

February 3, 2010

Wednesday

Title: [Tarbiya: The Journey \(Suluk\) to Know One's Self](#)

DVD title: Tarbiya: The Journey (Suluk) to Know One's Self

Dinner blessing: O Allah, I heard that You are promising us some new snow. And we ask You, Allah, to send it to our brothers and sisters up north who love it. We are grateful for having those who traveled back safely, and we ask You for those who travel today their safety in arriving and in returning. We ask You, Allah, to help us to remember, as time goes by, those people who are in tremendous need. Help us be a voice for peace, understanding, and sanity in this world, and to use whatever gifts you gave us and whatever potential we have to make our brothers and sisters in Islam understand what it truly is, and to help the people of the world to find better ways to express their needs. O Allah, this is a time of great tests and trials and more promised to come. We ask You to give us the strength and be voices and actors for good. *Amin.*

Suhbat: *Asalāmu aleikum.* I think it can be safely said that most of us here desire or the *himma* to be on this *sair ul suluk*. I think it's safe to say that at least most of us here have the *irāda*/will and the *niyyat* to be on this journey. I would also like to add, in light of the last talk I gave at Charlottesville on *ikhlas*, that I think in the heart of most human beings, except those who were born with some grave mental or emotional disability, there is a wellspring of *ikhlas*/sincerity. Sincerity is like manna for the *salik*, the one who is journeying. This journey cannot be made without sincerity. My attempt in Charlottesville was to try not just to talk about sincerity or give stories about it, but to talk about how one develops it. I think that we all recognize that the yearning or desire to seek greater knowledge of the reality that we call Allah (swt), the universe that is Allah (swt) (the unseen and the *sifat*/attributes) has many aspects to it.

We know the words that go along with it. We know *himmah*/yearning. We know the word *sabr*/patience. We know the word *ikhlas*/sincerity. We know the word *jihad*, to strive, and *furqan*/discrimination, *firāsa*/discernment, *islam* or *taslim*/submission, *tawakkul*/trust or piety, and *adab*/courtesy. So many words we know. But if we look at this *sair ul suluk*, the journey of a *murīd*, as a journey where one who is seeking and the one who is sought, both have a *niyyat*, an intention. Each one of us is required to become aware of our self, be familiar with our self, and to understand what the *niyyat* of Allah is in creating us. As we become more aware of our self, we become more aware of that *niyyat* of Allah (swt), which is like the space between the atoms, between the nucleus and the electrons. That space is not empty. That space is filled with energy. That space is filled with the components that comprise the essence behind those words.

Every word has power—not just meaning; but power. As we begin to understand this journey, we understand that many Sufis use this term *suluk*, but some do not. For instance, Shaykh Nooruddeen doesn't talk about the *suluk* in the Shadhilī line. But I don't think he would deny that everyone starts somewhere and goes somewhere. *Suluk* is not just the mechanism, but the means. *Suluk* has a meaning. It's a term we use often. We make the distinction between *suluk* as a process and *tarbiya*. *Suluk* implies a journey and *tarbiya* usually is described as education. I spent a lot of time in the dictionary today, because a lot of people make a mistake. I found that mistake everywhere. In some places, I wasn't surprised to find it because it was by people who are Sufis but don't tend to care much about Arabic. The root of this weak verb is “*rabā*,” which means to grow or exceed, to educate, teach, develop, and practice. It also implies one's upbringing. In agricultural terms, it means to breed. It can mean well-bred or well-mannered. Some people say it comes from the same root (*rabba*) as the word Rabb, Lord.

The overarching concept of *tarbiya* refers not just to education, but an ethical and moral education, an education that has a philosophy and parameters around it. It's not just

gaining intellectual knowledge. It comes from this root word that often means to accumulate. Acquiring knowledge also in this case means acquiring some kind of moral and ethical framework, not just as an individual but as a world view. As we educate our children, we are trying not just to educate them with information, but with a philosophy, a view of the world they are living in which they will be responsible for. When one has this world view, that we call *tarbiya*, we can achieve what the Qur'an requires of every human being. That is *maruf* and *munkar*: to enjoin, not just verbally, but by example and by action what is good, and to prevent or forbid or try to stop what is evil and destructive, either by the hand or by the word or by the look or the glance.

According to a famous *hadith* in the collection of Nawawi, it can be accompanied by the hand, the voice, or even the heart. In other words, *tarbiya* is to work as much for social justice as it is for a person's nearness to Allah. It is to gain the tools for right action in the world as well as to gain the tools for inner development and inner discernment/*firāsa* to know the Divine Presence. The moral framework for the Muslim is good *niyyat*. That means achieving good and avoiding evil. Just to have that intention is in itself good. This education/*tarbiya* gives a person the knowledge to recognize what is before them—what task, what need—and have the ethical and moral foundation to know what is best to do in order to achieve the goal. And [it gives one the knowledge to know] how to achieve the material resources as well as the spiritual resources to carry out the task.

These words have a lot of meaning. *Suluk* comes from *salaka*, which means to travel or follow a road, and to enter upon a course. You can see why it is called a road. In that sense, there is a *suluk* for everyone because there is a means to the goal. The course could be a certain *wazifa*, *wird*. It's a path. It would make sense to be in *tarīqah* on a path or a course, because *tarīqah* means path. It also implies the behavior of a person who travels. It also means to behave. It's not just that you travel, but how you behave and comport yourself. It also refers to the eye of the needle. Remember the story of passing the camel through the eye of the needle. This is what *suluk* is: the place to

thread through good behavior. [It means] how to have good behavior, good comportment, good attitude, how to move through the difficulties, temptations, and distractions, and the impossibilities of life as if you were threading the eye of the needle.

The word *silsila* comes from the same root as *salika*. That's also a thread from the Prophet (sal) to us. In fact, the word silk comes from the same word. Silk is what? Extremely strong thread that is made from what, a vegetable? No, from a caterpillar, an animal. What does the animal eat? One thing only: mulberry. It has a very strict dietary regimen. All the metaphors for silk are great metaphors for this journey. It only eats mulberry. It's a very frugal insect. To get the silk the worm has to die. You have to die to yourself in order to give out. Whatever the intention of the silkworm is, from our point of view, it only lives in order to die, if we are silk makers. How do you get the silk? Does the silk worm just die and you pull it off of it? No, you have to boil it and boil it. Then the strong thread keeps you warm in the winter and cool in the summer. It comes from this one-pointed insect that has to die in order for us to find the treasure. And we have to die to ourselves in order to find the treasure.

This concept of *tarbiya* – to develop, to practice, and the attitude of having comportment and being well-mannered – is also reflected in the word *suluk*, comportment and good behavior, too. Now you have two words of similar meaning that complement each other in their purpose. You cannot make progress on this journey without the right attitude. You just can't. Without the right attitude, you may gain many worldly things. One has to have the right behavior, the right *adab*, the right demeanor. When we use this word *suluk*, it has to imply to the *salik* what it means. When we say, "What are you?", you say, "I am a programmer." You have to work very hard to say, "I am a salik. I earn my living as a programmer."

If in this country you say, "I'm a Muslim and then an American and then a Virginian," people would think you are not a good American. Just the other day I read an article

where a person said, “I am a Christian and then I am an American.” People applauded that, because you can only be a better American if you are a Christian, by their standards. When we use this word “*salik*” and identify ourselves to our self, it implies not only the *sair ul suluk*, the journey, the open road, and the threading of the eye of the needle, but it also implies one’s behavior and comportment.

Why education? [It is] educating in a way that we can understand, a way that gives a sense of security and wisdom, a sense of belonging. [It is] giving the right upbringing as Muslims and Sufis, so that the person does not wander astray, or in today’s terms, cannot be radicalized by lies, because the truth is too obvious. Some people also use the word *irāda* for the spiritual journey. That refers to our will, and that refers to the choices we make. It comes from the root that means to walk or to look about and search. Again, here we are on a journey: to walk, to look about, to search. When it refers to the journey, it implies something else that *suluk* doesn’t imply. It implies temptation, enticement. It has to do with the marginal aspect of our nature (that is hopefully marginal) that can be corrupted or misled.

At the very same time, *irādi* means an intentional journey. The same word for journey now implies intention. *Irada* gives rise to other words. Why does it imply journey? What’s another word that comes from *irāda*? *Murīd* and *murīda*. What is a *murīd*, a static being who is a believer? You could just call that person a Muslim. *Murīd* is an aspirant. What do we call a *murīd*? A seeker. Does a seeker imply that you are standing still, and looking around, or are you moving? When we play hide and seek, only the seeker is moving; the hider is standing still. You seek what is hidden. Internally, you seek what is hidden. You are looking, paying attention (*tawwajuh*) to what is hidden in *khafī*, in *akhfah*. *Murād* is another word. Who gains knowledge? The person who seeks; the person who has the will, the person who is on a journey, who travels, and who has good comportment and good behavior. And now also *murād* comes from this word.

Murād is the one who is sought, who is desired. There is another word: who is intended. We say, “Who is your intended?” “Oh, my intended is so and so.” It means, “Who is it you are going to marry.” It hasn’t happened yet; it’s intended. We make it into a noun. I am Bill, I am intended. *Murād* is the intended. It is the result of Allah’s intention. If you have these qualities I have been describing, and you are seeking the knowledge, and you have the framework of *tarbiya*, it is intended for you that you are brought near by Allah to Himself. According to some Sufis, *irāda* is the flame of love in the heart, which desires Allah and longs to be united with Allah. It is also the intention of Allah, that which is sought after by Allah.

What could be said is sought after by Allah, other than *ibāda*/worship? What is that? It means consciousness of that Divine Presence. Who does that? The *abd*, the servant or slave. What is the wisdom of the slave or servant? He knows who the master is. Is the servant ever arrogant in front of the master? No. Maybe in front of the other servants, but never in front of the master. Why? Because their life depends on it. Enough semantics and morphology.

In other words, this journey begins from some place deep inside of us, a yearning to know. Allah provides us the names and the meanings, the means and the guidance. Allah tells us that we are *murīd* and we are *salik*. We are seekers. Here is the road, the *tarīqah*. Here is the path, the *suluk*. This is the journey, and here is the fuel, the *himma* (yearning). In addition to that, you need to have patience and compassion and mercy. If you are going to go and outfit yourself for a mountain climb, you have to know what you need. Since you are going to do that online, you have to be taught the names of those things. You are going to order them, and it is going to cost you something. Even when you have all those tools, you don’t necessarily know how to use them. You can even have an instruction manual, and still not necessarily know how to use them. So you have to have companionship.

You need to go with a guide, and preferable to have a little training ahead of time. It's good if you are climbing with fellow travelers, especially if you are climbing in the Himalayas. Still it is not totally safe; it's just safer. You should train for it.

For the journey, the yearning is necessary, but it's not a guarantee of anything. Without it, you wouldn't survive on the mountain. Because the time will come when you are at 15,000 feet and you can't breathe, and there is a big crevasse. Someone will say, "Jump," and you will say, "I'm going back to base camp." This journey starts from deep within us, and it's often hidden from us. That's why we have to understand how to see what's hidden. But for a few clues of our own behavior, perhaps some uncontrollable elements in our destiny, some of us would never, ever know we have this yearning. We'd never know we had the desire for the journey, except for these kinds of apparently serendipitous meetings that take place—meetings between you and some other believers; you and some other Sufi; you and the *shaykh*, you and a book, you and the Qur'an, you and whatever. You would never know you have the yearning, because it has to be opened.

Some of us knew we had the yearning, but something opened or triggered it. We find ourselves in places or with people we never outwardly intended to be with. We discovered that our lives were moving us away from what other people think is normal, away from repetitive patterns, hopefully away from our conditioning. The usual approaches to our day to day life are not fulfilling, or perhaps not even within our grasp anymore. We are motivated by our hearts to the degree that our hearts cause us conflict in our minds sometimes, between what we think should be or what we are driven to do or are yearning to do. It creates passion and longing, and an attraction/*jedhbah* to the truth of what is beautiful. It opens up in us yearning for more knowledge. The knowledge is not just book knowledge. It is yearning to explore, to define, to understand, to really gain marifah. Real gnosis, real knowledge.

This is *suluk*; this is *irāda*; this is the life of a *murīd* or *murīda*. This is the foundation of what we want to come out of our *tarbiya*, whether we are educating our children in school or not. What is it that is going to light the fire in their hearts? What is it that is going to inspire them in the moment to click on something, to understand who they are and what they are? And it's not too late for us; it's never too late on the *suluk*. The commitment to this journey, to this search, to this path, to this character development and building becomes the basis of our life; of our decisions. The foundation of our existence. It determines our location, our work, our friendship and companionship. If we are honest, that's what it does; otherwise, we are negotiating with our destiny, all the time negotiating, negotiating. And guess who's going to win?

Everything that has come before that realization is preparation for that realization, or it is discarded. If it is used— like the skills, knowledge, status or wealth we have accumulated as we journey, or before we journey—must be converted into a new currency, a universal currency, the currency of the *suluk*, of the journeyer. That currency is the only one that transcends this world. We always say that you can't take it with you, meaning the physical wealth. But you can take with you this wealth: the wealth of knowledge, the wealth of humility, of compassion and mercy, the wealth of trust and submission. You can take that. You allow this journey and your spirituality, your trust in Allah to determine where you are, and what you do, and all the rest of it.

If you go to most colleges and universities and ask the students there, “What are you going to do?” They say, “I don't know.” When someone says that to me I say, “That's good. Do a lot of different things and you'll find out what you want to do.” It takes a lot of courage. The will and desire to educate oneself, the desire to not just acquire knowledge but have good breeding, good comport, and good attitude; the desire to be well mannered and to not just learn but also to teach, to increase your knowledge, to exceed the norm (*tarbiya* also means to exceed, increase) allows you to make this journey and take the lead in the caravan toward the Divine Presence. Of course, it's a struggle.

Throughout the journey it may be a struggle. There is often a struggle even with the desire to journey, to find that well spring of peace and knowledge and contentment, and/or to return to the conditioning we are used to and the habits we are familiar with. The reality is, we want both. We want to have our cake and eat it.

We can have both to some degree, as long as the journey comes first in our hearts and minds, as long as the *adab* in our life is good, and our life is active in the gathering of knowledge. That means we can fulfill our responsibilities within the context of the *sair ul suluk*, because we have been educated, because we have increased our knowledge, because we are well-bred. After we recognize and commit to that journey, we realize how important it is to have *suhat*; how important it is to be guided, and to develop the sincerity. We know *niyyat*, but there is also the word *qasd*. *Qasida* is like a poem. Would you also define *qasd* as intention? (It means like “aim.”) Yes, the aim. *Qasd* means intention like “I am going from here to there,” or “My aim in this is to accomplish that, to have this kind of accomplishment.” It implies to pursue the goal.

At the same time, it implies to have the goal in view. If you are a teacher in the school, you don’t want just to teach information. You want the child to have in view what they are trying to learn. You want the goal in view. You want to say, “I’m going to teach you this for this purpose.” [You do not want to] just say, “You could use algebra for this” or “History is good for that.” But you have the goal in view. It also implies something else. It implies a kind of *tafakkur*, or *fikr*. It implies to contemplate and consider our purpose, and always to adopt the middle way. *Qasd* has another implication: to aspire. It implies a degree of aspiration: clear goals and clear aims that you aspire toward. The means with which we fulfill that aspiration are also implied: being thrifty, being frugal. In other words, focus on the main point of your life. Focus on the essence of your life, and on the core and purpose of things.

Now you see also this is a form of education, of *tarbiya*. This is what makes a person well-bred. This is what gives a person breeding. Like on a farm, you find the strongest or best animal, and you use that one to produce more animals in your breeding process. You are doing this kind of breeding inside your own self. This has another implication. The implication is to your conditioning, to get rid of the accretions, to get rid of these veils, and to dismiss all the things that are excessive or ancillary. They use the word *qasida* for poetry, meaning a tri-partate form of poetry. It's a very specific word. We use the word also *maqasid shar'iah*, the intention or design of the *shar'iah*, the clear design and aim and goal of it.

Niyyat comes from *nawah*. What is that? *Niyyat* talks about the tendency, the inclination to do something. We make *niyyat* and we hope it will move us toward the goal. We say, I'm going to make a *niyyat* for that. It forms a foundation. We talked about *niyyat* and sincerity in Charlottesville last time. That doesn't mean it cannot be specific. He can make a *niyyat* to give me more tea, or something like that. One points to sincerity and good faith, and a kind of trust. The other is a very clear aim and a clear goal. All of this: education, *suluk*, *niyyat*, *irada*, *qasid* imply *a'fal* / action—but not just action: efficacious action, action that is effective and fulfills that aim and goal. Education means to learn something, to move from here to there, to gain knowledge so that you can effect change and fulfill your aim and goals, so that you can take your stature, sincerity and well-being and move yourself forward in society, and come nearer to that awareness of the Divine. In that sense, the actions we perform have an actual effect. Then we are affected by that effect. In effect, we are affected by our actions.

Where does this take us? It takes us to *tarīqah*. So here we are, back again. It's a recursive process. A lot happens in this Arabic. The *salik* takes a step. Allah says to Prophet Muhammad (sal), **“And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in morning and in evening, seeking His countenance.”** (6:52) What is that instruction Allah gave to the Prophet (sal)? Allah (swt) says that no one is to be forbidden, to be

driven away. Indeed, He tells us we must show patience and support for their journey, for their search for knowledge from the cradle to the grave. Certainly, everyone has been tested and will be tested, but no one should be driven away from this journey. **“Keep yourself patient with those who cry unto their Lord morning and evening, seeking his countenance. Do not let your eyes overlook them, seeking the pomp and the life of this world.”**

We start with someone who may or may not know that they have a desire for the journey, deep in their heart. Now they come into contact with someone or some thing that awakens that, by someone who has realized it. Now they want to travel on it, and what it takes to travel on it. We are told, don't drive them away. Be patient with them. Because they don't know anything yet. They are for sure going to go about it in the wrong way; and they will use wrong words and resort to their conditioning. They will fight and doubt. Where are we? We are at *sabr*. The meaning is, the objective, the aim, the goal, the *qasd*, is *haqiqat al irāda*: the search for the Truth, for the countenance or awareness of Allah. It's interesting, I think. This word (*suluk*) that also means journey and will/*irāda* also has a sort of psychological aspect to it.

Allah tells us, **“Know yourself and you will know your Lord.”** Seek the face of Allah. Who is the seeker? The *murīd*. Who is the one that is sought? The *murād*. The *murīd* is a person who has within the core of their heart that desire, that passion, that will whose life becomes *ibāda*, *hikmat*, who performs *tawajjuh*, who pays attention, whose *adab* is consistent with the Shar'iah and the Sunnah. If not, they know how to bring it back and be repentant, who always deals with the *nafs*; who always watches it, who works with it and against it, who struggles with it. This is also the person who is available and willing, who gives good advice, who is a good companion along the journey, who is a fellow *salik*, and who understands what it means to make that extra effort, that *nafle*. That's enough for tonight. *Asalaamu aleikum*.

Q&A

Student: It seems we spend our lives gaining all this knowledge, and then we die. What happens to that knowledge? You said tonight that we can't take it with us.

Shaykh: Of course you take it with you.

Student: I don't see the value of it.

Shaykh: You don't see the purpose of the knowledge? You mean like $1+1 = 2$, that kind of knowledge? How would you get paid?

Student: I can see it in our day to day life.

Shaykh: Oh, what's the use of $1+1=2$ in the Hereafter?

Student: No, just any knowledge. Self knowledge, knowledge of life.

Shaykh: Do you want to look at it as a process? The short speak is you accept. You accept that this is a process of awakening. That's one way to look at it. We come into this world, and everything around us is an '*āyat* of Allah. Unless and until we see the continuity, all we are doing is existing in time and space with no meaning, except whatever the meaning of this world is. When we awaken to the fact, the reality, that all of this, everything we are amidst, is an '*āyat*/sign or *alam*/symbol of Allah, a world within worlds. We become aware of the fact that we are journeying, that this is just a part of the journey that looks like this. Musa can send you an article on quantum mechanics and time, which makes the case pretty well that we've been created and re-created many times over during the time I have been talking. The only thing that binds us together to make it seem like a continuity is something we might call memory.

Why would we expect that would end, if that were the fabric of the universe? If you have two points, you have a line. If you have three points, or any number of points and you connect them, you get direction. Why would we have all this opportunity? Knowledge is not factual only. It is a process by which we become aware that there are different entities existing within us. There is this physical body that is the first stage of the rocket.

It is going to drop off. Or we could say the placenta is the first stage of the rocket, wherever you want to start the metaphor. The only way it will go forward is if separation takes place under the right circumstances, and there is enough thrust to get you to the next level. In the midst of all this, what is the purpose of it? Originally, it was just to shoot rockets in the air. Now there are all kinds of experiments to be done, and they go to the farthest reaches of space and take photographs, and whatever.

You can then start to see how each *latīfa* has its own special (depending on which metaphor I want to use) capability on that journey. And that's the journey. You have to have a purpose, and you have to have knowledge to fulfill that purpose. You have to have the will to do it and the understanding that you are traveling with others, working with others, under the guidance of those who have gone before, or those who have the manual. And you are in contact with them through time and space, with radio transmissions, though you are not in the same room with them. What's happening on CNN? Wolf Blitzer is saying, "Well, Anderson, what's happening in Haiti?" The further away they are, there is that pause because of the speed of sound. It takes time, a second or so, and then he answers the question. It's the same kind of thing.

We are in transmission. What we do in dunya is "real" learning, in order to build the rocket, or get yourself ready or whatever. It's also not just for the physical. It's also to access certain capabilities, potentialities, possibilities within our own selves. As improbable as they may be, they are possible. The world of quantum physics is possibilities. Anything we know about is possible; if we don't know about it, it's not possible. What is a potential? It's already defined by Allah in Qur'an.

Now, the real conundrum and question is the one you didn't ask. The question behind that question is really one of faith. It's sort of where I think faith comes in. When you ask the question, "So why did God do this in the first place," you limit yourself to God being a thing that did something, and had some kind of human motive for doing it. You

ask the question very proudly and very logically. But then you are into that other world where that question makes no sense, or it makes sense but has no answer. The Sufi doesn't think that way; only periodically. 'Do what' (referencing the question: why did God do this?)? If there is only Ahad, there is no two—so, 'do what'? Isn't it a question of being aware of who and where you are, of being aware of that Divine Presence that is *hadari, nadhari, shahadi*? There is only Allah. It doesn't mean "I am Allah," it means Allah is me. Allah is everything, but I am not Allah.

If you get into the reality of who we are, even in a biological sense, and what the potential is in our biology (we talked the other night about the power of that space between things), you could sort of make an analogy or metaphor to a hologram that totality exists within everything and is not limited by the physical aspect of it. The proof of which is, the body drops off. What contains Allah? Only the heart of the believer. There is something implicit in belief that gives it non-locality and non-dimensionality. This is my way of saying it, I don't know if it is correct physics. There is something implicit in belief, in being a *mu'min*. It's not a thing or a person. It means there is, in that person, the capability to believe and transcend the limitations of the physical world. The totality is somehow in that belief.

Of course in Qur'an, Allah tells us that is love: "**They love Me and I love them.**" We know love has no bounds, and cannot be contained. It cannot even be contained in the heart. It needs expression. If Allah is that love, and it can't be contained in anything, it is expressed. BANG! That's the Big Bang. I'll stop the analogy there at that point. It's like that, sort of. That's why. It has everything to do with how we comport ourselves in this world. Allah is merciful in the sense that along with understanding that the human being in his physical form is frail and flawed, forgiveness is created and is part of the framework. 'Created,' meaning it is of the *sifat*/attributes of Allah. Nothing can be made without the Attributes of Allah. Everything that is made has something of the reflection of the Attributes of Allah—everything somehow has it, in some way of looking at it.

You could say the gemstones are patient; it takes a long time for them to get their beauty. We wouldn't use that term for them, but you could. The more patient they are, the more beautiful they are, until they are removed from the environment where they were created. They are apparently static things (but they are not, because they have atoms flying around); they are not being created anymore. We are removed from this kind of formative creation into another state or station. So just remember that, every minute of every day.

The point is, you need to have things to remind you, because you will not stand there and remember it like you remember A, B, C, D, E, F. Allah has all these reminders, which we tentatively (meaning carefully) call the *Asmā' al-Husna*. When you get to the state where everything reminds you of that Divine Presence, then *dunya* has meaning to it, and your perception, *firāsa* and *basīra* are clear. You have discernment, and you see the *fayyād* of it. Everything reminds you. Got it? When you get it really, really clear, come down and explain it to me. *Asalaam aleikum*.