

June 4, 2010

Khutbah

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: Slavery and Freedom

DVD title: Remembering Allah Morning and Night
Having a Consciousness of Freedom
Tafsir on 'āyāt from Suratu-d-Dahr

Opening duas. Allah (swt) reveals to us in the Holy Qur'an:

This is a reward for you. Your endeavor and time upon this earth has found acceptance. Even We have revealed to you the Qur'an, a revelation; so submit patiently to the Lord's command and obey not of them, any guilty one or disbeliever. Remember the name of your Lord in the morning and the evening, and worship Him [a portion] of the night, and glorify Him through the livelong night. Lo, these [people] love fleeting life, and put behind them the remembrance of a grievous thing. (76:22-27)

This subject of remembering Allah morning and night is tied to an understanding that our consciousness and attitude have everything to do with what comes to us. The actions we have today will determine what we have tomorrow. Hopefully, in continuation of some of the things I have been discussing, one realizes that the real servant of Allah is one who has, through a lot of effort and struggle and burdens at times, at times thinking the burdens were very heavy and never-ending, the real servant of Allah is one who wants nothing and really cannot serve anyone other than Allah.

This person sees service to their family, brothers and sisters, humanity, children, parents, and people they love as service to Allah, and really sees that in the moment. In a sense, we have come to the point where we don't even have the consciousness or awareness that there is a burden in that service; you just think that it is only Allah. A tree grows, and

goes to sleep in the wintertime. It produces fruit, and the deer come and they eat it. It is part of the natural cycle of things. We human beings have lost sight of the natural cycle of things. We see birth and growth and death, and there are certain biological cycles we are aware of. But we have lost sight of the natural cycle of things and natural attitudes. Allah has given us a choice. In fact, one could make a case that maybe this is the real punishment of falling from the state of Adam (as). Everyone, along with him, including the birds and animals, come into a different state out of the paradisaical state of perfection. You might say that this situation is the falling. Now you have to remember, [where before] everything was happening naturally. There was one instruction given (not 450,000), and everything else was provided for. They didn't follow that one instruction because they had choice.

Anyway, you can make a case for the fact that everything else has its natural cycles, but we have all this choice and this is where we mess up. We mess up our lives, our environment. We have to re-learn. We have to learn how to remember Allah. [We are not truly free] unless we are committed, and truly [believe] our best role is to be a servant, an *abd* to that truth; that we accept the truth, and we cannot stand being unaware or unconscious anymore of the presence of Allah. We just don't want to keep having these conflicts or the results of our forgetfulness. We would like to experience the freedom that we find in nature. I don't think that we are free just because we can walk on the earth, and the tree has to stay where it is. I don't think we are free just because we can choose to do bad things. It seems to be conflicted to say that a servant or slave is free, but it is. A person is free, when one is so much in service to the truth, to what is good and right. That is freedom.

Can we really be free of the questions of our own self, and about our motivations? I think we should see, realistically, that most of us, even in this moment are not free. There is a subtext, a narrative going on in our minds. Maybe we spend an awful lot of time suppressing and avoiding it, fearing it. What's going to happen to me? If we have

confidence in our *muraqabah*, in our *iman*, in our *islam*, in our *shuyukh* and our *shaykh* and in what is good, then we should be free. The way that confidence comes is really to free yourself of yourself. We are slaves, no doubt about it. We are slaves to our expectations. “Oh, being a slave of Allah is bad! That’s being a slave!” You are a slave right now. We are slaves to our expectations, our minds, our history, our culture and education; to our fears, doubts, and anxieties. We spend an awful lot of time in those chains.

In Qur’an, Allah says, “**For those who have covered up, We have made ready chains for them, an iron collar, and a furious fire.**” (76:4) Different people get hot in different ways. Some people scream and yell, some people boil inside, and some people just simmer. A “furious fire” is not something after death. What are those iron collars and chains? Certainly they are signs of enslavement. That’s the image you get when someone is in chains with an iron collar. This is not jewelry. Maybe rap jewelry, and they are in chains also. We are enslaved to many things. And we project it into our future, and see that if we are slaves to our doubts, fears, expectations, identity, our consciousness, we remain with this collar upon us and chain around us, that we put there or chose not to take off. After all, the future is an extension of our past and present. We have to make some very important changes.

To be *abdallah*, means to be a slave in the present, right now, to Allah, to the truth. If you are a servant to those Attributes of Allah (swt), then you are an *abdallah*. The totality of the unity of the absoluteness that IS, if we care to look and to see, then we can be in that state of trust. Everyone is a slave to something, and if we don’t create that relationship and servitude to that from which we came and to Whom we return, then we will bind and enslave ourselves to other than Allah and other than the truth. Since most of us don’t recognize the full truth, don’t see the test to overcome our fear, don’t trust...what do we protect?

We protect our nails, so they don't get broken; our teeth by brushing them. Think about the things you protect. I'm not saying these are wrong. You put on a helmet when you ride a bike; you put the seatbelt on. You protect your body. We are very conscious about protecting ourselves. We protect our reputations, our ideas, our control over things, our position. We protect ourselves from criticism, even critique. Think about all the things you protect yourselves from. Some do it with a big smile on their face, [and people think,] "That person can't do anything wrong." Others do it with a snarl, and it makes everyone stay away from them, but they are protecting themselves. You become a slave to something other than Allah. What's so important about our nails, our hairdo, our position? What's so important about our attitude that we already have, if we don't match it up with something greater?

In this *sūrah* (#76), Allah says it's not because of the state of mind, or *taqwa*, and sense of the meaning from this that there can exist on earth something greater. He talks about the springs and fountains in paradise, which are metaphors for what will satisfy us. In other words, Allah (swt) is telling us that yes, it may be in actuality; but also it represents the epitome of everything that would satisfy you. It would be the sweetest milk, the most beautiful river, the most beautiful flowers, the most perfect people, the best friends, a place and time without fear. You can spend eternity in a state of perfection, where all the things you have to protect yourself against in this world, you don't have. There is no need for that, no conniving, no planning, no talk to this person this way, or that person that way, or be careful with this or that. There is none of that any more.

We spend so much time negotiating communication, with our clients, employees, fellow workers, husbands, wives, children, brothers and sisters, strangers on the street, with institutions and governments. That all goes away, so Allah gives us these images, a perfect description of perfection. Family, name, popularity, financial success—they too can be a metaphor for greater satisfaction, if we pursue them *fī sabīli-llāh*. But they are not ends in themselves. We know that because they end. Once we have submitted to

Allah, once we have *tafwid*, reliance on Allah, we can be like a conduit that those rivers of paradise flow through, that those beautiful flowers are a statement of, that the refreshing milk flowing from the fountains are. People can refresh themselves from our fountain, if we can get the fountain working. Whichever way Allah (swt) wants us to be, we can be satisfied with, because our will and His Will become one.

The idea is that these springs of paradise exist in our own heart, and they are ready to be uncovered and expanded and drunk from, especially when other things are not available to us—wealth, material things. Just think about all the pious people in this world who have nothing, who live in this world with tremendous burdens; but in their soul, they are at peace. In fact, if you look at the teachings of Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili, especially the Darqawi teachings, they are talking about the *faqir*, the *fuqara*, the impoverished people, people who have chosen to have nothing, embraced that nothingness, and have love of Allah and they are satisfied. Some of us in this room cannot image being satisfied with nothing.

There was a brief period of time in my life when I sat in a cave and didn't have anything... with me. But I knew I had something somewhere else. That was the problem. I could always come back to the United States, but I got a little taste of nothing. When I was in the ashram, whatever you were fed, that's what you had. Whatever you brought with you, you ran out very soon. I ate my bag of nuts and dried fruit too fast. I knew there was an endless spring of dried nuts and fruit somewhere in the world. You have chapatti, some dahl or a little potato three times a day. All of a sudden, the simplicity hits you. This is fine. Just like in Ramadan, it hits you: not eating is fine. It's okay. In fact, it's easy. The concept of expanding this state of submission or reliance is an idea that is bringing us to the sense of dying before we physically die.

Practically, it means we have to expose ourselves and be vulnerable until such a time when there is nothing left but that which allows us to see Allah, until the last atom or

molecule has its power released from it, and we see light from that perspective. In that sense, if we are all enslaved and all have some type of disability, then we all have to be rehabilitated in some way. So this is a rehabilitation center. It starts with how we act outwardly with each other. Some of us can stand and say we haven't made much progress with that. It works inwardly to the core and center of our being, our heart, and some of us can say, "I know the core of my heart pretty well." If we don't fulfill our capabilities or try to fulfill our promises to Allah and one another, then we find ourselves in a very terrible conflict that leads us to *nifāq*. It's a gap between who we really are and who we can really be, who we desire to be; where we put our will, and where our desire take us; who are we really, and how do we act really.

If you come up with the conclusion that who I am really is a miserable, terrible, horrible person, you miss the point. Then you are saying that Allah made an imperfect being, that Allah made a mistake. It is such an ego trip, just pure ego. Until you hate your ego, *nafs ammāra*, you cannot free your ego to rise. You cannot make *nafs lawwama*. If you cannot achieve *nafs lawwama*, where you are constructively (painfully) critical of your own self, you can't get to *nafs mutamainna*. If you say, "Well I don't care," that's not true. The only way you wouldn't care is if you weren't miserable at times, if you didn't drive yourself crazy at times. There are two ways you can do that: you can be brain dead or you can be free. The rest of the time you can lie to yourself. I don't know many people who don't know they are lying to themselves.

I think that Allah's Hand is over everything. I went through about five different ideas for the topic today. I usually base it on something I said before, which makes it a little easier for me. Then I update it and talk in a slightly different way. Today I kept coming back to this, so I thought, what am I fighting this for? So I submitted to this subject. The first time I talked about this in the *khutbah* was 16 years ago. I could say, "Unfortunately, we haven't gotten very far," or "Fortunately, it comes around again." I'll take the latter, but I think it's one of the reasons I resisted it. Then I realized that this is exactly what I've

been talking about in the last couple of weeks anyway, in another way. You could say, “Shaykh, you always say you talk about the same thing over and over again.” And I do. But maybe it means something different.

There is a distance between what we promise ourselves and what we deny ourselves in terms of our spiritual life. There is a distance between our outer conflicts and our inner peace. There is a distance between our inner conflict and our inner peace. I don’t doubt that everyone has good intentions, but you can watch and see what blocks your good intentions and causes a distance between what you hope for and what is, and where the trust levels are or are not. If we are attentive and sensitive enough, we would really fear the results of being hypocrites, *munifiqūn*. We can try very hard to live as a true, full being with a strong identity, with a deep belief, abiding faith, and with submission and trust in Allah no matter what; and we will succeed if we make that our intention every day. The first thing we are going to do is fail. The second thing we will do is succeed. You make this intention, “I am going to be calm today,” then you get up and stub your toe. “Ah, that’s really a good stub! One of the best toe stubs I’ve ever had.” You can start to make progress with that or not.

I told you, I promised myself that every time I got up from my chair, I was going to do my exercise. Yesterday, I did it absolutely totally faithfully. I could feel my muscles getting stronger again. Today, three times I caught myself not doing it. The last time was 5 minutes to 1:00 pm. Mitra called me and said, “Are you not going to pick us up?” I lost track of time, thinking *dhuhr* was at 1:30. I prepared the *khutbah*, but forget it was Friday. This makes perfect sense to anyone over the age of 60 in this room. What did I do? I should have stopped and done it, even though I was a few minutes late. But I seized the excuse—no it wasn’t an excuse. It was a habit. I seized the habit. I wasn’t making an excuse. I did want to do it, but I didn’t think of it. I ran out the door, and forgot. Yesterday, I was reminding myself every time my feet hit the ground and I was standing vertically. That was enough to remind me. Today, it wasn’t enough to remind

me. Because I stubbed my toe, it made it harder. So, you will excuse me for a minute... (Shaykh does some of his calisthenics and the proceeds with the *khutbah*). You have to seize the moment.

There's a verse in Qur'an that warns us. As with most verses in Qur'an that warn us, it also inspires us. It urges us to take a good look at our relationship between what we say and what we do. Certainly, within the context of our *niyyat*, sometimes our intention can be good, but it appears that we are saying one thing and doing another. This *'āyat* refers to that and tells us how we think. **“And give food... (out of love of Him) ... to the poor, the orphans and the captives.”** (76:8) You see a poor person, and immediately you think this. You see an orphan, and immediately you think this. Do you understand? Immediately. When these verses came to the Prophet Muhammed (sal), there was a very specific situation, but they don't lose their applicability when we explore them.

This particular verse refers to a vow that Imam Ali (ra) took. He was having a problem, and asked the advice of the Prophet (sal). The Prophet (sal) asked him to fast for three days because out of constriction/qabd, comes bast. He asked him to fast for three days to find the essence of his problem in its opposite. Imam Ali, with his whole family, undertook this fast. They possessed very little, as did most of the Sabaha. Hazrati Fatima baked five loaves of very coarse barley bread to break the fast at sunset. You remember this story.

At the time of the breaking of the fast, a poor man came to the door, and Imam Ali gave his bread to him, as did Hasan and Hussein, and Hazrati Fatima. On the second day, an orphan came and the same thing happened. On the third day, just as they were about to break their fast, a prisoner of war came on his way home, and he needed provisions. In Islam, no prisoner of war was kept for more than three days before some judgment was passed on him, whether he was to be kept or

freed. That night, Hazrat Ali visited the Holy Prophet (sal) and explained why he looked so weak and why his face was so thin, and why he had no energy.

This is when this verse came to the Prophet (sal), as a result of something, someone acting *fi sabīli-LLāh*. He did it because of his pure nature. He, himself, was *masūm*, a pure being. But did the trials end? No. Who joined him? He didn't say, "Hassan, Hussein, break yours in half. I'll give him all of mine. We'll have something and he'll have something." That's natural. Wouldn't you want to do that for your children? You wouldn't want your children to go hungry, but he was teaching them a greater lesson. I don't know that I could teach that lesson, and say to my children, "Don't eat. We're giving it to the poor people. Don't eat for three days." I know my children would be better people if I could do that.

Imagine the character of those people. Most of the Sahabah had been poor their whole lives. You'd think it would be harder for them to give the little they had away, but it was easier for them. The more you have, the harder it is to get rid of it and give it away. The more you hold on to it. This is the lesson we have to learn today. We have to look at the purity of these people, in this case, the Ahl al Bayt. The giving is not just because it's good to give and you will get a reward. Anything that you do that is good is for yourself, and anything you do that is wrong is against yourself. The giving up of what we like or feel comfortable with, our "comfort zone..." What the heck is comfort zone? Is it 15 miles an hour? I don't know what comfort zone is, or comfort food. What the heck is comfort food? Is there uncomfortable food? Greed makes you uncomfortable. If you eat a whole table of comfort food, you will not be comfortable! I love mashed potatoes and gravy, that's comfort food for me. Here's a big mound of it! You will not be comfortable after eating it. Greed!

When we die, obviously we become detached from something we are very attached to, called life, this body and everything around it. It stands to reason that we should not

become too habituated to it, either. If we do, we will not die very peacefully. When we give, we should give for the sake of Allah, and not only for all the reasons that it is good for us. And pure giving is good. Allah (swt) said, “**Feed only for the face of Allah. We do not want any reward from you, nor any thanks.**” (76:9) There is no reward and no thanks because feeding for the face of Allah, the countenance of Allah, the sake of Allah is purity in action. There is no expectation of anything. Imam Ali (ra) and his family did not expect to see any of those people again. “Stop by again tomorrow, we’ll give you some more bread.” They just acted with that purity, and they were cleansed. This is how we can understand *at-tazkiyya*, *zakat* and *sadaqa*.

This is not a story about charity. It’s a story about actions, love, and thoughts that come from decency and humanity and kindness, and a sense of becoming one with Allah (swt). There is no end to these examples. There is no end to the pain and suffering we get if we backbite, and if we are selfish and malicious. It’s easy to get forgiven for our slips and mistakes, and things that come from our habits. But if we are purposefully selfish, purposefully backbiting and malicious, even if it is out of fear to protect this self, this body, then we have a problem.

Tomorrow is going to be the result of today. If you allow yourself to accept the guidance, the happiness, and the love that comes flowing to you from the *shuyukh*, the *shaykh*, your family, and those who love you; if you accept that, tomorrow will be a more loving day. Be patient. Watch yourself. Watch out for yourself. Trust those Allah has entrusted the message to, even though it may not make sense sometimes. Don’t forget to be patient in the face of Allah. *Asalaamu aleikum. Du’ās.*

SECOND KHUTBAH *Du’ās.* Allah, we have known people who have passed this week, and we ask You for protection of their souls and to give them a place to reflect upon their lives. We have among us those who are ill. We ask You, Allah, to heal them so they may serve You better. We know those who this week are having challenges, and are

grateful to you for meeting those challenges. O Allah, help us to think and act more as an *ummah* as we come in *jamat* together, not just in prayer, but for our meetings and for the serving of our children, for the gathering and appreciation for the guidance and talents and knowledge You have given to our teachers, and for the skills and the talent of our children, as we will see again tonight. As we gather together to prepare meals for one another, and for our neighbors who are ill; as we gather together to gather the right words, to spread them to other people, whose hearts are in need, and who are seeking for what we have found, O Allah (swt) we ask You for blessings, because You are the Best to aid us in all these things. You are the One Who succors us, and You are the One Who forgives us when we are wrong. You are the Best of those, and You are our Mercy. You are Mercy, Allah, and therefore You are full of mercy for us. You are the Provider, so everything that comes, comes from You, Allah. You are the Guide on our journey, even though we may think we know where we are going, and we have a good sense of direction. You are the One Who will keep us on the straight path, Allah. You are the One Who kept the hands of the oppressors away from us, so grant us a fair wind in accord with Your Knowledge, wafted upon the treasures of Your Mercy and transport us by the conveyance of Your generosity, peace and well being. O Allah, make order easy for us; lift afflictions from us; make our faces shine with Your Light on the day of resurrection. Make us be among Your Companions and friends, O Allah (swt). *Amin.*
Du'ās.