

July 21, 2010

Wednesday



Title: [The Purpose and Meaning of Vigilance](#)

DVD title: Muraqabah: Seen from the Definition of Vigilance

Dinner blessing: O Allah, we are so grateful for the successes that You shower on us and we are not worthy of them. We pray that we become worthy and more conscious. With gratitude, we received the good news of the programs in Morocco and the successes here. We are grateful for the people who have contributed their time and effort for it. We ask You, Allah (swt), also to heal those who are ill among us, to fulfill our simple needs and keep them simple. We ask You, Allah (swt), to give protection to all those who are traveling, all those who are here, all those who are hopefully benefitting from the good works you give us to do. *Amin.*

Suhbat : Tonight I want to return again to the subject of *muraqabah* from a point of view of the definition of it as vigilance, to be vigilant. In doing that, I think we have to go back to the Arabic. This word for vigilant, *nubh*, comes from *nabaha*. *Nubh* also means insight as well as vigilance. It also means acumen, a laser-sharp kind of insight. It also is another term like *firasa*, and means discernment and perception, attention (like *tawajjuh*) and alertness. We all know that from English to be vigilant is to be alert. Its root word, *nabaha*, has another connotation: something that is well known. Not like a famous person, but something known well, or noted. When you take notice of something, this is *naba*. It also has another connotation: to wake up. *Muraqabah*, which we loosely call meditation, means to wake up, to be vigilant. It leads to insight and discernment.

The idea is the capacity of the human being is to be constantly vigilant. It is not just a momentary state. We have these momentary states of vigilance. If you are a soldier on duty, you have to be vigilant for that period of time; otherwise, you are in big trouble. So you train yourself to be vigilant and alert. It's a matter of training. You can't take someone off the street and say, "Now you are a soldier. Be alert!" The way it is done in the military is there are consequences if you aren't. It's hard for us to believe there are consequences for our lack of alertness. If you don't have insight, if you are not vigilant, maybe you don't know what you are missing. You don't see it as a matter of life or death, which you would if you were in a war and you were guarding something.

Let's use another analogy: how about a neurosurgeon or a heart surgeon. You have to be trained. The consequences of their not being vigilant, not seeing this capillary or this artery, could be the death or destruction of a person's life. Vigilant. Let's take another analogy: a pilot not being vigilant or alert. This has nothing to do with insight. He's going through the checklist. "Oh, I went through the checklist at the last stop; I don't need to do it again." You understand the examples of vigilance. In every one of those examples, someone is highly trained, highly skilled, and has to understand the consequences of their lack of vigilance.

If these systems are in resonance, if what is inside is also reflected outside in the *dhāhir* and the *bātin*, if life in the human being is somehow an expression of a reflection of the qualities and attributes of Allah then there must also be consequences to lack of vigilance in the human being. We see it every day in people who don't care about justice, who are not compassionate, who are not kind, people who just don't want to go through the process to become vigilant. This is a problem. We think that consequences are only on the physical side. God forbid, the surgeon makes a mistake and is not vigilant. Let's say he gets away with it, but he has one ounce of morality and ethic in him. He'd live his whole life in regret, feeling guilty, understanding that because of his lack of attention or perception, somebody died. Someone's life was ruined.

So there are internal consequences. We don't know what they are until we experience them, often. But let's assume the universe is somehow designed to be balanced, *mīzān*. Let's assume there is to be some balance in this universe. If I stick my finger in this glass, it will get wet. That's a law of nature. If I put talcum powder on my finger and stick it in the water, it won't get wet. That's an intentional aversion of the law of nature. So let's assume there are consequences to our lack of vigilance, and *muraqabah* is vigilance. It's not just a consequence of not practicing practices. It's that the practices lead to insight, to attention, to alertness, to discernment, and acumen, etc. Constant vigilance in our outer life is a way of *dhikru-Llāh*, remembering Allah. *Dhikru-Llāh* is not just sitting and saying, "Allah, Allah, Allah, Ya Latīf, Ya Salām." It's looking here and seeing Allah, looking there and seeing Allah, looking at the technology and saying, "Wow, *allahu akbar*."

I'll say something that is borderline heretical, okay? Maybe everything you recite in Qur'an leads to the statement, "*Allahu Akbar*. God is greater." God is greater than what? Allah has revealed that Text; those are Allah's Words, right? No. It is the light, as it comes through the human being, that turns into words and concepts. We are saying here's the Qur'an, given by Allah, and Allah is greater than that, greater even than His Own Words as we understand it. Think about that.

Performing of *dhikr* as part of worship in this way, remembering, is known as *muraqabah*, contemplative watchfulness. Just as Allah watches over humankind—one of His Names is al-Raqīb (the Watchful)—so too, the seeker on the path must not only remember Allah (swt), not just remember the Hadith of Jibreel (act as if you are seeing Allah in everything, and if you do not, know that Allah is seeing you), but we have to guard against our own distractions/*gafla*, and our negative and evil thoughts. Well, religions have been based on sins and evil thoughts, and I have news for you, it doesn't usually work. What works is if you replace them with something else. If this is muddy

water, and I keep putting clear water in it, eventually it will become clear. Just fear of sin doesn't usually work. It works for a little bit of time, and then the person forgets. That's human nature. When you train yourself like the pilot, the surgeon, or the soldier, then you are vigilant.

“Wheresoever you turn your attention (*tawajjuh*), there is the countenance of Allah.” There is compassion over here, patience over here, kindness over here, justice over there, mercy over here, watchfulness over there. Wherever you look, that's what you are seeing. Allahu Akbar... and God is greater than that. There is always more. There is never enough. When a person is never satisfied, we say, “That person is greedy. They are never satisfied.” But never satisfied has a good side to it, too—never satisfied with the physical side of life, “I want more of this and of that”—it is knowing that there is always more.

I told a story today about a lady, young woman, who found out she was going to pass. She had a terminal disease. So she went to her minister for comfort (it was told to me as a Christian story, so I'll tell it as a Christian story, but it doesn't matter. She could have gone to her *shaykh*.) She went to her spiritual guide, and said “When I die, please I ask you one favor. Please bury me with a fork in my right hand.” He said, “I've never heard of a request like that. Why do you want a fork in your right hand?” She said, “Because when you are having dinner at a very nice restaurant, or at home, and someone says to you, “Please hold on to your fork,” it means something better is coming. I know something more is coming after death. When people see me, they will see a fork in my hand, and they will ask the question. So you please explain to them that this person believes something better is coming.”

That's *dhikr* also. It's wonderful. The real seeker on this path not only has to remember that Allah (swt) sees him at every moment, but also each one of us has to guard our heart against the distractions. When we are free from distractions, and only when we are free

from distractions – even for just a moment – we have tranquility. I don't know anyone who is free from distractions totally. Even my own Shaykh would be distracted at times, and he was fairly non-distractable. But there would be the person living behind him who didn't like the gate, or the telephone person came to get paid off. He would be very upset to be distracted. When we are free from distractions even for a moment, then the mind can gain *sakina*, some tranquility and serenity, and the heart can be illumined with the light. That's why people sit and meditate. In many traditions, people meditate, or they recite Qur'an, or sing hymns or whatever. They do it because they may capture a moment free from distraction, and experience *sakina*/tranquility. The heart becomes filled with light.

Then of course, there is also the effect of *muraqabah* on the mind. A great early Persian Sufi of Central Asia, Ibrahim al-Adham, in the 2nd century Hijra said, on the subject of *muraqabah*, is talking about *nubh* (vigilance), “*Vigilance is the hajj of reason.*” Hajj means emigration, movement toward Mecca. True *muraqabah*, if it can be maintained, is the highest level of self-mastery. If you look at it from the point of view of *shari'ah*, *muraqabah* is control over your external faculties and over internal faculties. This is a way of dispelling bad thoughts, and maintaining your concentration on the Divine Presence.

Lastly, true *muraqabah* is control over the innermost part of the heart where constantly the words are “*illa-Llāh, illa-Llāh, illa-Llāh*” only God. We know there are 70,000 or so brain cells in the heart. Scientists have shown us this. So there are cognitive processes in the heart. We know this because our brain will tell us one thing, and the heart will tell us something else. How can it do that if it had no cognitive capability? Your liver never tells you anything, nor your kidneys or lungs. But your heart will tell you to do things. “Oh, I was following my heart, not my mind. I knew better, but my heart told me to.” We say it in English. Then science proved it in 2005, what people have been saying for generation upon generation.

In that inner most part of the heart, the *huwal al-bātin*, is where it is being said. Whish, (sound of the blood wishing through the beating heart) wish, wish, *illa-Llāh, illa-Llāh*: only truth/*haqq*, only mercy, only compassion, only love. That’s what it means. That can be realized when we come to those moments, those states/*hal* when there is no concern for anything in us but the beloved—in this case, Allah. People who have fallen in love know that you get to this place where you can’t get the beloved out of your mind, your only concern is to make the beloved happy, your only concern is what the beloved is thinking, or the next time you are going to call the beloved, etc. We know from the outer reality, what love is; and we have to find the inner realities. These elements of *muraqabah* are like the levels of *dhikr*.

Kushari (ra) in the 5th century of the Hijra, defined *muraqabah* slightly differently. He defined it in terms of the Hadith Jibreel, which I’ve quoted so many times, where in Jibreel asks Prophet Muhammed (sal), **“What is the meaning of these: submission/islam, faith/iman, and excellence/ihsan?”** Then Kushari gives *tafsir* and exegesis of this. He says that this whole discussion of, “to act as if you are seeing Allah in everything but if you are not, know that Allah is seeing you,” which is from Qur’an, **“Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of Allah. Allah is the God of east and west,”** is an allusion to *muraqabah*. *“Muraqabah is the servant’s knowledge of his Lord’s watchfulness over him, and such knowledge is extended through muraqabah, vigilance, or watchful contemplation. This is the root for all good for the seeker.”*

But you cannot attain to the highest level of *muraqabah* unless you perform something else: *muhasabat*. *Muhasabat* is accounting for your self. Prophet Muhammed (sal) said, **“Account for yourself before you are accounted for. Weigh your actions before your actions become a weight upon you.”** We call our soul to account for what is in the past, or what we have just thought or said, and we rectify that state in the present time by just apologizing, by saying, “Forgive me,” by adjusting the resonance, by tuning. “Ya Allah,

I'm out of tune." (Mimes tuning a radio): Tune, tuning, tuned. Hmm.. mmm...Huuu. Everything's fine. No one has to have a guilt trip. You don't have to wait for the sky to open up and a lightning bolt to strike you. This is just the way it is. It is the way of truth. When you hold your soul to account for what is in the past and present, and you hold fast to the way of truth, then the heart's vision, and the eye's vision, and the mind's vision come into resonance. You are in contact, literally, with the Divine Presence as is manifest in this world.

If you are heedless to this or unaware of this, or if you turn your sight away from this, then it is very hard to maintain this journey. It is very, very hard to witness the mysteries, the Haqiq and Nearness of Allah. So, this is vigilance, keeping watch over it—Al-Raqib, the All-Vigilant. If you want to realize the meaning of this Attribute, this Name of Allah, then you have to keep watch over your heart. You have to look for the signs of God's will, the wisdom that transforms us. I had a wonderful meeting today with a wonderful person, *ma'sh'a-Llāh*. She said, "I'm divesting myself of all these things. I'm getting rid of all these things. I'm going to go to Texas and then California, because I feel called to do that. It's all about surrender." "That's right," I said. "Islam, surrender, *taslim*. You've come to that conclusion, *alhamdulillah*, now you sustain it." I don't think she would mind me telling you this, as she is a very open book.

You arrive at this and you want to maintain the clarity and wisdom that comes along with it. You do that through *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, remembrance, and practices. Not only is that a very powerful way of attaining to *qurb*/nearness, which is of course a bit of an oxymoron. It's like saying the fish is near to the water. The fish wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the water. But to keep achieving that closeness to Allah, one has to make *muraqabah*. Vigilance in discriminating between just impulses of one's thoughts (*khawatir*) is a very essential tool to have. These thought impulses are dealt with by practices, by invoking, by *du'ā*, by supplication, by meditation, by *dhikr*, by reading the Qur'an, by contemplation. There are all kinds of thoughts. There are the sort of diabolical thoughts

we have: “That person did that to me. I would really like to... but of course I won’t.” You visualize yourself wringing someone’s neck. “Oh, I’m scaring myself! I don’t really want to do that.” Those are kind of diabolical thoughts—Shaytan.

Then there are the soul’s words to you about eternity, about a sense of belonging. You look at the sky at night and you feel like you belong. It belongs to you, and you belong to it. “Oh, I’d like to go there.” As most of you know, that’s how I started my spiritual journey. I looked up at the stars one night at the age of 10 or 11 years, and wanted to go there. That’s before we landed anybody on the moon or shot a rocket up into the air other than with a bomb on the end of it.

Then, there are the thoughts and attitudes of the *malak*, the angelic thoughts. Then there are the *rahmat* thoughts, the divine compassionate thoughts. I consider it a science, because it is a repeatable phenomena. For generations upon generations people have attained these different states. It is not just talk, and no one has attained it. You can tell they have attained it by many things that come along with them: the depth of their words, the fact that their words last, the fact that we know their names 2,000 years later. Who is going to know my name 2,000 years from now? No one. But you know the name of Sidna Musa (as). You know the name of Sidna Isa, Jesus (as). We know the names of Prophet Muhammed (sal). Who is going to remember your name 1430 years from now? *Inshā’a-LLāh*, a lot of people.

The subtle knowledge that comes from *muraqabah* cannot be found anywhere else. It’s a branch of these types of thoughts that our *shuyukh* tried to inculcate in us, and encourage us to do, and warn us about not doing, and cajole us to participate. But there are no general rules that can be taught. There is no study that can be pulled down from some academic shelf where someone can say, “Here’s the study that proves what I’ve been saying.” The study lies in the people, in the results. The early Sufi text, *Awaarif al*

Maarif, of Shaykh Umar Suh'rawardi is probably the most well known Sufi manual of practice. This was in the 9th century. He devoted a whole chapter in that book to the question, origin, and significance of thought impulses, and the subtle science of how to diagnose them. What was happening in Europe in the 9th century? People were wearing skins and beating each other over the head. China was pretty well developed; it had had a thousand years of peace in a previous dynasty. Japan was pretty well developed, except for the samurai. The East was definitely different than the West in the 9th century.

Suh'rawardi explained the rigorous self discipline and indispensable condition for obtaining the power of *firāsa*/discrimination. To affirm good impulses and overcome bad impulses takes effort. To overcome the desire of our untrained *nafs-ammāra*, our lower self that wants us just to be gratified with things of this world, and to attain to the dignity a human being can attain to, and to have *yaqīn* (certainty) takes effort. I want to read to you something he said. He said,

In Basra, I heard Shaykh Abu Mohammed Ibn Abdullah al Basri said there are four types of thought impulses: the impulse from the lower soul, the impulse from God or Truth, al-Haqq, the impulse from Shaytan, and the impulse from the angels. Those emanating from the soul can be sensed within the heart itself (fī ard al-qalb)—the impulses from the soul are to be found in qalb—those from Allah above the heart; those from the angels to the right of the heart, and those from Shaytan to the left of the heart.

This is one of the earliest statements of the implications of the *latā'if*. Then he goes on to talk about how only the person who resists their lower nature would turn their “black” heart into one that is clear and clean. To do that, one has to have *muhāsabat*. This willingness to engage yourself tells you a lot about a true spiritual path. There is guidance that comes, but the action must be from you to yourself. No one can take the responsibility; no one can do it for you. The *shaykh* can guide you, encourage you, give

you the tools, and send you transmissions of upliftment; but they are all tools for you or me to use, or not to use, so that we can come to an understanding of our beingness, *wujūd*.

Shakespeare knew about *wujūd*. He said, “*Wujūd la wujūd*. To be or not to be.” You think he wasn’t influenced by the Sufis at the time? Go back and read some of the esoteric writings about him. See who was influencing these people in those times. I don’t care whether they were called Muslim Sufis or not, he was influenced by the mystics. Why? Because the truth is the truth: you can read it in Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, pick a language. You will find the same truth, because people have gone through a process and they have come to an understanding.

The concept of *muhasabat* dates back to very early times. Call yourself to account. Allah has told us in this kind of prophetic maxim, the Hadith Quds, “***Know yourself and you will know your Lord. One who knows himself will know his Lord.***” Does that mean you are God? No. It means if you know yourself, you will see how you and your essence is a projection of the Divine Truth. *Allahu Akbar*, but God is greater than that.

If I can look at something beautiful and say, “*Allahu Akbar*,” I don’t lose any of the beauty of what I have seen. But I have a stepping stone to say, “If this is beautiful, what would more beauty be?” Not different beauty, more beauty; depth, not difference. You get these descriptions of Jannah/Paradise with pearls, rivers of milk and honey, beautiful flowers, beautiful faces and people, because it has to be something we can relate to. It may not look anything like that, but that is a projection for our mind, an association for our minds. If you are going to call yourself to account, you have to understand that the attributions, the mystical quest, the *sair al-suluk*, this journey is to know yourself so that you know your Lord.

Well before the time of some of the early great Sufis, like Hasan al-Basri (ra), people reported that *fikr*/reflection is the mirror that shows what is good and what is bad in you. When you refer to yourself and make *muhasabat*, you look into the mirror and it tells you. It shows you. “I have a little pimple here.” “My mascara is not right.” (I don’t wear mascara.) Why does it show you? Because someone else is going to be looking at you. People who have no sense of themselves, who have a low self esteem, who have no sense of identity, they don’t care what they look like. People who are fearful want sometimes not to look good, so it pushes people away. When you look in the mirror, it tells you. “My hat is not on straight.” “I need to lose weight.” Isn’t that a form of *muhasabat*? Practices that are advocated by our *shuyukh* are also *nafs lawwama*, reproaching yourself, and making firm intention (*niyyat*) to try to utilize every breath of life you have in a good way, because it is said that every breath will be accounted for on the Day of Awakening.

During daily life, during the acts of worship, we should be in control of our selves. Another thing we are told is that this time, after the sun goes down, and we don’t see all the distractions easily, we lower the lights and turn off the lights, is when we should make *muhasabat* and *muraqabah*. Before the sun fully rises, just when the first light comes (fajr), these are the best times for meditation. There is less distraction, and you make *muhasabat* and make *muraqabah*. As usual, there is much more to say on this subject, but Al Hamdulillah I hope I made some inroads. I’ll come back to *muhasabat* and move on to *tafakkur*.

Any questions?

(Question on Nisfu Shaban.) It’s a good day for fasting . It’s a very good day for sitting up all night. Many things are to happen on that night, since we don’t know if we will be around for the next time. Nobody knows, and you will have a fork in their hand. Any other questions?

Question: As we approach Ramadan, I was contemplating the nature of compassion. Based on some of your discourses, I got the feeling that sometimes compassion can be a very self-centered act.

Shaykh: No it can't. Then it's not compassion.

Student: How does one move from that self-centered delusional state to real compassion, and how would I know the difference?

Shaykh: Because compassion comes spontaneously from the heart. Anything that is ersatz comes from the mind. You think, I want to appear to be a compassionate person so I can gain control over such and such. But they already know what you are. Unless you are severely bipolar, you are not going to convince yourself. It's not the same. Compassion can only be compassion. Water can only be water. Water cannot be dirt. You can have dirty water, but water is not dirt. A person can be compassionate, and then in their spontaneous compassion, could take advantage of it. Yes... those are the thoughts we were talking about from the Whisperer. But Compassion is Compassion, Rahmat is Rahmat. Allah is Allah. That's it, finished. There is no corrupted compassion or qualified compassion. Somebody might call it that, sure. People call something Islam today that has nothing to do with Islam, such as people killing themselves. It has nothing to do with Islam. You know that, but others do not. So don't fret over wondering if your compassion is compassion.

Student: I think I was thinking more like sympathy. *That* doesn't seem to be compassion.

Shaykh: It's not sympathy if it doesn't seem to be sympathy or empathy, or patience or tolerance or love or whatever. You have to not pay so much attention to worrying about what it isn't, and just affirm what it is. We call a lot of things by names they are not. We

even call people nicknames that are not their names. That's why the Prophet (sal) discouraged nicknames, because there is power in a name. It doesn't diminish what the truth is, though it may be distorted in someone's eyes. How do you know the truth? You know it. How do you know you are alive? (I'm breathing). How do you know breathing is not an illusion? Remember this? (Shaykh holds up a glass of water.) How do you know this is water? You've seen it before. This could be clear poison. If I sprinkle you with it, will you know it is water? No. You won't know it is water until you drink it. You can trust me if I tell you it is water. But I might be just playing with your head. Now it's time for prayer!