

July 29, 2010

Thursday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [The Meaning of:](#)
[“I Will Speak through Your Lips and Work through Your Hands.”](#)

DVD title: Direct Experience of the Divine Presence is in the Heart

Asalaamu aleikum. O Allah, we are grateful for the safe arrival of our loved ones, and we ask you to shower upon them and upon us the choicest of blessings so we can reflect, make *tafakkur*, and think with our minds and feel with our hearts the relevancy of Your Presence in our lives, the meaningfulness of the life You have given us, and to be grateful O Allah (swt) for all that we have found in Tasawwuf, and to be humble about all that we have yet to find.

The capability, capacity, and potential that we have as human beings has often been described by me and by others as consciousness or awareness. But it is probably more correct to say that we have the capacity to experience the Divine Presence. We have the capacity not only to have direct knowledge of Allah, but we also have the possibility of experiencing that Divine Presence because it is by definition proximate to Allah. When one is aware of that Presence, or allows oneself to be aware of that Presence, it is not a big step to experience in one’s heart the necessity to obey Allah. To obey Allah, of course, does not mean that Allah says something and you obey it; but it is to be in concert and resonance with the laws of this creation and the realities of one’s existence. So obedience to Allah and experience go along together.

Today, Sidi Abdel Haadi gave a talk at IIIT and I went there for it. I won’t get into detail about the reactions and responses of the intellectuals to the subject of *sulūk* and Tasawwuf, other than to say that it’s very easy to miss the subtleties of this path even if you are well versed in Islam, or perhaps especially if you are. It shouldn’t be that way,

but it is. The reason is direct experience is the real knowledge. That experience doesn't take place in the mind; it takes place in the heart. The experience of the Divine takes place in the heart. The explanation, articulation or expression of your experience is often expressed in the mind. There, one finds some time confusion; because often what happens in our intellect is linked to our worldly experiences and not our spiritual experiences. We often use the capacity of intellect or reasoning as justification or making excuses or finding rationalization of day to day life or desires. That's not what happens in the heart.

Sometimes there is a conflict when the experience of the heart comes into contact with the localized feelings of the intellecting of the mind. There is sometimes confusion. The mind tries to reduce the spiritual knowledge. When that is turned toward the subject of Tasawwuf, as I saw today, and as happens in all of our minds at times, we try to explain one thing by another, and it can't be. We try to compartmentalize our experience within the context of strictly worldly desires, fears, anxieties, and understanding. So what has become unveiled in the heart has become re-veiled again in the mind, and we become distracted. Those moments of *firāsa* or *basīra*/insight are converted back into kind of mental machinations, explanations, a viewing from outside what one has experienced inside—or has never experienced inside, because the out-sight has nothing to do with the in-sight.

What becomes spiritually unveiled to a person of Tasawwuf, if one allows oneself to have it unveiled, is that which is always with Allah (swt), especially when it is free of other than Allah. On the other hand, when the heart becomes veiled from Allah (swt), when it is completely submerged in other than Allah (swt), we don't have the experience of that Divine Presence. People who are pious and sincere turn to outer forms. They become very "fiqhee." They turn to rules and regulations and steep themselves in knowledge "about" and take the "form of."

Our minds, lips, and tongue will act as subjects of either the mind or the heart. If they act as subjects of the heart, then we become really servants of Allah; we become tools of Allah. Of course, when you express compassion, are you not the tool of the Compassionate? When you see someone in need and you serve them, are you not *abdallah* in that moment? When you are merciful toward someone, are you not a tool of the Merciful? And are you not articulating, speaking, acting, and are not your limbs the Hands of Allah? Allah says, **“I will speak through your lips and walk through your feet and grasp with your hands.”** Isn't that what is happening?

The consciousness and choosing of that, and the humility that goes with that, and the obedience of that comes in that moment automatically. It is as if Allah says, “Look, that person is in trouble. Go help them. I don't have the hands to help them; I work through your hands. Go speak to them a kind word, because I don't have lips to speak to them. Speak to them good words. I have revealed those words to the Archangel Jibreel (as), so choose from those words. You can choose from the example of Rasulallah (sal). I don't have arms, lips, or a tongue, but you do. So I am speaking through you. You are not Me, but I am speaking through you.”

Just as if you say, “I remember one day the Shaykh said this in a time like this.” I'm not comparing myself to Allah, *astaghfiru-Llāh*. Everything in this world is analogical to the Supreme Reality. If that is true (and you should think about that), shouldn't we be grateful, humble and obedient? You come to a situation, and you find people in need. All of a sudden you find the power to help them. God forbid there is a car accident, and you have to extract them from the car. So you get super human strength and pull the door open. We've all heard stories like that. It should be a humbling experience. You call upon in the moment for something that transcends your normal state. Where did that

come from? Where did the concern come from, the effort? Where did the lack of thought about one's own safety come from in the service of some other being? "Well, anybody would do it." No, that's not true.

The heart always wants to be obedient to Allah (swt). The *rūh* in its lowest form is called *nafs*. In its highest form, this *rūh* is the highest of [forms] of Allah (swt). In this process, we Sufis, don't talk about killing the *nafs*. We talk about the evolutionary process of the self. In this process, we have to understand that when the heart is obedient to Allah, then the obedience to Allah spreads throughout the whole body. When your heart is good, your limbs are willing to do the acts Allah (swt) can act through, whether they are the acts of prayer, the acts of service, or the acts of self-sacrifice, whether they are physical acts or spiritual acts. When the heart is obedient, that obedience; when the heart is filled with compassion, that compassion; when the heart is filled with mercy, that mercy; when the heart is filled with love, that love spreads throughout the whole body, including the tongue and the eyes. You are not finding fault, you are seeing the multiple facets of Allah (swt). You are not thinking whether or not you should reach out in the proper greeting; you greet automatically, whether it is the greeting to Allah, the believer to the believer, or even the believer to the disbeliever.

This obedience spreads through the body. I spoke the other day about light, and it illuminates the being. I was in the elevator yesterday. A young man walked into the elevator and I said, "*Asalaamu aleikum*," to him. He looked at me and said, "*Asalaamu aleikum, kefalak?*" I said, "*Alhamduli-Llāh*." "Are you a Muslim?" he asked. I said, "Yes." He said, "How did you know I was a Muslim?" I said, "Because you have the Nūr-i-Muhammed on your face." "*Wa alaihi, Sidi!* Why do you say that to me?" I said, "Because you do. You're not obviously an Arab; you could be Hispanic, but I feel in my heart that you are a Muslim and an Arab." He said, "How do you know this?" I said, "When you care, you know." I got off at B1 instead of my garage so we could continue our talk. He was a man from Amman, a Palestinian who grew up in the camps—a sweet

young man, with a wife and two children. I said, “What do you do? I assume you are very astute with computers.” “Yes, I am a software engineer.” I told him how to look up my work.

Who was speaking, Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid? Allah? Or just compassion, love, sincerity, concern? When you feel someone like that, you feel a brotherhood with that person. You don’t care whether he’s an Arab or a Turk or a Persian or American or Chinese or Kyrgyz. You don’t care. That’s other information. If my heart is disobedient, then guess what? The disobedience extends through all the limbs also. It leaves its traces in what you do and what you say and how you think, and what you value in the forms of corruption. If the heart is disobedient, then that too is expressed through the body. If Allah is telling us to be healthy and we are not trying to be healthy, you can say in shortspeak ‘that’s being disobedient to Allah.’ But I say it differently. It’s not disobedience to Allah; it is disobedient to what Allah is.

How can I be compassionate and merciful if I am taken up with my own illnesses, my own depravity, with my own miseries and fears and desires, if I am being controlled by my own laziness, or whatever? How then can I really be a compassionate and merciful person? It’s not black and white; I’d probably be pretty okay to my family. I’d probably take care of my ailing mother or father, and make sure my sons and daughters are fine. But beyond that... you probably won’t extend yourself.

The heart is the ruler of the body and the mind. The body is the kingdom, and it rules in this world. This kingdom, as one Sufi *shaykh* called it, is sustained by what the limbs do: drive a taxicab, type on a computer, listen through a stethoscope, speak with the tongue, like I do. The servants also – politicians, civil servants – are also parts of the body. This one *shaykh* gives an example: the secretary of state is the *aql*/ intellect. The passions are the malevolent slaves, the bonded slaves that reluctantly serve the ruler. The anger is like the police officer who is always out there on the edge. Of course, the enemy at the gate is

Shaytan. Either we are going to struggle with disobedience and all of these enemies, these negative aspects, understanding that there is a fifth column within us, and also that Shaytan is always trying to depose the king and destroy the kingdom (that is to say, to control the heart), or we are going to build loyalty to the king, and we are going to compensate the vizier in the best ways possible, and we are going to give the ‘*abdallah*’ his due in appreciation and gratitude. We are going to keep the heart engaged in what is good, so that this kingdom of ours is our vehicle in this world to understand the real meaning of life, the real purpose of existence, the real capacity of the intellect, and the real capacity of love can be assured—not just assured, but sustained.

The heart I am talking about of course is the *latīfa qalb*. It is grounded in what is noble and good and selfless and pure. The spiritual knowledge that we accrue from affirming these good traits by allowing ourselves to be engaged in, obedient to, immersed in, subordinate and subjected to goodness, compassion, mercy, love, understanding, and trust, have an immediate relationship with the physical heart, an immediate relationship to the *latīfa* of *qalb*, the subtle heart. The subtlety of the heart is the reality of the human being. The only way we can discover that is by lifting the veil, making *muhāsabat*, *muraqabah*, and *tafakkur*, striving/ *mushahadah* and yearning/*shawq*—allowing ourselves to yearn.

Think about the things you yearn for in your life. They can run the gamut from a career, to a person, to a car, to peace of mind, to escape from negative circumstances. Think about the insatiable thirst that comes from yearning for something. You can never have enough of the beloved (*muhabbat*)—never, never, never. Why? Because we are back to that same *qurb*: we want that nearness. The beloved represents the height of nearness, proximity to love. When we can lift the veil, and not just through intellectual knowledge or proper social attitudes and behavior, but from the core of our being, then the human soul, *nafs al insan*, becomes expressed and clarified. *Nafs ammāra* becomes

transformed. The animal nature falls away, and the sweetness, compassion, love, tenderness come into our heart.

Indeed, there may be a battle going on between our habitual tendencies to laziness or anger or acquisitiveness or fear or self-adsorption against the army of compassion, mercy, and love. But we have the courage to wage that battle. Since we have our Turkish contingent here, the Janissaries would scare the enemies days in advance of fighting by reciting and chanting at the top of their lungs as they came marching in masses toward the enemy. They were reciting the hymns and recitations of “*Allah, Allah, lā ilāha illa-llāh.*” The earth was shuddering with their footsteps and their words, and people would flee. Many a battle was not fought, because people would just surrender to the Janissaries. Yes, it’s fear; but it’s a very interesting kind of fear. It’s a kind of fear that knows “This is a power much greater than me that is coming toward me.” Allah (swt) is marching with them, if you will, in their footsteps. His words are on their lips.

The intention is to have the enemy surrender instead of fight; otherwise, why not just surreptitiously creep up on the enemy, pounce on them, and destroy them? Because a Muslim doesn’t do that. A Muslim wants to transform the people. I know that’s a long time ago, and we know what happened to the Ottoman Empire. It was sold to the highest bidder by their own selves. But there is something in us to understand. Each one of us has a little of the *malamati* in us; each one of us has some blameworthiness. There is an underlying trait in its negative form in our lowest nature, *nafs ammāra*, where we have irrationality, unjust anger, corruption, and grossness; but there is a positive side to that for the *dervish*, the *faqir*, those of the *fuqara*. There is a blameworthiness that goes with our higher nature.

Our love for high position in our lower nature could be humility and responsibility in our higher nature. Our desire for power in our lower nature could be an expression of capacity and capability in our higher nature. Our heart is disposed toward experiencing

knowledge of the Divine, toward goodness, toward compassion, mercy, love, understanding and obedience. But sometimes we are blind. Unless we have the inclination, *khatir*; unless we allow ourselves to have *shawq* / anxious yearning and longing, then we will not have a *niyyat* or *irāda* / the will. And we will not have the receptivity that allows Allah (swt) to move through our hands and extremities, speak with our tongue, and express with that speaking the good and uplifting and inspiring thoughts.

My dear brothers and sisters, I am not as well prepared as I usually am because I arrived home only 20 minutes before we gathered tonight. But I hope, as we come toward Ramadan and finish this month of Sha'ban, and as Allah has chosen this year to gather us together, that we allow our souls to be uplifted and to fly toward the skies of *qurb*, nearness, upon the wings of *muhabbat* / love, upon the wings of *shawq* / anxious yearning so that we can be in good company and understand the relationships that we do have with one another.

On our patio deck at our apartment in Washington, for the last three weeks there has been a dove sitting on her eggs. She is this far from the window on a metal rafter they have there for hanging plants. She flew right in front of my face when I didn't know she was there a couple of weeks ago, and I went to pick some basil out there. Her husband comes and visits her a couple of times a day. He sits on the railing while she goes out and gets food. Then she sits. She is sitting on a nest of just twigs. It's Washington, where do you get nice twigs? She has carried them up four stories and found this place. (She was there last year also). But last year, as far as I knew, nothing came from her eggs. When we arrived last week, there was one broken shell on the ground, so we assumed that a bird was born. She is sitting there, all puffed up on the twigs; it's not like a normal nest. She turns in both directions. Sometimes she is just between the flowerpot and the wall and the flowerpot and the window. Today the rain was very bad, coming in sheets; and she had herself perfectly positioned.

When he comes, she will fly off. I hope he is being a good dove and doesn't have another family somewhere else. Unless he's a Muslim, that's okay then. Maybe on the fifth deck he's got another family going, I don't know. He comes and sits, and she goes off to feed, day and night. I have watched her at 5 in the morning, at 1 in the morning, in the afternoon in the heat. She is sitting quiet, quiet, quiet—"...the mother, the mother, the mother!" Today, unfortunately, Mitra waited until we were in the car driving here to tell me that she saw little heads. She saw one, then two, and then she thinks she saw three. So she's sitting there on three babies, keeping them warm, *alhamdulillah-Llāh*.

My mind went to "...the mother, the mother, the mother." Why did my mind go there? Because if you have the right attitude, everything is *dhikr*. Everything reminds you of Qur'an and of Hadith; therefore, if you know more Qur'an and Hadith, there are more things that will remind you of more things. Sure, we all go ooh and ahhh, but that's not *dhikr*. That's not *qurb*. That's not saying, "I want to be like that all the time." That's not saying, "I want things to remind me of Allah." What does that mean? It means I want things to remind me of compassion, mercy, love, kindness and understanding so that it comes through me, through my body, to show respect.

In the talk today, Sidi was trying to help people understand what the role of the *shaykh* and the *suluk* was. I won't mention any names because you can Google them and find out that they are very, very important people in Islam in America, Canada, and Malaysia and wherever. I will mention one name, Mahmoud Ayyub, a very nice blind man who is still, he says, looking for his *shaykh*. He must be in his late 70's. Because every place he went there were *shaykhs*, he didn't find the right qualities. So he says he is still looking. I will tell you, what we have here is a very, very unique thing. Even the ones who were not in favor of Sufism, who were saying that there should be this and that and that and this don't realize that there is a community that has 90% of what they were saying.

Mahmoud Ayyub told a beautiful story. He was telling Sufi stories. He is not a Sufi... according to him. It's wonderful how much insight a blind man can have. There was a *shaykh* who came to a town. Everyone said, "The *shaykh* is coming, the *shaykh* is coming." They brought beautiful bouquets of flowers to the *shaykh*. One young man came and brought a wilted flower. They said, "How can you bring a wilted flower to the *shaykh*! What's wrong with you?" He said, "I saw the beautiful flowers, and they were all praising Allah. I didn't want to interrupt their praising of Allah, so I picked one that had already finished its praises to bring it to him." I'll leave you with that story, and you can tie it together. *Asalaamu aleikum*.