

May 12, 2010

Wednesday



Title: An Adab for Everything

DVD title: Adab in Tariqah: Futuwwah
Knowledge of the Principles of Sufism

Dinner blessing: Thank You, Allah, for the blessings of the week, for the safe travel, for the good works, for the opportunity to speak well of our country, our work, and to represent our values to a group of young people, to a gathering of people of different faiths; for a successful evening meal and discussion; and for the value that has allowed us to place on the name of our work of Legacy International. Also Allah, we ask You to give us the same blessing for the legacy of our community in the future, and to inspire our young people to carry on this good work and to give them a basis for making good decisions that are not based just on finances, locations, or desires, but one based on a true vision of the future and the needs of humanity. *Amin.*

Suhbat: Every once in a while I find myself saying that “*adab* is everything, *adab* is everything.” And a *talib* is a hard person to find. I’m in that state of mind again. It usually happens when *adab* seems to be nothing. As much as I wish it were just generalized into the political realms where we know there is no *adab*, or society around us, I’m afraid I also have to say that we have forgotten it here, too, to some degree. We have to hold ourselves to a much higher standard than others—not a little higher; but a lot higher. I can’t hold the whole community to a high standard on this. That’s an oxymoron. How can I do that when it comes to *adab*? Each one of us has to hold ourselves to a higher standard of *adab*. Along with that goes gratitude and humility and self-sacrifice. We also know it as *futuwwah*. So we’ll talk about *adab* and *futuwwah*.

In his a preface to “Fusus al-Adab,” Yahya Bakharzi (ra) said that since every seeker has to understand the nature of that which he seeks, knowledge of the theoretical principles of Sufism is essential to those who aspire to it. That, in relationship to *adab*, first begins with understanding that the *abwab* (forms, conventions) of *adab* are based on Qur’an, on the acts and words of Prophet Muhammed (sal), and on the lives of the Sahabah. Hence, the concept or conventions of *adab* begin with those who begin Tasawwuf. These were the earliest Sufis: Abu Bakr, Ali, and of course Prophet Muhammed (sal). I say that with a lot of authority. We are not claiming something that isn’t ours.

The principles and guidelines and eternal meaningfulness of Sufism, the hierarchical attitudes of Sufism, the existence of the Sahabah, the *taba’ain* and the *taba-taba’ain*, and the *shuyukh*, all begin with Prophet Mohammed (sal) and the Sahabah. The name may not have come into form for a few hundred years, but the reality was there. There were animals running around for a long time before anyone named them “dinosaurs” – a LONG time! The reality of the dinosaurs was around long before anyone put a name on it. There have been little microorganisms floating around the body since the beginning of humanity, before people like Dedeh put names on them. We didn’t even know they existed, until we had the ability to find them and measure them with microscopes. Let’s not have any problem with names.

Later, everything gets collected, organized and codified from different sources. One of the earliest sources is a man by the name Abu Fadl Mohammed ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi, and he called them, “The Rules and Manners of the Sufi. Adab al-Sufiyya.” The cornerstone of this is an inherent and articulated belief in the unity of Allah and in the pillars of Islam. How one achieves the perfection of those pillars, and how one understands the revelation of Allah (swt), and how one can accept the unity of Allah (swt) is something that one needs to be guided to and directed to, re-guided to and course-adjusted to. Over the centuries, a millennium and a half, there have been a lot of admonitions and encouragements to the person who aspires to be a dervish, to Tasawwuf.

Primarily, one has to have *ta'azim*: one has to revere Allah and His Messenger. A person has to develop a good opinion, and a concern and care for all humanity, and in private pray for all the Muslims. Also, that person has to be happy to serve the brothers and sisters of the *fuqara*, and in that service be willing to tolerate any kind of rejection or harshness that might come from them toward one. It is said that if a dervish has no other good in him, it is goodness enough that he permits another one to do him service. Then there is an understanding that this journey we are on has very real and clear *maqamat/stations*. Those stations are to bring us near to Allah which is, of course, a metaphor meaning to be aware of that Divine Presence. That is determined by the quality and quantity of one's *ibāda/worship*.

In Qur'an, Allah says there is no one of us that does not have a known station/*maqam*. There have been descriptions of those stations: being in need of Allah, being contrite, being scrupulous, being devoted, being in a state of *faqir* (spiritual poverty), *tasabbur* (to be patient), to have *rida* (to be content), to have *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), to make *muhāsabat*, to have *dhud* (detachment), to develop *siddiq, ikhlas* (sincerity). Another key element is that a person experiences *hals*, passing states, which are an interaction between the seeker's heart and Allah. Depending on the purity of a person's practice, the amount of practice a person does and the sincerity with which they do them, a person begins to see that they experience many *hals*, states, insights, moments of extreme compassion, or humility, moments of extreme fear (*taqwa* or *khawf*), moments of deep realization. One begins to realize that these are all gifts from Allah. These are *hal, ahwal* (plural of *hal*).

These spiritual states all have a meaning, because they are pure states. They descend upon the heart of the seeker, and become transformed into mystical states. Something happens to them. Compassion from Allah descends onto a seeker, and it has an

alchemical effect on the individual. The person becomes more attracted and more deep into their *muraqabah*, their meditation or contemplation. They feel a *qurb*, a nearness to Allah. There is more *muhabbat*, more love, more hope, more *khawf*/fear, more *hayat*/longing, more *uns* /intimacy, *sakina*, *yaqin*/certainty. Eventually, as a person does more of the meditation in quantity and more refined in quality, a person begins to develop *mushahada*, direct vision. If one perseveres, then there is an endless capability or capacity for Divine inspiration, visions maybe...or revelations, or insights.

One of the signs of a true *shaykh* is they have unending insights or inspirations. There are many methods of travel in the *suluk*. Or you could look at them as different ways of worship. Some Sufis were very ascetic. Some went into *khilwa*/seclusion a lot. Some traveled. Some went into exile from their own homelands. Some did service/*khidma* to humanity or people. Others endured many different kinds of spiritual trials and states and *ahwal*. Some were *malamy*. They deliberately lost face and honor before other people so they wouldn't be bothered, like Umar Suhwawardi. Some became teachers, *hafez*. Each one of these approaches to Allah has its *adab* – you thought I forgot *adab*?

Each one has its *adab*. Everything has an *adab*. If you could just get yourself to the point where you asked yourself, what is the *adab* for sitting in this room? What is the *adab* for coming to the *masjid*? What is the *adab* for picking up the telephone? What is the *adab* for speaking to one another? If you can just get yourself to ask that question for one day about everything you did, you'd get an idea. But you know this already, so you don't have to do that, *alhamdulillah*. Every one of them has its *adab*, and everything has its conditions, boundaries, rules. If the *adab* and conditions are not carefully followed, observed as they are prescribed by Qur'an, by Allah (remember we are predominantly Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī, and the Naqshbandī Order is very firmly based on the Sharī'ah and Sunnah) the *murīd*/seeker will fail in their striving, and will find themselves in trouble, in turmoil, in confusion. Their lower nature will rise and they will

become an enemy of that which they sought the most after in their lives, become a rejecter of it. The yogis used to call this “the razor’s edge.”

Knowledge about what it is you are pursuing (this is where I began) is to action, as spirit or soul is to the body. It is vital that the seeker’s knowledge, meaning experience, of what is right, of all the things I listed, their *khawf*, their piety, their love, their awareness of that presence should dominate over one’s moment-to-moment reason. You will note that the first thing a person turns to when they fail is reason: they have a reason for everything—the excuse. [They want] to justify, to reason, to logically explain this happened because of that. You do the quality and quantity of meditation, practices, prayer, services, and the list I gave you (according to your nature) with sincerity, then that will dominate. When we talk about knowledge we are talking about knowledge of the heart, not just of the head. That’s number one.

The second thing: in ancient times, every little thing meant something. Because of the fact that the Prophet Musa (as), the Prophet Isa (as), the Prophet Muhammed (sal) favored wearing wool, people would wear wool. The Catholics wore rough wool as a penance. It was to such detail that when a person would be living from one *latīfa*, they would often wear the color of that *latīfa* on their *khierka*, their robe. It was said that the outer should be in conformity with the inner, and they would take it even to the level of saying the outer color you wear should be in conformity with your inner state. It took over a thousand years for researchers to discover that certain colors had certain effects on learning, like yellow in a classroom encourages creativity, for example. But what do those old people know?

If a person wears black, they used to say it meant that he had slain his *nafs*. When the Archangel Jibreel visited Adam (as) after his expulsion from paradise, he was wearing black. It is suitable for people on the path to wear azure or sky blue. It means that you

have utterly and totally purged yourself through contrition of all your bad habits. The point I want to make is that the people of Tasawwuf were very conscious of everything they did. They would make sure their enemies would not get a hold of them; they would not deal with people known to be their enemies or unfriendly to them. They would only deal with upright individuals. They understood that no one outside of *tarīqah* could really understand *tarīqah*. They could observe it, write about it, talk about it. They could say, that person's a Sufi or not a Sufi. They could quote what a Sufi was, but they wouldn't understand Tasawwuf unless they were in *tarīqah*. You have to be in *tarīqah* to begin to understand the relationship.

What happened was that people got caught up in the outer forms: the dress, the symbols, and all the rest of it. Because if they didn't have *adab*, if the *adab* wasn't there, then the religion would not have both its outer and inner aspects. The *madad* wouldn't be correct. We know when we observe the world, there is a *dhāhir* and a *bātin*, an outer and inner. The outer is manifest by a person's *adab* in relationship to the world/*khalq* and the people. The outer aspect of faith is totally incomplete without the inner. *Adab* is absolutely indispensable for a sincere seeker of truth, a real Muslim, because unless things get filtered through something, there is no baseline. The baseline for life is *adab*. You could see that *adab* would be like a filter or an interpreter for your mind, intelligence ('*aqil*) to be able to understand if what you are perceiving and experiencing is truly of the best quality, truly in concert with unity/*tawhid*; if what you are hearing from a person, seeing in their behavior, seeing in their work, hearing in society at large, in consonance or not in consonance with the will of Allah.

It isn't just words in the Qur'an that allow you to understand that; it is the *adab* of it. There is the *adab* of the average person, people of *dunya* (*ahl al-dunya*). Then there is the *adab* of the people of the *ahl al-dīn* (people of the religion). And then there is the *adab* of the people who are the elect. The *adab* of the people of the world, if it's good, if it is the finest *adab* of the people of the world, these are the people who can speak

beautifully, have knowledge, and have understanding of the different branches of learning and knowledge. They are teachers. They can be good kings, poets, many things. They uplift society. When you add to that the disciplining of the lower self / *naf ammāra*, this is the people of the *dīn*, the people of *akhlaq*. People who take the religion and try to refine their character, to observe the laws of Islam and try to overcome their lower nature, this is the *ahl al-dīn*.

The people of the elect add something else. They keep watch on their hearts. They strive to keep a balance, an equilibrium between the conscious and unconscious aspects of reality, of their life and of their being. They turn their attention deeply inwardly, and they take that knowledge and put it outwardly. The difference between the *muridīn* consists in the quantity and quality of practice and actions. The people of *adab*, the people who gain real knowledge (*arifīn*) have a very high degree of *himma*/aspiration. It would be wonderful if it was a world of people of the *ahl al-dīn*. That's what we have to strive for, people of the *dīn*. But the people who move the world, the people who support that, who direct that Divine Light toward the people of the *dīn* are the people of *khusus*, the people of *tariqah*.

What Allah has given us is certain privilege. It's not a right, but a privilege. They used to tell us that when we are kids about driving: driving is a privilege, not a right. Allah has given us a certain privilege, and that privilege is over other creatures, animals, etc. We have the ability to see beyond, to see over the horizon, to think about the future, to have consciousness of not only our self, but the privilege of using that consciousness to develop insight; to see beyond the obvious, to learn things like the little children who learn things for the first time. These [new] things were heretofore unknown to them. Then they also discover what their effect is on other human beings, and how to use that. If they want attention, they learn how to do that. I'm saying that as a background to start a discussion on a deeper level of *adab*.

Adab is courtesy, behavior, character. It is also something else: it is recognizing and acknowledging reality. It is knowing your own place in the order of things. It is the ability in a moment to take something and put the thing in the right way in the right place. It can be words, an action, or refraining. It is like saying you will give just due to whatever has the right to it. You acquire things in the right way, whether it is knowledge, property, money, fame or name in accordance to the right proportion, in the right circumstances, with the right attitude, in the right character.

That's why you find, even in society today (and it's one of the things which is very disturbing about society today), in certain circumstances, there is a certain formality. If you walk into a court of law, there is a certain formality. That *adab* is because there is a relationship between what is just and what is *adab*. If you uphold that relationship, then it leads you to *taqwa*. This is not fear of God, but awareness of Allah (swt). A person that has this sense of *adab* understands that in the moment things have to be in the right place, the right time, and the right circumstance. You have a responsibility to say the right thing in the right moment, to place things in the right way, to remove the stone from the path. That person is a person who naturally acts, not just with *adab*, but that person is a person of *futuwwah*, spiritual chivalry.

There is nothing greater than that. There is nothing greater than the person who feeds the poor for the love of Allah. As Allah says in Qur'an, "**We feed you for the sake of Allah. No reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.**" (76:9) This is the highest state. A person of *futuwwah* is fair to others, and doesn't expect fairness in return; restrains from causing trouble, gives freely without expectation of receiving. Tirmidhi, a great Sufi, said, "*Spiritual chivalry means that native and foreigner are the same to you.*" This is a very basic Islamic belief, but how many people practice it? A person [of *futuwwah* is one] who loves everyone, doesn't hate anyone. Tirmidhi said:

Love all and hate none. Mere talk of peace will avail you of naught; mere talk of God and religion will not take you far. Bring out all the latent powers of your being and reveal the full magnificence of your mortal self.

Be overflowing with peace and joy, and scatter them wherever you are and wherever you go. Never refuse to help and bless the needy, the poor, the orphan, the widowed, if they come to your door. This is your mission: to serve the people.

This is what Moinuddin Chishti (ra) said to his *murīds* one month before he died. These are the *chevalier* of Tasawwuf. There is no room for selfishness. Your selfishness is the joy of choosing to live that way. Before Islam appears, this tradition exists. The Persian called it the *jaman mardih* or *futuwwah*. It was maintained throughout the Middle East as a very specific training for men especially to be *chevalier*. This was the role of a man, to have chivalry. This is what we need today. We need it today very badly. A person who straps on a bomb and kills himself, a person who is angry at a nation or country like that crazy Pakistani boy, has no *adab*. He has no *futuwwah*—nothing. He doesn't understand anything about Islam—zero, nothing.

A person who develops *adab* and reveres Allah for giving *adab* as a capability of the human being, that person comes to practice *futuwwah*. They have concern for others. They have self sacrifice. They have devotion. They help the unfortunate, people who have no guide and no protection. They are kind to all created beings, not just human beings. They keep their word at the cost of their own face. These are all qualities that lead to a person becoming *insana kamil*. Aside from that, these are the attributes of a true human being. This is the mold that the human being was supposed to be poured into.

Just like the *chevaliers* of old, they have a code of ethics, of morality, a code of conventions, of order, out of which this whole manifestation of *adab* comes. It's not surprising, then (this bit of history people don't like to talk about), that when Islam comes

onto the scene and reaches Europe, many of these *chevalier* became Muslims. They embraced Islam. They found that Islam didn't have the hypocrisy, *astaghfiru-Llāh*, that the Catholic Church had. It is this attitude, this giving, this nobility, this etiquette and *adab* that convinced the Indonesians that Islam was the religion to embrace. Who had this *adab*? Every Muslim? No. Not even just the *Ahl al-Dīn*, but the *Ahl al-Khusus*, the elect people, the people who practiced, who embraced it, and who had yearning to be the best kind of humane people they could be. Eventually, out of that comes things we can talk about later, like the teachings of Ibn Araby, *wahadat wujud* (the unity of being), out of Spain during that period of time. You can take all I said today as history, or as a way of thinking about your own *adab*, your own gratitude, your own ethic.

I'll end with a quote on *akhlaq* from Shaykh Adiya al-Dīn abu al-Najib, a Suhwardi *shaykh*, who used to advise his companions, "*Do not address the people of this path except in the purest of terms. This is because the degree of light in your speech is determined by the light of the heart and the light of the hearing. The light of hearing is determined by the heart's light. Unless the heart is illumined, there is no benefit in seeing; there is no benefit in hearing, and there is no benefit in speaking.*" That's the rule for people to speak to people of the path. You might have an opportunity sometime in the next month or two to speak to someone on the path. You never know. *Asalaamu aleikum.*