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Saturday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Abu Madyan's \(ra\) Practices of Bātin and Dhāhir](#)

DVD title: Abu Madyan(ra) : Applying Outwardly the Inner Knowledge Gained

Invocation: O Allah, thank You for Your blessings for the cleansing of my body, for the protection of our travelers and for the security of our community, Inshallah. We ask You to make us better Sufis, better Muslims, and to act in a way that is in accordance to Your Will. Amin

Suhbat: Shaykh Abu Madyan (ra) was a very great Sufi teacher whose *murīd* became the teacher of Abul Hasan ash-Shadhilī (ra). He, also Ibn Araby, Jazuli and others created a handbook for *murīds*, “*Bidaya al Murīd.*” In that, he referred to a lot of the earlier teachers of the *futuwwah*. Along with focusing on brotherly and sisterly relationships, ethics, code, he also focused on *amal*/work, social action, engagement. This outward focus was a focus of the spiritual expressions, spiritual experiences on life. Because, and it suggests to us, that the internalization of spiritual life, which had always been regarded as the most basic and essential life for the Sufi, the pious life, he said comprised only part of the work/*amal*. He made a distinction between the *dhāhir*/the outer, and the *bātin*/inner aspects of reality, to the point where he said that these two aspects were not understood to mean that the interior was more real than the exterior, but the application and the concerns or insights that arise from the interior are the criteria for meaningfulness in the outer.

In a way you could say that he focused on the *ummata wasita*, meaning the people of the center or the middle path. The spiritual method that a person is guided to use has to be outer and inner, public and private, worldly and spiritual, but they have to complement

each other as though they are a single reality. The foundation has to be in the spiritual, inner practice and its application in the outer. Nothing one does in the outer should be far from the reality of the inner to the degree that nothing one does in the outer should be far from your own consciousness of the inner. The best way to accomplish that, of course, is to be so cognizant of the Divine Presence that everything reminds you of Allah (swt), such that every action you take are in consonant with the Presence or Attributes of Allah: the *hādarī*. He didn't see the *dhāhir* and the *bātin* dichotomy as being some kind of philosophical or rhetorical device, only. It was not just a metaphor; it was a reality. So when one talks about the outer and the inner metaphorically, one is also, at the same time, discussing something that is real.

If then, Tasawwuf is the essence of Islam, and if Islam is not a religion or a creed, but a way of life that has certain creedal aspects to it, then *amal* or your outer work has to complement and must not oppose the inner knowledge. There cannot be a conflict between your outer work and your inner knowledge, your outer work and your inner intention. As outer work, most people would take to say, "Well, if my outer work makes me uptight, that is bad. So I should change my outer work so I am not uptight, but more like my inner state, which is calm and peaceful when I meditate." But you could flip that around and say, if you are uptight in your work, it is because you are not spending enough time in your inner state. You are not allowing your inner state to actually assist you in making decisions about your outer work. You are still operating from the ego and controlling.

You are taking advantage of your misery in your outer work, or your confusion or your success or your failure, and you are saying, "If I am successful in my outer, then my inner life must be okay. If I am financially successful (or famous or whatever), then my inner state must be okay. If I am not, it is not because my inner state is not okay. It is because my outer work is not refined enough." You see it is very ego driven. The right thing

would be to make a parallel statement, “If my outer work is not successful it is because my inner state is not right.”

When he says (or we say) that the outer practice or the *amal* has to compliment and not oppose the inner knowledge, or the ‘*ilm*, this is a pretty important statement. The Sufis who put all their emphasis on only the inner, who removed themselves from society and became pietists, did not have a balanced, spiritual experience; consequently, people identified Sufis as being pietists. How far back are we going back? We are going back pretty far. These are the teachers of the teachers of Ibn al-Araby (ra) and of Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili (ra). The idea is you don’t upset the balance required for spiritual growth. Spiritual growth requires balance. Most people want to start with the outer work, the *dhāhir*, but in fact one needs to start with the *bātin* and the *dhāhir*.

Of course, many of the people who we refer to were very deeply, profoundly spiritual people. They were writers. They were *imams*. They were *shuyukh*/teachers, but their outer work was that work. Some of them were shop keepers. Some of them were farmers. Some of them, even at times, were at court, in the court of the king, or the emir or the sultan. But for many, their outer work was the teaching. Of course, that is a great blessing; nonetheless, do not think it makes it any easier. Because when your outer work is teaching, it does not mean that you are spending enough time in the inner. People like Ibn Araby and Shaykh Allahu Akbar wrote a lot, spoke a lot, did a lot; and many of them were *qadis*/judges, advocates and teachers. That was their outer work and their inner practices were strong.

He also felt that the behavior/*adab* of the Sufi was of the utmost importance, including the *adab* of the *shaykh*. The relationship of the *shaykh* or *murshid* to the *murīd* was similar to that of a sultan to his subjects, he said, or a doctor to his patients. The value of someone who had true spiritual knowledge was that they could, indeed, transmit it. There was *tajalli*. There was in that transmission, a kind of intervention. They could

intervene in the lives of others and teach them. Teach them what? *Sa'ada*. *Sa'ada* is bliss. He insisted that all those who claimed the rank of *shaykh* have the *ijāzah* and are, as much as any human can be, free of ego, free of vanity, free of pretense. That was important. These are people who if they talk to you about prayer, you should see them praying. If they talk to you about meditation, you should sit with them in meditation. If they tell you the blessing of *dhikr*, you should be making *dhikr* with them, and they should be making it with you. He (of course as we still say today) sees the *nafs ammāra* as the major obstacle.

The problem is that the *nafs ammāra*, like its advocate Iblis/ Shaytan, over time loses power and gains power. Of course, at the very beginning, it has a lot of power and people recognize it and perhaps they struggle against it. But as time goes on, that can't go on. A person becomes used to the subtleties of the *nafs ammāra* and does not resist it with the fervor that they did in the beginning. [It is] precisely the time when they should fervently resist the *nafs ammāra*; because now, as an aged person, they can have humility. They have accomplished in life what they have accomplished, or they haven't, and they come to the conclusion that it was not meant to be, *inshā'a-Llāh*. By the Will of Allah, they have accomplished something else, and it is time for them to understand what it is that they have accomplished. Maybe they set out to become millionaires and they remain poor, but they helped many people. Maybe they were ethical, they were honest, and so great wealth evaded them. Or they were asked to play some political role and they demurred. Who knows what it may be.

A person has to come to a state of mind in believing that Allah was playing a major role in their life and accept what that role was without craving or yearning too many other things. Whatever came should be passing through them, taking care of their needs and passing through them. This is a great filter. One of the ways, in those days, they would accomplish awareness of the importance of such an attitude, was through *sawm*/fasting. He would have his students fast for forty days, like the fast of Musa, who was in the

desert for forty years, or in the mountains for forty days. Or they would fast only on water for forty days, leaving their *khilwa* only to answer the call of nature, to pray and to attend the *dhikr*. Forty days. They would, of course, fast at Rajab. They would fast at Shaban. They would do the fast of Daoud, every other day. They would fast three days a month, every month. It was done at a person's own discretion. But the most distinctive regiment was that fast of Sidna Musa (as). Like the Prophet (sal) in the cave in Hira.

The person who performed that *sawm al-wasl*, would repent, bathe and do two *rak'a* and then they would do their forty days of seclusion. What they would do during that time is repeat, "*lā ilāha illa-llāh, lā ilāha illa-llāh*" until they developed a strong *tawakkul*, a strong reliance and trust in Allah. You can read what is left of his aphorisms.

Understand that the foundational principle that develops the inner so that the outer is in consonant with the inner had to deal a lot with *tawakkul*/trust and *khumul*/ quiescence, and *suqun*/acquiescence.

What did that mean? Complete quiescence meant the cessation of the ego motivated thoughts, the ego motivated desires—not thoughts, not desires—but ego motivated thoughts or desires. So the heart would open itself up to divine *tajalli*, irradiation and inspiration. He said, "*The heart has no more than one aspect at a time such that when it is occupied by a certain thing, it is veiled from another. Take care that you are not attracted to anything but Allah lest He deprive you of the delights of intimate converse with Him.*" He also referred to his *muridīn* as sultans and emirs. As a group, they were called the Party of God (unfortunately, that sounds like a terrorist group, today—Hizbullah) and they practiced *futuwwah*. That was very important because *futuwwah* tells you about the inner and the outer simultaneously.

It also explains why many of the previous Sufis looked at him askance, because they thought that he had some kind of secret group of people; yet what he was doing was that he was really defining Sufism. He was telling us that Sufism is not just observing rules

nor does it just tell you the different stages and degrees of a person's growth, but it consists of other things that most people don't think about. It consists of personal integrity, and especially generosity—not just external, but generosity of spirit. That means you are not so critical so fast. You are being generous with your tolerance and your patience.

Also he said the Sufi is a person who can emulate what has been revealed by Allah (swt)—not picking and choosing. What was revealed by Allah (swt) was, of course, the Sharī'ah, the Qur'an, and also the Hadith, because everything that the Prophet Muhammed was motivated to say and do came from the Qur'an. So if you emulate him, you are emulating the Qur'an. If you are adhering to the principles in the Hadith, you are adhering to the ones in Qur'an.

The person, who follows the true path of Tasawwuf, as Abu Madyan saw it and as I would see it also, was not just an ascetic, who was someone lost contemplating God, and are not looking at the injustices that are plaguing the world. They are not looking at the poverty. They are not looking at the illness. They are not looking at the wars. They are not looking at the starvation. They remove themselves, like the yogis, to a cave. That was *haram*. A mystic, the Sufi is someone who has a full socially engaged life and not just with anybody. The Sufi is the person who uses discipline and uses vigilance and uses one's own self in the best way possible to serve one's brother and sister and one's neighbor. Remember when this is coming: 12th century. He died in 1198. Who is this person who loves his neighbors and his brothers and sisters? He says it this way:

The true Sufi must not be jealous, egotistical or arrogant with his knowledge, nor miserly with his money. Rather he must act as a guide, not confused, but merciful of heart and compassionate with all of creation. To him every person is as useful as one of his hands. He is an ascetic. Everything is equal to him whether it be

*praise or blame, receiving or giving, acceptance or rejection, wealth or poverty.
He is neither joyful about what comes to him or sad about what has been lost.*

That is the Sufi. You should imagine what it is for the *shaykh* or the teacher. Because the teacher or the *shaykh* has to be that way, but at the same time also teach. Since not everybody gets it, acts or emulates their own *shaykh* or teacher or the prophets, then sometimes there has to be corrections. Those corrections cannot come from ego. They cannot come from vanity. They cannot come from negativity. Sometimes they come from frustration. Sometimes they may come from pity and upset, because what people are doing to themselves is so blatantly obvious to the *shaykh*, to the teachers. It is as obvious as it was to Sidna Musa when he came down from the mountain and saw the golden calf. It was obvious what happened. He did not need to say, “Oh. What happened here? Did somebody come by and leave a golden calf?” “Oh. Were you practicing sculpture?” It was obvious what happened.

He started to gain a lot of influence and the *khaliph*, Yaqub al-Mansur ordered him to appear at the court because he was worried. “What is happening here? Somebody could challenge my authority.” He called him back to court, but on his way back to court, he died at Uban, near Tamsan. It was in 1198 and his grave, now over which a mosque has been built, still to this day is a place of pilgrimage. And we still know his name. Let us remember what he was saying. A balanced life, inner and outer, who is constantly vigilant over oneself, who is detached from the world, who participates fully in the world, and who has love and care and watches over his own neighbor’s property—the person who can really do that, who can enjoy doing that is a person who is rid of their ego, rid of their jealousy, rid of their arrogance, rid of their overwhelming desires for things of this world.

That is the story of Abu Madyan: the balance between the *bātin* and the *dhāhir*, the inner and the outer. The necessity for us to be aware of what is happening inwardly all the

time is the only way we are going to adjust what is happening outwardly. We are going to adjust what is happening outwardly by just brute, physical force or attention, but it will demand that we are constantly monitoring what we have created, externally monitoring, I should say. When it is all one package, then the monitoring is taking place all the time. There is a time for inward practices, as we know, but it is already being directed to effectuate change in the outer. It is not: do the inner practice, finish, get up, have breakfast, go to work, come home, eat a quick dinner because you have to go to the *masjid* because the Shaykh wants us there and do your Sufi practices. No. It has to be integrated. The only way it will get integrated is if you affirm and you allow yourself and when you commit yourself to experiencing the benefits that come from very serious and sincere practice. *Asalaam Aleikum.*