

April 7, 2010

Wednesday

Title: [Patience, Self-Renewal, and Gratitude](#)DVD title: Coming to Know Oneself:  
Reflection with Sabr for Self Renewal

It has been related that the Prophet (sal) said, “***Know yourself and you will know your Lord.***” This simple sentence has probably crossed the lips of every Sufi from the earliest recorded time of relating *hadith* until today. I’ll speak about it at the end of the month a little bit. In a way, it reflects the goal of *tarīqah/turūq* or *suluk*. It elevates the value of knowledge, because it opens up the questions you need to know. It’s a process statement; it’s dynamic. Then it says the goal of this is to know your Lord; and of course Allah (swt) is endless, so we must be endless, too. If you know yourself you know your Lord, and if Allah (swt) is endless, this process must be endless and we must be endless. The point being also that unless we know Ya Rabb, we don’t understand what the essence of this life is about. So, we take things very lightly, or we take things too seriously that we should take more lightly.

The question arises, what is the means to this knowledge? Obviously, everyone thinks they know themselves. One of the foundational pillars upon which one builds this knowledge / gnosis / *marifah* is through *tafakkur*, contemplation. This *tafakkur* is actually at the root of probably every practiced that we do. Even when we are just sitting in *muraqabah*, we are told to contemplate the meaning of what we are doing in this state of meditation or turning. Without some level of contemplation, whatever practice we do is merely external, whether it’s prayer or *wudu* or meditation or service. When we turn our attention inward, and it literally is a direction away from the world, what is it we are turning? Are we turning an eye that is aware, or are we just averting our glance from the

world for a period of time, but not looking with any eye of knowledge or certainty (*ain al- yaqin*) or intellect.

When we are told to turn our eye of awareness (*tawajjuh*, attentiveness) toward our heart; we do that because Allah says that's where He dwells. You find Him in the heart of the *mu'min*/believer. Are we looking to see what is present, and what happens when we do that? First, you get a sense of presence in the heart. You look into the heart and sense there is something there. As you go deeper and deeper, chamber by chamber, into this contemplation through *muraqabah*, feelings develop in the heart. One feels that the sense of oneself disappears. We begin to realize that the sense of I-ness is a kind of energy, an idea that comes from the depths of the ocean of the self, which is not our self, but Self with a capital S. It is pure reality, pure existence that is beyond name. In this state, we can momentarily let go of our own self image, and let our self be re-cast again in the image of Allah (swt). We can touch the imagination/*khayal* of Allah (swt).

If we let go of a resistance to the practice and the idea of absorption, and allow our own attributes to meld or dissolve into the attributes of Allah (swt), allow our limited self to be absorbed by the reality of Allah (swt), this *tafakkur*/contemplation has now become absorption. Let's take an example. Nobody here gets angry; but you may remember a time when you used to get angry or distressed. We can look inside and ask ourselves, "who is that angry person?" In our *firasa*/discernment, we begin to realize that this person is just a figment, an illusion—a kind of mis-match of expectations, disappointment and energy. It's not harmonized. We realize it's not really who we are. Sometimes when we are angry, and someone points it out to us, we get even more angry trying to explain that we have a) all the reasons to be angry, and b) we are not really angry.

If we can see this process, then we are in a process of restoration, restoring our self. When we go deeper into the heart, we see how that anger pulls energy from the good

aspects of our nature and character, to the point where that good energy becomes dissipated. We have to let ourselves dissolve, let our consciousness go deeper and deeper into the self, the origin of our self, until we lose ourselves in our *muraqabah*. We become lost for a while in the drifting. We lose our self in order to find our Self. Shaykh Mohammed Ibn Ali (ra) said in a quatrain:

*Wrap yourself in patience, and wind on the turban of self-renewal.  
You need the shirt of doing without, and you should wear yourself out in it.*

He's talking about the *murīd* who is traveling on the journey/*suluk* from the presence of the 'ālam al-khalq /creation, to the presence of 'ālam al-amr/command or reality; from seeing with the eyes/*basara* to seeing with insight/*basīra*. As compensation for his effort, his presence, his preparation and service, that journeyer develops love and longing. The end of the journey, the goal of the journey is the Rabb: to know Allah, the Lord—but there is no end. This concept of union with Allah (swt), if one contemplates it, one has to understand is really a kind of absorption in His knowledge, awareness. Only those who are patient can make this journey. He's talking about the patience that is necessary to obtain that knowledge. Not only that, the benefit or treasure of that knowledge comes to the one who is patient.

Whoever really desires to reach the *maqam* of real knowledge, insight, awareness of your Lord, “you better tighten your belt and feed yourself on your *himma*, and wrap yourself in *sabr*.” Without that, anything other than that is distraction. Distraction is, by definition, outward. If distraction were inward, that would be great; but that's not the way it works. The key to *tafakkur*/contemplation, as you know, the key to *muraqabah* and the *maqam* of *marifah*/gnosis is *sabr*. *Sabr* as you know has two meanings: patience and perseverance, which are two different things. The implication of patience is not exactly the same as perseverance. In perseverance, the implication is that there is hope. This *sabr*

is a key to make your meditation bountiful and conscious. It is the key that opens the doorway to the *rizq*, the *fadl*, and the *nai'ma* of Allah.

Patience brings with it a kind of gratitude and grace. Since it is a key to whatever is good, it is also the key that locks the door of the *nafs*. In other words, it protects the self, if you are patient and persevere with the means that are given to you. Patience locks the door of the *nafs* to keep the characteristics of the *nafs ammāra* distant from you. Or it keeps one's *nafs* from what is destructive to it, or hated by it, in order to reach what it loves and desires.

Even though the goal is Allah, one seeks the help of Allah along the way. How is that possible? How can you ask a police officer in San Francisco where to go, if you are in Oklahoma on your way to San Francisco? (Yes, I understand you could Twitter him.) Allah is present. The assumption is Allah is present, but you are not seeing or hearing; but you accept that Allah is present. You seek the *madad*, the *nai'ma*, the *fadl*, the *gawth* of Allah (swt) in the moment of your need as you travel. It is sort of like XM radio. I can sit in Bedford and hear the traffic report in Washington. I can tune in, though I'm not there. As we seek the help of Allah (swt), the difficulties are separated. The screens and veils and obstacles to our journey are lifted. At the same time, other screens are made to keep away the difficulty. The *mithāl* of patience (it is said) in acts of obedience or effort is the *mithāl* of iron in the craft of ironworking. Patience is the element out of which obedience is built; and that obedience is that surrender which is necessary for the *nafs* to remove itself as an obstacle from the journey, just as iron is the *mithāl* in the craft of ironworking.

If it wasn't for patience, there wouldn't be any self-renewal that I was talking about. There wouldn't be any healing of the self, no renewing of the self level by level. There wouldn't be any doing without, because there wouldn't be any trust, *taqwa* or effort. Patience and effort are not opposites. When he says, "*Wind on the turban of self-*

*renewal*,” how do you get rid of all those habits, that torpor, and whatever it is that cuts you off from the Allah (swt) from the path, from the knowledge of that Divine Presence, from wrong actions, so that we stop the actions or re-direct the power or forces that we have within us toward what is good?

As *murīds*, we have to take this self-renewal very seriously, because without *takhali* you can't have *tahali*—without divestment or relinquishing, you can't have adornment. Sometimes there are things that we do to ourselves, or situations we find ourselves in, that are very, very difficult to divest or relinquish or erase. To do it, we have to undergo pain and struggle twice. One is the pain of doing the things that were wrong, distorting or distracting, and then there is the pain of removing what we did. Then there's the *tahali*, which is the adornment. You want to be making sure you are adorning yourself with the right thing, and not just making the same mistake again and again. You have to be in a different environment, a different state, a different paradigm.

Self-renewal has a couple of very interesting characteristics to it. One is the guilt, the remorse, the regret that one has for what has happened that made us fall into making mistakes and getting lost. The other side is the devoting of oneself to Allah (swt), glorifying Allah, being obedient, drawing near, doing without those things that are prohibited or those things that are doubtful that we had become accustomed to or tempted by. The station of *rida*/hope, comes from doing acts of contrition and obedience. The station of *taqwa* comes from avoiding the things that are prohibited. According to this, the *shaykh* said, “*You must put on the two sandals of fear/khawf and rida/hope, and take the staff of yaqin/certainty and the rizq that comes from fear.*”

Any traveler needs a pair of shoes. Not one shoe, two. You have to avoid certain things. I heard on the radio the story of a man who traveled in 10 weeks from Washington to Antarctica by bus. He only knew that he was headed south. He made his arrangements as he went along, except for one or two times when he had to book ahead. He found

himself sometimes in wonderful circumstances, like in Argentina in a beautiful, air-conditioned bus; and in other circumstances like in Nicaragua in a terrible bus that broke down. He had to hitchhike in the dark with only 10 hours to get to a port to get a ship or something. In this journey, it's not done that way. We have to avoid difficulties if we can. We have to avoid the H1N1 virus, and the terrorists, and the cartel people, and the Shining Path in Colombia, and the whoever in whatever country. We have to make this journey with some knowledge.

Those of us who take this journey seriously, we are in a strange way, wayfarers who are traveling unknowingly to the court of the king, accompanied by the king himself; hence, the idea of the king disguising himself as a commoner. Only in this case, we are traveling with every thing the kind created, and everybody has been created by him. Indeed, we need to travel with those who know the way to learn how to turn our fear into courage, and do acts of goodness so that we exist between fear and hope. We have to rely on Allah, and have certainty that it is Allah (swt) who brings that journey to us, and the goodness, certainty and reliance to us. If we look, we see it's everywhere. The traditional example is the bird who flies from his nest in the morning to return with a worm to feed the chicks in the nest. She goes out every morning in search of the food, but never doubting that it's there. She has total reliance on her Creator. Or like the bee who works and creates what it has to create for the sake of the hive, but always creates more (when things are well) than what is needed.

So we can share in the labor of the bee, and we do. It's one of the most healthful things there is. It is possible it is so healthful because it is indicative of the bounty of Allah? There is nothing parsimonious about it; it just gives and gives and gives. That's how we have to be. Certainly, this reliance is indicated by the *shaykh* when he talks about the staff of certainty. The knowledge is the key to the act and the condition for obtaining one's desire. Allah (swt) is worshiped by the person who knows, not the person who doesn't know. There are many aspects to this knowledge, which we won't get into

tonight. But we have to accept, if we are to make progress, that we have to struggle with sincerity and with seriousness. We have to travel as quickly as we can on this journey, not to be stopped by the contemplation of the worldly things, but to make progress by the contemplation of the Creator of those worldly things.

With a certain guardian, we travel and learn how to guard ourselves from the things that are destructive. If we can maintain in our *tafakkur* centered in our heart this awareness throughout the day no matter what we are doing... as we become more and more aware of our ability to maintain our awareness and focus throughout the day, then you know, as it is said, Allah (swt) is making *tafakkur* upon you, and that your *tafakkur* is really Allah's *tafakkur*. The knowledgeable eye of the dervish or *faqir* opens and we see what is the Divine Reality.

The Prophet (sal) said, “***One hour of contemplation is better than a lifetime of worship.***” I don't know if at that time he was thinking that 1300 years later people would use that as an excuse not to pray. But when you come to this place where you understand that the contemplation itself is a form of *ibāda*, then the verses of the Qur'an will sound like the finest music. The truth you read in the text will be revelatory. The sitting in *muraqabah* will be filled with light. The acts that you perform will be done with humility. The opportunities to perform those acts in whatever you do will be filled with gratitude, and everything will be speaking to you. Wheresoever you turn, you will see the face of Allah.

Shaykh Muzaffur-dīn Effendi (may Allah protect him in his tomb and liberate him) said that contemplation is the highest form of worship. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq said, “*Before perceiving anything, I see in it the power of Allah.*” He sees Allah prior to seeing what is created. His constant *muraqabah* is on Allah (swt). He sees Allah's manifestation in every event, without the support of anything. Of course you know the classical story of *Rabia al-Adawiya*, when she was asked by her companion Mariam to come to her home

*on a beautiful day to witness the splendor of Allah's creation. She said, "Why do I need to look upon creation when I am witnessing the Creator?"* That's the process. It's something that we can take very seriously from this moment, if you are just patient and think about it and contemplate life. You contemplate life. We have a dynamic relationship with one another, with even strangers.

The Prophet (sal) said, "***Whoever extends kindness to you, compensate them. If you cannot compensate them, then pray for them.***" How can we live without the most simple gratitude and prayer? How do we compensate for the blessings that come to us, the kindness that comes to us? That's why we make *du'ā*, "*O Allah, bless our master Muhammed, and bless his family and his companions.*" Why? Because this is compensation. We cannot pay him, but we can pray for him. [We ask for] these blessings upon the Prophet and on the others messengers, on the *salihīn*. We say, "Praise be to Him, Ruler of the worlds. *Alhamdulillah Rabbi-l-'ālamīn.*" Isn't that what we are doing with Suratu-l-Fatihah? It's a form of compensation for all the good that is flowing toward us, and for all the light that is being sent to us. We should take it seriously. It's not something you just do sitting in meditation. There is a lot to contemplate every day, *inshā'a-llāh*, and it is a means to be patient. Even sometimes you have to be patient with your impatience, and know that it will pass. *Asalaamu aleikum.*