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Thursday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Depths of Adab](#)

DVD title: Adab: The Foundation for Gaining Knowledge
Adab for States and Status

To understand a little more of the depth of the subject of *adab* is important because you have to understand the relationship between *adab* and *akhlaq*, *adab* and *tarbiyya*, and *adab* and *ta'alim*, not just *adab* and character development, or *adab* in terms of being a *talib*/student (education). You have to also understand *adab* as a foundation for knowledge, for knowing, for understanding. To be an *alim*, an *arif*, nothing can be achieved without *adab*.

I'll give you an example. If you go to Washington, which we've been doing a lot; and if you go to Capitol Hill, which we've been doing a lot, if you watch the news and you are brought there by the power of fantasy and illusion (called television), what do you find? You find supposedly intelligent people who are acting like ignorant people, who have no *adab*. They ridicule people older than them. They ridicule people younger than them. They are chosen to lead people, but they are there, trying to hold onto their leadership role, and not because they are the most qualified to lead, not because they are the most intelligent or the most devoted and dedicated, not because they are specialists. I understand the argument that they are "of the people," but you see when people are unqualified or uneducated, they don't have *adab*.

There is a relationship between *adab* and education and knowledge; therefore, there is a relationship between *adab* and knowledge, of gnosis, and of *marifah*. I quoted the Suhawardi *shaykh*, Shaykh Najib. He was talking about "*the light of speech is determined by the light in the heart, and the light of hearing is determined by the light in*

the heart.” Another *shaykh*, speaking of the virtue of the Sufi, said, “*To attack a person of higher rank than you is impudence and folly. To attack one who is like you is impropriety. To attack one who is lesser than you is weakness.*” What do you draw from that? Don’t attack anyone! If you have a group of individuals or people who are committed to knowledge, to *adab* as we have been talking about it, then that group of people is in *suhbat*. They are in companionship, in company, but there are degrees of *suhbat*. There is becoming familiar, acquaintance, *marifah*. There is love, *muwadah*; and familiarity, *ulfat*. There is joy in being in the company of others, *ishrat*. And there is *muhabbat*. Finally, when you have all those qualities together, you come to this brotherhood/sisterhood that comes out of this mentality, knowledge, education, acquaintance, and good company.

True *suhbat* can only be realized (even with two people) when their inner feelings, aspirations and commitments are in harmony. This is, of course, not for everybody, obviously. But among the Sufis, the elevation of the Sahabah of the Prophet (sal)—in respect to their knowledge, worship, detachment, trust in Allah and contentment—is not ascribed just to their qualities, but precisely to the superior, excellent quality of their *suhbat*; not to their individual qualities, but to the qualities that come out in companionship. They are called Sahabah, the Companions. What is unique about the companions is that the best qualities of them came out not just as individuals—the Prophet and Umar, the Prophet and Uthman, the Prophet and Ali—but in *suhbat*.

Whatever spiritual degree or knowledge a person may have attained to in the gathering of others, and in the interplay and dialog of human beings, this is when the superiority, the growth and development takes place. You can be a very pious student, study Qur’an, study the teachings of the teacher, but it isn’t *suhbat*. The Sahabah were together for a reason; they had the Prophet Muhammed (sal). It’s not just that you take any two people who are together. Let’s say that a husband and wife are on a spiritual path together. When they first decided to get married, it was all, “I love you, I love you, I love you.”

Kiss, kiss, kiss. “Come to Bedford!” “I’d come to the end of the world with you!” “Oh, thank you!” Kiss, kiss, kiss. It’s like that. They may not match, spiritually, so you have to strive. That becomes the challenge, to show the power and the truth of *suhbat* and to rise to that occasion and to come into resonance (assuming you are a person of your word, of course). People in *tariqah* have to strive to make that *suhbat* real—to be sagacious, worshipful, detached, trusting in Allah, and all these wonderful things—to achieve a degree higher than they could achieve on their own.

There are a lot of sociological and anthropological issues that can be looked at from this perspective. You can look at the way relationships are in other parts of the world, people’s roles; how the women were kept over here and the men did this and that. There was no [spiritual] match; they were being married just to have children and till the fields and this and that. It had nothing to do with the spiritual journey. Often, the man was on the *tariqah* and the woman was pushed off. But we are too enlightened, so now everybody is equal. And it should be that way; but of course people aren’t equal. You have to achieve equality and equity.

You can look at it in terms of organizational management. It can be strictly hierarchical, or it can be values based, part of your *khidma* and *ibāda*, part of your *muhasabat*. But you have to strive with the people you are working with for *suhbat*. We assume you are a person of your word. You are assuming that what you say and the decisions you make are real. For that you have to qualify, just like for any job.

There is a relationship between the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*, the inner and outer aspect of the life of the Sufi. The inner aspect consists of traveling this path and traversing the *maqamat*/stations to eventually come to a level of *baqa*/self-subsistence in or through or with Allah (*sayr-fi-Allah*, *sair-ma-Allah*, *sayr adaniyya*). The outward aspect, *dhāhir*, exists in that courteous, chivalrous individual. This constitutes the development of the attributes of the perfected human being. Those attributes reflect the attributes of Allah.

The outer aspect of life has to reflect that, while a person is traveling inwardly in these stations: travel both inward and outward. Just like the *chevaliers* of old, the chivalrous soldiers, there is a standard bearer. In this case, everyone carries a standard, which is the school of humility, the tradition of *futuwwah*. But in the world today, it is very hard to find.

We have to struggle against modern civilization from destroying the noble human qualities that make a civilization a civilization, that make people civilized, and raise human beings to high levels. Instead, people today are dumbed down, and you see they become gross in their behavior, gross in their language, accusatory, destructive to society. It is always the other, the other. The narrative becomes a narrative of anger, oppression, and complaining, and of course the leaders are without *adab*. They have little knowledge. The ones who have knowledge are now being kicked out of office and are being replaced by ones who are disrespectful, who have no *adab*, who are dirt mongers (not that some of them don't deserve to be kicked out of office).

The people who displayed this *futuwwah* in the way of Prophet Muhammed (sal) were the Sahabah. The Shi'a like to say it was Hazrat Ali (as), and it is a wonderful story about Ali, but the point is we all have the potential of Iman Ali. We remember the story of the man who spit on him, and he was about to slay that man, but he stopped because he wouldn't kill him out of anger. Again, what is this *adab*? Yes, it is related to education. When *adab* is manifest, it is a recognition and acknowledgement of the Reality of Allah, and knowing you are placed in the order of things. That means you have the time, the space, the inclination, the desire, the natural ability, and the commitment to do the right thing, at the right time, under the right circumstances to put things in their place. I was cooking dinner tonight with Grandma.

On Thursday nights we like to work together in the kitchen. Or sometimes on Tuesday nights when the kids get back from their class and Mitra is not there. We have to get

dinner ready, because it's late and they're hungry, especially after all that exercise. We work together very well. We both have the same habits: if you use something, you clean it and put it away. I can wash a dish four times, take the same dish back and use it again. I use a utensil, wash it and put it away. After I use food, I put it in a bag and stick it back in the refrigerator. I don't leave it all out. This is my habit. That's different than leaving everything out until later. It is qualitatively different. It's not just a habit. It is an expression of the *adab* of the kitchen. Now, you can read about it, or because I've said it, it's become codified to some degree.

The idea is that naturally inside of yourself, you would do these things if you were free to do them. And we all have our weak spots. But if you can transfer that kind of order into how you work in the office or relate to your spouse, or the person you work with, or your children, as you put these together, the *adab* of this and that becomes one *adab*. The result is greater than all those parts. But people become self indulgent. They set standards for themselves they know they will fail to meet. They become critical. They want things done the way they do them and not the way anybody else does them. Sometimes, that's correct. When you are teaching someone, you want them to do it in a certain way. But there is an *adab* to that. When you do that, there is a kind of respect that comes along with it.

I can turn to Grandma, who is my elder, and say to her, "Grandma, please make some salad." And she does. She's much more advanced than I am. She won't say, "You do this." She'll say, "Maybe the children will like the many-colored pasta." I will say, "I'm making spaghetti." "Oh, okay." "Do you think they will want tomato sauce or garlic olio?" "Well, garlic is healthy." "Okay." It's like that. No one's trying to prove anything. There is also some *taqwa* in that, a kind of piety. You want things to go right because when they are going right, things turn out right. There is a kind of piety and a kind of concern that you wouldn't want things to go wrong. It comes naturally.

In an Islamic community that is deeply rooted in *adab*, it also means the ability to express things well, to be erudite, to have discipline. The words also have to be put in the proper place. I run spellcheck on my emails, because I was brought up to believe that you should use good language, and spelling is very important. We teach spelling in the school. The kids come home and say, “I got 100 in spelling! I got 98 in vocabulary!” They know the inherent value in spelling things correctly and having good vocabulary. Putting words in their proper place allows you to have multiple levels of meaning, nuance. In Arabic, nuance is very important. This nuance actually resides in the essence of the word *adab*. In Arabic, the imperative or command mode is the same mode used for requesting, without any difference other than the tone of the voice. A command and a request are the same in the way it is structured. It is only in the tone of the voice that you can tell the different. We have examples of that in English, “Really!” “Really?” “Really...” The tone of voice tells you what it means.

Some of the Arabic grammarians would say that the difference is whether one employs one attitude, mode, or tone, over or under the one being commanded or requested. For example, whether one is in a position of authority or a person is the subject of authority. Remember the *adab* about how to speak to someone above you or below you or at the same level? What this implies is that people are aware of their place in the hierarchy. How you use the language also reflects the awareness of your state and status. If you go back to the Rules of the Order, to the rules of how to speak to the *shaykh*, how you act, then you will see that you are aware of your placed in the hierarchy. You find it where else? In nature. How many of the worker bees die for the sake of the hive? Ants will do the same thing. We now live in a time when hierarchy doesn't mean anything.

For example, in Washington, some people in the Senate who have a lot of knowledge are pushed out by people who have no *adab*. Look at what is happening in the Muslim world. The Taliban, ignorant, stupid drug dealers who have no right to call themselves Muslims, let alone human beings, are forcing people to be more ignorant. Their hierarchy is

imposed out of fear. There is no *adab*. They make you bow down to their will. They make you give up things. They may be somewhat correct in certain things; certainly there are many things in the Western media and the Western world that are very corrupt. You recognize that there are corruptive forces; just turn on the television set. It's a no-brainer. There is no *adab*. We live at a time when hierarchy is a taboo, at least the word is. The idea of someone being over someone else is anathema philosophically to the modern, educated person. Of course, they struggle to be in that position; and then someone struggles to bring them off of that position.

But to our predecessors, to people of previous times, it was a sign of good upbringing, to rise [up] based on your knowledge, *adab*, capabilities, and even your "breeding," so to speak. I'm not trying to promote eugenics, but people look at family and upbringing, language and knowledge, means of articulation. When a person rose to a certain place, it was because they deserved to be there, for the most part. Of course, they were many exceptions, but this was the principle. Allah says, "**Are they the same, those who know and those who don't know?**" They are not. The Prophet Muhammed (sal) said, "***I was commanded to treat people according to their stature.***" It doesn't negate a *hadith* where it says that "***people are equal like the teeth of a comb.***" In relation to the Sharī'ah, all people are equal. But in their accomplishments, in their successes, people differ. If those differences would ever cease, then humanity would be in danger.

The Prophet (sal) said, "***You will continue to be healthy as a society as long as you have degrees of excellence. But should you all become the same, you will be destroyed.***"

You see these movements of ignorant people bringing down people who are above them, just for the sake of doing it. This is a sign of the destruction of society. This is a very important *hadith*, because it implies that the leveling of accomplishments (what I call dumbing down), knowledge, and talents of society by its very nature is destructive. But knowledge and talent and capability by its nature, if left to grow, is a sign that there still remains excellence in society.

We live in a sort of nihilistic world where there is less and less *adab*. What is nihilism? It is the belief in nothing (as opposed to the absence of belief.) It's not that you don't have believe; you believe in nothing. Nihilism is you actively believe in nothing. We live in a time when we are divorcing ourselves from the norms of values, virtues, morality and ethic. How can people become anything other than cynics and destructive? Cornell West said, "*When excellence is removed from the schools by dumbing down the students, you are creating functional illiterates and then you are expecting them to run society in the future.*" The people who covet power are not necessarily, or hardly ever, the people who are ethically, morally and spiritually qualified for the offices of power.

So you have to understand that at the root of our Islamic tradition, there is *adab*. At the root of *adab* is knowledge/'*ilm*. That knowledge has to be acquired consciously, intentionally, and painstakingly at the hands of those who know, or at the feet of those who know. That knowledge is a gift from Allah. Everything that we receive spiritually is a gift from Allah—and not just spiritually. Everything is a gift from Allah, specifically to human beings, beginning with Adam and continuing in an unbroken chain to this very day, to this very moment. It behooves us in every generation to gain this knowledge, and strive in the best way we can to understand it and apply it, in the context of society, and society's particular needs, and in the context of our community and our community's needs.

To learn this knowledge, which leads us to *adab*, proper attitudes, proper comportment, proper articulation, which leads us to that awareness of Allah and the Prophet (sal), we have to have *adab* at the outset. To have that, you have to have something to learn and someone to teach you. The true teacher is Allah, and the living teachers and students are sharing a journey of learning and teaching. For the Muslim, this knowledge is not ultimately taken from a human being but from the Maker of human beings, through the

Prophet (sal) who was a man unlike other men, in the same way that a ruby is a ruby but not a rose quartz. There is a history to that which we can get on to some other time.

To be chivalrous, which is the external manifestation of *adab*, requires a lot of discipline. There are up times and down times, but you want your baseline to remain. Try not to be in opposition. Argue less. Prevent the errors in yourself before you try to prevent them in others. Don't criticize the errors of others without trying to correct your own faults. Accept the things others say about you, and try to endure the difficulties that come to you that are caused by others. Use them as a means for overcoming your ego. Be kind to those who are older; be kind to those who are younger. Do good deeds. Give good advice. Accept and invite advice. Love your friends, and try to bear the pains and accusations of one's enemies if necessary. You remember that: it's all in Sulami's book, [The Book of Sufi Chivalry."] It's worth reading and reviewing. I guess that's enough for tonight.

It would be nice if we could say that, after all these years we have been together, [we instilled in our children the sense of being a Sufi]. We work very hard on language; we work very hard on behavior; we work very hard on instilling in our children a sense of responsibility. [But it is responsibility] not just for the world or to make careers for themselves or to get educated, but also a sense of being a Sufi. I have failed in that, and I'm sorry. No, really, for the most part I have failed with the children. But not always: we have some of them sitting here. But times have changed. The modern world, power, and influence can be couched in all kinds of good acts. But unless you attack the real forces of evil in this world, with goodness and with intellectual capability, and articulate properly, and try to be in the right place at the right time, it is a continuous uphill battle.

We are who we are. I think there was a lot of unspoken fear or resistance at one time, to speak about the realities of Islam and religion, and the way a person should act and

behave and their responsibilities, and their duty to Allah, their duty to the Prophet, their duty to their parents and community, and then from that, their duty to their world.

You remember those great Islamic explorers, those who left Spain, like Abul Hasan ash-Shadhilī (ra), and went to other parts of the world. There were only a couple of them compared to the rest of the population. Most people stay where they are. There was only one Ibn Battuta, only one Al Kindi. There weren't forty or a hundred of them. There are always pioneers and people reaching out. But those people were so strong that in their going out, they never lose their center, their knowledge, their yearning for truth. They never lose their teaching, their Islam, or their Tasawwuf. What we see is, after a year or two or three or four or five (you know my classic example), you forget it is Wednesday. That's a fearful thing. Do you know what I'm saying? Am I being too subtle? Those people were people of very strong *adab*, very deep character, very deep knowledge. They qualified. What does it take to qualify? *Asalaam aleikum*.