanding of *muraqabah* in the heart of a sincere, submitted individual who is loyal to his Lord, to the Prophet, and to his *shuyukh* is able to supervise himself. This is the self-direction, self-supervision. You are able now to protect your own self from your own evil emotions or dark thoughts or worrisome actions.

The President said today in his very realistic and pragmatic speech in Norway: “*Evil does exist in this world.*” He’s a strange combination between a theologian and a politician. If you haven’t heard his speech today, you should listen to it. The man who receives the Nobel prize for peace begins by explaining the necessity for war. Very Islamic talk! He even said, “*There is no justification for fighting a holy war.*” There is no such thing as a holy war. He didn’t say there was no justification for war; he made all the justifications for war. Behind that statement you know he is saying there is only one God, and believers can’t fight believers. That’s what is really behind that statement.

The first step in *muraqabah* and self-supervision is submitting, willingly and voluntarily, to the will of Allah, to the wishes of Allah with conviction and belief.

How can you do that? To accept what I said at the beginning in shortspeak: to accept that He is present wherever you are. He, Allah, is aware of your thoughts whatever you are thinking, your intentions and actions. Allah is... what? **Allah is the Watcher over all things.** If that is the first step, what's the second step? In other words, what's going to make your meditation real to you? If you don't spend some time thinking about this (this is my shortspeak), there is no place where you can eat the banana where you are not seen. You have to take some time and think about the reality of the system: that you are going to get wet if you are diving in the ocean, that Allah is everywhere. If you really think about this, not out of fear of getting caught in something, but just that's the way you are. We have earth, air, fire, and water that make up this body. Inside this body is consciousness and there is spirit, and it's contained within all these things. Within that are these *latā'if* that are even finer organs of perception you can perceive with. If you really think about that, then the second step means you have that belief.

Whatever you do with that belief, because you have spent some time with it, is going to bear fruit. What you are doing is what we call *muraqabah*/meditation. If the first step is that, the second step is turning toward Allah with your heart, and resting patiently, anticipating and receptive to the *fadl*, to the *nai'ma*, to the bounties and the gifts, the Grace and Rahmat of Allah. You are patient and you wait, and it flows to you, these Divine Gifts; they flow into your heart. Of course, this can happen to anyone. Uwaysi Qarni had no guidance but by Allah, but it is better to have guidance. You can figure out how to cut a log out and make it into a boat; but if you have a boat maker, he will tell you how to make a better boat. You can memorize the names of Allah, but if someone explains to you, maybe it clicks a little better; otherwise, you have to explain to yourself something you don't really know, and then you're not sure. Maybe by the mercy of Allah, epiphanies come to you; maybe they don't.

To the extent that a person is a murīd, whether you are at the very beginning of this process (no matter how long you have been on this path) and you are just accepting that belief; or you are at the second step in that process where you rest in your heart in that *muraqabah*; to the extent any of us can act according to the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (sal) or the prophetic teachings of all the prophets, that is the ability to live *ihsan*, the Hadith of Jibreel (as): *Live as if you were seeing Allah, and if you are not seeing Allah, know that Allah is seeing you.* That's what I've described tonight: *ihsan*. But along with this comes a very interesting feeling. You feel helpless, but not hopeless. You feel destitute, but wealthy. You feel needy before Allah, though Allah may have heaped benefits and gifts upon you, material and spiritual. You always are in need before Allah, because you know all things come from having that sole reliance on Allah, like the reliance of the traveler.

You might be traveling at this moment in perfect safety on the path of self-direction, *muraqabah* and there is no deviation. Or you might find on the path there is a big bear, and you have to divert yourself from the bear. But over time, if you follow the path of *muraqabah* – over time... not: I'll do my kids, my job, something else, now, and go back to it later. If you do it over time, and are consistent, you will acquire *sakina*/tranquility. You will acquire *suhl*, real peace in the heart. Your conscience and consciousness and your heart will remain open and receptive to the gifts of Allah (swt). You will receive the *tajalli* of that oneness and unity, and the radiance of that oneness.

Self-direction takes honesty. One of the most important ways you can keep yourself in this way is to make *muhasabat*, to critique yourself at least once a day. That allows you, like it allows every believer, to become not only aware of the personal faults you have and the things that need to be changed, but the causes of them. It's not just seeing the bad things you do, but you know the cause of it, and

so you find truth in your heart. That truth comes from your heart to your actions, and your actions become good.

That's why you begin to be able to say, *subhāna-Llāh*. You glorify Allah. You say, "All glory to You, Allah, because You see me and You know my place and You hear my speech and You read my thoughts." And you realize that no matter where you are or what you are doing, Allah is watching over you. As long as you stay on that track, in that path, as long as you try to act according to the wishes of Allah (swt), then you can pick up the Qur'an and read it differently, *inshā'a-Llāh Asalaamu aleikum*. Now your *suhbat* is *suhbat* with Allah. It always was – you are aware of it.