

June 3, 2010

Thursday



Title: [Hilm and Wara: Calm and Cautious](#)

DVD title: Hilm and War'a: Calmness and Caution
Staying within the Borderlines of Lawful

Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. Last night we were talking about... (reads in Arabic). I ended talking about... (reads in Arabic), and about *war'a*. *War'a* means to be cautious, to be careful. First we talked about being calm, gentleness in the face of ignorance. I'm speaking about this as a lead-in to the months of Rajab, Shabān, and Ramadān. These subjects are often talked about in a superficial way (which is important too), but the question the Sufi has to constantly ask him or herself (or should) is how is it possible that you say or put yourself forth as a *mu'min*/believer, as a Muslim; you believe in the Qur'an and you say you believe in Allah and the Prophet; and of course you are a good Muslim (in the true sense of the word, one in submission); and yet, you or I, we continue to commit offenses?

Offenses on a superficial level means sins, but offenses also means to be offensive, to offend our self, our God, our fellow man or woman, to offend knowledge itself, because Allah is Knowledge. Knowledge is not separate from Allah. It means to offend a sense of duty or responsibility or patience. The question is how can we disobey Allah? Not in the sense of disobeying somebody, but how do we call ourselves one thing, and then allow ourselves to be out of harmony or synchronization with what we know is true and good? How do we disregard the commands from the *'ālam al-amr*/the world of command?

To understand *war'a*, to be cautious and careful from a truly Sufic-Islamic point of view is not that you just stay away from what's unlawful. That's wonderful and great; one can do that. But it is the feeling of restraining yourself, of abstaining. It is the pursuit of abstaining and being careful. It is the pursuit of trusting in Allah. This is *war'a*, being cautious. It is not just abstaining from sins or wrong actions, but it is the feeling. In a sense, it's beyond *taqwa*, if you translate it as fear as opposed to piety. It's really avoiding the doubtful. That means being able to have the courage and the knowledge and the patience to look at what is doubtful, or accept what is doubtful in one's own attitude and behavior, and to avoid it.

If a person has *taqwa*, they avoid very well perhaps what is unlawful according to Shar'iah, Torah or Injil. Such a person doesn't look at what is unlawful, doesn't touch what is unlawful, doesn't eat what is unlawful. If a person has *war'a*, they stay away from what is doubtful because of the apprehension of committing an offense. It is another level of attentiveness. If a person is not careful, then you slip into that state where you are not in harmony. You are out of phase with what you might call Allah (swt): those attributes and qualities of Allah. That in itself, being out of phase with what is in harmony, supportive, and what is eventually liberating is a very terrible state for a human being, and a terrible end for a person.

If you see death as a passageway, and in every religion you have a concept of some kind of heaven and hell, paradise, or upper and lower worlds, then what is out of phase, disharmonious and destructive by nature becomes the hell. We know how we feel when we are "off," when what we say is not consistent with what we think. We let little things bother us, and we are care-less. And [we know] how we feel when someone else is care-less about us, or cares less about us. This is just a small, human analogy. When you are climbing a mountain, and you are walking on a very narrow trail in the mountain, just like I remember when we lived in this village with Tiki. There were two villages: Neri and Kotli. Neri was here, and there was a big valley, and Kotli was over there. Neri was

on the road to Tibet, but Kotli was just goat trails. If you wanted to get to the Kotli village, you had to walk on these goat trails. You would go up a thousand, maybe fifteen hundred feet from the road – but it was actually at 7000-9,000 feet – just to get to the villager. The trail was only so wide, with a straight drop down. If you are walking on the edge of an abyss, the rock you are stepping on could move and you could fall. The villagers run and run up and down in their bare feet. Or if you go into a building, go to the roof, and there is a wall there, if you stand on the edge of the wall...it's like that.

The Prophet (sal) said, “***One who gets closer to the borderline between the lawful and the unlawful is likely to fall into the unlawful.***” It's like that. *War'a* comes here. The example might be in day-to-day life experiences, relationships, but the spiritual aspect of it is an attitude of caution, a sense of caution. Then of course there is arrogance that goes along with it. “Ya Shaykh, don't worry. I'm an expert at that. I've done this before.” You say, “Watch out. Be careful of this person. Have you thought about this?” “No, I'm an expert.” It doesn't do you any good after you fall; you will be in pain for the rest of your life. To walk on the safe place is the most important thing. What does it mean? It means to walk where you are safe and secure. We know the root of that word is *taslim*, *islam*, safe and secure. It is not just the religion. It means safe and secure, and it also means submission. It takes a lot of freedom from the ego to submit. Submission leads to trust, and trust leads to a sense of contentment, patience and perseverance.

All these attributes of Allah (swt) start unfolding to you. Once you go through one doorway, the next one comes. If you are safe and secure, you won't be self-absorbed; you'll be seeing others. You'll be more compassionate and merciful; you'll be patient and persevering; your *iman* will be stronger, along with your sense of justice. You can go all through the Ninety-Nine Names of Allah (swt), once you open that door to safety and security. That's why it is called Islam—not because it is a religion. So you avoid the borderlines. We know what happens: those young people in Iran walked too close to the

border and got put in jail. They weren't cautious or careful. It was the same thing with those girls in Korea that just got released—border lines.

You should know here you are walking. You go to a new city and feel you can walk anywhere. Then someone says, “You walked there? Oh, I would never go into that neighborhood! You walked from WHERE to U Street? At what time? I would never do that!” Ignorance, no caution, no carefulness. Abstaining from the unlawful is one thing; avoiding what is doubtful and dangerous is an attitude. You have to ask questions. You have to know where you are. “Oh, I thought I'd walk over there. Is that safe?” “No, it's not.” “Oh, thank you very much.” I don't mean to be so simplistic, but believe me, every day we have this situation with our thoughts, with our relationships. In a *hadith*, there is attributed this saying to the Prophet (sal) by Sidna Ali. He said,

The Messenger of Allah (sal) taught us the following: we have to be gentle and calm and patient. We shouldn't get angry easily.

Not that we shouldn't get angry, just not easily. (Thank God.) We have to be calm when facing some disturbance originating from the ignorance, and handle the situation with patience. At the time of the Prophet (sal), what was the *masjid*? It was nothing, really—a sand floor, maybe a wall. They would just enclose a portion of the desert and make it a *masjid*. The floor would be sand, and outside would be sand also. There is a story about once a Bedouin came to the *masjid* and felt the urge to pass water. He got up and decided to respond to the call of nature in the sand by the wall inside the *masjid*. Everyone around the Prophet (sal) got very upset. He said, “Don't get angry at him; he doesn't know the proper *adab*. Teach him; he's new to Islam and doesn't know the requirements of cleanliness.” This is a retelling of the story, but that's basically it.

That's an example of *hilm* that we talked about last night. What is *hilm*? It is calmness: being knowing, calm and gentle; and winning the hearts of people through *tarbiyya*,

through example. We educate our children hopefully in the same way. When a child makes a mistake in Montessori school, do we get angry at them? No, we give them the lesson again. In regular school, you might say, “Come here. This is what you did, now try it this way.” You teach the person the correct way to do something.

The Prophet (sal), when he was descending from the Isra Miraj, saw a group of people. The group did not allow him to join them. That was called the Assembly of the Forty Virtuous Men. That’s not a true story. Who are the Assembly of the Forty? You have all these stories people try to tell to explain things they don’t understand. We tell a story that is not correct to ourselves; to explain away our lack of calmness, patience, gentility. It is always after the fact. When a situation comes along, you don’t say, “I’m about to become not calm.” We get upset and we explain it away. I try to do it at least 20 times a day. Who would these forty people be who wouldn’t accept the Prophet (sal) in their gathering?

If we look at the Miraj, there are a lot of reliable *hadith* concerning this subject of what actually happened when the Prophet (sal) left this world and traveled to the seven heavens. Everyone wants to make it a metaphor. They want to say it’s an apocryphal story. But not only is it true, from my humble point of view, but it is scientifically true. Now we know we can call it quantum tunneling. No one knew at that time that you (or physical matter) could be simultaneously in two places. I’m going to talk about how does a person qualify for this? What is the character of such a person and what are the steps? I don’t want to get into the Arabic of the whole thing, but when you use words in Arabic like *habiballah*, the word is structured to tell you what tense it is, what form, whether it is feminine or masculine, or whether you are referring to an event that hasn’t happened, but you are speaking about it as if it has happened.

How can I give an example of that? You say, “the disgraced person,” but it hasn’t happened yet. But your *kashf* knows, or there is some indication that such a person is

disgraced. But it hasn't happened in time yet. In Arabic, there is a way of saying that. Do you know how many people know that among Arabic speakers? They don't know the difference between a verb noun and an adjective. It says something, but they don't understand the nuance of how the language is structured. If that's true about language, what about perception? It takes a very calm mind, a person of knowledge and wisdom, not just to learn the grammar of something. Why is it described in this way? Why is an event that did not happen described as if it has already happened? Apply that to the Isra Miraj, or the time the Buruq put his foot on the ground at the Dome of the Rock. The footprint is still there. I've seen it many times. And it all takes place in the blink of an eye.

Who is it that can do that? How does a person become *murād*, called by Allah? Even you can tell the difference whether he is called by Allah or calling to Allah, linguistically. How does he become Rasūla akram? Nebi mutharram? The 'taw' is very important. It indicates something. I'm using language now to express something, and language has its subtleties to it. We'll never understand it, unless we can approach it with gentility and calmness. We'll never understand it unless we can approach these things cautiously and calmly. Now, who are the Forty, the Assembly of Forty, the Awliyāllah? In every age there are Forty. They exist as servants of Allah (swt). In every age: in the age of Sidna Musa (as), in the age of Sidna Ibrahim (as), in the age of Sidna Isa (as), in the age of Prophet Muhammed (sal). Even in this age, when there is no prophet like Sidna Musa (as) or Prophet Mohammed (sal), there are 176,000 messengers. In every age, there are these Forty. I don't want to get so esoteric tonight, but if you look through all the spiritual texts, you will see that the number 40 is very important.

The Companions, those who accompanied the Prophet; the Twelve who accompanied Prophet Isa; and those who accompanied Sidna Musa (as) and his brother Harun (as), these companions are not companions of people. They are companions of the truth.

They are pillars of the truth. If we are sincere seekers of knowledge and pious people, not necessarily just in terms of the form, then we have to try to be in the company of the Forty. The number is not so terribly important. That is to say, we have to be in the company of those people who are responsible. A sincere seeker—Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist—is always seeking out the knowledgeable individual; always seeking out the place. When I was young I went to SWOT. Why? I was seeking out wise people. I met a young man on Mount Athos in Greece. He wanted very much to know a Naqshbandi. He became a Greek Orthodox monk, and on Mount Athos he went to all the caves looking for wisdom. But he couldn't find a wise person. When he was in New York, he was interested in Sufism but didn't know anyone. So he became Greek Orthodox, and all he heard was orthodoxy. Surprise, surprise. They had the beards; they were living in the cave, but he didn't find what he was looking for. I don't know if he ever did.

When you find the path up that mountain, inside yourself, you realize that what you have been told are the commands of Allah (swt) in very practical, harmonious ways. The Prophet doesn't utter false information; he tells you about the orders of Allah. He conveys the messages of Allah. Why? Because he is the Messenger of Allah, be he Sidna Musa or Isa or whoever. That young man couldn't find a person that could transmit the truth. Why? He just found people who told him what to do. I'm not saying that there is no such person on Mount Athos. I'm telling you that he couldn't recognize the person whether he was there or not, because it's the same truth. The Qur'an says, **"If the Messenger of Allah had said something against the will of Allah would have been destroyed, his life vein cut off."** That's why we study. Anyhow, it's a long way around.

We have to be gentle, calm, have good character. Not just because it is the right thing to do. When you go to the store in the summer (because there are many people here), you find a combination lock is put on the store. And because we need to remember the combination, we write it on the post right by the door! In a way, it's a very mystical

thing to do: the truth is always in front of your face. You just have to know to look for it. That's the formula: to be calm, be gentle, and take your time. Every time you don't, the truth gets obfuscated. You don't see it, and you blind yourself. When you feel in danger, you go look for a safe and secure place. We try to avoid the things that harm and hurt us. We put on a seatbelt in the car. That was hard for some of us to do, who grew up without seatbelts. But now, there is no question. We do it. Thanks to modern technology, if we don't, we are driven crazy by little beeps.

We avoid the things that hurt us, but not a lot of things that we should avoid because we are careless. The month of Rajab comes upon us soon, the 13th. This is where we can start to become very cautious and careful. I suggest that we think of these three months as special. We will talk about the Nights of Light of those three months (Isra Miraj, Nifsu Shaban, and Laylatul Qadr), but not from a ritualistic point of view. Take it as "beeps" (to remind you) and look at the handwriting on the wall. Truly, every day, something will open up to you.

I got very distracted today because I started diving into the semantics and linguistics of Arabic. Just the "taw" added to certain words. I thought, my God, look at the grossness of what is going on in the world today. We talk about things like peace, understanding, and tolerance. We don't realize that we are talking about something on a very, very gross level, and we can't even achieve that. I've told the story so many times about the British Lord who sat down with the Jews and Palestinians in 1946, "Why can't you two get along like good Christian gentlemen?" What an idiot! We are operating on such a gross level in the world. And you see what happens. You see the mentality. It's another low in human mentality. If we believe that Allah is merciful and compassionate, and there is justice and truth for everyone as a possibility, then we had better affirm it and practice it as much as we can.

I was thinking today about the new viral interest on YouTube called “war porn.” War porn is video shot by soldiers, mostly, of executions. I was thinking of the children here. Where could you go? In a strange way, maybe the Chinese have it right. This is the third time I have come to this conclusion this week for various different reasons. I said it to the Legislative Fellows group, about the value of having a beneficent ruler who controls with love and kindness. You could jump over a lot of the bad stuff in the world, but where do you go? To Oman, or China, and laud the fact that they block Google? Really. I have very rarely in my life not had a solution to a problem in my head, or known what could be done to solve a problem. I’ve been stumped on the one in Israel for twenty years. I get close, then something happens. I know the answer, and then something like this week happens, and the whole paradigm shifts.

The question we have to ask as Sufis and Muslims is why is the paradigm shifting, and where is it not shifting, and how to I attach myself to that? How do I hold on to the hem of Rasūlallah, or by whatever name or form you want to call it. That’s why you have to be cautious. That is why you have to have *hilm* and *war’a*: calmness and caution, because everywhere you look, it’s not there. It used to be that such and such a person, or this group of people were fighting a war. Sometime it was the poor guys from the South and a contingent of black guys, and every once in a while a rich person. How many people were killed in Vietnam? 60,000. How many from Harvard were killed? 124. These are the people who fought the wars, and everyone else was unaffected by it. Now, everyone is not only fighting the wars, but vicariously killing people, and enjoying the thrill.

We have a lot of work to do, both in our secular work and in our personal spiritual work. I remember, I used to calculate the cycles of wars, starting with the civil war. I found out that I was going to be the right age at the time of a war, and I was. It was in my mind from the time I was 12. Along with that, I was very concerned with spirituality, obviously. Are our children that concerned with spirituality? Are our children naively

thinking they can just have a profession, get a job, and everything is going to be okay, because we are of the elite? We could be Harvard graduates. We don't have to serve. Most of us are clever enough to know how to get out of it, but you are never out of it now, because on Facebook, the Internet—all this is happening. The world is becoming more and more corrupted, and the level of morality and ethics is down. We have a lot to do this Rajab, this Shabān, and this Ramadān.

I know the spiritual answer; but I don't know how to protect the physical body from the horrors of what is happening in the world, and what can happen and probably is going to happen. If you plan a trip to North Carolina in the next week, by the time you get there, the oil (from the Gulf oil spill) may have reached the shores there. Now we are planning for disaster. Want to plan a vacation? Maybe you should go to the West Coast. This is very, very serious. We can sit here in our little space ship and pray that it would leave the ground and go to Andromeda, but it is not going to. We can, spiritually, go into *muraqabah* and leave this place. Many people have been jailed, imprisoned, tortured, and have become enlightened in the process. But when you put that number against the number who have suffered and who have not attained, it's the 124 against 60,000.

I don't want to be a harbinger of bad news; I want to be a harbinger of hope. If we are going to have hope, we have to change ourselves; and we have to figure out how we can affect the global community we are a part of spiritually. Now we are really down to the nitty gritty spiritual issues. There is wanton murder without worrying about prosecution, like Blackwater, and the rumor is that BP may be hiring some of those people. We are down to the nitty gritty moral and ethical issues of humanity. It's very serious. We can go to Peace Café and talk about peace, and lobby Congressional representatives, and do the good work we do in Oman and Central Asia, but do we have the timeframe for it to shift? How do we change the mentality of millions of people? Palestine and Israel is not the issue; it's a symptom of the disease. You have to change millions and millions of

people's mentality. I know how to do it spiritually, but it's that transition to move from the spiritual to the physical which is a very difficult thing to do. *Asalaam aleikum.*