

January 14, 2010

Thursday



Title: [The Reality of the Divine Presence: Love Hidden in the Core of the Heart](#)

DVD title: The Secret of Love in our Heart
is the Nearness of Allah and Gnosis

There is a story in al-Qur'an that some people find difficult to understand, or they take it only in a literal way, when Allah talks about the reflection of the marriage of a woman named Zainab to the stepson of the Prophet, Zaid. He had hidden his love for her in his *nafs*/self, it was said, out of fear for what people would say in public. But Allah revealed this love in public, in the verses in the Qur'an that I will read to you. For the next thousand years or so, it became the story of not to be ashamed for the love for Zainab. But instead, shyness, timidity and fear for Allah should replace that kind of fear of public scrutiny. Most Muslims look at this as a domestic story which has nothing to do with marriage or day to day life; rather, [they think] it has to do with human frailty.

Really, this is a revelation about love, and that everything comes from *Ahad*, the One. It is a story about how love is concealed and stored in the heart, hidden away in the vault of *nafs* (self). Whether the individual is a prophet or just an ordinary human being, it takes a tremendous amount of energy and force to pull this kind of hidden love out of the vault of *nafs*, and to reveal the kind of love that Allah (swt) alone can demand. Allah says in this long *'āyat*:

Remember when you said to him upon whom Allah has shown His Grace and upon whom you have shown your favor, keep your wife to yourself, and be conscious of Allah, and ward off evil from within and from without. And you hid within your self that which Allah was about to bring to light, and you feared the people, whereas Allah had a better right that you should fear Him.

When Zaid had ended his claim on her through divorce, We gave her to you in marriage that no blame should attach to any of the believers for marrying the wives of their adopted sons when they have ended their claim on them through divorce. Thus was the will of Allah fulfilled.

So people just take this as a statement on marriage and divorce, but there is a lot more to it. It's really about this place inside of us where there is a chasm or cave that is almost impenetrable—a vault. In that vault is this Divine Secret. What is that secret? The secret is love. The secret we keep the best is the secret of our love for someone. The thing we fear may be ridiculed is our love for someone. This is a metaphor also for the love for Allah. Love for Allah has been placed by Allah in the deepest cavity, the deepest vault of our hearts. It's placed there so we remember it, and it's present within us from the very beginning of time when Allah said “**Kun faya kun. Be and it became.**” What first became was love, the attraction that Allah created from Himself for His Creation, and from His Creation for Him. This love will be with us until the end of time, the endless future.

It is hidden in the heart, and when we love someone it is made known, seen. What is revealed, because it exists, is this love that was hidden. People are very hesitant to proclaim love lest it be ridiculed or rebuffed. Yet Allah (He – It – Hu) was present, and placed a kind of love called *malamy*, a blameworthy kind of love. It is love that one cannot escape. What does blameworthy mean? It means you cannot deny it. If it's seen, you are blamed for it. When I was a child, we had a crabapple tree. In the fall, we would lie on the lawn and throw the crabapples out into the road and see if the cars would run over them. Every once in a while you get tempted to throw it in front of the car and hit the car. The cars were going 40, 50 miles an hour. One day, a man slammed on his brakes and chased me, because he saw me do it. I was worthy of the blame for doing that. He saw me throw it in front of him.

The other day I was driving and Zeke picked up some snow to make a snowball, but it was ice. He was going to throw it at my car. I stopped and he got very apprehensive. I shook my finger at him. He was worthy of the blame. This kind of love, when it is seen, you are blamed for it. Everything people perceive about it, you are blamed for. Is it appropriate, not appropriate? It is the wife of the step son of the Prophet (sal). The question comes: if this love wasn't freely roaming in the vault inside of us, we would not have the capability to love anyone, or the Prophet, or Allah. If it wasn't placed in us, we wouldn't have the capability to love Allah. Allah places love inside of our hearts that emerges toward people and things without which we couldn't love Allah, and we couldn't find our way back. The lover will pursue the beloved wherever the beloved goes... until they catch the beloved. Once they catch the beloved, then you take it all for granted.

The question comes: why are these powerful feelings of love placed inside of a human being? We don't see it in most other animals, though we do see affection in some animals (some primates) for their children. (We won't get into Darwin.) The joys and the difficulties of love are established in us, placed deep in us, because they are the sign, the ayat, the signature of the Divine Presence within each and every one of us. Think about that. The love we feel for one another, with all of the trepidation and pain and joy that goes along with it, is the way we know Allah is present. This is the sign, the '*āyat*', the proof of the fact that Allah (swt) has placed Himself – we'll use that analogy – very near to us. [He is] as near to us as our jugular vein, we are told. But not just to me, to every human being in the human race. It was never made possible for any other member of creation to have that nearness and that awareness.

Of course, Allah is present in everything, but it is the consciousness of that Presence. This love, which has the capacity to recognize that Divine Presence, is not only placed in us, but it also has the capacity for an extreme sense of loss and pain. This is a blessing that Allah (swt) gives us. It is said that He comes ever close to His Servant every time

the servant feels love. But also every time you feel loss and stress and strain in love, it's all a testimony to that Divine Presence. When our heart is open, we feel the reality of love. When our heart is broken, we feel the reality of love. Allah says to us in a sense, "I offer to you this cup of knowledge/*marifah*."

At the beginning, it is knowledge you haven't absorbed. It is just like you experience love like a child experiences love. It's very pure, but it's not understood. They don't know the parameters of it. Our children love us; no question. But they don't sit and contemplate it and transfer it. They don't understand what it is as a commodity, so to speak, what its value is. When they need us, the love draws us. When they push us away, we feel the loss of love. But they have to come through life to understand the value of that reality, the gnosis. It's like a cup, as the poets call it, of wine or knowledge. Once you begin to understand love, it has a value to it. You begin to try to treat it with a great deal of respect. You sip out of that cup; you don't take big drinks out of it, because you value it too much. It is like a sommelier sips from a cup of wine and tells you exactly where it comes from, which vineyard it came from, what year it is. Be a sommelier of love.

What we try to understand is this love in the core of our heart, where our self resides. The metaphor is often of the altar of love in the heart. On that altar of love we worship, and we sacrifice. Think about the way Catholics worship. You have all seen a Catholic mass. On the altar where they celebrate the Divine Reality, Presence, they also sacrifice. It's the same place: you worship on the altar and you sacrifice on it. In us there is this place of worship and this place of sacrifice. It's the very same place. It's like sometimes the seas is calm, and sometimes the sea is tossing and turning. When the sea is tossing and turning, then our vessel our self, being tossed and turned, loses direction. We all know we can lose our direction in love. We all know we cannot navigate the waters sometimes so easily. Other times, things are wonderful and peaceful and paradisiacal.

Yet, at the very core of our love, we are afraid to utter the words, though we say it to people: “I love you.” And we mean it.

Now, comes the issue: the issue is to what degree do we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to that love, because the love for Allah (swt) is absolute and total vulnerability. We try to put it deep inside of us, and we are very careful how we express it. Or we express it in a very cavalier way and think everything is fine, until someone ridicules it or rebuffs it or accuses us through it. And there we are in public, our love on our sleeve. But we cannot hide it from Allah, because He places it there. There is some part of our love that remains very hidden, and can be coaxed and cajoled out. It has to be forced out of us, otherwise it is a secret. So you see that story is a metaphor as well as a reality. When we love someone or some thing, that love is invariably followed by a thousand tests and trials; losses and sorrows like hammers that can shatter the heart.

The heart also is like a mirror. It reflects so many things. But when you shatter the mirror, every little piece of the mirror reflects something. You cannot shatter the love that was in the heart. You can shatter the mirror, but it is still going to reflect. So too, even in the shards of the heart that is broken, you find the light of Allah. Even in the broken heart, you find the love of Allah. It’s an interesting thing, because it’s not the same love that you experienced when the heart was just filled with love and whole. There is another quality to it now. It indeed has been reflected upon; it’s not as superficial. It’s not as fantastic... I want to say fanstastical, but there’s no word like that. It’s not so much of a fantasy. It is love that has a different level of closeness to it because there is more knowledge, *ma’rifah*. There is more gnosis—something you couldn’t be taught. You could read poetry about it, and you can realize that love, but you couldn’t be taught this.

When the heart is broken, every piece of that heart is reflecting that love, but it has now new knowledge with it. That closeness, that knowledge is because you have now touched that inner core where you have hidden that love in the core of your heart. Something has

brought it out, and invariably, something attacks and breaks it at some point. You now have thoughts you never had before. You had realizations you never had before. Yet most people reject those thoughts and realization; they don't understand them. They push them away. This is not the romanticized, mythological love. It is not the common love. It is not the "honeymoon" stage of love. This is love that has been tried and tested. At these times of difficulty or terrible loss, like mourning the loss of something, they are also times of *ma'rifah*/gnosis. This is when you are taught something you cannot be taught in any other way. There is only one way to be taught it. This is the acquiring of Divine Knowledge, because it has access to something that has been buried deep within you. You have kept it deep within you, a kind of knowledge you have not yet learned.

When you were born, in the old days, the parent went out and bought an Encyclopedia Britannica. Now you just buy the software, or download it for \$2.99 on your Iphone. Those encyclopedia are put into the room with the baby. It will be years until the baby can access it, and probably will not access it unless the school teacher tells him or her to look up something—unless you are crazy like me. I used to read the encyclopedia. They smelled really good, the maroon colored ones with the gold leaf. Something has to cause you to go to it, to this place in your heart. Many people define Sufism in many ways. Tasawwuf is the means to go to your heart, in order to come to know who is Allah and why we exist. That's one way of saying what Sufism is. But to do that, even to set out on that journey, somewhere along the line you are going to have the experiences with love.

It seems that it is love and love alone which is the core truth of human beings. Allah has placed love in our hearts. That is the secret that is there. It has all these other aspects of it that touch our relationships, our social relationships, our senses of duty and responsibility. Why are people donating and running down to Haiti? Why are we not just saying, "Thank God it's them and not us?" Why are people going there? They go out of love. Compassion is a form of love. Mercy is a form of love. Empathy is love.

Sorrow is love. You feel sorrow for those people. You feel grief. It is a form of love. This is the fullness of love. When we say to love Allah, we can love Allah only because we can love, because He placed love within us. It sounds so superficial. Along with that come affirmations and denials, very specific forms and general forms, love that is accessible to a point and inaccessible beyond that point. There is a point where the only access to that love is by Allah. People can meet there, but it's directed toward Allah.

When you love someone or something, and the loss or grief or mourning come, no matter what the forces are, and no matter what you do, the Divine Presence or secret of that love within the vault of our own *nafs* (self) can never be extracted except by the One Who put it there. No one can draw that core of love out of you. You can't force it out of you. Only by Allah can Allah extract it from you. This is the part that is hard to grasp. Whenever you say or I say "I love you" to someone, the "I" that says it is by the Will of Allah. It is by the Will of Allah that you can love. That love coming out of your heart is extracted by Allah, attracted by Allah. You may remember many years ago I used to say that a person loves someone by the permission of Allah. The love a person has for you or you have for a person is when you give each other permission. It is extracted by that Divine Presence. It is the Divine Love in you.

The love that is placed in you is extracted or permitted by Allah to come out of that vault—attracted/*jedhb*. When the Hindus say "Namaste," it means the God in you bows to the God in me. It's not that Allah is contacting Allah. All that love you have inside of you resonates with someone else, and it is extracted by the Will of Allah. There is a kind of vulnerability in them. There is an affirmation. Someone, maybe Junayd or Jami, one of the early saints, said that when you say with sincerity, "I love you," and it comes with nothing else but a sincere love, Allah permits it and extracts it. That "I love you" is recorded as a Divine Utterance. It is an honor that is bestowed upon you. It is a state, a *hal*. There is no coercion, no power that can release you from it. There is nothing that can stop you from it. There is a vulnerability that comes along with it. It may be

rebuffed, or it may come at a sorrowful moment. You are looking at the corpse of some poor soul, even it could be a stranger, a strange Haitian child crushed in the earthquake. You want to say, “I love you.” You don’t even know the person! This is a Divine Utterance. Allah is saying that from the core of your being.

That is what the Divine Presence means. That’s what it means that Allah is as near to you as your jugular vein. It is Allah that is speaking those words to you. It is not being coerced. You don’t have some material goal in mind. You are not trying to be manipulative or opportunistic. You are not trying to covet someone or own anything. You just feel this love: “I love you,” or “Oh, my God, that poor soul”—a sorrowful love. The pain is there, as if it is your own family. Forget about saying “I love you” to someone you love. I am talking about something that is so not what you would think you would feel that for, and you say it. That’s a Divine Utterance. How could you utter something that didn’t exist? You couldn’t tell me something you did not know, or explain something you didn’t understand. You can’t describe something you haven’t tasted. You couldn’t tell me the smell of something you haven’t smelled. How could you feel that? Because it’s there.

That *‘āyat* says, “**That which Allah was about to bring to light.**” The problem is when we say “I love you” under that circumstance, we think it’s us. You’re convinced that the reality is you. Allah can love us, and when – excuse the way I’m using Allah tonight; you know how I feel about it – when that Divine Presence is speaking through us, we can easily mistake it for our own voice. But that Divine Voice doesn’t feel loss and sorrow; only we feel it. Loss and sorrow is a quality of the Divine. In other words, we also don’t want to anthropomorphize God. We don’t want to say, “Allah feels...something.” It is the statement: “I love you” that means “I, the Creator of Love, expresses the love through this creation in this circumstance to you who are also created and part of this creation.”

Now the story changes a little bit. Hazrat Adam (as), for example, came so close to Allah that there was no I-ness. Allah had to name things for him. He created Adam, and Adam had no consciousness of self. He endows Hazrat Adam (as) with love and compassion and mercy, and He gives him the gift of something else. What was it, semantically? He gives him the gift of the pronoun “I.” Before that, there was no I, only Allah and creation—no sense of self. Then He gives him the gift of I. He gives the gift of I to everything, because everything has a name. Allah places that Divine Presence in everything, and the challenge is to be able to see that Divine Presence in everything. It is almost like say to extract the “I” out of everything.

That “I” that Allah gives to us is the key to extracting love. This journey is about I, me, *nafs*. It is about understanding this self. The Hindu yogis say, “Who am I? what am I? How do I? Why am I? Where do I? Why do I?” When we wonder, “How can that person say that stupid thing he said,” you are making a comparison with your own self. You are saying that can’t be the truth. That can’t be Allah. That can’t be a Divine Utterance. There is no love in it. There is no Divine Reality in that. This is strictly the ego, not the utterance of Allah. Allah gives us the “I” which we can choose to look at as the ego, or he gives us the “I” that is the utterance of Allah. How do we move from the state of Adam when he finds out his embarrassment and vulnerability with his ego to this point there again there is the pure utterance of “I” that comes from Allah? That is the journey.

The analogy is, you are born pure and perfect with no ego. That’s the state of being in the garden. The child is born in the garden, so to speak, and immediately is on a journey to this ambiguity of I and confusion of I. At some point, in everyone’s life, they have a choice to make. Most people don’t ever see that choice. Most people don’t know about it. Most people are not sensitized to it, unfortunately. So they go on this journey of human expressions only, but they don’t know where it’s coming from. Some of us are given the opportunity to unlock the door. We went through that door and realize we have

to answer those questions: Who am I? What am I? Where did I come from? What am I supposed to be doing? How do I do it? Where are these feelings coming from? Where are the *Sifāt* of Allah, and how do they manifest? How did I wind up sitting here day after day, year after year, being reminded again and again, because I have to be reminded because every day there is distraction? Every day there are ambiguous things happening that are not clear. Some things remind you and some things don't. So we are on this journey of remembrance that the One Who is speaking of that love is Allah, even in the times of difficulty.

The Qur'an tells us that there is a great misunderstanding about that. Pharaoh says, "I am the most high." It's ridiculous. Pharaoh is not the most high. He is using the I incorrectly. "Bow down to me. Pharaoh is a god." These are the stories that come from pre-Islam, from Torah and other things. It's always the same thing. Why is Pharaoh such a terrible person? He's totally deluded. He thinks he's Allah. Why does Mansur al Hallaj get himself drawn and quartered and cut into pieces? He says, "An al Haqq. I am the truth!" You have to pass through that stage of the ego to the point of realizing that only Allah says that. When you utter it most sincerely, these are the Words of Allah, Divine Utterances. The only way you can say it sincerely is when your heart is unlocked by Allah.

Now this love is the *'ishq*, the unrestrained total love from within this vault of self. As it comes out, it becomes a light. It becomes *nūr*. That *nūr* shines over the people. How do you see that in the miserable situation in Haiti today? All these people were living their lives, eating their dinner, in their schools, doing what everybody everywhere does. All of a sudden, their world comes literally crashing down upon them. Everybody feels the horror, the sorrow, the grief. Now, within 24 hours, the planes are landing, the tents are up. The people are there with their dogs. They are digging people out. They will bring in front-end loaders and find some people alive. All of a sudden in a kind of existential

way, over all this sorrow and grief, there are moments of light and beauty and love. Who would have thought?

What are you going to look at? You can look at them both. [You look at] the misery and sorrow and grief and loss; and then look at the compassion, mercy, love, and sacrifice, and the people putting their lives in danger; and the money flowing to them to buy bandaids, tents, and food. Who is sending it...? Then there is Shaytan. "Click here, send money to help the Haitians." All the scams that are on the Internet. You don't believe in Shaytan? They profit from that [terrible situation]! Here we are in a situation where hidden in the core of people's hearts is this love. It pours out of their hearts to people they don't even know. First there is misery, and then there is light. There is light and misery all mixed together. Just like when someone passes, you remember all the wonderful things and you miss them terribly. You are in grief, but you remember the wonderful things about them. It's very, very difficult. This is the Divine Presence.

This is the real essence of the love that Allah (swt) put in us. Remember the story of Zulaika. When she heard the malicious talk of the people, she prepared a banquet for them and gave each one a knife. She said to Yusuf (as), come out before them. When they saw him, in their amazement, they cut their hands. They said, "This is no mortal! This is none other than a noble angel." But some people couldn't see it. They could only see the stupidity. You see these stories in the Qur'an and hear the stories of Majnun and Leila, this kind of unrestrained love. When you look at it, these are circumstances where there is no choice. They didn't sit down and decide they would have love for one another. These are stories of unrestrained love; there is no choice. Most people who love one another don't realize there is really no choice in it. So they keep expecting affirmations of something that is obvious.

It's not that saying "I love you" is bad. It's fine; it's wonderful. But the point is, one accepts their destiny when they know it comes by Allah. You find comfort in that and

repose in that; not insecurity and fear in it. You have to come to the point where you find repose in it, respite. It's a subject that doesn't end. There is the example of Noah and Isa and Musa, and many examples of the Prophet (sal), of the *'ishq*. The thing for us to try to remember as Sufis, is when people say Sufism is love, we have to try to remember that it is reaching the core of this treasure of love Allah has placed in the heart of the true believer. Allah says what? Where do you find Allah? In the heart of the *mu'min*, in the heart of the real believer. In that self-same heart is that human angst about vulnerability, publicity, public vulnerability, being public about one's love, and then all the fears and anxieties about being rebuffed or ridiculed, or embarrassed by the reciprocal love seen by others. That all passes when one realizes that these utterances and the essence of that love come from Allah.

If the core of Sufism is love, and one finds Allah in the heart of the believer, I'll leave you to finish that equation. What is it, then, we are trying to solve? What is the challenge for us as human beings? What is it we are computing about our own existence? What is it we are trying to understand by putting these elements together? When we say Divine Presence or Essence; when we say love or belief, lover/beloved, what are we talking about? What is the state of a real Sufi? It's all in the Qur'an. Many people would like to talk about these things and not talk about the Qur'an. It's not impossible to do it, but you will never get to understand it. And you never will appreciate the Qur'an at all.

By the way, that barrier in that vault, the lock, you could also call the *barzakh*. Allah says in the Qur'an: "**Between them is a barrier they don't transgress.**" Only Allah can pass through that barrier, or only the love of Allah can pass through it, or only the lover of Allah can pass through that barrier. That, in a strange way, when I was talking somewhat about ambiguities, should prove to you that in my talk tonight I have talked about and proven ambiguity. *Asalaam aleikum*.