

January 13, 2010

Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: Gifts, States, and Stations on the Suluk

DVD title: Our Uniqueness: Similar but not the Same
Hals and Maqams on the Suluk

Dinner blessing: O Allah, thank You for the blessings You have given us over the past few days, and have answered our prayers and given us many opportunities to do good work and spread good words. Please continue to shower that mercy upon us. We ask You for the safe travel of Abul Hasan and Dedeh in their return tomorrow. Cure him of his cold so that he travels with ease. We want to remind ourselves about gratitude and trust and submission, O Allah, and to seek out the treasures that You have provided for us in our *muraqabah* and in our day to day life. Give success to those who are seeking it for the benefit of good things and good people. Heal those among us how are ill. In particular, send Your Protection and Healing blessings to Iman. *Amin.*

Suhbat: There is a word that is used [that has the] meaning of self-similar as opposed to self-same. This is going to clear up a lot of things for you. Are you ready? I'm not going to go into why fractals might be interesting. I will resist the metaphor.

Each one of us has experiences on this path. If you read in texts about Tasawwuf, you hear about the seven stages of *nafs*. When we think about the experiences of different people on this path, those of us on this path, we know that they are not the same. Each individual does not have exactly the same experience. We also recognize historically that they are similar experiences. Every human being is obviously unique, yet we share many things in common: biologically, historically, chromosomally. We even share a general

set of potentialities and properties that differentiate us from each other and from other species.

The *Tajalli* of Allah (swt), the irradiation—some might say the projection from Allah that comes into manifest form—we find doesn't repeat itself in the self-same way, but in similar ways. We can't truly talk about *suluk* (spiritual journey) as being a linear process of *hal* and *maqam* that is exactly the same for everyone. But we can identify many of those *hal* and *maqamat* when they occur. Different individuals have described this path or this journey in many different ways that obviously reflect their own experiences. [Those descriptions] aren't represented as "this comes after this exactly, and only at this time," or as hard and fast rules, or as X number of stations, and this and that. When we talk about them, you'll hear me make this caveat: *some* people say there are seven levels of *nafs*.

In addition to that, there are sometimes even disagreements about certain stages or stations in this travel, in this journey. This disagreement further indicates differences which, when you reflect upon it, bring people to the path, because they reflect certain truths in the mind of the human being, which causes them to want to engage in this journey. In other words, what causes you to engage in this journey may not inspire me to engage in the journey. But when we see what the engagement means, it's similar. This uniqueness is a process of remembrance or realization for all of us.

Allah says in pre-eternity, "**Am I not your Lord?**" When we come into this material existence, we forget about that state of pre-eternity, and our task in life is to remember our way back to the truth. It is like finding our breeding ground, like whales or salmon. That way is both similar but uniquely personal as it reflects the nature of our essential relationship with Allah (swt) from the moment we were created. There are many names for this process of remembering or recollecting. In general terms, the *hal*, the gifts or states, are temporary spiritual states that are related to some kind of internal effort or

striving that hasn't been consciously directed. It's a gift of Allah. It comes to us because there is some kind of spiritual effort, but you cannot describe it as "this effort creates this state." It's a *hal*, a gift of Allah; whereas, the *maqamat* are more permanent stations, and they are conditions for which we have to struggle. We have to exert some effort and strive in a very concentrated way. The *hal* come as gifts of Allah from some striving that we are doing in a general term, but the *maqam* come from a concentrated effort. We call them practices.

The *maqam* can be described as spiritual states or conditions that have to be earned and *hal* are gifts of Allah. Gifts that say you are on the right path. There are things to be done that will take you to these more permanent states, but they are not exactly the same for everyone. You can predict that they'll come, but not exactly how they will come for each individual, except for the fact that there is an intuitive side to it. That is the relationship between the *basīra*, the sight of the *shaykh*, and the *firāsa*, the discernment to give this at that time, and this other thing at another time, and to encourage this or discourage that, because it indicates that the person is headed toward this *maqam*. In one sense, you can say that spiritual effort doesn't create spiritual progress, necessarily; because sometimes it comes automatically. On the other hand, you have to see that it is a necessary condition when you are talking about the states and stations.

The gifts of Allah (swt) couldn't be experienced or sustained, the divine succor wouldn't come, without some spiritual effort. Then there are circumstances and instances where individuals, as we know, are not on any specific spiritual path but receive Divine Grace. Most religions depend on the fact that if you have a certain attitude, you will receive the grace of Allah, or God, and that is sufficient. It's looking for state after state. When people say, "This is a gift from God," or "Jesus has blessed me," in a sense that is true. There is some striving, but not much; no defined practice. Those states come and they are gifts. People strive to have those gifts one after another, which sort of represent a station but are not a station. They don't sustain. The likelihood of going from one *hal* to

another is increased when one is actively and sincerely pursuing a very specific path under the guidance of an authentic and sincere *shaykh*.

We have to remember that Allah in the Qur'an says: **“If Allah were to take human beings to task for their wrongdoings, Allah would not leave one living creature on this earth. But Allah forgives or reprieves them to an appointed term.”** (16:61)

Whether we are talking about a *hal* or a *maqam*, nothing is deserved but everything comes from the *Nai'mah*/Grace of Allah. Also, the effects of the *hal* are not all the same. It's not like you have a *hal* and it lasts for 22.5 hours. Some of these states last moments, and some of them last for a longer period of time. It's very important if you believe you are talking about a *hal* rather than a *maqam*. Some people can't tell the difference. A *hal* could last for weeks, months, years; but it won't be sustained. You won't know that until it is gone.

There is a metaphor or analogy that could be made. That is, some of these spiritual conditions are like dreams. In a dream, if you are watching the dream, it is very real and lasts for whatever period of time it appears to last for. It doesn't require any kind of specific insight to have the dream, but to understand the dream, to interpret the dream from a Sufic point of view, you have to have very specific insight, or a guide who can interpret it. In the same way, we have to have some kind of insight or guidance to really appreciate the reality or the nature of what is happening to us, whether it's in our spiritual condition, or a dream state, or the relationship between the two and what we consider to be reality.

When we look at these things, we can talk about them and all relate to them because they are similar, but at the same time we realize they are not the same. This is the affirmation of the uniqueness Allah made us with, the unique intention that is then reflected in the fact that it takes these unique individuals that have similar experiences, puts us together in ummah, or in prayer like in *jamat*, and then separates us again, puts us together, then

separates us again. We have the opportunity in dialogue with one another to understand each other, because we share similar experiences or definitions semantically, or we share certain beliefs that exchange in our exchanges, or are reflected in our exchanges. There was an example in the book, The Path of God's Bondsman From Origin to Return by Razi. He uses the example of fire to illustrate the complexity.

Someone who is traversing the path of Tasawwuf may see the attribute of fire, and depending on the nature of one's spiritual condition this attribute will have different meanings at different states and stations. For example, the appearance of fire to some may be an indication of anger, if they see fire in a dream or vision. For others, the fire may mean light, the light that comes from dhikr/remembrance of Allah, and the person's passion for the spiritual journey. Someone else may see fire as the presence of guidance as with Musa (as) in the burning bush. Some other people may see it as an indication of Iblis, Shaytan. Someone else may see fire as the passion of love. Some may see fire as the ardor of witnessing the Divine Presence.

All these different modalities can be seen through the same symbol. This attribute of fire is just one of many qualities we have when we speak about our experiences, or we have experiences. But each one is, somehow, an expression of our spiritual state. But just like with dreams, you need to understand the significance of them. As we pass through these different states and stations, each one of them may reflect in *dunya* the 'alam al-*khalq*: earth, air, fire, and water; and the heavens, the heavenly bodies, the *malakut*, the planets and the stars; and they may reflect the thousands of other realms. All are different aspects of the Divine Emanation of the *tajalli*, but they are manifested, perceived, gifted by Allah. They come to you depending on your circumstance and your spiritual condition.

That's why there is no one book that can tell you dream interpretations, of what you have to do under this or that circumstance. There are all these different complex possibilities. How do you find the correct interpretation if there is no standardization? You don't. You move along the way. This is where your sincerity and faith comes in. You depend upon your sincere yearning for knowledge. You can be yearning for knowledge of something in the world, but with sincerity. Allah gifts you with that knowledge. "Eureka!"

Archimedes said. He was gifted with some insight in the moment. He didn't have to be a Muslim to qualify; he was gifted with some insight that has a profound effect on us still today. These are special cases.

For a spiritual journey, we really need to have the insight of someone else who guides us, not just through the intellect/'*āqil*. To understand the intellect is a whole other story. It's not what you think it is, only. [We need someone] to guide us through intuition and insight, having passed through the stations and states - at least some of them. The guide recognizes the terrain. Just like terrain, it changes in the seasons. Look what happened to the terrain in Haiti; it changed. But a person who lives there might recognize a landmark if it is still standing. Terrain changes, but it is recognizable. You know if you are going in the right direction.

Also, it's very, very possible that a person can go on this journey of the *sair ul suluk*, and not even have one mystical experience. These are people from whom Allah has kept secret the nature of their own spiritual condition for their own good. They have been created with such humility that Allah has restrained from showing them [their state]. Or in their *qadr*, they are not shown their spiritual state. They are transparent. So when people say, "I don't experience this or that," every *shaykh* worth his salt will say, "That's okay. You don't have to have that kind of experience."

A good example of different methodologies or perspectives is the difference in perspective between Ibn Araby and Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī, may Allah be pleased with

both of them. One is *wahadat shuhud* and one is *wahadat wujud*. One is the unity of oneness in witnessing, and the other is the unity of oneness in being. So many arguments have been put forward between these two differences of approach, from a hermeneutical point of view, but there really isn't any difference between them. I've said it for years. It's just approach, a perspective you have on things.

The other thing to realize is that in this journey we are on, there is constant revision taking place. Look at the history of humanity: it is fraught with wars, people's inhumanity to other human beings. We can take the point of view that human beings haven't changed much, that we are just fighting the same wars in more sophisticated ways. And that's true. You can also say that because of understanding the interrelationships between human beings, perhaps we might be coming closer and closer to a time when that paradigm would shift, because of the interdependency on human beings. So, we can look historically and see that things have not changed much. On the other hand, we can project and say that because there are weapons of mass destruction, deterrent theory keeps people from using them. What disturbs people the most about that is when people would rather die than be like other people. *Dar al har* versus *dar as salaam*, house of war versus a house of peace.

Again, we experience similar things. I'm talking in a very broad sense. Individually, we experience similar things, not exactly the same. Some of our insights, most of them, come as gifts. But if we understand that we have to strive, then they come as stations which are more permanent. And we are re-writing, or returning, or remembering, or recollecting, our initial state. Many people come on to this path with clear ideas of what they might call enlightenment. Other people come onto this path, not ever knowing why, but feeling they have to tread it. Circumstances in life bring them to it. Some people come on a journey with the desire for paradise; others couldn't care less about paradise. They come on this journey because they have to, because they want to serve Allah or humanity.

Remember the prayer of Rabia of Basra: *“O Lord, if I worship you for the desire for Paradise, deny me Paradise. If I worship you out of fear of Hell, then throw me into Hell. But if I worship You out of love for You and Your alone, then grant me a vision of You.”* The question arises, at what state does a person stop negotiating with Allah? This prayer comes at a very specific state or station. At what point do you stop negotiating with Allah? At what point does even a person like Rabia surrender to Allah? That Divine Presence has promised compassion and mercy. Allah has promised that if a person traverses this path with sincerity and humility and gratitude, then whatever the reward is will be given.

It's neither a denial of Paradise or fear of Hell, nor the desire for the reward or fear of punishment that moves you along the path. What moves you along the path is your sincerity in the way you worship Allah, in the way you serve Allah, in the way you live your life and make your decisions, in the way the love of Allah that is in your heart is reflected back. There are certain things we can be sure of. One is, the sincere seeker is always seeking something beyond which they have. What they are seeking may very well be right before your very eyes in plain sight; yet, we keep seeking from the cradle to the grave and from horizon to horizon. What we are looking for is present within us.

Why the example or the metaphor is used for lifting or rending the veils is we are standing in the midst of the truth we are seeking. We are swimming in the ocean as I have said so many times, and don't know we are wet. We have to rend or tear the veils and reveal that Divine Presence. How we do that is by continuous striving: not for the purpose of rending the veils in a conscious way, but for the purpose of maintaining the state that Allah has gifted us with, which becomes eventually a *maqam*: the state of seeking.

Seeking itself is a station. But it comes periodically to us in life until we settle into it. When we accept it and embrace that's what we are doing, it becomes a station. We all know this is true, because we get to these periods where we are strong in our practices, then we become weak. We become very sure of our piety, then we question it. Or it sustains for a while, and then "I've lost it again. I was sitting in meditation and really enjoying it, and then XYZ happened and now I can't. How am I going to get back to that?!" Everyone experiences that until they realize the seeking itself is a *maqam*. That's part of the *maqam*. You are in it, you are watching it.

All the practices—whether the *shahada* or *dhikr* or *muraqabah* or *tafakkur*; or the outward things like *sawm*, or *hajj*, or charitable giving (like for the poor people in Haiti), or the performance of good deeds—all of them have something in common, which is the expression of *Haqq*/Truth. Each practice engages us in facing an aspect of the Divine Presence. Each of those practices turns us toward Allah, toward compassion, toward mercy, toward piety, towards patience, toward love, toward restraint, toward some *sifāt*/attribute of Allah—every single one of them. As we do those from that perspective, it brings out in us certain aspects of character, which then come into resonance with an aspect of the Divine Attribute, and that *hal* comes to us. We receive the gift, so to speak. Federal Express: it's delivered to us because we are there to receive it. If we stay in that place, that receptivity of the gift becomes the *maqam*. We are in constant receptivity of the Divine Gift.

When this happens, it can't be predicted. As it happens, it can be seen. When it probably will happen can be seen. How one can position oneself to have it happen can be guided. But exactly when, it can't be exactly told. When we stop those practices, when we don't fast or pray, when we don't make the *shahada*, when we don't make *dhikr*, *wudu*, fast, *hajj*, or we don't give *zakat* or *sadaqa*, then we cut ourselves off from the different ways and means, dimensions of life that allow us to engage or become resonant with that Divine Will or Presence.

There is another thing. Do you remember the janitors [you knew while growing up]? Mr. Dee was the janitor in our high school. He used to walk around with a bundle of keys. Did you know a Mr. Dee in your life? If one key didn't work, he'd try another. Most of the time he knew which keys went where. Sometimes he wasn't sure. There are many keys to use: the key of *dhikr*, the key of *sadaqa*, the key of *zakat*, the key of *sawm*, the key of *hajj*, the key of *hubb*, the key of *muraqabah*, the key of *tafakkur*, the key of *hidmat*. But you have to be in the state to choose to use them. If you are not sure which key to use, you go to the *shaykh*, and he says, "Do this recitation now. Do this *du'ā*." When you are given a transmission, you are given all these keys. You try them out and think, I really like that transmission. Now you have the key. You go back to it later on, and you can use it. Also, you have to use these keys on different occasions under different circumstances. Someone may say, "I did this and it helped me." You can try it; but it might not work for you. It's similar, but not the same. So you think, "Under this condition I used this key, but it didn't work. I'll try it under another condition." You never know.

Each *hal* and each *maqam* is like a point of reference for a certain aspect of the truth, a certain facet that reveals the complexity and the beauty of the nature we live in, like fractals. The truth of one thing is not the truth of another. The truth of *bast* is not the same as the truth of *qabd*. The reality and the result of patience is not the same as the result of repentance. The reality of compassion is certainly not the same as the reality of revenge or avenging. The yearning one has for something is not the same feeling you have when the thing you yearn for comes to you. You yearn for the beloved, and when the beloved comes, it's a different feeling. One leads to the other, but it's not exactly the same. The yearning feels one way and has one set of thoughts, emotions and planning. Then the beloved comes. Now, something else happens. They are related, but they are not the same.

One person's yearning is not exactly the same as another person's yearning. When something is difficult, what do we say? "With hardship cometh ease." The feeling of hardship is one thing; the feeling of ease is another, but one follows the other. A person feels something when they are punished, and then when they are rewarded they feel something completely different. When you create the tapestry of the realities of life, this form of *tajalli*, then you begin to experience the fullness of this journey. We begin to realize that whatever we know, there is more to know. Whatever we know, there is more to understand. We come into this *maqam* of knowledge, of seeking.

For it to be a *maqam*, it has to be the result of some effort, some practice. Our *qalb*, *rūh*, *sirr*, *khafī*, *akhfā* are all potentials of our *fitrah*. As we put our attention on those different loci, then different capacities of our *fitrah* becomes manifest. We have to have a means to do that. There is some guidance, a plan or a template that we use to put our attention properly on these *latā'if*. Each one has their uniqueness. Not any of them can exceed their definition. What you learn in *qalb* is not what you are going to learn in *rūh*. What you learn in *rūh* will only extend to the borders of *sirr*. What you learn in *sirr* will only proceed to the borderline of *khafī*... and *akhfā* the same way.

There is a story that Shaykh Masūm, son of Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī (ra), came to his father and presented a question to him. The son indicated that he had an experience in which he seemed to rise higher than the station of the prophets. Since this contradicted what was understood to be possible—in other words, he exceeded his limit and was confused by his experience—Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī resolved the situation by saying, "*Associated with every human being are two points. One is the point that signifies the station of their origin, and the other is the station of their ascension. On occasion, the ascension of a not-prophetic being might rise higher than the station of a prophet, but in no case would the station of a non-prophetic ever rise higher or approach the station of Prophet Mohammed (sal).*" What he meant in that, and which people have misunderstood

for centuries in my humble opinion, is that one can experience something higher than the prophetic level, but they cannot maintain it.

Prophet Mohammed (sal) was assigned to the highest station. How do we know it? Because of Isra Mirāj. We know he goes past Musa and all the prophets, and comes to within two bows length of the ‘Arsh. Who else got there? Everything else was gifted down. Allah gifted the Ten Commandments to Musa (as). He gifted the miracles to Sidna Ibrahīm (as). But he took Prophet Mohammed to this highest level, surpassing the other saints, and then brought him back: *indirāj an-nihāyah fi’l-bidāyah*. We say in the Naqshbandī line that we start with the *qalb* and end with the *nafs*. This is the same indication that you can rise to certain levels in your experiences, your hal, your state. But you will be brought to the station you can sustain; you can’t go beyond that boundary.

Another way of saying it is in political terms. There are certain freedoms guaranteed by our democracy, but you can see that you cannot really effectively guarantee that they are going to remain, because circumstances affect them. Because of that, they are abrogated at times. And there are excuses given for abrogating them, I might add. But you cannot abrogate what cannot be abrogated, only that which can. (That raises a whole other series of questions about abrogation in the Qur’an. But, only Allah can make those changes.) We live by certain rules, ideas, and principles, but only the ones that are guaranteed, the stations that are guaranteed cannot be abrogated. Even these freedoms we call freedoms have been toyed with in our lifetime. Some of them have been pretty well abrogated. But when you reach a certain station, it can’t be abrogated. Why? Because you have come to a point where you have gained knowledge and cannot lose the knowledge you gained.

We were talking about certain things that happen. Once the knowledge is out of the bag, that’s it. Once someone knows how to make a nuclear weapon, that’s it. You can’t unlearn how to make a nuclear weapon. *Khalas*, finished! In *dunya*, you have these examples of things that can’t be changed unless there is total destruction. For some of us,

our whole existence depends on what we understand and feel in our heart, in *qalb*. For others, all that makes sense to us that is important is what happens in our minds. For still others, our feelings, our emotions are most important to us.

I wanted to get to this point where we were talking about the *latā'if* and the efforts that are made—why we have to make effort. We speak in terms of *nafs ammāra* or *nafs lawwama* or *nafs mutma'inna*. These are all terms that are used, but the development of *nafs*, the attributes that are developed as we sit in our meditation and contemplate those transmissions in our meditation, within those *latā'if*, each of us will have a slightly different experience. As we perform different forms of *dhikr* (some quiet and some aloud), as we sit in different levels of our meditation (some with ease and some with difficulty), we are tuning ourselves to our *latā'if*. Guaranteed by Allah, eventually the doorways open, and it becomes clearer and clearer to us how, in the world of command, we are given command over things.

In the world of creation, we are given responsibilities for creation. When we have command over things, that power or that capability allows us to experience the state of creative being that we experienced in pre-eternity. Now the circle has become complete. In human life this is most often a state, a *hal*. Very few people may achieve that highest *maqam* in their life, but the irony is, unless you continue to strive, you don't experience the state for very long. If you experience the state, it encourages you to move forward or to continue to strive. You can't remove things. You can't take *dhikr* away from its spiritual context. The goofy Soofis think spirituality is only the emotional feeling they have when they are singing *lā ilāha illa-Llāh* or whatever. You can't remove it from its spiritual context. The efficacy, the capacity, the transformational capacity of the *dhikr* will only manifest in the sincere spiritual context.

It is the same thing with the relationship we have with our brothers and sisters in *suhbat*. It is the same thing in the relationship with the *shaykh*. You can have all kinds of

relationships with someone: friend, brother, sister, confidante, and you can have great discussions or arguments. But in the context of the spiritual reality, that relationship will bear a different kind of fruit. The relationship with the *shaykh* gives you a relationship with the grand *shaykh*, the great grand *shaykh*, all the way up so you have access. Not access to the personality, but to all the knowledge that was gained by those individuals. It's exponential. You or I are sitting here at the bottom, and then we get access. Now more knowledge is flowing through you, more *madad*/assistance is coming to you.

In *muraqabah*, as you watch over the condition of your heart, or as you empty out these *latā'if* and become awakened, then your heart becomes guarded. Every time you move to another *latīfa*, all the transmission become protectors over your heart. The heart is the core, the center of our path. The manifestations of *qalb*, *rūh*, *sirr*, *khafī*, *akhfā* create protection around the heart, like the oyster shell protects the pearl. The influences of each of these *latā'if* affect the heart. The heart is the link between ourselves and Allah. This whole path is about love, about the manifestation of the love of Allah (swt) for His Creation. **“They love Me and I love them.”** *Asalaam aleikum.*