

King's Chapel Talk, Oct. 4, 2016 (7-8 pm)

“Visible and Invisible Islam”<sup>1</sup>

The “**Hadith of Gabriel**” (on the meaning of Religion, from *Sahih* of Bukhari)

The Prophet came out for the people (to meet him) one day, and a man came up to him who said: “What is faith (*īmān*)?”

He replied: “Faith (means) that you have faith in God, His angels, His Books, in (your) meeting Him, in His messengers, and that you have faith in the Resurrection.”<sup>2</sup>

Then he asked: “What is *islām*”<sup>3</sup>?”

He answered: “*Islām* is that you worship God and don't associate (anything) with Him, that you perform the prayer (*salāt*), give in charity, and fast during the month of Ramadan.”

Then he asked: “What is *ihsān*?”<sup>4</sup>

He replied: “To worship God as though you see Him. And if you don't see Him, surely He sees you.” [This last sentence could also be translated as “*And if you are not, you see Him*; and surely He sees you.”.]

Then he went off, and (the Prophet) said: “bring him back.” But they couldn't see anything. Then he said: “This is Gabriel, who came to teach the people their Religion (*dīn*).”

The “**Hadith of the Questioning**” (at the Resurrection)

God says on the Day of the Rising: “O son of Adam, I was sick and you didn't visit Me.”

He said: “O my Lord, how could I visit You, and You are Lord of the worlds?!”

---

<sup>1</sup> [All of the translations and related summaries below are drawn from our forthcoming sourcebook *Openings: From the Qur'an to the Islamic Humanities*. These unexplained, uncontextualized selections should only be considered in the original context of the actual short talk they illustrated.]

<sup>2</sup>All of these points are frequently included in Quranic enumerations of the “objects” of faith (e.g., at 2:285), although the Quran more frequently mentions simply “Faith in God and the Last Day (resurrection)”.

<sup>3</sup>Here, as in some of the later passages in the Quran and in a number of hadith, the root *islām* has taken on a specific association with most basic shared ritual practices typifying Muhammad's nascent religious community. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the primary Quranic sense (far closer to the Arabic root) refers to the highest spiritual condition of total “*inner surrender*” to God's will (and the divine Peace flowing from that surrender), in which meaning it is often applied in the Qur'an to pre-“Islamic” prophets, messengers and people of exemplary faith.

<sup>4</sup>Literally (although the definition given here is far more appropriate to its particular Quranic usage): “*to do what is both good and beautiful or noble*.” The reference in the hadith is certainly to the Quranic usage of the term, where “those who do *ihsān*” are referred to frequently (25 times) with the highest praise, promised the highest paradise, associated with the prophets and messengers, connected with the central spiritual virtues, etc. Even more strikingly, the Quran insists that “Surely **God is with those who act in awareness of Him and the *muhsinūn***” (16:128; again at 29:69); “**Do *ihsān*, surely God loves the *muhsinūn***” (2:195; the restriction of God's profoundest Love (*hubb*) to them is repeated similarly at 3:134, 3:148, 5:13, 5:93;); and “**God's Lovingmercy (*rahma*) is near to the *muhsinūn***” (7:56).

God said: “Didn’t you know that My servant so-and-so was sick, yet you didn’t visit him? Or didn’t you know that if you had visited him *you would have found Me with him?*”

[Then God says:] “O son of Adam, did I not ask you for food, but you refused to feed Me?”

He said: “O my Lord, how could I feed You, and You are Lord of the Worlds!?”

God said: “Now didn’t you know that my servant so-and-so asked you for food, but you didn’t feed him? And didn’t you know that if you had fed him *you would have found that with Me?*”

[Then God says:] “O son of Adam, I asked you for a drink, but you didn’t give Me anything to drink.”

He said: “O my Lord, how could I give You a drink, and You are Lord of the Worlds!?”

God said: “My servant so-and-so asked you for a drink, but you didn’t give him any. But if you had given him a drink *you would have found that with Me.*”

### (Complementary and Contending) **Forms of “Authority” in Islam**

In reality, the practical expressions of all these forms of authority naturally build on the multitude of *pre-existing local customs and historical situations*—but they are also *justifiable* by allusions to particular elements of either the Qur’an or hadith (but they are NOT “determined” by those scriptural appeals). Likewise, *all of these overlap in dramatically different combinations in different historical settings, and within the lives of different individuals*, even within the same family or marriage. (Keep in mind illustrations offered by the relatively familiar diversities of African-American Islam.):

- **Individual faith, conscience and experiential awareness**, in natural and human worlds (“Signs on the horizons and in the souls...”)
- Devotional relationships (prayers, pilgrimage, etc.) with spiritual guides and exemplars (**prophets, *awliya*/Friends**, etc.), **both in spiritual realms and living on earth.**
- Sacred **Kingship** (David, Solomon) and other forms of **hereditary** leadership charisma (sayyids, Alids, Sufi lineages, etc.)
- Individual spiritual guides and inspired teachers (shaykh, pir, murshid, kiai, etc.), including popular and feminine equivalents.

[The above elements are those actually emphasized or at least mentioned positively *in the Qur’an itself*; the following items are more developed in the hadith and/or in pre-existing cultural, religious, and political developments of different regions/cultures where people “became Muslim.”]

- **Eschatological, charismatic popular leaders** (endless titles: mahdi, caliph, Imam, etc.)
- **“Consensus”** (*shura*) of locally powerful figures or groups.
- **Preachers** (*wa’iz, khatib, da’i, imam*, etc.)
- **Ritual “specialists”** (e.g., Qur’an reciters, music/dhikr performers, marriages and funerals, halal butchers, etc.)

- **Creators & performers of ADAB** (cultural expressions and artistic eliciting of spiritual virtues, teaching and perception): music (dhikr), poetry, song, calligraphy, weaving, literature, epics, cooking, dance, collective celebrations/holidays (mawsim, ‘urs, etc.), and so on....
- Other **local customs and rituals**: e.g., healing, mediation, gifted women, inheritance, property, grieving (far beyond funerals), name-giving, circumcision, rites of passage.
- Multiple, competing forms of traditional religious and/or philosophic/scientific “**learning**” (*‘ulama*): Qur’an; hadith; fiqh, kalam theology, philosophy & rational sciences, medicine, astronomy, etc. [NB: not “clerics”]

*Walaya* (Divine Proximity and Caring): “*the Friends of God*”

...For God **will** bring a group whom He loves, and they love Him.... (Qur’an 5:54)

*Surely the Friends of God, there is no fear upon them, nor do they sorrow, those who have faith and have been conscious of God: theirs are good tidings in the life here below and the hereafter...:that is the Immeasurable Attainment.* (Qur’an 10:62-64)

**The Hadith of the Wali (or of the “supererogatory works”)**, from *Sahih* of Bukhari

[The Messenger said that God said:] “Whoever treats as an enemy a *wali* (friend) of Mine, then I have declared war against him.

And My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than the duties I have made obligatory for him. *And My servant continues to draw near to me with the deeds that come next until I Love him. Then when I Love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, and his Sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks.*

Were he to ask of Me, I would surely give to him; and were he to seek refuge with Me, I would surely grant him refuge.”

I. DISCOVERING THE “GATEWAYS” OF GOD’S *WALĀYA*:

- The ever-present theophanies of the world of **Nature**...
- The spiritual power of **Beauty** in all of its infinite forms and expressions...
- The poignant grace of our individualized “**Tests**” and **Crises** (*ibtilā*)....
- Faithful **Devotion** and **Service** (*‘ibāda, khidma*), as the essential basis for contemplation, illumination, and eventual creative actualization.
- Each soul’s discovery or awakening to the active presence (in this world or more often beyond) of the **Friends of God**, the living instruments of God’s Lovingmercy, and their guiding influences of Grace (*karāmāt*).
- The individual **Ethical Challenges** of everyday life....

- The intrinsic spiritual necessity of **Active Creativity and Renewal**...
- The discovery and unfolding of each person’s **mystery of Destiny** (*sirr al-qadar*)...

## II: EXPLORING *WALĀYA*: MAKING SENSE OF THE “INVISIBLE”

The four successive dimensions, or intertwined stages, of the actual spiraling process of exploration and realization that is engendered by our moments of awakening to *walāya*: four basic “tools of discovery and discernment” that are elicited by any of the initial encounters and discoveries of *walāya* briefly suggested in the preceding section.

- (1) Close **ATTENTION** (*tawajjuh*), as we gradually develop an appreciation of the awakening spiritual senses...
- (2) **REFLECTION** (Qur’anic *fikr*, *tafakkur*) and **DISCERNMENT**...
- (3) **ILLUMINATION**, or the assimilated understanding of the meaning and directions flowing from each recognized encounter with *walāya*
- (4) The wider context of appropriate responsive **ACTION and VERIFICATION/REALIZATION**

## III. INTIMATIONS OF *WALĀYA*: RECOGNIZING AND DEEPENING THE “GIFTS OF GRACE”

Discovering *walāya* means a *transformative recognition of the “Invisible” (to others) divine Presence*—i.e., of *al-Walī*, in any of Its/His concretely experienced qualities, effects and activities—*through the distinctive qualities and particulars* of each of Its manifestations. The moment of discovery in question is equally real and potentially transformative whether that encounter first happens through pilgrimage, holy places, devotions, dreams, visions, inspirations, readings, or in even subtler echoes, intuitions, premonitions, or “sympathetic vibrations” that we unexpectedly encounter at any moment:

The following short list of relevant qualities or particular results is meant simply to suggest or recall the particular concrete experiences that readers necessarily have to supply for themselves.... Such “personal stories”—whether we frame them as love-stories or mysteries—are in fact all that can ever really be shared and potentially communicated. Nothing at all about *walāya* can be somehow “proven” or demonstrated to those people who have not yet discovered and awakened to the first signs of that relationship, who have not already discovered the foundational elements of the process of realization (*tahqīq*).

- The relationship discovered is always *personal and individual*....
- What is discovered is a *process*—something very difficult to conceive or convey in the subject/object, linear temporal frameworks of Indo-European languages....
- What one encounters of *walāya* is characterized by its *openness and availability*...
- *Mystery and wonder/awe or amazement* are always inherent in the reality and experience of *walāya*....

- **Engagement** (both *mutual* and *long-term*): we already know ... that the aim and fulfillment of *walāya* lies beyond our earthly time, however we seek to imagine or situate that “beyond.”
- **Commitment**: once this deeper reality is discovered, one is never truly alone, never abandoned—nor able to abandon.
- **Intention**: the unfolding power (and concomitant challenges) of focused spiritual intention (*himma*) is what inevitably flows from our initial attitude and ongoing efforts of spiritual “attention” (*tawajjuh*) highlighted above.
- **Direction** and resulting **clarity of purpose**....
- **Co-operation** (i.e., an interactive harmony beyond either personal control or external compulsion, *jabr* or *ikrah*)....
- An outwardly inexplicable, inner awareness of **protection and safety**, of re-assurance, inherent trust, confidence, sustaining...
- **Motivation and spiritual energy**....
- **Devotion and longing**...
- **Gratitude**... ever-growing...
- **Mutual respect** (*adab*: no adequate English word): discovering an *inherent* (“cause-less”) valuing of the other and simultaneous *being-valued* without outward or visible “cause....
- Awakened **absolute, conditionless love** (*rahma*: not the same as the devotion and longing just cited... a true and sufficient *end-in-itself*)
- **persistence** (*sabr*) and **insistence** through all tests and challenges...

#### IV. Some Central Spiritual Virtues in the Qur’an

*Imân* (892 times):<sup>5</sup> faith, inner peace and absolute assurance, implicit confidence and total trust, granted by God (intimately connected with imagery of LIGHT); for its “objects” (God, angels, divine “Books”, messengers), see the summary in the Hadith of Gabriel above. The nearest Qur’anic equivalent is probably *absolute certainty, yaqîn* (28x)—which is almost the contrary of the commonly used English “belief” (or some common uses of “faith” as well).

*‘Ilm*<sup>6</sup> (876x, although more than half of those verses refer specifically to *God’s Knowledge*): *spiritual* knowledge, or inspired direct awareness of God and the spiritual world, of the inner nature of things and the deeper spiritual realities underlying the phenomenal and historical world. It is *given by God*, and its human locus is the *Heart, qalb*; it is also intimately connected with the central Qur’anic

---

<sup>5</sup> [caution: the “counts” of the related Arabic root here are very approximate, just to give a *relative* indication of the frequency each Arabic root-symbol is mentioned in the Qur’an.]

<sup>6</sup>Because the key term *‘ilm* became historically associated in later centuries with the acquired, traditional “religious” learning (usually in Arabic-language disciplines) of the “learned” (the *‘ulamâ’*), many later spiritual authors and traditions in Islam instead chose to use forms of the Arabic root *‘-r-f* (*ma’rifâ*, *irfân*, *ârif*, etc.) to refer to the type of directly inspired or intuitive spiritual understanding that is normally called *‘ilm* in the Qur’an.

imagery of *Sight* and *Light*. Its key contraries include “ignorance” or “barbarity” (*jahl*) and “unconsciousness” (*ghafla*).

The Qur’anic usage of this direct “Knowing” closely overlaps with *five related roots* relating to the soul’s more *active* recognition or realization of God’s presence and manifestation in the divine “Signs” (*âyat*) in all creation and experience: *nazara* (112x); *arafa* (72x); *’aql* (49x); *faqaha* (20x); *tafakkur* (18x). All five terms point to the rare spiritual ability—and human beings’ innate, intrinsic active *striving*--to recognize something as it really is, in its relation to the divine Name it manifests, to know inwardly, by direct acquaintance, through profound penetration and reflection, etc.--i.e., “*to know things as they really are,*” as a famous hadith puts it. (See also *Basîra*/Insight below.)

*Dhikr* (292x): inner remembrance, mindfulness, awareness of God, *anamnesis*; see illustrations in the many related classical hadith. (Its contrary is unconsciousness, heedlessness, forgetfulness: *ghafla*.)

*’Ibâda* (282x/often grossly mistranslated as “slave”, etc.): “*The worship, adoring service and total devotion flowing from complete inner surrender to one’s Beloved*”. In its perfect form, the state of the highest prophets, who alone are “God’s true servants” (*’abd Allâh*), those “wholly devoted” to him (*mukhlisûn*). (Closely related in meaning to *islâm/taslîm*, and *itâ’a* below.)

*Taqwâ* (242x): “*Active God-awareness*”: Consciousness and awareness of God, inner *mindfulness* of the divine at every instant, combined with an eager, attentive orientation to *do* what that inner state of spiritual awareness demands. (Compare the closely related term *muslihûn/sâlihât* below). The Qur’an repeatedly discusses this as one of very highest spiritual states, fully embodied in the prophets and “friends of God”.

*Ihsân* (191x): See the remarkable complete definition in the famous hadith of Gabriel above--noting the essential connection there between right/beautiful *action* and the natural contemplative *vision/awareness of-and-by God*. Literally: “*doing-making-seeing as good-and-beautiful*”. Likewise described repeatedly as one of highest human spiritual states.

*Muslihûn/Sâlihât* (180x): Doing what is appropriate, fitting and needful in each particular circumstance; or specifically “making better” and “reconciling” situations of conflict or disorder.

*Sidq/Siddîq* (154x): *Recognizing* and *acknowledging* the truth of what is true or real: hence the *inner sincerity and purity*, total confidence and trust (in God), and only by extension the outward expression of that state of inspired spiritual knowledge. (Compare the closely related virtue of *ikhhlâs* below.) Muhammad’s close companion Abû Bakr became known as “the *Siddîq*” because of his immediate confidence and credence in Muhammad’s account of his spiritual Ascension.

*Hamd* (63x) and *s-b-h* (94x): (Fully deserved!) praise, glorification and adoration of the Truly Real. As the Qur’an explains, what the angels and all creatures (except for *bashar*) do unceasingly in their inner state, though we humans are ordinarily unable to perceive that state.

*Basîra* (148x, plus related uses of verb “to see” and related roots [“blindness”, etc.]): Specifically *spiritual* insight and awareness, especially as granted directly by God. Part of the complex Qur’anic imagery of Light and spiritual vision. Close in meaning to all the roots for spiritual “knowledge” and awareness above, as well as *shahîd* below.

*Islâm/taslîm/muslim* (137x--plus 73x for *ridâ*): “The *Peace* that passeth understanding,” and the *inner concomitance of the divine and human will* that leads to that peace, spiritual “surrender” and ecstasy (*salâm*). [More rarely in later parts of Qur’an: outer, temporary compliance of late Bedouin tribal allies with a few basic Islamic rituals.] *Ridâ* is the same thing seen, as it were, from what is more commonly God's point of view: the *divine* contentment, satisfaction, complete agreement without any inner opposition or disquiet.

\* *Shahîd* (159x, but often in other senses): Someone who *sees* or directly witnesses the spiritual truth, and then “*bears witness*” to it through action, especially the ultimate sacrifice of *martyrdom* (spiritual or physical) for God's sake.

*Itâ‘a* (118x/often mistranslated as “obedience”): The inner state of doing something *willingly*, because you *want* to do it (precisely as opposed to *karh*, *ikrâh*, or inner opposition and uneasiness, the spiritual state in fact often suggested by the word “obedience” in English!).

*Hikmal/Hukm* (109x, but with disparate meanings, plus 97x of God as *Hakîm*): divine *Wisdom* and the proper *judgment* (in all circumstances) and the certainty that flows from that inspired wisdom. (Compare the several closely related roots referring to God's Knowledge and its spiritual counterparts above.)

*Sabr* (99x): the *inner* state of someone who perseveres in allegiance to and pursuit of the truth *because they are aware* of the real nature and ultimate aim or true context of their difficult circumstances. (See *Itâ‘a* above.)

*Hubb* (96x): “Love” in the particular sense of a special individualized response to and awareness of a particular worthy action of the beloved (as contrasted with God's universal, all-encompassing creative-maternal Love and Compassion, *rahma*). Almost always used in a context of divine-human *reciprocity* in the Qur’an (and the hadîth), applied to those exemplifying the highest spiritual virtues.

*Tawba* (87x): “Returning” to God (and His “turning” in forgiveness at the same instant); the inner state of “repentance-*and*-forgiveness” as experienced at the same time. More broadly, describes each moment one becomes inwardly aware of the divine after a condition of heedlessness.

*Shukr* (75x): Thankfulness, gratitude (for God's blessings and grace); differs from “Praise” only in having a more specific object or occasion. [Its contrary--*kufr*, or active metaphysical “ingratitude” and inner hostility to God, often mistranslated as “unbelief”--is one of the most frequent terms in the Qur’an, often used as the contrary of the central spiritual reality of *îmân* (see above).]

*Tahâra* (30x) and *zakkâ* (26x as verb, plus 32x for *zakât*): Terms referring to the inner “*purification*” of the soul from all distractions or tendencies contrary to God's Will (like *ikhhlâs*, *sidq*, etc.); in the latter case in connection with the virtue of *charity* (or of “compensating” for one's sins and manifesting true repentance through charity), eventually evolving into the later more public forms of *zakât*. (Closely connected with related root *s-f-y*, specifically referring to the unique divine *purification* and “singling out” of *Mary* and certain other prophets.)

*Ihtadâ/Hudâ* (59x for the human spiritual virtue alone): Being spiritually “*guided*” by the ultimate Guide.

*Hâfiz al-ghayb* (51x, often of God): *Respectfully and appropriately responding to one's awareness of the spiritual world* in each instance; observing the appropriate *adab* in one's relations with God (as exemplified by each of the prophets in the Qur'an).

*Ijâba* (43x): Like *tawba* above, the mutual relationship of “answering” or responding to the divine Call, often applied particularly to relations of prayer.

*Tawakkul* (43x): Total trust and confidence in God, inwardly “handing things over” to Him as one would to a trusted servant or trustee (*wakîl*).

*Ikhâlâs* (31x): absolute inner purity of intention, doing whatever one does *entirely for God's sake*, in a state of pure inner *taslîm* and *ridâ* (see above).