



Traversing the Corridor of Time and Space: Isra Miraj

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Bismillaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Allahumma inna nasalaka mujibati rahmatika

Wa'aza'ima magfiratika, wa salamata min kulli

Itmin, wal-ganimata min kulli birrin, wal-fawza bil-jannati min-a nnar.

O Allah, we ask You for words which will make certain Your Mercy,
actions which will make certain Your Forgiveness,
freedom from every offence, a supply of every virtue,
entering Jannah and safety from the Nār.

INTRODUCTION

My Dear Friends: As I prepared for this *dars*, it became obvious to me how the series of *darus* over the past two years in Bedford, at the Ramadan retreats, and here in Charlottesville have been woven, by Allah (swt) as a tapestry of profoundly beautiful, deep, and revealing expressions of the inner and outer interface between the Allah (swt) and the seeker of Truth and understanding.

From the sacredness of submission in *sawm*, to the sanctifying “upliftment” of *suhbat*, to the subtleties of *dhaahir* and *baatin*, and today, to discussing the dynamics of the Isra Miraaj (to be followed by Nifsu-Shabaan and Laylatu-l-Qadr), we are on a continuing journey of understanding the pathway of

light, the reality of *wujuud*, and the transformative process of *tajalli*. It is a process of transcendence within our self, as an expression of Allah (swt).

All testifies to the incredible harmony, balance, consistency and systemic integrity of Allah's Will, in His Divine Presence, from the world of command to the world of creation (*'aalam al-Amr* and *'aalam al-khalq*).

So let us take up this journey, once again from where we stopped, in order to contemplate, rejuvenate and reaffirm the signs of Allah. In Qur'an, we are told:

Subahana-l-ladhii 'asra bi-'abadihi laylam-mina-l-masjidi-l-harami 'ila-l-masjidi-l-'aqasa-l-ladhi barakna howlahu li-nuriyahu min 'ayatina; innahu huwa-s-sami'u-l-basir.

Glorified is He who carried His servant for journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless in order that We might show him some of Our signs. Surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing. (Qur'an 17:1)

The Qur'an further narrates:

For indeed [the Prophet] saw [Jibreel] at a second descent near the Lote tree, beyond which none may pass: near it is the Garden of Abode. Behold the Lote tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!)... (His) sight never swerved nor did it go wrong, for truly did he see of the signs of his Lord the greatest! (53:13-18)

This was a journey of tremendous distance and speed. Some say it took only one third of the night. Some say it was the time it took for a pitcher of water, kicked over by the foot of The Prophet (sal), to fall, with his returning before it fell completely over and spilled.

It is important to remember when recalling this event that he (sal) was carried by Buraq on this journey. The meaning of al-Buraq in the Arabic language is a beam, to send out light (an active and dynamic word). Today, science tells us that light is the fastest traveling entity in the world. It travels at the speed of 700 million miles an hour. Fourteen hundred years ago, when no scientist had even imagined the swiftness of the light or its reality, Allah (swt) and His Messenger (sal) called this fast traveling beast, al-Buraq, on the basis of its fast pace.

Allah says in Suratu-l-Fussilat:

Sanurihim 'ayatina fi-l 'afaqi wa fii anfusihim hatta yatabayyana lahum 'annahu-l-haqqa.

We will show them our signs in the Universe and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this (the Qur'an) is the Truth. (41: 53)

Allah is always showing us His signs; the question is, "Do we see them?" The experience of seeing/vision lies at the core of the Isra Miraj. What kind of seeing? It is a kind that penetrates shrouds and mysteries without wavering, that penetrates the veils of human limitation to see "the greatest" of "the signs of [the] Lord."

The vision of the Prophet (sal) surpasses our comprehension. But as hard as it may be to fathom the experience of the Isra Miraj, one lesson seems clear: in it we find a model of coming to see in new ways, observing Allah's signs clearly, and overcoming distractions in order to be fully present in the Presence of the Divine.

I will speak today about the subject of the Isra Miraj, discussing it as a reality and as a *majaaz* (corridor or metaphor) for deepening our understanding. In the story of the Isra Miraj are many lessons for today; lessons of *ihsaan* (being present in the Presence), trust, yearning, *adab*, and the journey of the seeker.

While the Qur'an mentions the Isra Miraj in the quotes I just gave, and there are additional Hadith on this event, much of the detail about the Isra Miraj comes from the *hukama'al umma*, (wisdom/insight of the *uluma*). What we learn or gain from such transmissions is greatly dependent on our own state and receptivity; indeed, it is dependent on our line of reception to the line of transmission. A listener outside of *tareeqah* can only hope to gain the 'information,' the 'story,' but not the transforming and sustaining 'light' that comes with the *tajalli* and the transmission of the *shaykh*, *shuyukh* to the heart, *lataaif* of the authentic *mureed*.

SEEING WITH THE EYE OF THE HEART

Ibn 'Ata said of the Prophet's (sal) night journey:

[The Prophet (sal)] was caused to journey by night in his self. He journeyed by night in his spirit, and he was dispatched in his secret-heart. The secret-heart did not know what engaged the spirit; the spirit did not know what the secret- heart witnessed, and the self had no report from either of them, or from what engaged them. Each stopped at its limit, witnessing the Real, apprehending something of it without intermediary or abidance of humanity; rather, the Real became realized in His servant, making him realized. He stood him where there was no station and addressed him. He revealed to him what He revealed. Lofty and exalted is our Lord.

In another narrative of the Isra Miraj, by Ibn Abbas, the Prophet (sal) speaks of gazing with his heart at what he had previously seen with his eyes.

When I closed my eyes, Allah returned my vision to me in my heart, and I began to gaze with my heart at what I had been gazing at with my eyes. I saw a light gleaming. I was forbidden to describe to you what I saw of His grandeur. I asked my Lord to favor me with the steadiness of vision toward Him in my heart, in order to complete His blessing of me. (Sulami, 10)

These ideas of seeking steadiness of vision (*thibat*) and seeing with the eye of the heart are the bases for many Sufic practices and intentions.

Allah says in Qur'an, in Suratu-l-Najm, of this encounter:

Fa-owhaa ila 'abadihi maa 'owha.

Then He revealed to His worshiper what He revealed. (53:10)

Ma kadhaba-l-fu'adu ma ra'a.

His heart did not lie in what it saw. (53:11)

Afatumarunahu 'ala ma yara?

Will you dispute with him as to what he saw? (53:12)

Ma zagha-l-basar wa ma tagha.

His eye neither veered nor did it stray. (53:17)

Laqada ra'a min 'ayati rabbihi-l-kubara.

Indeed he saw the greatest among the Signs of his Lord. (53:18)

But Allah also tells us, in Suratu-l-'An'am that no one can see or comprehend Him:

La tudarikuhu-l-abasar wa huwa yudariku-l-'abasar: wa huwa-l-latifu-l-khabir.

No vision can comprehend Him, whilst He comprehends all vision. He is the unfathomably Subtle, the Conscious. (6:103)

Thus, we must conclude that the Prophet's (sal) manner of 'gazing' was unique. Because he 'gazed with the eye of his heart,' he was able to see. Not everyone who sees has a heart enabled to comprehend it, since sight may overcome and unsettle the secret-heart from bearing what reaches it. But the Messenger (sal) was able to bear "the greatest of the signs of Allah" because of the sincerity of his inner heart.

Ibn 'Ata' tells us that while the vision took place through the physical faculty of the eyes, the heart believed (*i'taqada*) and correctly understood what the eyes perceived. The hearts of lesser creatures, by contrast, might have disbelieved the vision and formulated a false opinion about what was seen. The second half of the saying develops the idea that only certain individuals possess hearts that can bear what their eyes witness in such circumstances. Ibn 'Ata', concludes by drawing a connection between the ability to bear the vision and the sincerity of one's inner heart (*tawfiyya*)—an organ that enfolds the innermost secret-heart (*sirr*).

The heart he is talking about is not just this thing that is beating in our chest. However, there is a relationship between the physical heart and the spiritual heart, or "*lateefa qalb*," because analogically or metaphorically what takes place in the heart in human life is transformational. It is filled with many meanings and knowledge that come to us, unplanned and unprepared, just as Allah bestows upon us His *Tajalli* (lucent manifestation that removes the veils) and cause changes in our spiritual heart/*qalb*.

The subtlety of that *lateefah qalb*, the heart, is a most important subtlety. Consequently, our heart is referred to as the most important center of the spiritual body, and the most important of the *lataa'if*, (subtle organs of perception). When the eye of the heart opens, it transforms us spiritually and gives us the potential to see what is Real. When it is operating properly and functionally, it is able to distinguish between what is real and what is an illusion, what is good and bad, right and wrong, true and false. If it is not functioning properly, just like the physical heart, it loses its rhythm and capability.

Just as the Prophet (sal) "saw" Allah with the eye of the heart, each *lateefah* (organ of perception) has its own range of sight. It turns attention away from the physical, from the semi-conscious to another

dimension of insight, *baseera*, and *kashf*. This *kashf*—‘uncovering of the secret,’ what we may call intuition—is in the advanced ‘see-er’ the ability to see other dimensions or frequencies of reality, each with its own domain and rules of engagement.

METAPHOR AND CORRIDOR: ITS RELVANCY AND SUBTLETY

The Night Journey of the Prophet (sal) is unique in its joining of *dhaahir* and *baatin*, inner and outer, physical and non-physical. As Iman Nasafi (d.537AH) said: “*The Prophet’s ascension was a bodily journey in a wakeful state to the heavens and then to the heights where Allah wished him to go.*”

The Isra Miraj illustrates for us that there are some spiritual realities or concepts that are inaccessible directly, but for the interface of *majaaz*. Without metaphor, without the corridor or tunnel, those spiritual realities won’t be revealed. Just like when you hear a poem, you hear words. They are images of reality, but in some way there is a non-spoken, spiritual experience that is taking place that uplifts you and deepens your knowledge. This is reflected in the aspect of the *majaaz*, which is the mirror effect.ⁱ

This concept of a corridor that instantly takes you from one reality to another has already been found in laboratories; it is called the quantum tunneling effect. Quantum tunneling is the quantum-mechanical effect of transitioning through a classically forbidden energy state. It can be generalized to other types of classically-forbidden transitions as well. (By classically forbidden I mean outside the apparent and widely accepted traditional laws of linear reality.)

Let me take a moment to dive into the world of quantum mechanics, to further explain the quantum tunnel and its relevance to the journey of the Prophet (sal). Consider rolling a ball up a hill. If the ball is not given enough velocity, then it will not roll over the hill. This scenario makes sense from the standpoint of classical mechanics, but is an inapplicable restriction in quantum mechanics, simply because quantum mechanical objects do not behave like classical objects.

On a quantum scale, objects exhibit wavelike behavior. For a quantum particle moving against a potential energy “hill,” the wave function describing the particle can extend to the other side of the hill. While the object remains on “this side of the hill,” the wave represents the probability of finding the particle in a certain location, meaning that the particle has the possibility of being detected on the other side of the hill. This behavior is called tunneling; it is as if the particle has 'dug' through the potential hill. This ‘tunnel’ is a *majaaz* and hence not only a corridor but also a metaphor simultaneously that applies in many, if not every, aspect of creation. The ball is ‘here and there’ at the same time, apparently ‘traveling’ through this ‘corridor’ or ‘tunnel’ yet remaining also where it also is.

The capacity of quantum tunneling is exemplified as a Reality in the Isra Miraj (long before the scientific community discovered quantum mechanics). Thus the reality of bending time and space, or being simultaneously in two distinct locations is comprehensible from the perspective of science, Islam and most especially Sufism.

So physics affirms the message of the Qur’an. Why should we be interested in this associative fact? The Qur’an and the Sunnah are sufficient for a believer; one does not need the affirmation of apparent secular science. Yes, this is true. However many of us, during our lifetime have challenges that come in the form of questions such as: Am I making progress? What is life truly about? How do I come to realize the nearness of Allah (swt)? How do I deepen my *iman*? What is *dunya*? What is *akhirat*? And how do I really relate to the Creator and creation? What is my place in what is presented to be a continuum of some type of life? What actually is ‘here’ and ‘Hereafter’? Can we even grasp the answer?

These and other questions can be addressed, and some of us can find great comfort in coming to know our place in this matrix of inner and outer. Seeing how exact, how subtle, how complete and systemically integrative and consistent Allah’s creation and laws are can give us great confidence and peace. Seeing parallels of transcendent laws and resonant dimensions of Reality within and around us attests in clear and personal experiences what the Qur’an and Hadith direct us to see and understand.

This creation is for us to investigate, understand, and use for the ultimate journey to liberation from the constraints of self and other, to penetrate and see behind the veils of illusion and desire, fear and doubt, by true knowledge and experience.

Affirmation after affirmation of Divine Presence is everywhere and thus it is for us to explore, plumb the depths of and embrace the Unifying Truth that is Allah (swt), wherein all doubts cease, all fears are abated and all trust is proven worthy. True safety and security, willing trust and submission is found in the experience and certainty of knowing that we are at once in and surrounded by, moving and living in the Divine Presence.

AL-MAJAAZ IN OUR LIVES

To see and understand, we must approach these questions with an open mind and an open heart, as the Prophet (sal) did. Take, for example, the quantum tunneling effect that I discussed. It is generally believed by scientists to be only a nanoscopic phenomena, because this is where it can be detected as the wave behavior of particles is more pronounced in that normally unseen dimension of reality. But in the spiritual realm, there are stories that give evidence of it being repeatable phenomena in our physical reality as well.

It is told that Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (ra) made some sweets that a very special *mureed* of his liked very much; but the *mureed* was on Hajj and somewhere encamped in the Hejaz. So Mevlana went to his roof with a plate of the favorite sweets in his hand, extended his arm, and at that moment, somewhere in the Hejaz, this *mureed* saw a hand come through the tent opening with the plate of sweets. The plate, I gather, he returned to Mevlana when he returned from his Hajj.

This is a story of seeing and being, of seeing through an unconscious, yet apparently necessary experience of being both 'here and there,' without awareness on the part of the one seen. It is also an example of servant-hood to the community, or in this case, the *shaykh*.

This reality also effectively speaks to the Reality of the journey. Direction from and to the *dhaahir* and the *baatin* are intrinsic in the Night Journey. For those who are curious and desire a direction to understand the dynamics of this journey, look again at the footnotes.ⁱⁱ

What we should know and remember is that knowledge from the *baatin* is always traveling through the metaphorical corridor, the *majaaz*, from the *baatin* to the *dhaahir*. It is transformed as a reflection within our self, and indicated as ‘present’ in many ways that we take for granted. While this may seem to be a stretch for our intellectual minds, we encounter this *majaaz* between one reality and another much more often than we realize.

Think about meditation or sleep, for example; a time in which we leave one aspect (physical awareness) to another state of awareness. What we ‘see’ in our meditation or dream is ‘seen’ by us, but not by our physical eyes. When we sleep we dream, but may not even realize that we are dreaming; yet, a part of our consciousness is involved in another place and time, using what we consider real images and words. But we can also dream and know that we are dreaming, and choose to let it transpire, or choose to return to our original state of wakefulness.

In each state there is a reality of ‘self’ and specific or non-specific ‘other,’ linked by language, context and feelings. The dream is not selected by us, but rather we are called to it by our existence. We are independent of it, yet we are drawn not by our will into it. We remain corporeal—in the bed or in the *muraaqabah*—yet we are present and not present. This is the *majaaz* (metaphor), quantum tunneling. [See endnotes]. In the corridor, in a *barzakh* we are here and not here, there and not there.

From a quantum point of view, most importantly from a Sufic/Islamic point of view, the physical being can be in that co-joined reality simultaneously. Science and the mystical reality are always reflective, if one knows them both. What we see is a reflection of the Real, illuminated as an affirmation of Being (ness) *wujuud*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Of course we know that neither dreams nor meditation are the same experience as that of the Prophet (sal), but they are a way of understanding a greater aspect of *tawheed*--the interrelatedness of all aspects of life and internal consistency. If nothing else, it is a way to accept the possibility of such a journey, since it is consistent with both our experience and today's science.

A better understanding of the Isra Miraj enables us to actively seek higher and higher states in our own life. Seeing the uniqueness of the Prophet (sal), can hopefully cause us to intensify our yearning and deepen our *imaan*.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT

It is commonly agreed upon among Sufis and non-Sufis that the most exalted station that a human being can reach is that of faithful servant or slave (*abd*) of Allah. Some Sufis believe that the ontological gap between servant and Lord can be bridged through mystical experiences in which Allah becomes realized, to the degree that the contingent nature of His creatures pass away.

Veiling and unveiling is a function of intention and of light. Transcending the limitations of the self and its relationship to 'the other' is a function of transmissions that awaken deeper and more and more subtle organs of perception (*lataa'if*). This culminates in the transmission of, or effective awareness of, *tajallite bari ta'ala* or the 'lucent manifestations' that reveal our "presence in the Presence." In our Order, this occurs within what we call the 'circles,' and signifies the illumination of the seeker with regard to the two *'aalam*.

In the *dhaahir*, things are only nominally connected and require developing to connect the elements of events or elements in creation, while in the *baatin* things are obviously connected and reflective of the Unity. In the *baatin*, everything is One and unending...infinite. So every little thing affirms the infinite. The *dhaahir* is the emergent abstraction. The *baatin* is the innermost concealed essence or core.

In the *dhaahir*, things are actualized. In the *baatin*, things are compressed and condensed, even time. For example, the Prophet (sal) stated that, **“An hour's contemplation is better than seventy years of worship.”**

[NOTE: the entire “night journey” by some accounts took only the time it took for a pitcher of water to fall, by others only 1/3 of the night. Obviously, we are not speaking of linear (horizontal) time (*zaman*), but of a moment of vertical time (*waqt*).

Some things cannot be transferred from the *baatin* to the *dhaahir*. This is perhaps why the Prophet (sal) kept his experience, especially his encounter with Allah (swt) at the culmination of the ascension, a secret when he returned. Yet it is, in most accounts, verified by what he saw as he returned. For example, the caravan he reported on its way to Mecca, later was verified when it arrived.

Abu Uthman was asked about the saying of the Prophet, **“I cannot enumerate the praise of You as You have praised Yourself.”** He said,

The Prophet had unceasingly invoked and praised his Lord. When he was made to ascend on the night of the Night Journey, he witnessed what he witnessed of the grandeur of his Lord, being ashamed of how he had praised and invoked. So his faltering tongue returned. He said “I cannot enumerate the praise of You...”

Others have said that his silence was due to the privacy of lovers that cannot be shared with others. Words are simply inadequate to describe his experience or to express at that level the love of the Divine. There is an inability of the human language to share some experiences. *Fana*, the characteristic state that is beyond understanding in words, can only be experienced.

THE NATURE OF THE JOURNEY

There has been much theological debate about whether the Prophet's journey took place in body or in spirit.

Ibn 'Ata said, *"...He was caused to journey by night in his self. He journeyed by night in his spirit, and he was dispatched in his secret-heart. Each stopped at its limit, witnessing the Real, apprehending something of it without intermediary..."*

So, according to Ibn 'Ata, there are three different aspects of the Prophet's being, which participated simultaneously on the night journey, each arriving at a different limit. The self (*nafs*) of the Prophet (sal), sometimes identified with the portion of the soul connected with the physical body, was the aspect of Muhammad (sal) that was sent on the Night Journey. It is the faculty that was first acted upon, connected to the Qur'anic verb '*asra*'.

The second aspect or spirit (*ruuh*) of the Prophet (sal) actively journeyed by night (*sara*), a different form of the same root as the verb *asra*, reaching a farther limit. Finally, the innermost secret-heart (*sirr*) was dispatched (*sayyara*) making use of a different verbal root to refer to the final stage of the journey, perhaps standing for the final stages of the heavenly ascension. The saying makes it clear that the spirit and the secret-heart both reached a station beyond what the self was able to reach.

Although, all the three aspects witnessed the Real to some degree, none of the three aspects could comprehend what the others experienced. Ibn 'Ata introduces the idea that each of the faculties witnessed the Divine Reality in its own manner, and each transcended its connections with the human body in order to reach that point.

As Sufis, this ties into the concept of *fana* (passing away), and is reflected linguistically in this saying, as the Prophet (sal) "subject" dissolves into the mystical experience of Divine self-revelation, and ambiguous verbs and pronouns near the latter half of the saying evoke the apathetic mystery of non-duality. As I quoted before: **"He revealed to him what He revealed."** (Suratu-l- Najm).

“*The Real (al-Haqq) merges with the servant insofar as the real (haqq) became realized (tahaqqaqa) in the servant, making Him/It (swt) realized (Haqqaqahu).*” Ambiguity in this passage makes it extremely difficult to translate, but is particularly rich in potential mystical meaning. The phrase “**He stood him (aqamahu) where there was no station (maqam)**” points to the fact that this experience transcended human rational categories of thought and speech.

How do we relate to this as seekers on the path? Many *shuyukh* use the story of the Prophet’s journey as a metaphor for the 7 stations of the *sair ul suluk*, travelling through the seven stations one after another on an infinite spiritual journey.

Wasiti (Muh. B. Musa ibn Farghani) said of the Prophet’s (sal) journey:

Allah (swt) wanted to lift up the state of the beloved from the station of servant-hood to the station of eternity, and from the station of eternity to the station of lordship. He showed the Prophet (sal) in the station of servant hood in order to show the proprieties of servant hood to the community. Then he moved him to the station of eternity in order to teach through it the propriety of he who is in that station. Finally he moved him to the station of lordliness, namely the ascension, to which he was caused to journey by night. At that, the stations and traces were eliminated from him. He was moved to the station which was created out of approach and nearness. (p 47)

As a Sufi progresses on their spiritual journey he/she rests along the way at different mystical *maqaamaat*, stations. Each station represents a different attitude of mind or knowledge, a different level of spiritual maturity and understanding. On occasion, the *saalik* may have a *haal*, mystical state, which is transitory and reflective of another station.

So the Night Journey can and is often seen also as allegorical, where each stage is symbolically (*alam*) representing a stage on the Sufi’s path. In this way each of us can emulate his example by making

progress along the spiritual path. So in this sense, the ascension can be taken as a manual of moral behavior, sincerity in devotion, love of the Divine Presence, and spiritual integrity and effort.

But it is important to look more closely at this concept of ascension. As I quoted to you before, in Qur'an it says: **“He caused His servant to journey by night.”** The verb ‘to cause to journey by night’ (*asra*) is used here. Why not the simple active form ‘to journey by night’ (*sara*)? The latter usage might have implied that the Prophet (sal) undertook the journey of his own accord, without receiving the Divine Command or *madad* (assistance). If so, the journey and ascension would have focused exclusively upon the Prophet (sal) and his power, rather than recognizing the One who caused His servant to journey by night. Thus, we must always remember the One Who causes us to live, and die, to breath, to be lifted up or to fall down.

BEING PRESENT IN THE PRESENCE

Why was the Prophet (sal) caused by Allah to make this journey? Why at this time, in this way?

According to Imam Nawawi and Zarqaani, the Prophet's (sal) journey took place on 27th Rajab, 17 months before Hijrah. This was the year the biographers call the Year of Sorrow, when his beloved wife Khadija (ra) died, as did his caring uncle and protector Abu Talib. The Messenger (sal) was sad that he lost two great supporters and comforters. The Prophet's (sal) enemies rejoiced to see him so sad, without a wife to console and comfort him, and without his uncle to protect him. They began to treat him worse than ever before. This was the time that he traveled to Taif, and had children throw stones and filth at him. We cannot imagine how he felt, or how he may have yearned to be near to Allah. It was at this time that the Prophet (sal) was raised up to the Presence of Allah. Perhaps the yearning and pain opened his heart and prepared him to be “present in the Presence.”

Do we long to experience Allah's Presence even one fraction as urgently as the Prophet (sal)? Do we really realize that in that Presence of Allah (swt) there is peace, happiness, understanding and love?

The Prophet's journey is the ultimate experience of *ih-san*: being present in the Presence. While we cannot expect that kind of experience, we can open our eyes and hearts, and look for the Presence of Allah in our life. Just as the Prophet (sal) was open to the signs and Presence of Allah, we must make our self open as well. How do we do this? The answer lies in the phrase: "*ka-anna*." *Ka-anna* means "as if,"

An ta-a'buda allah ka-anna ka taraa hu—

Worship Allah as if you were seeing Him....

This 'as if' has significant implications. Obviously, we cannot literally 'see' Allah with our eyes in this world. Even the Prophet (sal) is described as having seen the SIGNS of Allah. But we too may aspire to see at least some of the signs of our Creator – and, having recognized them, to worship Him with the assumption, with the thought that He is within our range of vision, although not visible to our outer eyes.

I began with the eye of the heart. Our capacity to see through our heart's eye increases as we allow love to grow between ourselves and Allah (swt), and between one another. Through the eyes of the heart, through love, we respond differently to the world than we respond when we are acting only through the intellect, through reason, or through our normal emotional reactions. Our ability to be aware of the Presence of Allah, moment to moment, has to do with our heart and with how we feel toward Allah and His creation. To have one's external life totally suffused by the internal feeling as if we are seeing Allah (swt): this is the goal.

Of course, we cannot force ourselves to be in the state of *ihsaan*, but we can practice that which makes that state come forward. Through *dhikru-Llaah* and *tafakkur* (remembrance and contemplation), we can become more aware of the vital, living Reality of Allah’s Presence in every moment. Especially important for *mushaahadah* (witnessing the Presence) is *muraaqabah* (paying attention) and *muhasabah* (accounting).

Although *muraaqabah* refers to meditation, it is not just sitting on the floor, closing one’s eyes and making recitations. The Arabic root word “*raqaba*” literally means to watch, to pay attention, to be alert and vigilant. *Muraaqabah* refers to actively paying attention to the Divine Presence. In *muraaqabah* we sit, thinking that we are in the Presence of Allah, and Allah is with us...we love Him and He loves us...wherever we look internally, He is there...in whatever is happening, He is present.

When our heart, *qalb*, is nurtured by our *muraaqabah*, by our *du‘aa*, by our *dhikr*—in an environment that is not overly attached to worldly matters or things—then it will begin to turn (*qalaba*) naturally toward Allah (swt). Like a mirror, it will reflect the “Truth.” It will move to the state of *mushaahadah* (witnessing), and we will begin to witness reality. If we really aspire to believe (to have *iman*), if we really want to submit in *Islam*, then we need to develop the ability to witness.

Through *muraaqabah* and the transmissions directed to us by our *shaykhs*, we align the *qalb* and our other *lataa’if*. The more we focus these inner lenses, the more we come to “**worship Allah as if [we are] seeing Him.**” Our spiritual practices unlock the doors that allow the Divine Presence to be seen. Such practices change the *mureed* to *muraad*, the seeker to one called by Allah (swt) as the Prophet was ‘called’ in a greater sense. The piety and the practices of Rasulallah (sal) are not just techniques, but experiences, passageways, moments to extend in our lives, places where we would like to be within ourselves all the time, on our inner journey or *sayr-i anfus*, that we would like to manifest on our outer journey, the *sayr-i afaq* (the journey off the horizon). We take this to mean beyond the physical world, toward the source of Light through the inner light, analogous to the Prophet’s (sal) journey.

If we want to understand we are in the Presence of Allah, if we want to practice *ihسان* and thereby deepen our *iman* and *islam*—our faith, our submission, peace and security—then we must pay attention. We must pay attention to our *lataa'if*, and look through the optical lenses of those *lataa'if* inwardly and outwardly. We have to pay attention to the teachings, to our teachers, to our work, the way we speak, the way we act, the way we portray ourselves. We need to apply ourselves to our meditation and try consciously to translate our spiritual efforts into the tone of our voice, the intentions behind our thoughts, the meaning of our words, the way we listen, the way we verify what we hear.

We need to go beyond saying, “I need to have the right *adab*,” to actively living the good *adab*. Constantly, we try to drink from the well, so that we will not become spiritually dehydrated. We must make a schedule for sitting in *muraaqabah*; we must set aside time to read the Qur'an; we must make more *du'aa*. We have to go even deeper than that. We have to refine our attitudes and affects, too: how we speak to other people, how we greet a person with love and affection, how we say goodbye, how we do our daily tasks. Who among us can claim perfection in even these basic things? Until finally it is Hu we are; effortlessly, entirely and immediately.

No matter what happens, immediately Allah (swt) is known to be present. Immediately a *du'aa* rises to our lips from our heart. There is thanks. There is gratitude, without hesitation. It is as seamless as the meeting of our in-breath and our out-breath.

Allah tells us in a Hadith Qudsi:

...My servants continue to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love them. When I love them, I am the ears with which they hear, the eyes with which they see, the hands with which they strike, and the feet with which they walk.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will say this: Allah does not tell us that we have to be an *alim*. He does not tell us we have to be a *hafez*. He does not say we have to be a *shaykh* or an *ustadh*. Instead, Allah tells us that the only thing He wants from us is: to see His signs and remember Him.

Fa-dhkuruunee adhkurkum...

Remember Me, and I will remember you... (2:152)

It is said that during the Isra Miraj, when the Prophet Muhammad (sal) ascended to the highest heaven, Allah showed him an endless line of humanity, walking from the beginning of time. The Prophet (sal) was told, “*This is humankind. From the first moment to the last minute of creation, there have been and always will be human beings in this endless line, passing in front of Allah.*” These are all the souls, each soul in existence long before its physical body, each existing in the Presence and the Light of Allah from the beginning of time.

Allah asks in the Qur’an:

Hal ‘ata ‘ala-l-‘insani hinum-mina-d-dahri lam yakun shay’am-madhkura?

Has there ever come upon a person any period of time in which he was a thing unremembered? (76:1)

There is never a time in which we are not remembered. We were always in the mind of the Creator. We were not even in the minds of our own parents before we were conceived, but we were in the mind of the Divine.

The aim of life is not to go through some long struggle to find a moment of contentment. Contentment is always there for us, for Allah is as near to us as our jugular vein. Even during the Year of Sorrow, Allah was there; even in our darkest moments, Allah is there.

Finding fulfillment and contentment, being happy, being at peace: these are not the ultimate goals of life. They are readily available to us if we do what we have been given to do. Contentment and fulfillment are easy to attain when we have love in our hearts, when we are serving Allah, when we aspire to serve Allah better by deepening our service to His creatures and by turning everything into *‘ibaadah*.

The key is to have unswerving focus in the eye of our heart, to believe what we see of the Signs of Allah, and not dismiss them or interpret them to fit our rationalized view of reality. That is how the Prophet (sal) was able to witness Allah. His *adab* and focus were perfect and pure, as it says in Qur’an:

Ma zagha-l-basaru wa ma tagha.

His eye neither veered nor did it stray. (53:17)

We need to strive with our hearts and all our minds to come to that place where we are never more than a thought away from Allah, where we are so accepting of Allah’s (swt) nearness that our thoughts and words naturally lead directly to Him. Then we can have acceptance and contentment with what He is giving us, and we can really begin to appreciate our lives and our existence, our roles and our responsibilities, our gains and our losses, with fulfillment.

* * * * *

Pilgrim, stop this useless wandering.

Stay a while and listen to the sound of your own heart's call.

See the moment's beauty,

The diamond stars garlanding the sky.

O blind one, see.

Awaken to My Presence

Everywhere.

* * * * *

Wa Llahu lahu ul-haqqi wa huwa yahdis-sabil.

Hasbuna Llahu wahdahu wa ni 'mal-wakil.

*Wa salli 'ala sayyidina Muhammadin wa alihi wa sahbihi ajma'in
wal-hamdu li-Llahi rabb il-'alamin.*

Truth belongs to Allah; it is He who shows the way.

Allah, alone, suffices us, and what a fine guardian is He!

Blessings upon our Master Muhammad
and his family and Companions altogether
and praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

Allahumma salle 'ala sayeddina Muhammed al fatih oghliq wa-al Hatim limaa-sabaq naser al haqq bil haqq wa-al haadi ila siratiqa-l-mustaqeem, wa ala alehi wa sahbehi haqq qadrihi wa miqdarihi al adheem.

O Allah, shower Your Blessings upon our master Muhammad, The opener of what has been closed and the seal of what has passed, the champion of Truth by the Truth, and the guide to Your straight path, and on his family and his companions with the equivalent to the greatness due to his exalted status.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ As the words leave the human Wujud (Being) aiming at the other universe, some part of the existence of these words does tunnel through the corridor of Majaz, however some parts fail and they ‘reflect’ back towards the human Wujud (Being), the humanity at large and in general the whole universe.

You might have said that the said barrier is a half-mirror, partly allows for the words to get through and partly reflects the words!

Definition: This reflective aspect of the barrier is called The Mirror.

Allah has created all Wujud (Being) with needs for other Wujud (Beings) and for that matter the Human Wujud (Being) has to fulfill his needs by means of other Wujud (Beings) as well e.g. Human Wujud (Being) cannot see his own Self i.e. no one really knows how they look like unless another object such as a mirror is present to reflect some image which carries the attributes of his shape for his own eyes by means of the externality of the mirror’s Wujud (Being).

Therefore the mirror is a necessary Wujud (Being) without which human being can never know his own shape and form.

Note: This mirror might take different forms e.g. a camera or a drawing hand. For that reason any entity that is able to transmit back a ‘reflection’ of some kind is called a mirror as well.

To go one step further: The said barrier is a mirror off of which we can view a reflection of our Self (Nafs) and this reflection is what we call ‘I’.

This barrier was placed there for the purpose of human Wujud (Being) to have a reflecting entity that allows reflections/images of his own Nafs (Self), and only upon the reception of these reflections an image forms within the human Aql (Intellect) which we incessantly call ‘I’.

Note: The Hadith saying “Indeed Allah created Adam as in his own image” within the context here can be interpreted as Allah created a ‘consistency’ between the Adam and Adam’s image in the mirror so Adam could know he is looking at his own self. Linguistically in ‘his own image’ indeed ‘his’ refers back to the Adam.

ⁱⁱ Pointing at Allah or towards Allah or at Allah’s Sifat (Attribute) needs some more explanation. “To Allah belongs the east and the West: Wherever you turn, there is the Wajh (Face) of Allah” Qur’an [2:115], and in several other verses of the Qur’an as well as the Hadith (Prophetic Narration) the term Wajh (Face) is used. There are several possible interpretations of this word extracted from the Qurtubi Tafsir (Exegesis) and Ibn ‘Ajiba:

1. Huz-zāq said: It means returning towards the Wujud (Being) of Allah, and the term face is used metaphorically. And the term Face is used since the face is the most patent part of a body and therefore it is used for observing or seeing.
2. Ibn Fūrak said: In Arabic sometimes an attribute of an object is used instead of the object itself e.g. I saw his knowledge today or I glanced at his knowledge means I saw a scholar today! Therefore seeing someone’s face means seeing their being in entirety and this usage of ‘Face’ means seeing Allah’s Wujud (Being).
3. Some said: Wajh (Face) is a Sifat (Divine Attribute) of Allah from Qadim (Time Immemorial). (So Allah has an attribute, just like the other attributes e.g. Mercy or Light and this attribute is called Face)
4. Ibn ‘Ajibah said: Wajh also means direction, so Wajh (Face) of Allah means towards the direction of Allah. Everything including the directions/dimensions and places exist/subsist upon the Nur (Divine Light) of the Sifāt (Divine Attributes)—meaning there is nothing but Allah that we may turn our face towards to—and all shall be obliterated by the Ahadiyyat (Absolute Oneness) of Dhāt (Divine Intrinsic Essence) that “Allah is and none else with IT, IT is over whatever it is”; The rays of Divine Light efface all traces of anything (in existence) and the secrets of Ahadiyyat (Absolute Oneness) eradicate the

Lights and IT is singular so far as the Wujud (Being-ness). (Universe is immersed/drown within the sea of Nur (Divine Light) and Light is immersed/drown searchlessly within the infinite sea of Divine Secrets)

In all these several things are clear:

1. The very nature of Wujud (Being-ness) has a 'towards' attribute i.e. it is a directional vector, a vector guiding towards Allah's Wujud (Being)
2. There is no need for anything to be in existence in order for this vector to be, everything faces Allah no matter when or where
3. Imagine a circle, and an object roaming on the circumference, no matter what happens to the object, being (moving clockwise) or non-being (moving counter-clockwise), it faces the center of the circle i.e. Allah's Wujud (Being). Even when the object is a non-being, it is within the Divine Knowledge and still faces the Wujud (Being) of Allah.
4. Everything is a consequent Wujud (Being-ness) save the Wujud (Being-ness) of Allah.

iii The Law of Tajalli (Lucent Manifestation) upon a mirror (TUM)

Ibn Arabi

“And only from the Law of Tajalli (Lucent Manifestation) upon a mirror, emerges our knowledge about the ‘difference’ between the viewer the mirror and the image formed upon the mirror!”

Note: The word ‘difference’ only has meaning on our side of the universe, the transient temporal side or the Muhdath. Also the image might be of some other object than that of the viewer e.g. if you hold a mirror and you might see your face or tilt it and see the image of other objects around the room.

Had this law not been there, then we could not have told the difference between the image in the mirror and our own Self i.e. by looking upon the mirror we would have marveled: What is that? Or Who is that?

The TUM law allows the human Aql (Intellect) to discern between the viewer and the object's reflection and the mirror. This is a law of the universe as much as the gravity is a law.

This law is evident to us due to our Aql's discerning ability, however the law is not trivial at all and in many cases we misinterpret what we see:

Ibn Arabi

“And also the Wujud_Mutlaq (The Absolute Being) is like a mirror for the ‘Adam_Mutlaq (The Absolute Non-Being) i.e. the Non-being views itself upon this mirror and the shape/image that is reflected off is the very core essence of Non-being which is described as Mumkin (The Potentiality), the image is indeed that of the viewer in front of the mirror and it is the image of none else.”

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