

# SIGNS FROM OFF THE HORIZON

“Sa-nurihim ayatina fi’l-afaq wa fi anfusihim”

“We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves”

## AWAKING TO THE *LAYLATU-L-QADR*

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*Bismillaabi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem*

*Allaahumma inna nasalaka mujibati rahmatika  
Wa'aza'ima magfiratika, wa salamata min kulli itmin,  
Wa-l-ghanimata min kulli birrin, wal-fawza bil-jannati min-a naar.*

*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 Naar.*

*As-salaamu 'alaykum wa Rahmatu-Llaahi wa Barakatuhu*

## INTRODUCTION

What is wonderful about these Sunday *Daruus* is that they enable us to look at one subject from many perspectives and in so doing reflect the essential reality that we call Islam and Sufism. We find that there is not one reason or approach to the Truth, yet all true approaches reflect the ONE—Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*). The mere capacity to strive to go deeper, to understand the why, the how, the when, and the experience of Islam is in itself a testimony to the fact that some of us seek to grasp what is behind the “supposed to’s” to understand the ‘because.’

Inshaa-a-Llaah, I will attempt to examine *Laylatu-l-Qadr* in this context; what is *Laylatu-l-Qadr*...the night of Destiny? What can be grasped and experienced? Why is it truly a significant sign?

Today I hope we can go beyond ritualism, beyond “supposed to,” to Significance. (Even in English we see that the word “significance” is derived from “sign.”)

It is not an exaggeration to say most Muslims and non-Muslims living in the modern era have a very poor understanding of the meaning of ritual, and hence, religion in general (Dr. Faiz Khan, Sufi Circle)

Most practice or observe what are deeper and more meaningful acts or events, out of habit or because they are ‘supposed to’ or ‘because’ there is an emotional or nostalgic association with that act or event. Because we are caught in this kind of ‘supposed to’ or ritualism with regard to this Holy month; many of us tend to enter into an almost binary mode, and lose the opportunity for experiencing the beauty and the true power of the Fast of Ramadan and the moment of the *Laylatu-l-Qadr*. That is not to say we should not feel moved or even compelled by the word of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) and the tradition of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) to fast and strive to experience the *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, or associate it with pleasant personal or familial experiences; quite the contrary. But in addition to following the form in the outer, enjoying and remembering cherished moments of the past, we should dive deeper to the point where we personally and consciously embrace the Fast and seek the sacred moment of *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, as a result of deep contemplation, reflection and humble acceptance of our Destiny. That diving takes us from the outer (*dhaahir*) through the ‘*aalam al mithaal*, to the inner (*baatin*) or conversely it makes us aware of and receptive to the continued manifestation of the Light (nuur i Allah/nuur i Muhammad) as it reaches our beingness in this dimension we call life.

## PREPARATION FOR *LAYLATU-L-QADR*

In trying to understand *Laylatu-l-Qadr* internally and externally, it is important to go beyond the form or apparent reality and seek its inner meaning. Most people look for the external signs, but really, it is an internal experience

more than an external experience. The *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is not only one night in the month of Ramadan; it is also the culmination of the month of Ramadan.

Over the course of the month of Ramadan, as the days merge into the nights, as the moon journeys through its different phases, the person who undertakes the fast with complete sincerity and profound intensity approaches a state of spiritual readiness. Until, in the last ten nights of the month, there arrives the possibility of a profound inner remaking, an unfolding of the potential to witness the *Laylatu-l-Qadr*.

*Wa maa adaraka ma Laylatu-l-Qadr? Laylatu-l-Qadri khayrum-min alfi shahr.*

**And what will make you understand the *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is? *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is better than a thousand months.** (Qur'an 97:2-3)

Therefore, the quality of our *niyyat* as we enter Ramadan, the sincerity of our fast, and especially in the last 10 days is extremely important. It is an opportunity for understanding what it means to make progress. To make progress we first have to see clearly where we are. We must identify the toxic tendencies that have crept into our day to day life, our words, our thoughts, our attitudes, leaving tracks of laziness, envy, jealousy, doubts, arrogance, and greed growing within us, even as we pray, and fast and give our *zakat*.

The only way to neutralize these toxins to cure our self of these illnesses is through the love of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaahu*) and love of Rasulallah (sww) . Day by day, awakening-to-awakening, we can address the illness, still the inner being, and begin to reach awareness within our self that alters our perception of our own self (*nafs*) and all that affects our intentions and our behavior.

As one Fasting Muslim wrote with an articulate sensitivity, something we can all relate to:

*[When I am fasting] suddenly, stimuli from the external world that used to bother or distract me have a blunted reaction on me. They have become very different, less powerful or inciting. I am still aware of them, and they are still problematic and bothersome, but they don't cause the dysfunction or disruption within me that they used to. Moreover, other things that bothered me don't seem to bother me at all anymore! It is like I face the world and its stresses with a different 'buffering system.'*

*Stimuli in the outside world that seemed to penetrate my 'psyche' and prompt it to anger, malice, envy, lust, gluttony, vanity, pride, harshness, sloth, haste, selfishness, and greed have become so much more apparent and I can easily detect these stimuli. I have become sensitized to the existence of these stimuli in the world external to me, and sensitized to their impact upon me. I have come to witness that the stimuli that were prompting me to anger, malice, envy, lust, gluttony, vanity, pride, harshness, sloth, haste, selfishness, and greed were doing so all along, and were present in so much of my daily routine and experience – all without me barely even perceiving this process of 'assault' on my inner, and without me perceiving how so much of my volitional behavior, deeds, and actions, were tainted – despite their seeming outward normalcy, or even goodness. I can see why the saintly companions of Muhammad, were always examining themselves, and begging forgiveness from God, and asking Muhammad if he detected in them any defects—despite their immaculate compliance and noble behavior.*

*Moreover, I can more clearly see how in the past, these malignant entities have penetrated the 'courtyard' of my inner – of my heart; yet even further, I can see how these have scarred or have occupied and 'taken up shop' within my heart – disturbing the Peace that should ordinarily reside and emanate; I can see and actually feel that the lodging of these malignant qualities in my heart is such that my intentions and behavior can easily be co-opted by them – co-opted by anger, malice, envy, lust, gluttony, vanity, pride, harshness, sloth, haste, selfishness, and greed; so that I still succumb to their various effects. I have become palpably aware of such instances that prompted me, and continue to prompt me to act on behalf of these spiritually malignant qualities, and I realize how polluted my inner space was, and remains by these processes.*

The practices, such as the fast, are designed not only to help us make progress and “cleanse our inner space,” but also to help us to be aware of the value of them. But we can only be aware of the true value to us, personally, when

we look beyond the form, into the transcendent purpose of the Fast. Imam Al-Ghazali reflected on the importance of this in his commentary on this hadith and ayat from Qur'an:

*In a Hadith, the prophet reminded his disciples, “**The fast is a trust (from God), and so do each one of you fulfill his trust.**” To this, Ghazali relates the following Qur'anic verse: **Surely, Allah bids you to restore what is entrusted to you to its owners.** (4:58) It is reported that the prophet pointed to his eyes and ears upon the narration of this verse – meaning that this verse pertains to more than just the contractual obligation of material trusts. That is, human senses and cognitive faculties, including the enjoyment of food, drink, and sexual pleasure are also a trust, and periodically re-charging or re-purifying them through reminders of the Trustee is important – the reminder of course being abstinence.*

For us to gain even more benefit from the Fast than the fasting, and its associated meanings, we must see the fasting and observing of the rituals as being a re-orientation, renewal, and re-calibration of our perspective. It is an opportunity to recreate the base line of our perception and actions. Allah reminds us in Sura-at-Tin:

**Truly We created the human being in the best form.** (95:4)

And Also in Suuratu-r-Rum:

**So turn your countenance (orient yourself) to the way of uprightness/purity/sincerity/truth – the very nature (fitrah) [ordained by] Allah to be the true natural way for the people.** (30:30)

So this month of Ramadan, and in particular the night of *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is an opportunity for us to return to our true nature and best form, to “press the reset button,” if you will.

Of course, if you do anything during this month, there will be benefit, and the benefit will accrue to you. But if we want to see the benefit, and be assured of it, then we have to enter this month with a heightened consciousness. If we really sincerely engage in this month of Ramadan, for even a relatively brief period of time, it will reinforce the meaningfulness of this month and its practices.

Ramadan is very much about patterns and ceremony, but there is essence and a meaning to everything. Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaahu*) responds to our sincerity because the whole system of reality responds either positively or negatively to what we are putting forward. The metaphor can be carried to many levels.

We can think of *Laylatu-l-Qadr* as part of this opportunity during Ramadan to perceive something that is present, and to perceive it through rhythmic patterns of perception or looking. It may be one of the reasons it is considered to be on the odd night, so that there is a rhythm set up.

Abu Dharr (*radhiya-Llahu 'anhu*) related this Hadith,

We fasted with Allah's Messenger in Ramadan. He did not lead us in qiyaam at all until there were 7 nights of Ramadan left. Then he stood with us that night in prayer until 1/3 of the night had passed.” He did not pray with us on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, he prayed with us until half the night had passed. And we said, “O Allah's Messenger, won't you pray with us the whole night?” And he said, “Whoever stands in prayer with the imaam until he (the imaam) concludes the prayer, it is recorded for him that he prayed the whole night.”

And Abu Dawud mentioned,

I heard the Prophet being asked, “Do you like for a person to pray with the people or by himself during Ramadan?” And he said, “Pray with the people.” I also heard him say, “I prefer for people to pray qiyam with the imam and pray witr with him as well.” For the Prophet said, “When a man prays with the imam until he concludes, it is recorded that he prayed the rest of that night.”

Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said,

“Whoever stands in qiyām in *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, and it is facilitated for him out of faith and expectation of Allah’s reward, will have all his previous sins forgiven.” Bukhari and Muslim added, “and it is facilitated for him.”

We can approach this month by from the point of view of wanting the benefits of having our sins forgiven, but we can also understand that this month and this special night, *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, in particular is a means of establishing for oneself a new and deeper relationship with our practices and the Divine Presence; a relationship that will, *inshaa’a-Llaah*, last us beyond this brief month.

It was reported by Aisha (*radiya-Llaaha ‘anha*), that she asked the Messenger of Allah, “*If I knew which night was Laylatu-l-Qadr, what should I say during it?*” And he instructed her to say, “*O Allah, you are forgiving, and you love forgiveness; so forgive me.*”

One can say that again and again, during the possible nights of *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, but we will be more focused, more sincere, if we have practiced and refined our focus, prepared ourselves throughout the month. If we practice balancing our time during the day with focusing on the inner, while still doing the work that we have to do; if we give ourselves less opportunity for our mind to wander astray and less opportunity for incidental things; if we can do this, when we reach the night, we will be in a more secure place, with a more secure focus.

Again, it was reported by Aisha, “*When the last ten days started, the Prophet (salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam) would tighten his izhar and spend the whole night in prayer, then wake up the family for Fajr.*” He would spend the whole time in worship and stay away from the normal relations with his family and wives. All of these things are like guidelines and rules, but it’s what is behind them that is important. The intention with these practices is to help us overcome our torpor, our bad habits, to help us overcome this kind of relaxed attitude toward practices.

#### THE INNER FAST AND *LAYLATU-L-QADR*

While the month of Ramadan is something celebrated and participated in by the whole Ummah, the *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is a uniquely personal experience. It is something we must each seek and find within ourselves. It is a time when the ‘reality’ of our inner self may become clearer to us, a time for sincere reflection and also change of perspective on the self by being more in contact with our ‘soul’ (*ruh*). It is a time for knowing our self more honestly. How do we know someone?

*Sidna Umar (radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu) once asked a fellow if he knew a particular person. When the fellow replied in the affirmative, S. Umar (radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu) asked him, have you traveled with this person? The fellow replied, “No.” Umar (radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu) (radiya-Llaahu ‘anhu) asked the fellow, “have you ever engaged in financial dealings with the person?” Again, the fellow replied, “No.” S. Umar then quipped, “Well why do you claim then to know this person?”*

How well do we know ourselves? In a sense, this month, and specifically the *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, is an opportunity for each of us, our soul, to interact more consciously, and with more awareness of the ‘reality’ and the ‘light’ of soul of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*). Just as the air we breathe is always present, but we do not think about it or see it, so too the light and soul of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) is present. The *sahaabah* who walked, lived, and talked with him were obviously affected by his presence and words, to the extent their lives were re-calibrated, changed, and transformed.

If we fast and practice remembrance (*dhikr*) with sincerity and purpose (not just “supposed to’s” or for recognition), this month can also transform us. Fasting brings out the ‘real person’ and often the depth of habit (thought and language habits) and expectation, and hopefully it also gives us the tools to the struggle to adjust our habits, to change. Allah reminds us in Sura al-‘An’am about people who lie to themselves:

*Undhur kayfa kadhabu alaa anfusihim wa dalla anhum-ma kunna mushrikin.*

**Look at how they lie about their own selves and [how] that which they made up has failed them.**  
(6:24)

So it is a time for being honest with ourselves, for Taqwa and piety, which are also provisions of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaahu*)—a gift to us. As Allah reminds us in Suratu-l-Talaqa:

**...All who faithfully believe in Allah and in the Final Day and who guard themselves for Allah—He will appoint for him a way out—and will provide for him from where he never reckoned; and whoever puts his trust in Allah, so He shall suffice him. Truly Allah brings His Command to pass and Allah has set a measure for all things.** (65: 2-3)

This is why it important to engage in what is known as *muraaqabah*— exercises based on keeping a conscious eye on ones intentions and heart (soul), with a constant self-examination and vigilance against delusion and hypocrisy.

This leads us to the conscious inner fast, which brings from the unseen world of our thoughts and intentions, into the light of daily interaction and manifestation the means to renew ourselves.

The inner fast is comprised of spiritual discipline, and behavior which spiritually demanding situations call for; restraint of temper, shunning of ill will, gossip, envy and envious contempt, and making *takefeer* of another; compassionate forbearing, restraining and disallowing our lusts to govern our behavior; avoiding any egoistic expressions of vanity or pride; maintaining indifference to drawing admiration and praise of others, and being conscious of any public show of superiority or exaltedness materially or otherwise; forgiving others unconditionally and abundantly... We are all familiar with these, of course, but how well do we follow them? When we sit in silent, private contemplation and self-reflection, what do we really learn about our self? How complete is our inner fast?

Some of what it means to fast in a complete sense is found in the Qur'anic advice given through the Prophet Luqman to his son:

*Wa la tusa' ir khaddaka li-n-nasi wa la tamshi fi-l-ardi maraba; inna-llaha la yuhibbu kulla mukbtalin fakbur.*

*wa-qa-sida fi mashyika wa gh-dud min sowtik; inna 'ankara-l-aswati la sowtu-l-hamir.*

**And do not scornfully turn your cheek away from people, and do not walk arrogantly on the earth. Surely Allah does not love anyone who is a self-deluded boaster.**

**And be modest in your bearing and lower your voice. Surely the harshest of all voices is the voice of the donkey.** (31:18-19)

And Imam Ghazali quotes a hadith of a sahabee (Abu Darda) who stated the following words: *"How many are they who fast, but in reality are not fasting; how many are they who do not fast, but in reality are fasting."*

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF *LAYLATU-L-QADR*

So, why have I taken all this time to speak about the fast (inner and outer) and the month of Ramadan when we are here to talk about *Laylatu-l-Qadr*? Because maintaining the inner fast as well as the outer is essential to seeing the presence of *Laylatu-l-Qadr*.

Ubaadah bin Saamit (*Radiya-Llaahu 'anhu*) said: Once Rasulu-Llaah (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) came out to inform us of the (true date of) *Laylatu-l-Qadr*. Unfortunately, a quarrel took place between two Muslims, whereupon he said: "I came out to inform you as to when *Laylatu-l-Qadr* occurs, but because two people quarreled with each other, the knowledge of the correct date was taken away; perhaps that is better for you. So, seek it among the ninth, seventh and fifth nights."

It is only from this point of focus on the inner fast that we can begin to undertake a journey toward grasping the importance of *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, a night about which an entire Sura was revealed:

**Truly We sent it down on the night of Destiny.**

**And what will make you understand night of Destiny?**

**The night of Destiny is better than a thousand months.**

**In it the Angels and the Spirit descend, by the Permission of their Lord, bearing with them all the Orders. Peace--until the coming of dawn. (97)**

*Laylatu-l-Qadr* can be considered one of the most significant events in the history of humanity. It is when the *nuur* of Muhammad was manifest in our earthly dimension of time and space. *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is a moment when The Divine Presence touches the human being; it is a moment when one who is prepared by the month(s) before, one who is sincere, kind, humble, giving, willing and intending goodness can sense, 'taste,' the Divine Presence.

It was at the moment of the outpouring of the Qur'an that our Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), through the enveloping presence of Jibreel (as), was made aware of his purpose; who he was, what he was to do.

"The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) described this envelopment as if being crushed. *'The Awe was so severe he would not stop shaking, and he thought he had become mad.'* Prior to this, he was Muhammad: the conscientious objector to exploitive customs and institutions, the Haneef of Mecca, Al Ameen, a trustworthy citizen of Mecca... But on Laylatul-Qadr, he became Muhammad: the Messenger of God. By Allah's Self- Disclosure to a perfectly submitted soul, the unlettered one who desired to know Allah became the Prophet of Allah."

This was *Laylatu-l-Qadr* for our Prophet – a transformation of a lasting and sublime nature. The event quite literally shook the world – and it does so to this very day. Each time a soul embraces the way of Muhammad, or decides to submit to Allah and live a more spiritually sound life – it is because of the Laylatul-Qadr of Muhammad.

Obviously, our experience of *Laylatu-l-Qadr* cannot be at the same rank (maqam) as that of the Prophet's; however our experience, if sincere, will include some part of the transformative Grace and lasting effect that acted upon the Prophet; producing within our soul a similar, yet obviously attenuated change in our very beings."

#### SEEKING LAYLATU-L-QADR

As is true in the System or the Process of Islam, (an understanding that I have been discussing with you over these months) we find that not only are we inclined in our soul (*ruh*) toward *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, but *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is the 'intelligent light' or *tajalli*, lucent manifestation of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*), and as such has 'intention, direction and consciousness'. So, in truth, not only are we seeking this moment but also the moment, the "peace" of *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, is seeking us. Who called us together here today? Shaykh Nooruddeen and Shaykh Rashid?, where did the idea of these talks originate? We are here today because of the call of Allah swt and this dars because of the existence or reality of *Laylatu-l-Qadr*. You and I are, knowingly or not seeking that moment, that experience that recognition that affirms our destiny. But there is only one 'I' that can experience *Laylatu-l-Qadr*; it is the 'I' we discussed before: The purified, self reflective, sincere self; the self that has been making the sincere inner fast, as well as the outer fast, during this month of Ramadan. Does someone who is not at peace recognize peace when it surrounds them? No. To experience the peace of *Laylatu-l-Qadr* we must be seeking peace in ourselves.

It is deeply significant, and also a metaphor for the search for knowledge, that we must seek this night. Unlike the other nights we have discussed (*Nisfu Shab'aa* and the *Israa' Mi'raaj*) we do not know exactly when the night will fall, nor do we truly know the all benefits of this night. All we can say is that it occurs somewhere in the month of Ramadan, toward the latter third, and most likely on one of the odd numbered dates, between sunset and sunrise. (Yet as we shall see, others say that 'a' *Laylatu-l-Qadr* can occur at other times too.)

The *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is a night when the opening between the seen and the unseen is enlarged and the *nuur* of Allah pours down on those whose hearts are prepared to receive that light. The fact that this outpouring exhibits change and dynamics and hence is not subject to the constraints of space and time in *Dunya* is consistent with its context in the physical world and its ultimate purpose, *vis-a-vis* the inner and the changeable nature of creation and the refinement of consciousness or the nearness of the Divine.

So too, this night cannot be assumed to be only some physical experience. Each moment of the revelation, of the Qur'an, for example, is like a hologram, containing the whole of the Qur'an; it emerges out of the darkness and brings its own light, non-physical, yet by some, experienced as physical. This Holy light is carrying the Message of *al-Haqq*, the Truth, *ar-Rahmaan*, the Compassion that is Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*).

We cannot predict the time or the appearance but we do know it is a moment that captures and transmits something of the Whole (the Holy) to its resonant manifest creature ...to each of us.

#### THE SIGNS OF *LAYLATU-L-QADR*

So if we cannot predict its appearance, how are we to seek and to find the *Laylatu-l-Qadr*? As I have spoken about in the first half of my talk, we must prepare ourselves to find it by fully engaging in the inner and if possible, the outer fast of Ramadan from the very first day of Ramadan. But we also must seek this special night, and know it through its signs. The signs by which *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is known are as follows:

The first sign: it was reported in Saheeh Muslim from the hadith of Ubayy ibn Ka'b (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) announced that one of its signs was that when the sun rose on the following morning, it had no (visible) rays (Muslim, 762).

The second sign: it was reported from the hadith of Ibn Abbaas narrated by Ibn Khuzaimah, and by al-Tayaalisi in his Musnad that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "*Laylatu-l-Qadr* is a pleasant night, neither hot nor cold, and the following day the sun rises red and weak (Saheeh Ibn Khuzaymah 2912; Musnad al-Tayaalisi).

The third sign: it was reported by al-Tabaraani that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "*Laylatu-l-Qadr* is a bright night, neither hot nor cold, in which no meteors are seen."

The relationship between non-material and material signs (*ayaat*) is an essential reality of the Three Holy nights that we are discussing in this series. Indeed semiotics—the study of signs and symbols—is essential to Islam. We find examples throughout the month of Ramadan, beginning with the enjoinder to view the moon to determine the beginning of the month. The moment when the crescent moon is seen at the start of Ramadan is a pronouncement of a material change born out of darkness, and an introduction to a series of events linked internally and externally. Similarly, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) has linked *Israa' Mi'raaj*, *Nisfu Sha'baan* and *Laylatu-l-Qadr* with events that stimulate, and evoke knowledge, as well practices, and understanding, as well as defining community and its purpose.

We know that this "moon sighting" is a controversial subject when it comes to determining the beginning of Ramadan and Hajj, but what is significant about such 'material semiotics' is that material signs never quite do what we want them to do. There is always some gap between what we think, want, or say and what the sign does.

In fact, seeking *Laylatu-l-Qadr* through its signs (rather than only relying on and miming the rituals and tradition) is so important that some of the Awliyya believe that it is not confined to the last ten days, but moves throughout the year.

Ibn Arabi (*radhiya-Llaahu 'anhu*) says: "In my opinion, the view of those who believe that '*Laylatu-l-Qadr*' comes on various nights throughout the year is most likely correct, because twice I have seen it in *Sha'baan* - once

on the 15th and once on the 19th; and twice I have seen it in the middle ten nights of Ramadan - the 13th and the 18th. And I have seen it on every odd night of the last ten. For this reason, I am certain that it moves over all nights throughout the year, but comes mostly in Ramadan.”

And Shah Waliyullah of Delhi believed that “*Laylatu-l-Qadr*” comes twice every year. One “*Laylatu-l-Qadr*” is that one, on which Allah’s commands are revealed (to the angels); this is also the night on which the Holy Qur’an was sent down from the “Lowhul Mahfuz” to the Heavens. This night does not come in Ramadan alone, but shifts and can come on any other night of the year. However, the particular night on which the Holy Qur’an was revealed fell in Ramadan. The second “*Laylatu-l-Qadr*” is the one of tremendous Spiritual value, when angels descend in large numbers, while “Shayateen” are held back, and when prayers are answered. This night comes only in Ramadan, during the various odd nights of the last ten days.

What we come to realize in Islam, especially through the Sufic approach, is that even though the signs are qualified by ‘matter’ and thus are perceivable, there are ‘realities’ in the physical matter that Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’ala*) has pointed to as affirmation of the transcendental reflection or near perfect reflection of the Divine. Hence, we say “Divine Presence” to affirm that what we experience in the apparent ‘material’ is somehow infused with, reflective of, and a direction toward what or “Hu” is perfect.

#### SIGNS AND REPRESENTATION IN QUR’AN

If there is anything that stands out in the Quran to one who is sensitive to the relationship between the outer and the inner, the seen and unseen, the spoken and unspoken, it is the continual reference to ‘signs’ and their significance to one who seeks the Divine Presence. There are over 950 references to Nature in Qur’an, most of which are metaphorical and intended to affirm in us the nearness of the Allah by His / Her creative force and presence in our daily life. The beauty and power of Nature itself is an invitation to and intention to cause us to remember our origin our Creator and our purpose.

Allah knows the inmost truth of everything, and He has revealed part of His infinite knowledge through His Book, so as to guide the believers. In Suuratu-l-Baqara, Allah brings attention to the significance of His signs:

*Kamaa ‘arsalna fikum rasulam-minikum yatlu ‘alaykum ‘ayatin wa yuzakkikum wa yu’allimukumu-l-kitaba wa-l-hikmata wa yu’allimukum-malam takunna ta’lamuna*

**For this We sent a Messenger to you from among you to recite Our Signs to you and purify you and teach you the Book and Wisdom and teach you what you did not know. (2:151)**

(Note the correlation in this *ayat* between hearing or seeing the signs and its effect: to purify us and to teach us what we did not know.)

So we can see Islam is essential semiotics; the art of making connections, linking disparate dots, seeing direction, seeing the relationships between (at times) apparent trifling matters and turning them into metonymic moments: definitive moments where a term or familiar idea is substituted for another not so familiar. This, in turn, allows some to seize the moment (Waqt).

The Quran is the penultimate example of connecting of dots. The exchange between visual, aural and verbal markers create a direction and a hope for a destination. In Qur’an Paradise is described in signs and metaphors that are familiar to us, evoking positive efforts and inspiration, as well as marked behavioral changes that assure a ‘place.’ Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’ala*) speaks to us through what we call “signs of the times,” indicators of circumstances, just as we affirm our existence or reality by leaving testimonies to our presence as we pass through life. A crumpled napkin tells that a meal has been consumed, an open Qur’an that someone was reciting and or reading, a door ajar, a lingering odor of perfume, a rising moon, a foggy night... all are signs or contain signs.

We are created by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*) to have the consciousness, the will, the ability to name the names and to read the signs; to have eyes that see and ears that hear. As 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.

Signs of the Divine Presence (active in this World) can be seen as '*da'wah*' of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*), calling us to see and to hear and to understand. The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) himself is a 'sign;' a way Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*) manifests His Love and Presence, Compassion and Mercy; His pleasure and displeasure. And when these *ayaat* and '*alam*' (signs and symbols) are concentrated, when Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*) has directed our attention to specific times and places, this is the time when there is the least distraction and barrier to awakening our inner senses (*lataa'if*) and perceptions, 'the doors to Hell are closed' and when the fruit of knowledge is ripe on the tree: *Laylatu-l-Qadr*.

The challenge, or one of the challenges, is that we need to not only relate to the material character of the ayah, but we must also relate to the "semiological" character of matter. To see the Divine Presence requires our *iraadah* (will) as well as a constant *niyyat* (intention) so that we don't get stuck within a pre-representational notion of signs (i.e. caught in the form and not the Essence.) This is the line between idolatry and true worship.

Our ability to articulate, to interact with and to 'see' the reality behind the creation and all its signs allows us to succeed in reading and understanding the text, or the subtext of the Qur'an. Our relationship with the 'signs,' through faith, or appreciation, awareness, is essentially the same as any relationship and demands the same attention in order to extract the utmost reliance and trust.

In our search for *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, we should also seek to understand the 'representation'--signs that stand in for and take the place of something else. It is through representation we know and understand the world and reality: through the act of 'naming it.' Hence, when Adam (as) told the names to the angels he was beginning a process, directed by Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*) to understand and make sense of creation.

Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*) has created countless, innumerable, complex and simple, hidden and obvious "representations" of His attributes in Creation and within us and in the Universes. As Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaalaa*) says in Sura Fussilat:

*Sanuribim ayatina fi-l 'afaqi wa fii 'anfusahim hatta yatabayyana labum 'annahu-l-haqqa*

**We will show them Our Signs on the horizon and within themselves until it is clear to them that it is the truth. (41:53)**

Not only are we directed to see something in the physical/material world, but we are enjoined to reach through it and experience something that allows us to sense what is beyond the physical/material—to see the signs within our selves. These non-material sign are things we cannot easily 'name,' but through which, we can travel to another dimension or track; an entrance to a world of other names and aspects of the Divine Presence—which brings me back to *Laylatu-l-Qadr*.

#### UNIQUENESS OF *LAYLATU-L-QADR*

As I come to my conclusion, I want to remind us that while *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is described to us in signs and meanings, material expressions cannot encompass it. (Even Qur'an says, "what will make you understand it?") What makes this night so unique that it can be known mentally, but it must be experienced existentially?

Look at the three nights we have talked about in this series: *Israa' Mi'raaj* is experienced by the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu alayhi wa sallam*) and described to us ontologically, *Nisfu Sha'baan* is a described series of special events that we quietly and sincerely attune our selves to, and *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is to be experienced by seeing and reading the signs, capturing a dynamic moment by seeing the difference between this night and other nights. It must be experienced as a reality in the Universe, whether visually, aurally, or some other way.

Our biological organism is quite complex and multi-layered, with varying degrees of difference, however, when we learn how to focus our inner sensory energy of the *lataa'if* we are accessing a kind of lucent manifestation or bioluminescent energy: *tajalli* that manifests in the human being and in creation in multifaceted ways.

From this night come many things, such as, healing, precognition, telepathic communication, spiritual energy, visions, mystical experiences, etc. Specific and different energies that can be experienced as a human being and while the energy, the force the love, the creative force is non-human, it is humanly accessible. Hence we are told to seek out that night, receive its Baraka, blessing.

At every stage more is understood, (i.e. more is named), and thus from the smallest wave particles to the largest structures of matter and space; from the richest sensory experiences to the most subtle spiritual experience, our universe shows differences and uniqueness on every scale. But it is dynamic, all things come into existence and go out of existence, from stars that are born and die to physical life, energy and even ideas. It is the ebb and flow, the *qabd* and *bast* that characterize what we call Existence or life (physical).

In this binary world of good and evil, saints and sinners, gods and demons, beneficent and maleficent beings, representations abound and even our brain is a structure of two hemispheres where what is 'real' and what is 'imagined' co-join, and through energy we perceive and define the material and pursue the 'spiritual' non material.

This night is a sign, it stands in for another reality: the One reality from which flow "the angels and the Spirit... bearing with them all the Orders" of the unseen and seen. This night gives us place and meaning in this universe of which we are a part. We can recognize this night by the rhythm and the expression of the non-nights--we know things and often define them from their opposites.

Language and forms are constructed to bridge the gap between the seen and unseen world...*du'aa*, prayer, *dhikr*, *fikr*, *muraaqabah*, *tambah*, are means to open the door way to the Infinite Divine Presence in the Present.

This process is ongoing, it is endless and it is infinite in its possibilities as it represents the Creator of the Infinite...Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). The endless, depthless truth of the Qur'an is probably the penultimate example of the dynamic process of endless meaning and affirmation of the Divine Presence. This is important when one looks at the structure and intention of Ramadan and what it 'represents' and how it 'stimulates' the one who embraces the totality of the process: in the body as fasting and in the heart as unveiling truth in the state of receptivity that fasting provides. It comes to a dénouement in *Laylatu-l-Qadr*, as it did in *Nisfu Sha'ban* and for the Prophet sal in *Israa' Mi'raaj*.

These are deeply spiritual nights and months, where spiritual knowledge surrounds us and can be experienced; it is neither subject or object, but momentary events that dissolve for a time, ever so briefly perhaps, into a transparency...where we become who and what we essentially are, free from culture, civilization, even name and form and experience an aspect of completeness.

We can potentially experience moments during these three nights that are precious jewels from the treasury of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). But even if we do not feel or see or sense them materially, their effect remains and in the core of our receptive and sincere hearts there is recognition and transformation taking place. The passage through time and space, the significance of the sighting of the moons, the moments within each month, the opportunities to interpret and produce change are reflective and representational of the Creative Process of the Creator for all to see and all to reflect upon and all to heed the signs.

**And He has subjected to you everything contained in the heavens and in the earth—[it is] all from Him. Surely in that are Signs for those who reflect. (45: 13)**

*Inna fi dhalika la-ayatil-li-qowminy-yatafakkarun.*

#### CLOSING

In closing I will say this: We have to understand what it means to recognize the *Laylatu-l-Qadr*. Though there may be outward signs, *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is the result of our piety and sincerity during the month of Ramadan. *Laylatu-l-Qadr* is a night that is greater than a thousand of other nights. It is the greatest because it is a night in which we have become absorbed and lost in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). The whole universe responds to our *fanaa*, to our *baqaa*. Indeed, the *baqaa* is the result.

So, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*), we ask You for Your mercy and to help us to find ourselves, especially in the last ten days, to refrain from all the things we have promised to refrain from, and to intend all the things we have promised to intend: to foster good thoughts, to speak good words; if we falter, to make our apologies quickly and not let any time pass.

O Allah (Swt.) teaches us the meaning of *Laylatu-l-Qadr* before the grave. Teach us the joy of *subhat* and the meaningfulness of our life, and help us to seize the opportunity for our families, our community, and ourselves. Heal this world of its greed and people. Remove those in power who are the greed and hate mongers and liars. And if you see fit, Allah, place us where You will and give us Your protection. *Amin*.

#### CLOSING DU<sup>CAA</sup>

*Hasbiyallaahu , Laa Ilaaha Illaa Huu. 'alayhi tawakkaltu wa humu rabbu-l-'arshi-adhim.*

Allah is sufficient for me! There is no deity save Him. In Him have I placed my trust, for He is the Sustainer , in awesome almightiness enthroned. (9:129)

*Subhaana rabbika rabbi-l-'izzati ammaa yasifuun. wa salaamun 'alaa-l-mursaliin. wa-l-hamdu lillaahi rabbi-l-'alamiin. Wa salla-llaahu 'alaa sayyidinaa Muhammadin, wa 'alaa aalibi wa sabbihi wa sallam.*

Limitless in His glory is thy Sustainer, the Lord of Almightyness, (exalted) above anything that (human beings) may devise by way of definition! And Peace be upon all His message-bearers! And praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds! And may Allah send blessings on our master Muhammad, and on his family and people and companions, and also peace.