

July 25, 2010

Sunday



Title: [Invocation, Meditation, and Guidance: Necessary for the Journey](#)

DVD title: Muraqabah: With Meditation, We begin the Journey
More on Fikr and Dhikr

I will pick up where I left off, *inshā'a-Llāh*. Those who have not heard these three series that I have been doing on *mahasabat*, *muraqabah* and *tafakkur* should listen to it. I think I ended off by talking of the questions of *dhikr*, *fikr* and *khayal* and *firasa*. How in the 'alam al-khalq, *dhikr* is preferable to *fikr*, but in the 'alam al-bātin and 'alam al-amr, *fikr* meditation is more efficacious than *dhikr*. Because in the material world (you are familiar with the material world), *dhikr* itself assumes different forms. Since *dhikr* is coming off the tongue and the tongue is a physical, material entity, what comes off the tongue has a quality of the material.

So here is a kind of a more in depth doorway of understanding of why we do *dhikr khafī*. *Dhikr khafī* is a link to the 'alam al-amr, the world of command. It doesn't come off the tongue. In fact the tongue is placed behind the teeth and the tongue should rest on the palate like this, so there is a connection between this world and the next world. Meaning, the brain, the world of silence and the world through which we have cognitive capability is a transformative world. *Fikr*, on the other hand, contemplation, or in this case Imam al-Ghazāli uses the word *fikr* to refer to meditation. We use *muraqabah*, but he uses *fikr*. Meditation does not coalesce into form and it ultimately leads us to awareness of the nearness of the Presence of Allah (swt) who is formless, un-definable, un-material, and un-manifest in a full form.

The means to the language, or the means to that nearness, that *maqamat*/station of nearness, comes through a process that does not end in form. It is two different paradigms. It is a different language; it is a different paradigm. But because we live in the material world, we are provided with two means. One is the means of the material world, to remember Allah and be aware of that Divine Presence, or at least to be aware that everything that we are perceiving and interacting with is a Divine Manifestation of some kind of that Divine Presence. That is *dhikr*, from the ‘*ālam al-khalq* or ‘*ālam al-arkan*. All of this physicality will pass. So we have to have a link through our *rūh* to what is eternal and what is everlasting. The Names of Allah are eternal and everlasting. That means those are the attributes, these are qualities.

What he calls *fikr*, we call *muraqabah*/meditation. Where would you find it? You find it in the heart. Allah says that is where you find the believer. That is where you will find Me. The believer finds Me in his heart/*qalb*. We can say that *fikr* or *muraqabah* is in the heart. The heart has form. Yes, it does have form, but it is not that fleshy heart that we are talking about. Again, it is an analogy. The fleshy heart is the center of the system; it is the place where things return towards Allah, or turn towards Allah. So we, the Naqshbandiyya, begin in the heart. In other words, we begin that process from the very beginning of study, from the very beginning of meditation, from the very first teaching. We begin the process of differentiating what turns us toward the world of command and the eternal, and what helps us to remember the eternal as it is manifest in the world of creation. So we begin in the heart.

The seeker, of course, is still in the material world and hasn't yet, for the most part, attained to the heart. Because of that, one does *dhikr* and one does *muraqabah*. In most *tarīqah*, you find one or the other. Actually, you mostly find *dhikr*. You do not find *muraqabah*, you do not find *fikr*, except for brief moments of contemplation. But for us, we do mostly *fikr*, and we do *dhikr*. Also, we respond in a very positive way to *dhikr*, because it is of the material world. We identify ourselves with what is material, mostly,

and so we like the feelings and experiences of *dhikr*. Most of the time, people find the experiences of *fikr* or *muraqabah* elusive. But they are not really as elusive as they seem. What it requires is effort, commitment, constancy. Then transformation takes place, because that is the law of *muraqabah* or *fikr*. It takes time.

Anybody can draw a picture, but Michelangelo lay on his back and took a long time to draw what is on top of the Sistine Chapel. It was of a different quality. Those things that take time, usually you find are of a higher quality, except for one thing: laziness. Laziness takes time and it disqualifies. It does not qualify. For most people, it is not appropriate for them to perform meditation or *fikr* as a regular practice. In most Orders, we call it *bataqalūf*/imposition, not to impose on the person, because the heart has to be illuminated by the *nūr* of contemplating the spiritual world itself. That may seem contradictory.

Through remembrance, one is doing some kind of contemplation. Even if it is just looking at the manifestations of Allah, and commenting, “How beautiful the flowers are,” there is an element of contemplation in it, because there is an element of recognition of something that is transcendent. It is coming from somewhere. It resides in the flowers. It is coming from the flower to you; it resides in you. It is a process. In most Orders, a person who is not free of the bonds and the enslavement of the prison of the *nafs ammāra*, of the lower world, or of the desire nature is not free of Shaytan, the Whisperer. Sometimes the Whisperer does not whisper words. Sometimes the Whisperer whispers static (!) so you don’t hear and you don’t see. “I can’t hear what you are saying; let me turn down the radio.” Only, that is the radio you have to really learn how to turn down.

Also most people have a love of this world, of material things, a love of wealth, a love of power, a love of status. Those loves, just like when you are in love with someone, are in front of your eyes, and you don’t see beyond. You fall in love and don’t see all the other beautiful people. You don’t see anything. Maybe you have a hard time seeing your job.

You don't hear anything, only the words of the beloved. That makes for beautiful poetry, but unless you see it as an analogy to something greater, it's a distraction. Our vision becomes filled with things of the world, *bisar*. For the sincere seeker, to practice *fikr* or contemplation at this stage would be like a man who starts out in the dark, on a cloudy night, on an unknown route, to an unfamiliar place. However far that person may go, it would be as if he had not gone at all. It's as if he never set out. Why? The chances of not arriving are very high. If you are wandering around on roads you don't know, in a direction you are not sure of, on a dark and cloudy night, your chances of arriving are pretty slim.

If you set out on a road you don't know for a journey you don't know, there is no *rukhas* (exception) for that which can save you. So you get lost. In getting lost, you will have to endure a lot of frustration, anxiety, and maybe suffering and fears. So our predecessors say it's better to not make any journey at all than to make that kind of journey. So why do we start with *muraqabah*? We are starting on a path that we know where it goes, taught by people who know where it goes, from a long history of people who know where it went, know what the route is, and know approximately how long it would take if you don't distract yourself, if you don't stop along the way, if you don't become enamored of other things, if you are sincere and persevere and you don't lose time.

I was telling the young people today, time is a very precious thing. They are lucky to be starting very young on a journey of social responsibility, caring, and concern about humanity, one another, and the world. Time is a very precious thing. But we don't treat it as precious, because nobody wants to contemplate death. So we don't want to talk about time. If we make time too precious, it means you have to ask, "Why is it so precious?" And you will come flat up against the one thing you can't choose in life; or if you do, you are in big trouble. For the average person, meditation will not serve to open the heart. But we say, "*Main mutawajjuh hoom qalb kitaraf. Qalb mutawwajuh zat pak kitaraf.* I pay attention to my heart. My heart turns to the Divine Essence."

My heart turns away from this world toward Allah. But you have to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right person to do that; otherwise, you are like the person on a dark night, on a road unknown, on a route un-plotted on a journey. The sad thing about that is, you could choose to do that and not even know unless you overcome your own torpor, your own laziness, your own fears, your own desires for something different all the time. To be occupied with *dhikr* is more beneficial for the type of person who doesn't have the right guidance. A person who doesn't have a guide who knows the value of *muraqabah*/meditation or *fikr*, who doesn't come from a path that is well laid out, it's better to do *dhikr*.

Dhikr, as we all know, softens the heart. Eventually, it turns you away from the things of this world. *Dhikr* with *du'ā* makes you come to a point where you can make *tafakkur* or *muraqabah*. *Du'ā* makes things easier, makes the path easier. *Dhikr* also illuminates the eyes of the heart, and unlocks the heart's capability for *fikr*. When you have difficulty and you are distracted, when you are being attached to the things of this world, when you are distractible, lazy and confused make *dhikr*. Let the *dhikr* lead you to the *fikr*.

Supplication, *du'ā*, invocation is like a torch that lights the way through the corridor to a place of contentment and happiness. It opens a doorway to where the guidance and instruction becomes meaningful to you, and you can master your own self. Allah (swt) says in Suratu-l- Baqarah, “**Enter houses by their doors.**” (2:189) Invocation for the average seeker (who is not the average person) is *dhikr jahri* (with the tongue). It is a key that opens a doorway in the heart to meditation, *muraqabah*, and *tafakkur*.

Because we are of this world and *dhikr* is a necessary process in this world to open up the door of meditation, to open the door of the heart to *tafakkur*, *muraqabah*, if you lose the key to that door, the door won't ever be open. All the success in this of course only comes from Allah. You don't want to lose the key to the doorway of *dhikr*, because you

know that the higher way is *fikr*, and the door to the ‘*ālam al-amr* is open through contemplation. Still and all, we have to spend time in *dhikr*, because we are of this world. You begin in the heart as we do, because we know the route. It’s a clear night; it’s a plotted out route, and we have a GPS. The voice on the GPS is saying, “recalculating” and it is the voice of our *shaykh*. It tells you as soon as you are off course. We begin with the heart, and we are of the few who do that. Invocation/*dhikr* is to the heart what the fruit is to the tree, Imam al Ghazāli said.

To expect fruit from the tree before it is watered and has grown, before it is protected, is ridiculous. The fruit won’t come. I told the children the story of the man who heard about oranges. Some men heard about a sweet fruit called an oran-ghee, and someone called it an or-janj, and someone else called it an orange. They didn’t know what the name really was, but these three men from a village went looking for it. They traveled for weeks and months, but couldn’t find anything and no one could tell them, because they were pronouncing it all wrong.

The first man found nothing, and went home, frustrated. “There’s no such thing!” The second man finds this old, rotten orange with a lot of mold on it, and he’s now been away from his village for months and months. He looks at it and smells it and it is putrid. “This is what I’ve been looking for, and I left my wife and family and my farm for this?” He goes home. The third man goes on for months and months, and flowers and fruit come on the tree. He watches the tree, and the fruit finally falls on the ground, and he eats it and it is sweet. “Ah, this is worth all this travel and waiting.” But he realizes this is all he is going to have unless he takes the seeds home. So he harvests the seeds and takes them home.

That’s the way it is. When it’s not the season for the fruit, we have to tend the tree anyway. Without any caring for and attending the tree, there will not be any fruit. You have to keep the weeds away and watch over it. Then the fortune comes, *sa’adat*. And

the *Inayyat*/Divine Grace of Allah (swt) descends. Then a person is ready for *muraqabah*. Why so many people, maybe some of you, have some difficulty with *muraqabah*, is because you don't make enough *dhikr*. You are not trying to remember that all this comes from Allah. Once the tree has put out its beauty, leaves and fruit, it will function in the right way and continue to produce fruit for a long, long time—especially date and olive trees.

Those who strive, as Allah says, “**We shall surely guide in our way.**” *Muhasabat*, *muraqabah*, *mujahadah* and *mushahadah*—this striving takes place with the tongue and the heart. Under the proper conditions, with proper guidance, contemplation brings about an abundance of harvest. Then *sakina* descends into the heart—*nafs mutamainna*, serenity—and the lights of knowledge come into the mind and heart.

The *fikr* is for a person who is more adept, obviously; and one of the fruits of *fikr* is *firasa*: intuition, discernment. That comes deep in the heart where nothing can harm it, *fu'ad*. There is always that place in your heart where that discernment will be there. This *firasa* is what Jamī called ‘*Rasulan al-Haqqi*, the Emissary of the Truth, God’s Ambassador to the Truth.’ He describes it this way:

This emissary never leaves empty the hands of any believing servant of God who practices tafakkur (meditation, muraqabah), but constantly brings gifts and presents. Now he brings the light of certainty, next the light of thankfulness; now the light of endurance; now the light of hearing the arcane mysteries; now the light of beholding divine effulgences, fayd; now the unveiling of that which is shrouded in mystery; now the gift of love; now the gift of intimacy and holy presence, uns. When he or she reaches this point, he or she is emancipated from the bondage to themselves and the world/khalaq, and becomes absorbed with the signs of God’s unicity.

These teachings, which come to us through the Khwaja Khwajagan and through the Sufis of Central Asia and of Persia, are the core teachings of our *tarīqah*. It is very rich and filled with wisdom. There is a lot of practical guidance and instruction that come along with this, as you know. Invocation, supplication/*du'ā*, *dhikr*/remembrance, *tafakkur*, *muhasabat*, *muraqabah*: these come one after another. The great Sufi Attar said, “*It is the traveler’s contemplation that journeys on the path; contemplation that has benefited from his invocation.*” First there is invocation. Rumi (ra) said, “*This much have we said: go and think out (make fikr) the rest. If thought freezes up, then go and perform dhikr. Dhikr endows meditation with lively movement. When fikr is frozen, make dhikr the sun to melt it.*” It is not one or the other: one leads to the other.

Rumi’s writings are filled with exhortations and guidance. In that, he often teaches to leave your thoughts behind you, but he holds the same position as Jamī and other Sufis. There are certain requirements for meditation, *fikr*, and *ādisha* (in Farsi) rumination, contemplation. These are directed against being too overly preoccupied with the world, with worldly matters, with anxieties and fears. These are things that fight against the rationalistic approach to things, which will always hold you back. It’s okay to rationalize things of this world for worldly purposes; but not spiritual things. Never, never, never are *fikr* or *dhikr* going to hold you back from real, true, objective understanding and reasoning. As Rumi says, “*It is the partial intellect that has given the universal intellect a bad name.*”

Think about religion, practices, restrictions, belief and faith. You think that you think about it, and it gives real thought a bad name, because it’s limited. In the Mathnavi, he also gives another opinion about the complementariness of *fikr* and *dhikr*. “[*The Sufis*] *polish their breasts with invocation and meditation that the mirror of the heart may receive images of virginal purity from the unseen world.*” That’s the way. In fact, there is no other way. You have to have both; you have to understand both; you have to choose both, and then you have to be guided all along the way. What helps us to

understand that is to have a good attitude, *futuwwah*, a sense of selflessness, compassion, and kindness (*akhlaq*), and to have a kind of anxious yearning/*shawq*. It develops by making *dhikr*.

When you find yourself among Sufis who are just making *dhikr*, join them understanding that they are at the beginning of their journey. They haven't come to *fikr* yet. You have been given the means of contemplation. The one who gives it to you, by Allah and the Prophet Muhammed (sal), has a very big responsibility to inform you of these things; and you have a big responsibility to hear it. As I quoted to you the other day, Allah says, “**I hear and I obey.**” So, hear and obey. *Asalaamu aleikum*.

Question: Tonight you talked about *rūh* as being the *latīfa* that gives you yearning. Could *sirr* be described in that same way?

Shaykh: *Sirr* is a part of the heart that is the organ of perception of the secrets. It give you access to secrets. What are secrets? They are things that have to be seen. Things are secret as long as they are not seen or heard. When opened and operant, it is the *latīfa* that allows you to see and hear what you didn't see and hear before, and have access to the secrets of the teachings of the *awliyā*. It is why we say, “*Quddisa sirruh*. May Allah protect the secrets.” It is not that he has a lot of bad secrets or skeletons in his closet. We can also think of what is secret as being sacred. What is sacred is truly secret until it is unveiled. In *sirr*, things are unveiled. When the *latīfa* of *sirr* is awakened, we begin to see behind the obvious.

There is another aspect to *sirr*, which is my realization. I have never seen it written down. That is, because this is analogical, and something in the ‘*ālam al-amr* is always reflected in something in the ‘*ālam al-khalq*, what would *sirr*'s reflection be in the *ālam al-khalq*? That would be your conscience. When all of a sudden you develop conscience, it means you are looking at the thing you have been keeping secret. You feel ashamed or guilty

or something, because now it has been revealed to you about your own self. Your conscience is awake. This is something I realized about 20, 25 years ago. Conscience is a word we don't use very much anymore. We now think that anything is okay, and it's just personal choice and taste. There is no overriding ethical or moral context. Even the word sounds almost alien to me now. It comes from the same root as consciousness, so you become aware of something that has been hidden inside of you. *Asalaam aleikum.*