The Sufi Path of Self-knowledge
Lecture Five

Spiritual Discipline
Al-Wasiti was asked about the practice of remembrance and said, "It is leaving the enclosed court of unconsciousness for the vast space of contemplation through the power of fearing Him and the intensity of loving Him."

—Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism by Al-Qushayri
Let’s ask God to help us to self-control: for one who lacks it, lacks His Grace.

The undisciplined person doesn’t wrong himself alone—but sets fire to the whole world. Discipline enabled Heaven to be filled with light; discipline enabled the angels to be immaculate and holy.

The peacock’s plumage is his enemy. The world is the mountain, and each action, the shout that echoes back.

This discipline and rough treatment are a furnace to extract the silver from the dross.

–Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi
Levels of Spiritual Discipline

• Introductory: *Shariah*, Exoteric
• Intermediate: *Tariqah*, Mesoteric
• Advanced: *Marifah / Haqiqah*, Esoteric
The divine Law [Shari'ah] commands one to the duty of servanthood. The Way [Tariqah], the inner reality [Haqiqah], is the contemplation of divine lordship. Outward religious practice not confirmed by inner reality is not acceptable. Inner reality not anchored by outward religious practice is not acceptable. Divine Law brings obligation upon the creation, while the Way is founded upon the free action [or experience] of the Real. The divine Law is that you serve Him. The Way is that you see Him.

The divine Law is doing what you have been ordered to do. Haqiqah is bearing witness to what He has determined and ordained, hidden and revealed. I heard Abu Ali al-Daggaq say that God's saying [in the Opening Chapter, Al-Fatihah of Al-Qur'an] iyyaka nabudu—"You we worship"—preserves the outward practice, the divine Law. Iyyaka nastain—"to You we turn for help"—establishes the inner reality, the Way.

Know that religious obligation is a spiritual reality in that it was made necessary by His command. And spiritual reality, as well, is a religious obligation, in that the realizations of Him were also made necessary by His command.

—Al Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Iradah, the will to find God, is the beginning of the path of spiritual travelers, the first title given to those who are determined to reach God Most High. This attribute is only called iradah because will is the preface to every undertaking. When the servant does not will, he does not carry out. Since this is the start of the enterprise of one who travels the path of God Almighty and Glorious, it is called ‘will’ by analogy to the resolution involved at the beginning of everything else.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Many people talked about the meaning of will, each expressing the extent it has manifested to his heart. Most shaykhs say that will means the abandonment of what has become habitual. What is habitual for people, in the vast majority of cases, is dwelling in the realms of unconsciousness, basing one’s life upon the pursuit of the passions and inclining toward whatever one’s desires call for. The spiritual aspirant is someone who has cast off all of this. —Al-Qushayri, *Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism*
According to etymology, the disciple is ‘he who possesses will,’ just as the knower is ‘he who possesses knowledge’ because the word belongs to the class of derived nouns. But in Sufi usage, the disciple is he who possesses no will at all! Here, one who does not abandon will cannot be called a disciple, just as, linguistically, one who does not possess will cannot be called a disciple.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Know that the foundation and rationale of struggle or striving (mujahadah) is to wean the ego from what is familiar to it and to induce it to oppose its desires (passions) at all times. The ego (animal soul) has two traits that prevent it from good: total preoccupation with cravings (attraction to pleasure) and refusal of obedience (avoidance of pain/harm). When the ego is defiant in the pursuit of desire, it must be curbed with the reins of the awe of God. When it stubbornly refuses to conform to God’s will, it must be steered toward opposing its desires. When it rages in anger [at being opposed], its state should be controlled—no process has a better outcome than the breaking of the power of anger by developing good character traits and by extinguishing its fires by gentleness. And if the soul finds sweetness in the wine of arrogance, it will have become incapable of anything but showing off its great deeds and preening itself before anyone who will look at it and notice it. It is necessary to break it of this habit, dissolving it with the punishment of humiliation by means of whatever will make the soul remember its paltry worth, its lowly origin, and its despicable acts.

—Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism, Al-Qushayri
Does not training (riyadat) alter the animal qualities of a wild horse and substitute human qualities in their stead, so that he will pick up a whip from the ground and give it to his master, or will roll a ball with his foot? In the same way, a boy without sense and of foreign race is taught by training to speak Arabic, and take a new language in exchange for his mother tongue; and a savage beast is trained to go away when leave is given to it, and to come back when it is called, preferring captivity to freedom. Therefore, Sahl and his followers argue, mortification [striving, mujahadah] is just as necessary for the attainment of Union with God as diction and composition are necessary for the elucidation of ideas; and as one is led to knowledge of the Creator by assurance that the universe was created by him, so one is led to union with God by knowledge and mortification of the lower soul.

—Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
“Those who strive to the utmost for Our sake, We will guide them into Our ways’ (Qur’an 29:69). i.e. whoever mortifies himself will attain to contemplation. Furthermore, he contends that inasmuch as the books revealed to the Prophets, and the Sacred Law (Shari’ah), and all the religious ordinances imposed on mankind involve mortification, they must all be false and vain if mortification were not the cause of contemplation. Again, both in this world and the next, everything is connected with principles and causes. If it is maintained that principles have no causes, there is an end to all law and order: neither can religious obligations be justified nor will food be the cause of repletion and clothes the cause of warmth.

–Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
[Abu ‘l-Sari Mansur Ibn. ‘Ammar] said, “All mankind may be reduced to two types—the man who knows himself, and whose business is self-mortification and discipline, and the man who knows his Lord, whose business is to serve and worship and please Him.” Accordingly, the worship of the former is discipline (*riyahdat*), while the worship of the latter is sovereignty (*riyasat*)” the former practices devotion in order that he may attain a high degree, but the later practices devotion having already attained all. What a vast difference between the two!

–Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
Here we think a note upon faith should be of interest. Initiates say that its meaning has been misunderstood. Faith, as the world uses it, possesses no spiritual nature; though in the secondary system it means power and energy applied to action. All success in Yoga comes from this application; for the true quality of faith is a Solar force that illumines the mind and attracts to it atoms of power and energy. More human wrecks have resulted from the misconception of this quality than man realises.

—M. The Dayspring of Youth
Practice

• Continue to develop your self-observation and self-awareness throughout the day, becoming conscious of your thoughts, words, feelings, and deeds. At the end of each day, sit down to reflect on how well you did.

• When you awaken in the morning, stand facing the east towards the rising sun. Place your hands over your heart, your right hand over your left. Pray to your Innermost, your inner divinity, to help you to develop spiritual willpower and strength.

• Afterward, place your heels together. Then place your right hand on your right hip, and your left hand and arm flat against your left side.

• Vocalize the following mantras (sacred sounds): “TA, TE, TI, TO, TU.” Do this seven or more times.