

Halqa Meeting of November 1, 2015

Abdul Hayy:

At the morning *zikr* I explained how God describes Himself as *Arham ur-Rahimin*, the Most Compassionate of the Compassionate. His profound compassion can be witnessed in the expansive states of the *zikr* where He reveals the signs of His love, and the direct experience of one aspect or another of His Divine Qualities. Let us recall Jonah's *zikr*, "**You are the Most Compassionate of the Compassionate.**" [*wa anta arham ar-rahimin*]

In the evening there is more conversation about the Mercy, and we have the pleasurable company of our friend Kabir Helminski. Kabir speaks about the direct experience of God's Love and Mercy. We share thoughts about human nature. There are aspects of ourselves that bring us closer to God and there is the selfishness that keeps us from experiencing His grace.

I continue with a discussion from earlier in the day about identifying and understanding the source of our changing states. We can distinguish between the instinctual, emotional, and mental drives that fill our experience. One aspect may dominate, but self-observation reveals that our experience is in the simultaneous activity of these various drives manifesting with shifting dominance and intensity as we react to environmental changes, and as we relive the past and anticipate the future.

This is a vast topic which I hope to explore further. Let us first consider the most common Islamic model of the self as stated in the Qur'an. In July of 2012, I shared the following description of the Qur'an's tripartite division of the self's experience:

In the Qur'an we have, at the simplest level, a psychology based on three conditions of the self [psyche and *nafs* both mean the 'self']. Most people suffer, and because of this they become the cause suffering and the source of evil. As long as they are identified with the 'self that incites to evil' [*nafs-e ammaara be-su*], people seek to dominate others, and make their primary concern their own pleasure and satisfaction, and their self-preservation. The Qur'an states that such people are heedless of their spiritual origins. By spiritual origins is meant the direct witnessing of God's Presence. This is the primordial state of each person, in the realm beyond time. The veiling of one's primordial nature occurs as people become embodied upon entering this world. Entering this realm of time and space, people construct their identities and personalities in accordance with natural instinct, sensory awareness and the many environmental factors that also shape them. The result is usually the objectification of the self and the world, which Rumi speaks about in his opening lines to the Masnawi, whose original manuscript reads, "*Listen to this flute reed as it complains/ The stories of separations it proclaims.*" These 'separations' refer to cognitive, mental objectifications [*umur-e e'tebaari*] which conceal the primordial awareness of Unity. People generally fall into prolonged states of heedlessness and inauthenticity which are

characteristic of the *nafs-e ammaara be-su*. The egotist operates from a mentality of self-defense, acquisition, and immersion in a variety of diversions and pleasures. There remains deep suffering and causing suffering because the true purpose of the human being is not being fulfilled.

At this point, if a human being is rightly-guided, there is the development of his or her inherent conscience. Conscience is known as the *nafs-e lawwaama*, the second level of self that is described in the Qur'an. The healthy conscience engages in the useful observation and critique of pride and selfishness, and of unkind or negative thoughts, feelings, and behavior towards others. Here it should be noted that one must carefully distinguish between the cleverness of the *naf-e ammaara* as it pretends at conscience, and the manifestations of true conscience. This is not very hard if we diligently observe and note the content of our fantasies. It is relatively easy to distinguish what is self-serving from what is objective self-critique.

If the work of conscience is successful, a person can regain the consciousness of his or her primordial relationship to God. She or he becomes deeply satisfied and secure in the profound and permanent nature of that relationship. This third level of self is called the *nafs-e mutma'ina*, the satisfied, peaceful and secure self. The Qur'an says of this state of the self, "***O satisfied, secure soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and well-pleasing. Now enter among my servants. Enter my paradise.***"

We should not think of these three states of the self as being mutually exclusive. My favorite illustration of their mutual activity can be found in Rumi's story about Hazrat Ali's reaction to being spat upon his face by an enemy.

Rumi writes in Book I, starting at verse 3975:

'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, upon him peace, said to his [former enemy who was now his] companion, "When you spat in my face, my lower soul became agitated and the purity of my action no longer held good, and it was this which prevented me from killing you."

The Commander of the Faithful said to that youth

that "At the time of the battle, O great hero,

when it happened that you spat into my face,

my soul was disturbed, my nature undermined;

Half went to God and half to vain impulse;
In the work of God, partnership is not allowed.

You were fashioned by the Lord's hand.
You are of God, I did not create you.

A divine form may be smashed by God's command.
Throw only God's stone at God's glass lamp."

Abdul Hayy: At this point, Kabir adds Rumi's point that it was through this blessed action on Ali's part that the idolator became spiritually awakened and was transformed. Here is my translation of Rumi's narrative:

The Magian listened to this and a light appeared
in his heart; then he severed his cult's sacred belt.

He said, "I was sowing seeds of oppression,
I imagined you being other than who you are.

You were the scale with Oneness' character,
in fact the tongue of every scale's measure.

You were my tribe, my origin, my very kin;
You were the radiance of my own religion.

I am the slave of that eye-seeking Lamp
from which your own lamp received its light.

I'm the slave of the wave of that Ocean of Light
Who has brought such a pearl into appearance.

Direct me to recite the testimony of Faith,
for I see you as the paragon of this era."

Nearly fifty of his relatives and tribe
lovingly turned their faces to the Faith.

'Ali, with the blade of kindness at so many throats
redeemed a multitude from the blade of severance.

The blade of kindness is sharper than the blade of iron;
It is more victory-rallying than a hundred armies.

Kabir asks me to speak more about the psychology of 'khasiyyat', which is the particular character of each person resulting from his or her specific relationship to one or more of the Divine Names. I explain that there is a direct relationship between each person's selfishness and negativity to their specific intimacy with the Beautiful Names. Their negativity is regarded in this psychology as the deviation [inhiraaf] from their particular, essential capacity to realize the beauty of God's nature within themselves.

Again from our class in July of 2012:

Each person is an individual with a general, as well as a particular, relationship to the Divine. Each person's particular relationship to the Divine is its 'feature' or 'particularity' [*khaassiyat*]. Just as each person has a general relationship to the Lord of the Worlds, he or she also has particular relationships to any number of Allah s.w.t.'s Divine Names. For the Sufis, each Divine Name is a 'particular lord' [*rabb-e khaass*]. But let us not just think of the Divine Names in an abstract manner. Let us realize that our every state is a particular manifestation of one of, or usually some combination of the Divine Names. Each of us is like a tree of the Divine Names, with different Names being like various kinds of leaves, flowers, and fruit. Each person's tree has different leaves and stalks, possibly thorns, and likely flowers. The tree may or may not be fruit-bearing and may or may not be in fruit.

Each person has deviated from the harmony of comprehensive awareness in accordance with his or her essential particularities. These deviations conceal, and for the gnostic reveal, something about a person's inherent nature. There is an approach used by Naqshbandi and other Sufi teachers to remedy this situation. It involves the successive unveiling of those deficiencies [*naqaa'is*] in mentation and behavior which make us unconscious of our primordial relationship to Spirit. Sufis teach people how to identify the imperfect [*naaqis*] manifestations of their feature, and which behavioral and cognitive remedies to apply to each situation. These imperfect, or deficient, manifestations are the mental, emotional, and behavioral patterns adopted in infancy for the sake of survival and domination.

At the same time, the Sufi guides seekers to uncover their essential relationship to each particular Divine Name that colors their experience. The capacity [*isti'daad*] for each individual relationship to the Divine Names is claimed to be essential and divinely bestowed outside of time. In the Qur'an it is written that, "***He gave to each thing its nature and creation, and then guided it [accordingly].***"