

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Five Sunday Series 2010-2011**

**'Peace'**

**Travels on the Road to Peace:**

**A Life Time Journey in the Search for Truth and Happiness**

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## OPENING DU'AA

*Allahumma inna nasalaka mujibati rahmatika  
Wa'aza'ima magfiratika, wa salamata min kulli itmin,  
wal-ganimata min kulli birrin, wal-fawza bil-jannati mina-n-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.

*Allahumma, yassir lanaa umuuranaa ma'a -rraabati li-quluubinaa  
wa abdaaninaa wa-s-salaamati  
wa-l-'aafiyati fii diininnaa wa dunyaanaa.*

O Allah, make it easy for us in all our affairs,  
with ease for our hearts and our bodies and safety  
and protection in our religion and our worldly affairs.

## INTRODUCTION

For so many years, decades, in fact, I have been speaking about, pursuing, advocating, and affirming peace as a civil rights activist in the 1960's, using Gandhian methods of *Satyagraha*, living in the Gandhi Ashram and others in India, working for constructive non-violence in the Middle East, marching with Martin Luther King, protesting Nuclear weapons outside the White House in the early 1960's, protesting the war in Vietnam, creating the first Peace Camp for Palestinian and Israeli Youth in 1982, writing and producing plays like, "In Our Hands" and "Peace Child." All of that effort, all that work began as a personal inner journey, a journey to understand where that urge for peace comes from.

I could regale you with many stories about the journeys and the people I met, worked with, resisted, was beaten by, loved, and struggled not to hate or resent in my search for peace. But what I will tell you is that it is a never-ending

journey that begins with the self, our struggle to relate to the qualities and attributes of our own souls. These qualities and attributes yearn to escape the confines of our conditioning, cultural prejudice, bigotry, fear, weakness and arrogance. They are the qualities that I, we, have come to know as the *Asmaa'u-l-Husnaa*.

For there to be inner peace on the journey inwards (toward the *baatin*), there must be access to a mixture of attributes; just as there must be those same attributes in the *dhaahir* for there to be peace in our societies and our world. Whatever exists in the *baatin* must also have its correlative in the *dhaahir*; whatever is sought in the *afaaq* is found in the *anfus*. From off the horizon will be manifest in the self. Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) reveals in the Holy Qur'an:

*Inna-Llaaha laa yughayyiru maa biqawmin hattaa yughayyiruu maa bi'anfusihim.*

**Allah will not change the condition of a people (nation), until they (all) change what is in themselves. (13:11)**

The Arabic in this is somewhat complex. I will not go into it in depth but to say that the implications are that there needs to be both individual affirmation of values and collective effort for change to take place.

As we see from the issues of today—political, social, economic, spiritual, moral—there is a great necessity for patience, tolerance, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, truth, justice, goodness, guidance, wisdom, benevolence, protection, humility, faith, equity, nourishment, empathy, gratitude. All are the qualities of the *Asmaa'u-l-Husnaa*; yes, even at times, there is the necessity for avenging, punishing and abasing. Today the struggle between the two is quite apparent and disconcerting. I have lived through many incarnations of this struggle, and my concerns about our future are many, but my hope and faith is still strong.

Years of inner striving and outer action have created in me a framework for recognizing the greatness of Islam and its positive and constructive approach to peace. It is one that transcends the limits of this physical life, but also includes it, indeed uses it exclusively as a means to an endless awareness. In the Islamic context, peace has many names and subtleties, as well as outer and inner manifestations. These are many inter-related concepts in Islam, there is, *salaam* (peace, submission, safety, security). There is *sulh* (reconciliation, settlement, compromise, from *salaha*). It is a very comprehensive term which also means righteous, pious, appropriate, and permissible. There are other derivatives like *salah*: meaning good or proper condition, and beneficial. But there are also other words like, *sakina* (tranquility) and *tam'ana* (calm, quite, repose, peacefulness). Just as there are many names for peace, there are as many doorways to peace and signs of peace, inner and outer.

This is a vast subject, and today we have limited time to touch on a few elements that are critical to understanding. Today, I will start, in a sense, at the ending. Following the tradition of the Khwaja Khwajagan and the principle of *indaraja-n-nihayat dar bidayat*, we begin where others end. But let me first say: There can be no lasting peace, inner or outer, without love. This we will discuss in another *dars*. There can be no state of peace without a step-by-step ascension, by repenting of shameful acts, to the state where the chief motive to repentance is a debt of gratitude and grateful service. This too, will be discussed in later *daruus*.

## THE ETERNAL SEARCH FOR PEACE

We live in a world of tremendous complexity, and the problems that humanity faces in day-to-day life create a great deal of fear and anxiety. Finding solutions to economic, health, food, personal and mental issues are difficult enough in an environment where people are cooperative and motivated by the same principles and values; but they are infinitely more complex in today's fractured world of partisanship, greed, economic instability and wars of

attrition. Solving problems demands co-existence, mutuality, equity, and requires degrees of love and patience, humility and faith that transcend the limitations of human frailties and selfishness. In Qur'an, Allah ties together the concept of peace with faith and trust:

*Wa'inñ janahuu li-s-salmi fa-jnah labaa wa tawakkal' alaa-LJaaib. Innahu huwa-s-Samee'u-l' Aleem.*

**And if they lean toward peace, then you [should] lean as well, and trust in Allah. Surely He is Hearing, Knowing. (8:61)**

Here we are enjoined to trust in Allah. In the face of all our difficulties and all the obstacles to peace, trust in Allah. We are all in a state of constant struggle of the attainment of peace and comfort and happiness. We are in a struggle to balance our trust that Allah has provided for us, with our hopes and desires for more, for a vision of happiness and peace that we hold inside ourselves. But since we seek it through the material, we are always failing or disappointed or experiencing greed and power. Nothing guarantees the *hayyata-t-tayyiba*, the good life, not health, not wealth, not even a good home life. These things can all be contributory factors, but not guarantors; yet, every person holds up the ideal of happiness and peace in his or her mind. There is a fundamental requirement of attaining that peace/happiness ideal. What is that requirement? What is it that the vast majority of human beings seeks, but does not find? What is it that allows a human being to say, "I am happy. I am at peace"?

True peace and happiness, that which caused me to journey from place to place, to live in the cave near the Ganges, to live in *asbrama* in the Himalayas, to sit for years at the feet of my guide, friend, and Shaykh, and a few other noble souls, is the same thing that made me dissatisfied with my early life/work. My dissatisfaction with the quest for wealth and the desire for recognition drove me to understand that the fullness and peace comes only from spirituality, from submission, from faith, from the pursuit of knowledge of the Divine.

Up until that search became the reality of my life, any peace and happiness that came from the material spheres was transient and momentary, easily lost or hidden behind the latest fear or worry, illness or doubt...the vicissitudes of daily life. But with the awakening to Islam/Sufism; with the company (*suhbat*) of fellow sojourners and with the company of the *shuyukh*, at the very least, I knew that a permanent state of peace was attainable. It was a peace could be lived for longer and longer periods of time, until it eventually can be the reality of life. Yet still, it is an unending journey. It is only in the true, sincere, humble and continuous pursuit of spiritual awakening, in the reality of the *deen* of Islam that this can be found. Islam, the way of peace, is the answer in its name and in its reality.

Today there are many 'religions,' many 'isms.' It is in the name of these 'isms' that wars have been fought, innocents have died, lands destroyed, society undermined, scapegoats created, and empires have risen and fallen. Marxism, Hitlerism, Zionism, 'Jesus-ism,' 'archaic revivalism,' fundamentalism, even 'Islamism.' They are all products of human minds, all products of a limited capacity, with limited knowledge and a limited point of view about life/humanity, excluding and exclusive, far from the affirmation and intention of true Unity and Truth.

As certain as adherents to these beliefs are about their righteousness, there is a very high level of uncertainty seen in their aggressiveness and defensiveness, arrogance and fearfulness. Sure and trustworthy guidance, the light of peace, tolerance and inclusivity can only come from One Who is infinite, perfect, balanced and loving. Indeed, each of the above 'isms' engenders the opposite, justifying the abandonment of ethics and morality, and incurring hate and fear. Their leaders and the followers are not able to comprehend the whole past, present and future; their vision does not transcend the limitations of personal bias and ignorance.

Comprehensive knowledge is an impossible expectation for us limited human beings. This limitation is at the foundation of our inability to solve the complex problems we face, and the inability of man-made 'religions' to solve

social problems. When you add to that the interface of emotions, desires, fears and cultural conditioning, one understands the challenge we all face in the pursuit of peace, inner and outer. Yet, peace, contentment and happiness are all attainable as Allah tells us:

*Alladheena aamanuu wa tatma'innu quluububum bi-dhikri-Llaahi. Alaa bi-dhikri-Llaahi tatma'innu-l-quluub.*

**Those who believe and whose hearts are made tranquil by the remembrance of Allah. Surely, it is by the Remembrance of Allah that hearts find rest. (Qur'an 13:28)**

When we move our attention from the external to the internal, when we put our reliance in Allah, not on our self, our restlessness is quieted; our hearts find rest.

### ISLAMIC MODEL OF PEACE

Because of this message of Islam, I believe that there is an exceptional opportunity in Muslim communities to establish peace and, perhaps in time, become models for peace-building and reconciliation. Islam's model of conflict management, prevention and resolution comes from Muslims' commitment to seeking peace, inner and outer, for the sake of Allah. Because of Islam's emphasis on personal submission, inner peace and security, Muslims should be predisposed to conflict prevention. This predisposition for seeking inner peace is ideally reflected in peace in the community. As Allah guides us in Surat-al-Furqan:

*Wa 'ibaadu-r-Rahmaani-lladheena yamshuuna 'alaa-l-'ardi hannañw-wa'idhaa khaatabahumu-l-jaabihuuna qaaluu salaamaa.*

**And the worshippers of the Universally Merciful are they who walk modestly upon the earth; and if the ignorant address them they say, "Peace." (25:63)**

Islam emphasizes community well-being, sacrifice for the benefit of others, brotherhood/sisterhood, and the greater *jihad*—struggle with the *nafs* (ego). This *jihad* is a Muslim's struggle with attitudes of selfishness and greed on a daily basis in an attempt to turn the focus of his or her life away from the self and the world towards actions that reflect good intentions for others. In a model Muslim community, conflict is prevented and pre-empted by the sincere inner struggle and refinement of the character of the members of the community.

As simplistic as it might sound, the foundation of conflict prevention, management and resolution lies in individuals or communities uncovering the benefits of cooperation. Inherent in cooperation is some degree of peace, reconciliation and restitution. In Islamic terms these concepts fall under the rubric of *sulh*, meaning righteousness, and, by extension, reconciliation, settlement and peacemaking. It is increasingly important that in Western, democratic countries Islam is understood not simply as a religion of peace (rather than one of hostility), but furthermore that within Islam resides this powerful tool: the concept of *sulh*. What exactly does conflict resolution through *sulh* mean? It means individuals and communities establish a social contract, a truthful relationship based on mutual benefit, promoting a comprehensive and fair, democratic and spiritually equitable society.

As you know, in early Islamic history there are many example of the establishment of peaceful social contracts. One of many historical examples of pre-empting conflict is the Muslim's treaty with the Christians and Jews in Medina.

The Prophet (sal)... made a covenant of mutual obligation between his followers and the Jews of the oasis, forming them into a single community of believers, but allowing for difference between the two religions. Muslims and Jews were to have equal status. If a Jew was wronged, then he must be helped to his rights by both Muslim and Jew, and so also if a Muslim was wronged.<sup>i</sup>

When the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) was building a new society in Medina, he went to extreme ends to avoid conflict between people. To build a model society at a time when many people questioned the success of this new revelation was necessary to maintain peace and for the message to be accepted. Indeed, it is not so different from what we face in many communities and countries today. The rules of conflict, and the benefits of avoiding it are well documented in Islam. The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said:

**A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe, and the believer is one in whom people place their trust in regard to their life and their wealth.**

A sustainable peace is a legitimate peace, meaning it is for the benefit of and supported by the people involved in conflict, regardless of their differences. That means the transformational process must move the population from the status of extreme volatility and dependency on those in power, to one of self-sufficiency and well-being. In that latter state, individuals are dependent only on the values and principles they share with those with whom they were formerly engaged in conflict. This is called conflict progression, to which reconciliation (*sulh*) is key.

*Sulh* implies not only reconciliation with regard to the present situation, but with the past and its historical prejudice, healing historical wounds. Reconciliation of the past, present, and future is necessary for sustainable peace. Instead of longing for acknowledgment of painful losses and experiences, one finds inner peace and the foundation for respect. Allah says in Qur’an:

*Idfa’ bi-llatee hiya ahsanu fa’idbaa-lladhee baynaka wa baynahu ‘adaawatuñ kaannahu wa liyyun hameem.*

**...Repel [evil] with that which is better; then will he, between whom and you was hatred, become as it were your friend and intimate! (41:34)**

We know that violence breeds hatred as exemplified in former and current conflict sites the world over: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Iran, Kurdistan, Chechnya, and Iraq. It sows destruction on physical, emotional and mental levels. In contrast, choosing to create a pre-emptive peace and to commit to nonviolence inspires people to re-make their lives. One of the most successful modern-day practitioners of nonviolence was the Muslim leader Khan Abdul Ghaffur Khan, who mobilized the Pathans of the North-West Frontier in the 1930s and 1940s into a nonviolent army on behalf of Indian independence. He wrote to his followers:

I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it.<sup>ii</sup>

Khan Ghaffar Khan’s efforts reflect the *hadith*: **“Allah grants to gentleness what He does not grant to violence.”**

## THE DOORWAY OF INNER PEACE

Patience, righteousness, gentleness... these are doorways to peace. The way to peace has many doorways and it has many obstacles. But all the doorways begin with our *fitrah* (innate good nature), while the obstacles begin with our cultures, our ignorance, our animal fears, and our urge to fight/resist. To overcome these obstacles, everything,

every aspect of our life needs to be examined under the microscope of self-reflection and meditation (*tafakkur* and *muraqabah*), until we realize that surrender takes greater courage than resistance. This is the essential message of every non-violent movement: Islam—submission and humility—brings peace and security.

When we talk about peace, we must remember that it is not a thing. Peace is not a treaty, or a state of the world in the physical. As has been said, thousands of times by me, millions of times by others, peace is a state, a station, a *maqam*. It begins with and is sustained within. There can be no lasting outer peace without inner peace.

Why is it that **“Allah grants to gentleness what He does not grant to violence”**? Because gentleness comes from a state of inner peace; gentleness is a sign of a refined and good character, a sign of inner contentment. The totality of our inner character is seen through our conduct. Similarly, peace passes from the *‘alam mithaal* (world of ideas/images), through the corridor (*majaaz*), from the inner to the outer. Inner peace is manifest in acts of peace, attitudes of peace.

We cannot underestimate the importance of intention and the inner state in the search for outer peace, in our lives and in our communities. It is precisely in the realm of the spiritual where peace is found or lost. The unseen forces of the *nafs* pull us down toward the lowly characteristics, while the *ruh* (soul) pulls up towards the Divine Sublimity. Only in this realm of the *deen* can we find peace.

*Remember that Nafs or selfness, what some call the psyche, is the entrance to Ma’rifah (Divine Gnosis). The dervish rests at peace, understanding that the management of the Nafs is even more difficult than understanding the Nafs; therefore the dervish behaves like a shepherd over his flock, the ever scattering herd of his Nafs.*

On one hand, we have a virtual unlimited urge for perfection and desire to achieve the loftiest heights of success. On the other, our limitations are enough that we are often incapable of determining the right path and the ultimate consequences of our actions. We can see, but we are blind; we can hear, but we are deaf; we understand, but we are ignorant and lack *yaqeen*/certainty.

We are swimming in an ocean of universals, and we are given the potential and ability to extract and deduce particulars. If peace is to be real (*as-Salaam*) in our lives then it must be identifiable and graspable. If one has *idraak*, then one grasps with something other than one’s physicality, something of essence that is non-physical, but deeply spiritual. We are all moving toward death in the physical, while at the same time moving in and toward spiritual life and eternal life.

## THE DOORWAY OF REMEMBRANCE

I would like to ask you now to take a moment to reflect on the times in your life you have felt most at peace. What we mostly see are temporary moments of satisfaction, quiescence or detachment from the ‘real’ physical world. But when we look deeper at those moments, we find that our moments of greatest happiness, contentment and peace come when we are recognizing the greatness and the power of Allah, the immensity of His Love, the un-ending quality of His Mercy, the depth of His Universes. In those moments when we can see ourselves in the greater context of the Greater System, when we humble ourselves before Allah and His Greatness, we find peace. Thus, the doorway to peace, inner and outer, is through remembrance of Allah. As I quoted to you before, from Suratu-r-Ra’d:

*Alladheena aamanuu wa tatma’innu quluububum bi-dhikri-Llaahi. Alaa bi-dhikri-Llaahi tatma’innu-l-quluub.*

**Those who believe and whose hearts are made tranquil by the remembrance of Allah; surely, it is by the Remembrance of Allah that hearts find rest. (Qur’an 13:28)**

What kind of a tranquility and rest is it that is described here in Qu’ran? The word “*‘am’an*” is used, meaning to quiet, calm, appease, soothe, repose, peace, serenity, tranquility, peace of mind, composure, equanimity, trust, and confidence (Hans Wehr, 569). What a beautiful word and what a beautiful state to be in: a state of quiet composure with trust and confidence in Allah, a state of peace of mind and serenity.

Certainly, the manifestation of that peace comes naturally, stage by stage, through a gradual process perfecting heart and soul. Every righteous act, every righteous thought produces and reflects dimensions of peace, gradually bringing harmony (*meez‘aan*) into one’s life. It is through a perfected awareness and love of Allah that we can understand that His Will is our will. We can come to a state in which we have no desires that are in-harmonious with the *‘hikmah* (wisdom) that is Allah’s. As Allah (*Subh‘aanahu wa ‘ad‘aalaahu*) 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.**

In that state, we have no desire but the Benevolence and Mercy of Allah (*Subh‘aanahu wa ‘ad‘aalaahu*). Understand, this is not a theological reality. In the sense that it begins in scripture, it is a manifestation of that Reality of Peace, and Love, and Compassion. It is the *‘Haqq* that has travelled the corridor of the *‘aalamu-l-mith‘aal* to the *‘aalamu-l-kh‘alq* from the *‘aalamu-l-kh‘ayaal*, from the *‘aalamu-l-amr*.

#### THE DOORWAY OF HUMILITY

This *‘Haqq* of Allah, this state of *‘sakeena* is always there, always available to us; but we are blocked from accessing it by our conditioning, our arrogance, our resistance. When there is arrogance and *‘kibr*/pride you cannot have peace. This is true on an individual level, as well as in the greater social context. Consequently, you can only have real peace when there is humility. Humility is one of the greatest doorways to peace. There are many references in Qur’an to humility, but listen to this in Suratu-l ‘Araf:

*Wa-dh‘kur Rabbaka fee nafsika tadarru‘a anw-wa kheefata anw-wa duuna-l-jabri mina-l-qawli bi-l-ghuduwmi wa-l-‘aas‘aali wa laa takum-mina-l-ghaafileen.*

**And remember your Lord in your soul-self humbly (*tadarru‘*) and with awe—without raising your voice unduly—in the morning and the evening, and do not be from the mindless. (7:205)**

The word used for ‘humble’ in this *‘ayat* derives from the root *‘da-ra-‘a*, which means humble, to beseech, to implore. It means to be similar, to be like, to emulate, to be equal; and, of course, it means humble, humiliate, and to be submissive. This *‘ayat* is followed by the correlative, the warning about what blocks peace and success:

*Inna-lladheena ‘inda Rabbika laa yastakbiruuna ‘an ‘ibaadatibi wa yusabbihunahu wa lahu yasjuduun.*

**Surely those who are with your Lord are not too proud to worship Him, and they glorify Him, and to Him [alone] they prostrate. (7:206)**

If you contemplate that in terms of humility and, of course, the opposite of that, the danger that comes from *‘kibr*/pride, you will understand that the person who does good works is more likely to be overtaken by pride than

one who doesn't even do good works; therefore, the most necessary of virtues is one that rids one of pride, and that is humility.

Pride, of course, makes you stand out. You want to stand out. A prideful person is not imploring for anything or beseeching anything of Allah. The prideful person, though they may be a religious person and might call themselves a believer, in the state of pride is not believing in anything, because they have set themselves up above Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'alaah*). So, it is actually a state of *shirk*. It is the story of Iblis who was made from fire, and refused to bow down, saying:

*Qaala lam akul-li'asjuda libasharin kbalaqtabu miñ salsaalim-min ḥama'im-masnuun*

**Never shall I prostrate to a creature made out of dry clay transmuted from dark slimy mud. (15:33)**

And:

*Qaala Rabbi bimaa aghwaytanee la'uzayyinanna labum fi-l-'ardi wa la'ughwiyannabum ajma'een. Illaa 'ibaadaka minbumu-l-mukhlaseen.*

**He said, "My Lord! Because You have sent me astray I will surely make [rebellion and disobedience] attractive to those on earth and I will mislead them all—save for the sincere among Your worshipers." (15:39-40)**

So, this pride and putting oneself above others is the source of conflict and discord in our world. It is the very opposite of peace and tranquility. We can think about this juxtaposition of pride and humility in big terms, in global terms, in terms of peacemaking, like the Palestinian/Israeli peacemaking, and we can also think about it in terms of our own life.

## SIGNS OF PEACE

When a person is humble, there are signs of it on the person that are evident. They are evident in that person's character, their conduct, and their physical being. Even their mannerisms show humility—like this lowering of the eyes, lowering of the voice. A person who has arrived at this *maqam* of humility will have a voice that will tend to be quiet. Their demeanor will be gentle; the language they use will be sweet; their admonitions are filled with love, even though they may be strong. This type of person controls their anger. The humble takes no vengeance, because vengeance is by Allah. If anything is to be avenged, it is by Allah. These are some of the signs of one who has attained a state of humility.

Now take those few characteristics that I have just described: a softer voice, subdued anger, not avenging but admonishing, a desire for not standing out but for equalizing, being submissive to a much higher power than one's own self. Apply these qualities to a nation and what do you have? You have peace! Or at least you are on the road to peace. As I quoted before:

**Allah will not change the condition of a people (nation), until they (all) change what is in themselves.**

## REFINING OUR HUMILITY

But, of course, there are different kinds of humility. You beat a dog and it will act humbly before you. It will put his tails between its legs when it sees its master. This kind of humility is one where there is no *ruuh*, no spirit. That is a form of humility, but not really humility. It is humiliation, a poverty of the soul. Real humility is humility before Allah. That comes with an obligation, dignity, and confidence. Obligation can only be understood and it can only be grasped by people of reason, of ethic, of love, of sincerity. It is incumbent upon that type of an individual (*inshaa'a-Llaah*, us) at every situation, at every location, with every individual, under every circumstance. There can be no exception. This is the highest degree of humility. Because a person who has acquired this stage of humility is a person inclined to be at peace within himself, a person who has found (*sakeena*) tranquility.

We all have these periods of humility, just as we all experience pride and arrogance. But when we are in the state of *tadarru'*, or *khashiya* (as it is also referred to in Qur'an), as in Suuratu-l-Mu'minuun:

*Qad aflaha-l-mu'minuun. Alladheena hum fee salaatihim khashi'oon.*

**Successful are the believers—those who are humble in their *salah*. (23:1-2)**

In this state a person behaves, simply, neatly, unselfishly, sincerely. Your humility will be obvious in your service, in the way you speak, in the way you teach, in prayers done with in the utmost humility and yearning. A truly humble person will not only mourn for the mistakes that they have made, but they will also mourn for the mistakes that others have made or will make. They will not make *takfeer* or say (even to themselves), “Look at me compared to that person.”

*A man came to a shaykh, and the shaykh told him to be humble. He said, “I have no money. I do all my prayers. I fast for Ramadaan. I give my zakat. This is who I am. What am I to do?” He said, “Tell me about what you were before you were this way.” He said, “Oh, I see what you mean. I was a thief. I stole.” He said, “Go now and ask forgiveness of everyone you stole from. Write down on a piece of paper everything that you stole, the amount, or whatever, and go to each person and ask forgiveness of them.”*

*So he did. Not only did he do that, he got the signatures of the person next to the amount. Ahmed so and so, 5,000 rupees, and so on. And he brought this back to his shaykh, the shaykh looked and said, “Very good. But how do I know you didn't just sign all those paper yourself? How do I know you really did that? Go to the post office and get as many pre-paid envelopes as there are people on your list. Writing for confirmation will be sufficient.”*

*So he went to the post office, bought the envelopes, and brought them to the shaykh. The shaykh said, “Okay. Good. You don't have to send these because your niyyat was to send them, and you would have sent them. But, seeing as you have bought all these envelopes, I will buy them from you.”*

*But the mureed replied, “No. No. I cannot sell these to you. How can I sell them to you?”*

*And the shaykh said, “Now you understand what it means to be humble. What it means to be forgiven.”*

As we uncover this capacity for humility within ourselves, we are, in a sense, also establishing a state of tranquility and peace within ourselves. As we are acting with humility, we are expressing a means or an example of peacefulness. Now of course, a person who is totally humble (whatever that would mean), completely, like the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*), [would be] free from pride and conceit, ego and selfishness, and all the things that go along with that. But, for most of us, as with the man in the story, learning humility is a long and sometimes difficult process.

Similarly, when we look at the struggle for peace on a global scale, it would be naive to postulate some simple formula. But we can say that we cannot work for peace without humility, without humble leadership, and thoughtful and calm people. We cannot have humility without having a sense of our own errors, or without shame and repentance. We cannot have repentance if we do not believe in something higher than ourselves. We cannot believe in anything higher unless we see our self as lower (humble). Most important is that we must share common values, not just articulated but affirmed in the society, in the rule of law and in the actions of the vast majority. This cannot happen until they are affirmed and strived for inwardly.

## SOURCE OF HUMILITY

If we are going to cultivate humility, somewhere along the line we have to introduce into our 'system' of thinking, the greatness of things to be considered. We have to see ourselves; [we have to see] our tiny insignificance in the context of the greatness of the universes. As Allah reminds us in *Suuratu-l-Mulk*:

*Huwa 'alaa kulli shay'in qadeer*

**He has Power over all things.** (67:1)

And it continues:

*Alladhee kbalaqa-l-mawta wa-l-hayaata liyablwakum ayyukum ahsanu 'amalañw-wa huwa-l'azeezu-l-ghafuur*

*Alladhee kbalaqa sab'a samaawaatiñ tibiaaqam-maa taraa fee khalqi-r-Rahmaani miñ tafaawutiñ fa-rji'i-l-basara hal taraa miñ futuur.*

**[He] Who has created death and life in order to test which of you is best in [your] actions, and He is the Mighty, the Ever-Forgiving,**

**Who has created seven heavens [in harmony] above one another. You cannot see any fault in the creation of the Universally Merciful. Look again; do you see any fault? (67: 2-3)**

Our realization of our helplessness and smallness in the greatness of Allah can be as simple as reflecting on creation. Many of you have heard me say over the years that it was the observation of the starry night in my early youth that compelled me to this search for truth and happiness, peace and fulfillment. As we look at the starry heavens and the diversity of this creation, we are lead to the unavoidable conclusion that there must be a great Designer, Creator. Something does not come out of nothing; logic even tells us that nothing exists without its Creator, a Creator that is All Knowledge, All Powerful, All Seeing and Omnipresent.

This universal belief is natural, except to those who are either mentally, emotionally, or irrationally incapable of

seeing beyond their ‘I.’ Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) is not limited by the confines of the ‘isms.’ He has created for us Islam, the direct guidelines for peace, the right companion/guide in the infallible Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), a teacher of high wisdom and good character, and those he has appointed. The proof lies in their ability to effect profound change, in the transformation of whole communities, as well as in the fact that those who followed these people, these prophets, the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), could and did succeed in attaining great spiritual success in their lives, and high levels of perfection and contentment. It was not from their pride, expertise or even education that they succeeded, but in their profound humility and selfless service to Allah.

At the end of the day, we have to look and look again, as it says in Suuratu-l-Mulk; by making *tafakkur*/contemplation on the greatness of our obligation to our Creator, and on the thought of how small is our fulfillment of our duties. We have to contemplate and reflect on the insignificance of the human beings in comparison to the wonders and greatness of the stars and the universe. If we fill our mind with these and similar thoughts, then we will find ourselves continually humbled, until humility becomes our default, becomes our very nature. All the pride and all the arrogance are removed from our heart as we strive to be among those described in Suratu-l-Imran:

*Alladheena yadhkuruuna-Llaaha qiyaamaññ-wa quʿuudaññ-wa ‘alaa junuubihim wa yatafakkaruuna fee khalqi-s-samaawaati wa-l-’ardi Rabbanaa maa kbalaqta haadhaa baatilaññ subhānaka*

**Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. “Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You!... (3:191)**

By devoting our heart, mind and soul to the study and contemplation of the works of Allah, of the relationship between the revelation and the reality we live in, we can become convinced of the infinite goodness of Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*). Remembrance and contemplation lead one, inevitably, to true humility and perfect trust in Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*)—to resignation to His will (*tadbeer*) and dedication to His service. What’s more, it leads to seeing the unity, the correlation between the outer works and the Reality we call Allah, between Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) the Name, and Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) the Reality of the interface of the attributes in every relationship (human or not).

A person who sees the interfaces between every aspect of creation humbles themselves before Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*), and will not only do good to all human beings, all living things, but will speak kindly to them, never speak things that are shameful about them, and will forgive them for the shameful things that they know about them. There are many stories of the *shaykh* exemplifying this

*There was once a shaykh walking down the street with his entourage of students. There, lying in the street, was a dead carcass of a dog and it was decomposing and smelling awful. One of the students said, “Oh, Shaykh, how badly this smells!” The shaykh looked at him and said, “How beautifully white its teeth are.”*

He said this, not only to counteract the negative remark, but to show his students how to think, to show them, “Don’t even speak disparagingly about a dead dog.” If that is the model, how should you speak of a human being, if you can’t speak disparagingly of a dead, stinking, dog? If it is a blessing to speak meritoriously of a dead dog, then how much more is it a duty for us to praise the goodness of another human being, let alone Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) who created the human being? Of course, this *shaykh* was teaching the student to speak kindly of things and to avoid speaking evilly, but more than that, he was teaching the student to train the mind and the heart to be modest, humble and sincere, to be grateful for even the smallest goodness and beauty in our lives.

As we contemplate the works of Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*), the infinite goodness that is Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*), the infinite peace, truth, justice, mercy, love that is Allah, the gratitude that we feel for the blessings of this life and world, a true indebtedness will grow. These begin to dominate our mind and our heart. Contemplation, meditation, remembrance of this leads to true and lasting humility and perfect *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), submission or resignation to “His” Will.

At times like this, in a world fraught with conflict and leadership that uses conflict to promote self-interest, it is hard to remember the goodness of the Divine Creator. But through gratitude and humility, we can begin to see clearly compassion, benevolence, patience and love of Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*).

## THE DOORWAY OF ORDER AND REGULARITY

Before I end today, I want to speak about one more of the doorways to peace (internal and external). This is the doorway of consistency, order and regularity. In our Order we express this as one of the Rules of the Order:

**Be honest and commit yourself to a specific practice which must be accomplished. Order and regularity is the law of the universe and the foundation of honesty.**

With practice, we will find that there is a peace of mind and contentment that comes from structure and consistency. This is exemplified in the regularity of our prayers and practices, but also extends to the more subtle levels of consistency in character and values. (The Shaykh gives the example of Hazrat, his *shaykh*, describing his good character and the consistency of his habits.)

Even in the greater social context, when we think about the circumstances necessary for peace, we find that there must be stability in the society. People must be able to know what they can expect from one another and their government, in an accountable and honest manner. In each of our lives, the rhythms of regular *namaz*, *dhikr*, *muraqabah*, *sawm*, *khidmah*, *zakat* frame our inner and outer life’s meeting points. Hence the ‘law’ is accepted as a means of liberation, of ethical behavior, of social harmony as a basis for reason. The obligation to right conduct, right thinking is universal, as is the contemplation of the ONE Infinite Cause of All Good. From this *tafakkur*, one sees how all embracing the process is...one truth, one justice, one mercy.

To the Sufi, it is the personal communication with Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*), through His Attributes and within one’s refined self (*nafs*), which affirms and reinforces the goodness, evokes gratitude, promotes inner and outer peace, and demands ethical means. To the Sufi, remembering the duties of the heart are more important than those of the body. Peace for the sake of peace, love for the sake of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness for their own sake is affirming that our actions and our thoughts are *fee sabeeli-Llaah*.

Inner peace is subtle and outer peace difficult to attain, lest it be sought for its own sake. ‘For the sake of peace’ means for the sake of *as-Salaam*, or justice for the sake of *al-ʿAdl*—in other words, for the sake of Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*).

## ALL DOORS ARE CONNECTED

I have spoken today about doorways to peace: doorways in ourselves and in our society; doorways of humility, of remembering Allah, of good character, and of order and regularity. But it is important to remember that these are really interconnected parts of the greater System, a System that ‘wants’ us to be in harmony, to be at peace and contented. Each of these doorways is interconnected: if we remember Allah with sincerity in our hearts, we will be humbled; and if we are humble, then we will have good character. So too, regular practices, done with humility, continually remind us of Allah. Islam is structured so that every path and every door leads us toward peace.

Peace is not an object, yet it can be manifest. It is a state of mind and heart. It derives from the essential goodness (*fiṭrah*) of each of us, which, in turn, is a reflection or manifestation of the Divine Attributes that are at the core of all life. Inwardly, it is experienced as a state of tranquility (*nafs al-muṭma'ina*) and one who can control that or default to that (i.e., attain that *maqam*) will be at peace.

The essential belief of Sufism lies in developing the ability to control one's more base desires, emotions, thoughts, attitudes; and discover within the attraction (*jadhbah*) to the love, mercy, compassion...of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ṭā'ālaa*). The one who chooses a path of submission, of character and virtues, and shuns the path of resistance, violence, and negativity; one who controls the self and purifies the heart will not be distracted by the mundane and transitory aspects of life, such as power, money, fame, or pride (things which incite one to conflict). The *jihad* of the Sufi is to be always focused on an internal struggle, striving for virtue and goodness, encouraging that in others, working diligently for equilibrium and harmony in society.

A Sufi controls his/her self and experiences the benefits of *tazkiyat*, finds fault in oneself and realizes that the most violent pernicious enemy is one's self, one's ego. The one who has cleansed the heart and created a 'home' for Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ṭā'ālaa*) is one who sees, lives, speaks and exemplifies the Truth; one who is assisted by Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ṭā'ālaa*); one who eventually is called by Allah (*muraad*); one who exemplifies peace. Peace and violence cannot co-exist, either in a society or in a person. The Sufi approach to establish peace is, therefore, to change the individual as a means to change the society. The process of perfection is a returning of the soul (*ruuh*) to its incipient state. One approaches that destination within, as a result of remembering, love, and *adab* (right conduct).

...

...*Yuhubbubum wa yuhibbuunahu... dhaalika fadlu-Llaahi yu'teebi mañy-yashaaa'u...*

**He loves them and they love Him...for this is Allah's Face, He gives of it to whom He pleases....**

(5:54)

Remembering Allah is remembering the moment of our own creation. Finding our way back to the moment of origin is reflected in the metaphor of nature: the whales who follow unseen electromagnetic fields, or the salmon who return each year their place of birth. Allah has created this world as a metaphor for this spiritual journey. The peace and love and justice and mercy instilled in our hearts are invisible tracks back to (not a place) a knowledge, a discovery of one's essential self. The perfection of the human soul can only be attained by finding harmony with Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ṭā'ālaa*) through a perfected love of Allah.

*Wa'idhaa saalaka 'ibaadee 'annee fa'annee qareebun ujeebu da'wata-d-daa'i idhaa da'aani fa-l-yastajeebuu lee walyu'minuu bee la'allahum yarshuduun.*

**And when My worshippers ask you about Me, [know that] I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided. (2:186)**

When we call... that is when we are answered; yet so often we forget that it is only in remembrance that we find peace. We used to carry photos of our loved ones in our pocket, close to our hearts. (Now, of course, it's a digital picture on our phone). But during moments of absorption in other things, we totally forget the closeness to us of those pictures, representations of the beloved. Our thoughts wander and a distance is created between us and the

object of love. Yet, it is still near to us in our phone or pocket.

Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) is near to us every moment, but as far as we are concerned, we are either conscious of His nearness or unconscious of it in our thought. We have to make the effort to realize that nearness by remembering Him, until it becomes a permanent *maqaam*—the more the remembrance, the more the peace and happiness.

## CONCLUSION

When we look at the world today with the eyes of those who desire peace, for ourselves and others, we see that the tasks before us, and within us, are immense: the banishment of hatred, envy, scorn; the end of revenge, the silencing of doubt of the Divine Mercy; the end of the exploitation of one man/woman over another. We must task ourselves with the fulfilling of the obligations of the heart, the affirmation of the virtues of Allah, the cultivation of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, the affirmation of love, the cultivation of right thinking and conduct. For the obligation to fulfill the duties of the heart is the greatest of all obligations; it is from the heart that we can recognize what has been born of the heart.

But the Sufi finds freedom and peace in this obligation, like a bird in flight. Where peace is unattainable for many, if not most people, the Sufi, like the high flying falcon, can see over the horizon (*aafaaq*), while at the same time seeing the miniscule rodent on the ground. The higher the flight, the wider the horizon, not fettered by fears and doubts, empowered by the virtues and goodness of the Divine, true to his kind, yet for the most part compatible with others of similar skill and rank. Our approach is peace-full, and manifests more and more wisdom, knowledge, patience and love than most. We respect other cultures. We affirm that Allah is One. We embrace community and affirm that He has created other communities, and that we are created equally from the One Creator. This is diversity within unity. In Quran:

*Wa likulliñw-wijhatun huwa muwalleehaa fa-stabiquu al-khayraati aynamaa takuunuu ya'ti bikumu-Llaahu jamee'an inna-Llaaha 'alaa kulli shay'in qadeer.*

**Every community will face a direction of its own, of which Allah is the focal point. Vie, therefore, with one another toward all that is good. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you together; for Allah has power over all things...** (2:148)

This is what leads the Sufi toward living inwardly in the realm of peace and tranquility. This leads the Sufi to love others as their brothers and sisters and to live a life that is not permissive, that unites people rather than divides them based on culture or tradition. The Sufi is one who is open-minded, accommodating, and inclusive; who welcomes all people to share in the bounties of Allah, affirming that all humankind are potentially reunited in the One Truth...Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). The Sufi can say: "I serve Allah by serving people, since Allah dwells in the hearts of believing people." This is the core principle of peace in Sufism. It embraces all people regardless of color and creed.

Test out what I have tried to say today. Make a practical experiment. Build the structure of your life-activity on the foundations of remembrance of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). Develop the comfort and peace of humility, and you will soon find your life being molded in a harmonious pattern in accordance with the Divine Will.

*Inna-lladheena qaaluu Rabbunaa-Llaahu thumma istaqamuun tatanaazalu 'alayhimu-l-malaa'ikatu-llaa takhaafuu wa laa tabzanuu wa ab'shiruu bi-l-jannati-llatee kunntum tuufaduun.*

*Nahnu awliyaaa'ukum fi-l-hayaati-d-dunyaa wa fi-l-'akhirati wa lakum feebaa maa tasbtabee añfusukum wa lakum feebaa maa tadda'unn.*

**Those who say, “Our Lord is Allah,” and are then righteous: the angels descend upon them, saying, “Fear not nor grieve, but rejoice in the good news of the Garden that has been promised to you. We are your protectors in this life an in the final life. There you will have whatever you desire, and whatever you call for will be yours.” (41:30-31)**

CLOSING DU'AA

*Hasbiya-Llaahu laa ilaaha illaa humu 'alayhi tawakkaltu wa humu Rabbu-l'arshi-l'adheem.*

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

*Subhaana Rabbika Rabbi-l'izzati 'ammaa yasifuun. Wa salaamun 'alaa-l-mursaleen. Wa-l-hamdu li-Llaahi Rabbi-l'aalameen.*

**Limitless in His glory is thy Sustainer, the Lord of Almighty, (exalted) above anything that (human beings) may devise by way of definition! And Peace be upon All His message bearers! And all Praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds!" (Qur'an 37: 180-182)**

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Lings. "Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources." (p125)

<sup>ii</sup> Easwaran, Eknath. *A Man to Match his Mountains: Badshah Khan, Nonviolent Soldier of Islam*. Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1984, pg 17.