Sufi Principles of Meditation

Lecture 11: Renunciation

“When you enter the world of poverty and practice it, God bestows upon you kingdoms and worlds that you never imagined. You become ashamed of what you longed for and desired at first.” —Rumi
“And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah, so will you not reason?”
—Al-An’am 32

“Whoever desires the reward of this world—then with Allah is the reward of this world and the Hereafter. And ever is Allah Hearing and Seeing.”
—An-Nisa 134
“Whosoever wants to die in the Lord must wash their feet in the waters of renunciation.”
—Samael Aun Weor, *The Aquarian Message*
Renunciation and the Transience of Life

Abu Bakr said: “Our abode is transitory, our life therein is but a loan, our breaths are numbered, and our indolence is manifest.” By this he signified that the world is too worthless to engage our thoughts; for whenever you occupy yourself with what is perishable, you are made blind to that which is eternal; the friends of God turn their backs on the world and the flesh which veil them from Him, and they decline to act as if they were owners of a thing that is really the property of another. And he said: “O God, give me plenty of the world and make desirous of renouncing it!” This saying has a hidden sense, viz.: “First bestow on me worldly goods that I may give thanks for them, and then help me to abstain from them for Thy sake, so that I may have the treble merit of thanksgiving and liberality and abstinence, and that my poverty may be voluntary, not compulsory.”

—Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
The Sufis have differing opinions in the matter of renunciation (zuhd). Some of them say that one need only renounce the unlawful, because the lawful has been made permissible by God Most High. When God benefits His servant with lawful property and the servant in turn worships Him with gratitude for it, it is not preferable for him to leave it with his own will rather than keeping it with God’s permission.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
The Virtue and Obligation of Renunciation

Other Sufis say that renunciation of the unlawful is an obligation, while renunciation of the lawful is a virtue. From this point of view, as long as the servant is patient with his state of little property, satisfied with what God Most High has apportioned for him, and content with what he has been given, he is more perfect than one who lives richly and comfortably in the world. God Most High has urged people to abstain from the world by His saying, “Say: The provision of this world is but small, while the next is better for whoever is God-wary” (4:77) and in many other verses that may be cited disparaging the world and recommending abstention from it.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Renunciation of the Heart

I heard Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say... that Sufyan al-Thawri said, “Renunciation of the world means to give up placing your hope in it, not to eat coarse food or wear the robe of an ascetic.” And I heard him say... Sari al-Saqati said, “God strips the world from His Friends, denies it to His purified ones, and removes it from the hearts of those He loves because He is not satisfied with that for them.”

–Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Types of Renunciation

God, the Most High, says, "That which is left for you by God is best for you" (11:86).
Renunciation lies in three things: renouncing the world, renouncing people, and renouncing oneself.

–Abdullah Ansari of Herat, Stations of the Sufi Path
The Three Types of Ascetics

Whoever does not refuse the wealth of this world to his enemies is an ascetic vis-à-vis the world.

Whoever does not allow his shame over what people may think about his piety coax him away [from worshipping God] is an ascetic vis-à-vis people.

Whoever does not behold himself with self-congratulation nor look upon himself with approval, is an ascetic vis-à-vis himself

–Abdullah Ansari of Herat,
Stations of the Sufi Path
The Signs of Renunciation

Renouncing the world and remaining an ascetic in the world has three signs: remembering death, being content with one’s sustenance, and seeking the companionship of the dervishes.

Renouncing people has three signs: understanding that the command of God precedes everything else, understanding that providence is firm and established, and seeing that people are helpless and vulnerable.

Renouncing the self has three signs: recognizing the deceit of the devil, realizing one’s weakness, and seeing the darkness of being lead on by the lure of passion (istidrāj).

—Abdullah Ansari of Herat, Stations of the Sufi Path