



Muhabbah and Muraqabah, Part II

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Now I would like to speak about *muhabbat* and *muraqabah*. Most people seek momentary inspiration and affirmation for their faith, but struggle with “struggle and effort” in the spiritual realm. While we accept struggle as a necessary part of our social or work relationships, somehow we feel that because the *dīn* comes to us for “free,” we do not have to make much effort in order to benefit from it. Yet love requires courage, patience, effort, sincerity, and sacrifice. It was narrated that the Prophet (sal) said, ***“Whoever loves me, I will burden him.”***

And in another account, one person came to the Prophet and said, ***“O Prophet, I love you,”*** and the Prophet (sal) said, ***“Then prepare yourself to be poor.”*** Another time, a person came to the Prophet and said, ***“O Prophet, I love God,”*** and the Prophet (sal) said, ***“Then prepare yourself for affliction.”*** He recited a verse: ***“Everyone desires the good, but no one has attained the ascension except by loving the One Who has created the good.”***

There are three ways that seekers reach knowledge: *muraqabah* (contemplation), *mushahadah*, and *muhasabah* (accounting, reckoning). In the state of contemplation, Bahaudin Naqshband (ra) said ***“The seeker forgets what has been created, and***

remembers only the One Who created it.” In the state of vision, inspirations from the unseen come to the heart accompanied by two states, *qabd* and *bast*. In the state of contraction, the vision is of majesty, and in the state of expansion, the vision is of beauty. In the state of reckoning or accounting, the seeker evaluates every hour that has passed. Was he in the complete presence of Allah, or was he in the complete presence of the world?

Bahā’uddīn Naqshband (ra)said,

The seeker in this way must be busy in rejecting the evil whisperings and insinuations of the ego. He must reject them before they reach him, or he might reject them after they reach him, but before they control him. Another seeker might not reject them, however, until after they reach him and control him. He cannot gain any fruit because at that time, it is impossible to take the whisperings out of the heart.

So, let me talk a little about *muraqabah*. *Muraqabah* is knowing that Allah is watching over us. Allah (swt) says:

"And know that Allah knows what is in your minds, so fear Him." (2:235)

"And Allah is Ever a Watcher over all things." (33:52)

"And He is with you wherever you may be." (57:4)

When we talk about *muraqabah* we are talking about a combination of things: witnessing something (*mushahadah*). We are talking about hopefully the result of looking into a heart and mind that has been somewhat cleansed by *muhasabah* (accounting). And we are talking about the way we can see ourselves or supervise our own actions, watching, controlling, learning in a conscious way, putting our hearts on Allah without attachment to anything other than Allah. It means for most of us, we have

to go beyond a state of normal mental activity. In a state of normal mental activity, we are very distracted, thinking about the bills to pay, the next piece of work we have to do, the place we have to be, or what has happened before.

So we have to go beyond our normal mental activity and distraction, because you cannot just say to ourselves: "Put your mind on Allah and don't attach anything." We have to come to that from a different doorway. We cannot come to that through the normal doorway of cognitive thinking. It is great to say, "enjoin good and forbid evil," but you have to have some way of enforcing the prohibition. In most cases, it is through *taqwa*. If a person has some genuine piety and fear of Allah, it is much easier to restrain your actions than if you do not have any.

Al-Junayd said, *"The one firm in muraqabah fears the waste of even a moment for other than his Lord."* Yet, the best way is through love. Focus on what or who you love and who loves you. Affirm your love of service, justice, compassion. Dhun-Nun said: *"The sign of muraqabah is to favor what Allah has sent down (of the revelation), to glorify what Allah has glorified, and to despise what Allah has despised."*

FORMS AND CONTEXT OF MURAQABAH

What is the methodology? There are different forms of meditation, but I want to come at it from a slightly different point of view. What we are advised that the point of view is of a Sufi, is to try to understand what the will of Allah is, and to be sincere, and try to live our life in the consciousness of being guided by Allah. The traditional way of saying that is to discuss *ihsan*, to "act as if Allah is seeing us in whatever we do and say." Whatever state we are in, whatever 'āyat of Qur'an we are reciting, whatever deed we do, Allah is witness over us and especially when we are deeply engrossed. We have to find another way into a different state of consciousness.

Muraqabah is a way of ending the separation between ourselves and Allah, and making us aware that all of our actions and all the things around us are not only created, but are under the active supervision and Presence of the Divine. What is disagreeable are the behaviors and attitudes of human beings that keep us from seeing that and keep us acting contrary to the way we would act if we were aware of the Divine Presence.

If *muraqabah* means that we are aware and attentive, then the first step would not be attaining to some state where all of our actions and words are perfect, and we have total control over our desires and wants. It would have to be something much less than that. It would have to be that we are consistent in our practice and sincere in our effort, and committed to our journey. What is important is that we enjoy and seek out service to others, that we respect Allah's creatures, that we act from our essential goodness (our *fitrah*), and that we are committed to our commitments.

Muraqabah is more about the effort we make to put ourselves into a state of mind or a place of being where our thoughts become more pure and our intentions clear. Even when we are alone in the privacy of our own hearts and minds, we are aware that we are not truly alone. We are aware that there is, in our own breath and in our own life, the Presence of something that we are not in control of, that we are not able to make decisions about.

We know what these terms mean, ultimately; but if we define them in our own lives as a reality only when we achieve the ultimate state, we give ourselves an excuse not to make effort, not to fulfill what we can really fulfill on this journey. If meditation and practices are a way that lead to the awareness of the Presence of Allah, and if it is basically in our hands (even though we have our guide), these are the things we can say we know; they are things we can be sure of.

Another way of saying this is the Divine message over the millenniums has been given to the prophets and their followers in a way that there has been a spiritual order or

lineage. Travelers on the path of *muraqabah* have the means to turn to Allah at any time and at any place, because they are aware of their helplessness, their poverty, and destitution before Allah. To be admitted into a private, intimate gathering with God, one needs to have awareness of one's neediness.

WATCHING OURSELVES

When in *muraqabah* we are watching ourselves and we feel Allah is Present with us and guiding us, we are able to keep our minds away from anything other than Allah for a period of time, and we are deaf to all things not related to Allah. Our eyes do not see anything that does not remind us of Allah. Our tongues do not speak anything that does not remind us of Allah. Then we have achieved the state of *muraqabah*. (*Ra-qa-ba*—to watch over, to keep an eye on, to take care of.) Mevlana said,

God Almighty described Himself as the All-Seeing in order to warn you against evil. He described Himself as the All-Hearing in order to admonish you not to say anything bad. He described Himself as the All-Knowing to inform you that He knows you, and therefore He exhorts you to be alert to corrupt thoughts and considerations.

In this way, Rumi is really talking to us about *muhatabah*. We have a way of supervising ourselves, after we have accounted for ourselves and know our weaknesses. He is talking about *muraqabah* by saying we have a way of supervising ourselves to protect ourselves from the emotions, thoughts, and actions that are not attentive to God. You cannot do that just through a *suhbat* like this, or just because you know it intellectually. You have to give time and effort to the process.

Allah says that He is the Watcher over all things. We have to turn to Allah, we are

told, with “a heart that is at rest.” We have to be patient and anticipate the *fayd*, the flow of Divine gifts, effulgent light and energy that is able to come into our hearts. We cannot do that in the normal course of our daily life. If we want to achieve it, we have to make the time in the normal course of our daily lives, and that is when we are going to sit and drift. This is the greatness of the teachings of Abdul Bari Shah and the Mujaddidī way of *muraqabah*.

When we are sitting in *muraqabah*, we get to the point where we are “drifting” (*ghunūgi*). It is in that drifting that we can enter the secret doorway and begin to see with the inner eye. When we are not drifting, our minds are running and consumed with other things. We are not going to be able to detach ourselves from the things of this world. When we are drifting, we can drift through that doorway, and then momentarily or for longer periods of time, awaken in that state of meditation where we are attentive in a different way (*ādrāq*, cognition). I hope you have all experienced it. You were sitting; your mind is taken up with other things, you drift. You awaken in a state of meditation, and your mind is not taken up by all those other things, like it was before. But it was taken up with some recitation, some sense of light or presence, or even some sense of your own self. (*Warūd*—coming, becoming, sight.) Mental concentration is sustained and the spiritual eye is awakened. Concentration comes and goes, and one sees without the usual intellect; the *kashf* reveals what can only be seen or experienced in moments of illumination.

To the extent that a person turns to Allah sincerely in their meditation, it means that one is making the time and space for *muraqabah*. You know inside of you that this is the way you can enter into that doorway and make *muraqabah*. For a person who does this, you achieve a state of peace in your heart through which your conscience and mind and heart all remain open to the Divine gifts that flow to you, like insight, enlightenment,

and radiance in your heart. This is a blessing of God for the person who pursues awareness of the Presence. One of the most important mechanisms for that to happen is to go through that self-criticism in *muhasabah*, because it is a way in which we control ourselves and we are aware of our limitations, and the things that we have accomplished.

MUHABBAT IN RAMADAN

Ramadan provides for us a very focused and extended opportunity for *muhasabah* and *muraqabah* and experiencing the Presence of Allah. It is a time when we can foster a given intention. Just like in *muraqabah* we have to foster a different way of thinking about the Presence of Allah, because we are not thinking in our normal thought patterns. It is a time when we are more tuned to patterns in the non-physical, non-linear dimensions. Perceptions in meditation are not extensions of the day-to-day thoughts and perceptions; they are reflections of different realms and capabilities.

In special occasions like Ramadān, we can foster a kind of love for the Divine that is hard for us to do when we are not in a state of such obvious poverty, such a state of hunger or yearning. We can strive to find a different aspect of *muhabbat* (love) during this month. *Muhabbat* means a kind of tenderness and kind feeling, an inclination. It is a time when we are watching our tongues and not criticizing. These are goals and things that human beings *can* accomplish: not backbiting, not being envious, serving one another, and inviting one another to our homes.

Every year we wish we can make it longer, and end it by saying, “We can’t make Ramadān longer, but we can do these practices longer.” *Inshā’a-llāh*, maybe this year we can carry on longer prayers, or inviting people to our homes, and have real generosity and brotherhood and sisterhood, and set aside our own selfish natures. These are all the things that can be focused on during Ramadān. This is the other doorway to another dimension and capacity of love.

The love of passion, even the love of the parent for the child, or the lover to the beloved, is a different kind of love. What one experiences as spiritual love is more a love that takes elements of the kind of love that invades our heart and soul and is transformed in us as an experience of gentle piety, humility, joy and peace. Ramadān allows us to have a taste of such a pleasant experience with one another, a very deep kind of irresistible kind of love that burns out our desires, and makes one yearn for a kind of meeting with Allah, enthusiastically and fervently. That love, which is defined by the Sufis as the relationship with the heart, is the love of the One Who is the real Beloved, the irresistible love we feel only for Allah (*eshq*).

Ramadān, or *khilwa*, or the Hajj becomes a doorway for a different kind of love, to being aware of the Presence of Allah. We cannot be aware of the Presence of Allah without some kind of mechanism that allows us to do that. So too, this mechanism of Ramadān that Allah gave us through the Prophet Mohammed (sal) gives us another doorway to love.

Again, I reiterate: it is not the usual doorways we are used to. It is not normal affection, normal responsibilities, normal relationships we are used to fostering with other human beings. This is a love that, because we have it with Allah and we submit to Allah, it allows us to love other people differently and relate to each other differently. *Iftār*, *suhur*, Tarawīh, discussions, Qur'an reading, and just the general gathering of the *ummah* together ignites another dimension of love. You have all experienced that to some degree. Haven't you?

In that level of love, we are not trying to just comply with our desires and every thought that comes to us. There is a sobriety that comes. Maybe we can describe it as standing in the Presence of Allah, free from the transient aspects of other relationships, from the worries that go with other relationship. Because there is no worry in the Presence of Allah, only love, the heart of a person who has that degree of love always

beats with new understandings of the Beloved. Every moment has the possibility of new revelations and unveilings. Our creativity and imagination, the mysteries of love, and the feelings we receive when we hear the message of love are not the same as when you feel them just from another human being. But we recognize them from our human love.

DOORWAYS TO ALLAH

But this state does not come just because we are fasting, or saying, “This is Ramadān. I love Allah, and Allah loves me, and everything is wonderful.” It is because Ramadān is a door way to another dimension of love. We have made *mahasabah*; we have made *muraqabah*, and we are now in the state of *muhabbat*. Then in *mushahadah*, we witness all this from a different perspective.

Just like those of us who have experienced love many times in our lives, we know that it transcends the limitations of ourselves. We lose ourselves flying with the winds of love. You realize that there is yet another type of love that is solely reserved for Allah and your relationship for Allah. The amazement a lover feels, or the abandonment a lover feels, the intoxication and submission in the human sense of love all have a greater dimension in the love of Allah. The way into that realm is through such things like *muhabbat* and fasting.

Sometimes we are on a journey alone in love; sometimes we are accompanied on that journey. Sometimes we only speak of this in the silence of our hearts; sometimes we speak to our companions who we are journeying with, communicating our state. Sometimes the lover feel totally abandoned and cannot attain the beloved. And sometimes the lover feels he has to communicate through poetry, because he can't communicate through any other way, as poetry carries the communication of the heart. Rabi'a (ra) wrote,

You talk about loving God while you disobey Him. I swear by my life that this is something very strange. If you were truthful in your love, you would obey Him, for the lover obeys whom he loves.

She goes on to say that love is based on two pillars: *the first which is manifested by the lover's acts. The lover tries to comply with the beloved's desires. The second relates to the inner world of the lover, which should inwardly be closed to everything else unrelated to the beloved.*

The love that is felt by those who are at the beginning of their journey, who are not established in their constancy, who are not able to maintain fully their commitment is the kind of love where one dreams to attain certain things, dreaming of the presence of the beloved. At some moments, we receive signs of the knowledge of the Beloved or God. There are times when, on the horizon, one sort of vaguely feels the awe and amazement of Allah's creation. Then there are those who have persevered, who have maintained their commitments, who are constant in their practices and their prayer, in their sincerity, who do not let their yearning become totally supplanted by the things of the world or even their experiences of love in the *dhāhir*. What is empty in the *dhāhir* becomes filled in the *bātin*, what is full in the *dhāhir* becomes transcendent in the *bātin*.

For those people who experience this (*inshā'a-Llāh*, those of us), we can live in the light of the Qur'an. For that person, when they open up the Qur'an, it is like turning on a light. A beam of light comes out of it and illumines something in your heart and mind. When you read the *hadith* of the Prophet (sal), something is clarified. Light comes from it. When you make your prayer, or sit in *muraqabah*; when you assist someone, like your brother and sister; when you do things *fī sabīli-Llāh*, then a light comes and refines your

character and strengthens your will and your sincerity.

You don't have to think about not gossiping, or not being selfish, or being afraid of what's happening next, or failure or success, because you become more aware that you are now in the realm of the Lover and Beloved. Those are the things that are not thought about in that state. When one reaches the epitome of that state, you realize how little you are, and how blessed you are to have any sense that you are loved by God.

The ones who are most advanced in the love of Allah are described as *“Those who are like the rain clouds in the Paradise of Islam. They feel their existence is only by Him; their breath is only by Him; and that without remembrance of Allah, there is a painful separation.”*

But we also must remember that there are degrees of love, of attachment, of practices. There are degrees of witnessing. We cannot allow ourselves to have the excuse that because we don't know the way to attain the ultimate state of nearness to Allah, we shouldn't even bother to go through the motions of the practices. Do not despair or become indifferent. Just the commitment and regular practice is the foundation for contentment. This is the path through the valley of indifference.

The Prophet (sal) said, *“A man is with him whom he loves,”* and he declared, *“Whoever becomes an enemy of my friends has waged war on me. He has waged war on God Almighty.”* We know that if someone were to attack anyone whom we love, or harm anyone whom we love, or stand in the way of the life and freedom of anyone we love, that person is our enemy. The Prophet (sal) in this *hadith* is revealing what Allah says, if you make this commitment to me, in this journey, this is how I will feel about your love for me. This is how I will protect you.

In the *hadith* where Prophet Muhammed (sal) was questioned, *“What is meant by, ‘I am with the one who remembers Me?’”* He said, *“It is the clear evidence that people of the heart who remember Allah always are always being protected at any*

moment by Allah.”

CONCLUSION

Every day we have the opportunity of perfecting our *adab* and our witnessing, and our refinement. To the point, *inshā'a-Llāh*, by the time we get to the end of Ramadān, our criticism in *muhasabah* will be brief, and the part where you see all the good we have done becomes so long. Prophet Muhammed (sal) said, **“It is impossible to reach the love of the people of God until you come out of yourself.”** Meaning, one has to have good conduct and good *adab*. Good conduct is the foundation for everything I have talked about today.

Good conduct with Allah Almighty is perfected in worship, keeping away from all that is forbidden, and keeping with all that has been ordered. Good conduct with the Prophet Muhammed (sal) requires the *murīd* to follow the states of the Prophet, and know that the Prophet is the bridge between Allah and His creation, and that everything in the universe is under His orders. Good conduct with one's *shaykh* is a requirement for every seeker. The *shuyukh* are the causes and the means for following in the footsteps of the Prophet, and it is a duty for the seeker in all their actions to keep the orders of the *shaykh*. Bahā'uddīn Naqshband (ra) said,

One time, one of my followers greeted me. I didn't respond to him, though it is a requirement of the sunnah to respond if someone greets you. This made my follower upset. I sent someone after him to apologize and say, “At the time of meeting you, my mind, my heart, my spirit, my body and my soul were completely lost in the Divine Presence, listening to what Allah was saying to me. It made me so engrossed in the speech of God that I was unable to respond to you.”

He also gave us a teaching on our intention. He said, *“To correct the intention is very important. Intentions are from the unseen world.”*

Where does your intention come from? You do not know where it comes from. It rises up from within you. *“Intentions are from the unseen world, not from the material world. For that reason, Ibn Sireen did not pray at the funeral prayer of Hasan al Basri. He said, “How can I pray, when my intention has not yet reached me, connecting me with the unseen?”*

He continued, *“Intention is very important. It consists of three letters: Nun, which represents the light of God. Ya, which represents the hand of God, and Hah, which represents the guidance of God. The niyyah is the breeze of the soul.”*

Inshā’a-llāh, we all have good *niyyah* for these last days of Ramadān and the months beyond. *Inshā’a-llāh*, we all contemplate the doorways into love of *muhasabah* and *muraqabah*, and not just to think that of these as methods and techniques, but as the ways Allah has provided to His *awliyā* to get around barriers that we face in the world. He gives us this opportunity in Ramadān and in prayer, through our actions toward one another, to find a way into that place where His presence can be felt. I pray, *inshā’a-llāh*, that in these days we will begin with a wonderful opportunity to establish a new and lasting relationship with our Beloved.