

SOUND & SILENCE IN ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

The following discourse is an introduction to the realities of Sound and Silence according to the spiritual teachings of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani School of Thought. The commentary on the spiritual levels of the Heart is based on the teachings of As-Sayeed Shaykh Nurjan Mirahmadi, Representative of Mawlana Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani {QS}. Mawlana Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani {QS} is the Deputy of GrandShaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al Haqqani {QS} and the Shaykh of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order of America.

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Part I – Introduction to the Spiritual Notions of Sound and Silence

Relation Between Sound and Silence

We usually think of sound and silence as two opposite concepts. In fact, they are not really opposites of each others. Both sound and silence represent two forms of sounds: sound as we know it represents audible sound. It is the sound of the Known. On the other hand, silence represents non-audible sound. It is the sound of the Unknown.

Silence is the sound of the Unknown.

The Unknown is referred to as “HU” in Islamic Spirituality. “Hu” is both a sound and a Holy Name of God. The sound "Hu" is the most basic vibration in the universe. It is the smallest sound, or the smallest vibration, that is produced whenever an object moves in the universe. Since nothing in creation is in perfect state of rest (electrons are constantly moving around the nucleus), it is safe to say that there is no place in creation where that sound "Hu" is not produced.

Therefore, the real meaning of Silence, which is perfect absence of sound, does not exist in the universe. In this world, when we seek to immerse ourselves in Silence, we are not trying to shut our ability to hear sounds. On the contrary, we are trying to increase our ability to hear a very specific sound: the vibrating sound of the Universe, which is the sound of our inner Soul. That sound is the eternal vibration of "Huuuuuu".

Importance of Sound

A sound represents a Message. When a sound is emitted, some information is moved from the person emitting the sound to the person hearing it. At the very first stage of spiritual development, that Message is the Calling towards Islam, which means submission to the Lord. That initial stage of spiritual development is very critical because it is at that stage that the child in us (the child represents the pure human soul) hears for the first time the sound of his parents’ calling toward a righteous and spiritual life. This is why whenever a baby is born, his parents whisper at his ears some Islamic formulas such as the call to Prayer. These formulas are sounds that the baby can hear long before he can see. Those sounds are reminders for the child. Indeed, they remind that child of his true Origin in the Presence of the Lord.

Melodious Sounds

Melody is a form of sound. Melody is connected to memory. This is the reason why certain songs remind us of some past experiences. Melody is also connected to the Memory of our real spiritual past in Paradise, where all human beings were with the first man, Adam {Peace be upon him} as atoms in his body. The melodies we hear in this world refresh this Memory and make us lighthearted and happy, because in Paradise, there are endless beautiful melodies sung by Angels. Therefore, Sufis use melodies to awaken that Divine Memory.

Importance of Silence

There is a voice inside all of us that is hidden and subtle. That subtle voice is the voice of the Soul. The voice of the Soul is in love with Silence and it will only manifest itself when its beloved comes. Our purpose on earth is to reconnect ourselves with that Voice, which is the Voice of our inner conscience. In order to attract that voice, we need to surround ourselves with what it likes the most.

The metaphor of the Angels who are attracted to nice smells adequately describes the relation between silence and the voice of the human soul. To attract angels during our prayers, we usually spray some nice perfume in the room. When angels smell that perfume, they rush toward it and stay around the person who prays. Similarly, in order to attract the angel of the voice of our inner soul, we need to spray the perfume of Silence around us. When the voice of the soul smells the perfume of its beloved, it quickly comes out of the ocean of the heart and starts speaking to us.

Therefore, silence means seclusion from the external world and conversation with the inner spiritual world.

Part II – Sound, Silence and the 5 Spiritual Stations of the Heart

About the 5 Stations of the Heart

According to the spiritual Masters of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Sufi Order, the human heart is a reflection of the spiritual Heart of the Prophetic Reality. This spiritual Heart represents the Divine Ocean of Power (“Barh’ul Qudra”), which is the Origin of all creations. Whoever reaches the Knowledge of the Heart is able to understand the true Prophetic Reality of Nur Muhammad {s}, the Muhammadan Light {s} inhabiting the Ocean of Power.

There are 5 lata'ifs (subtle points of spiritual Energy), or Maqams (spiritual stations), on the human heart. These five stations are, in an ascending order:

- Qalb (“External Structure of the Heart”)
- Sirr (“Secret”)
- Sirr as Sirr (“Secret of the Secret”)
- Khafa (“Hidden”)
- Akha (“Most Hidden”)

5 Stations = 4 Levels of Sound + 1 Level of Silence

Out of the 5 stations of the Heart, there are 4 that are related to creation and 1 that is related to the Creator. The last Station, called Akhfa (“Most Hidden”) is related to the Creator while the remaining 4 stations are grouped together as the stations that are related to creation.

The first 4 Stations (the stations that are related to creation) have a special relation to Sound while the last Station (the station that is related to the Creator) has a special relation with Silence.

- 4 Levels of Sound
 - ✓ Qalb represents the external call to Islam and to Union with the Light of Prophet {SAW}. While listening to the call to Divine Servitude, the seeker must remain humble and obedient to the Caller: *Sami'na wa Atana* “We heard (the call) and we obeyed”. At the beginning, the Caller urges the seeker to adhere to the external Divine Rules of God.
 - ✓ Sirr is represents the Islamic Sufi sound. At that level the seeker follows a spiritual path (“Tariqa”) that will lead him to the Light of Prophet {SAW}. As a Tariqa follower, the seeker listens to Zikrullah (Remembrance of God through his Divine Names), Sallawat (Praising of Prophet {SAW}), and recitals of Holy Quran. These sounds awaken the heart of the seeker who begins to see the realities of praising. The seeker also listens to his Shaykh who urges him to adhere to the internal rules of the Tariqa (Adab).
 - ✓ Sirr as Sirr represent the manifestation of the Divine Conversation that takes place in the heart of the seeker. At that stage, the seeker interacts with the Divine Light and starts hearing Heavenly voices. This station is under the spiritual authority of two Prophets who used to converse with Heavens in their times: Seydina Musa {as} talked to God through the Burning Bush and Seydina Ibrahim {as} spoke to the Divine through astrological codes and metaphors only him {as} could understand.

- ✓ Khafa represents the Hidden Sound of the words of God. Whenever a word is written, there is a sound associated to it. However, the sound is not released until the word is spoken. Therefore, the sound is hidden and contained in the letters of the word, waiting to become manifest as soon as the letters are pronounced.
- 1 Level of Silence
 - ✓ Akhfa represents Silence. As we saw earlier, Silence means seclusion from all types of external sounds. Silence is the Sound of the Unknown. The Akhfa station of the Heart is the Station of Annihilation; therefore all sounds of creation are annihilated at that level. It is important to understand that annihilation of the sounds of creation does not mean annihilation of Divine Sound. Indeed, there are still some callings, melodies, sallawat and conversations taking place in the Ocean of the Black Station. However, these sounds are all related to the Divine. In this aspect, one may say that Silence is the Sound of the Divine.

Each station is a complete universe appearing with particular characteristics. As the murid (spiritual student) progresses on the Way that lead to the Divine, his Shaykh (spiritual Guide) pours in his heart the knowledge that is associated with each station. The ultimate goal is to reach the 5th and last station of the Heart, for it is the highest adobe of the Ocean of Divine Power within which dwells Nur Muhammad {s}, the Muhammadan Light {s}.

A Journey Towards the Union with the Light of Prophet {SAW}

The 5 Stations of the Heart describe a journey towards the Union with the Light of Prophet Muhammad {SAW} because Seydina Muhammad {SAW} is the only One who has truly reached the Divine. This special honor is known as the *Miraj* (Journey toward Allah Ta'ala). During this lifelong journey, the seeker frequently recites the utterance of Prophet Muhammad {SAW}: “*Illahi anta maqsudi wa ridaka matludi*” (“Oh Allah, You are my Destination and Your good pleasure is what I seek”). The Divine represents indeed the seeker’s true Desire.

The unique closeness that exists between Allah {SWT} and Seydina Muhammad {SAW} is manifested in the Islamic Prophetic Testimony of Faith (Qalimah): “*La ilaha ill Allah Muhammad Rasul Allah*” (“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger”). As we can see, the blessed name of Prophet {SAW} is written right after the Holy Name of God in the Qalimah.

Prophet Muhammad {SAW} is described by Allah {SWT} as a Shining Light, or Nur in Arabic. Therefore, reaching the Light of Seydina Muhammad {SAW} means reaching the Divine Presence of Allah {SWT}. The 5 Stations of the Heart lead to this Divine Presence through the Reality of the Light of Seydina Muhammad {SAW}.

5 Stations = 5 Senses = 5 Fingers

The 5 human senses are directly related to the 5 spiritual stations of the Heart. Each sense is a manifestation of a spiritual station of the heart at the level of cognitive perception.

- The first station (Qalb) is related to hearing
- The second station (Sirr) is related to sight
- The third station (Sirr as Sirr) is related to touch
- The fourth station (Khafa) is related to smell
- The fifth station (Akhfa) is related taste

The 5 stations are also manifested as the five fingers of the hand:

- The little finger corresponds to Qalb (1st Station)
- The ring finger corresponds to Sirr (2nd Station)
- The middle finger corresponds to Sirr as Sirr (3rd Station)
- The index finger corresponds to Khafa (4th Station)
- The thumb corresponds to Akhfa (5th Station)

The little finger corresponds to *Qalb* because it is the station of humanity (normal individuals). As humans, we are indeed as weak as the little finger, and in constant need of support.

The ring finger corresponds to *Sirr* because it is the station of the seal of Faith (Iman) that is engraved on the ring the spiritual seekers symbolically wear. This station is the station of the people of Tariqa who are the true spiritual seekers and who wear the ring of absolute faith in their Guide.

The middle finger, which is the highest of all fingers, represents *Sirr as Sirr* because it is the station of the most Perfect Representative of Prophet {SAW} who is the highest spiritual Authority. This Representative is given complete and perfect authority over creation and is therefore the highest spiritual human being living at any given era. This highest authority is manifested as the superior height of the middle finger.

The index finger corresponds to *Khafa* because it represents the Shahada index, that is, the designated finger we raise when we pronounce the Islamic testimony of faith. The Islamic testimony of faith was brought by Prophet Muhammad {SAW} who is the first one to declare the Unity of the Lord. At higher levels of spirituality the *Khafa* station appears from the Reality of Seydina Muhammad {SAW} (see table below), that is why this station represents the Shahada finger.

The thumb corresponds to *Akhfa* because it is the only station that is separated from the other 4 stations (*Akhfa* is related to the Creator while the remaining 4 stations are related to creation). Similarly, the thumb is the only finger that is separated from the other

fingers (the thumb is considerably located below the other 4 fingers while these 4 fingers are all the same level).

The 5 Senses and the Journey Towards Union with the Beloved {SAW}

If we look at the way the five senses are assigned to the five spiritual stations of the Heart, we notice a clear movement: the senses describe 5 increasing levels of interaction between the spiritual student and the object of his desire, which is the Light of Prophet Muhammad {SAW}.

- **First Level: Hearing the Call to Islam and Believing in the Unseen**

At the very first level (the first station called Qalb), the seeker does not know about the spiritual reality of the Light of Prophet {SAW}. In this state of ignorance, the only way the seeker can know about the existence of a Higher Reality is through **listening** to the call to Islam. Therefore, the notion of Sound plays a particular important role at the first stage of spiritual development. At that stage, the seeker does not see the Higher Reality that is calling him, but he hears about the beautiful description of this Higher Reality. This description of the Beautiful Names and Attributes of the Higher Reality brings faith to the seeker who starts believing in what he does not see yet. The first step in religion is indeed to acquire belief in the Unseen.

At this very first level, the seeker cannot see the Higher Reality because of the veil of his ego which stands between him and the Higher Reality. Therefore, his vision is obstructed by the wall of the bad characteristics of his ego.

- **Second Level: Seeing the Reality after having destroyed the Veil of the Ego**

After the seeker has heard about existence of the Higher Reality, he sets on a journey to eliminate the bad characteristics of the ego in order to lift the veil of the ego that stands between him and the Divine Reality. Through the spiritual training of his Shaykh, he is able to “kill” all his bad traits until the wall of his ego crumbles down. At that moment, the seeker can now see the Higher Reality he was believing in.

The seeker’s belief in the Message he was hearing (symbolically through the call to Islam and spiritually through the information his Shaykh sends him) made him reach the second level of the five stations of the Heart, where he is granted spiritual vision. At that stage, the seeker is now a step closer to the Higher Reality because he now has the ability to see and to hear. The next natural step for the seeker is to move closer to the Reality standing in front of him up to the level where he can touch the Reality.

- **Third Level: Touching the Reality**

Through the spiritual power of his Shaykh, the seeker reaches the third level where he is brought close to the Higher Reality of Nur Muhammad {s}, up to the point where he is able to physically interact with the Reality. At that stage, the seeker is reborn as a new baby, free from the bad characteristics of the ego, and pure as a crystal. This

purity is the condition to physically interact with the Prophetic Light {s} because this Light can only be touched by a clean and pure heart.

- **Fourth Level: Smelling the Perfume of the Divine Presence**

After the seeker has reaching the level of physical interaction with the Light, his Shaykh brings him even closer to the Light so that he may smell the Perfume of the Light. Perfumes are signs of the Presence of a higher reality, therefore the seeker who is elevated to the stage of Smell is automatically transported in the Presence of the Light of Prophet {SAW}.

- **Fifth Level: Tasting the Reality**

The last step on the way to spiritual realization is union with the Light of Prophet {SAW}. Through the spiritual power of the Shaykh, the seeker moves from smelling the Presence of the Light to disappearing in the Spirituality of Nur Muhammad {s}. At that stage, the seeker does not need any external sensitive sign to interact with the Object of his desire. Hearing, Sight, Touch and Smell are indeed all external cognitive signs of perception while Taste is directly related to the inner soul of an individual. The sense of Taste is the only sense that requires you to be one with a reality in order to interact with it.

Table of the Characteristics of the 5 Stations (Live Discussion)

For more details about the spiritual characteristics of the 5 Stations of the Heart, please visit Shaykh Nurjan’s web site www.NurMuhammad.com

1 st Station	
Name	Qalb (Heart)
Characteristic	External Knowledge
Prophet	Under the authority of Seydina Adam {as}
Higher Reality	From the reality of the Sultan of Saints {QS}(Living Khalifa)
Sense	Hearing
Color	Yellow
Meaning	Honor granted to the Children of Adam to be Abd Allah
Secret Meaning	Station of the Sun, the king in the space of creation Secret of Amana Rasul {SAW} – honor in the Assembly of Saints Manifestation of Ayat “We have honored the Children of Adam”
Zikr	Ya Sayyid
Relation to Sound : Listen to the Call to Islam – Listen to the external Guide	

2nd Station	
Name	Sirr (Secret)
Characteristic	Knowledge of Tariqa
Prophet	Under the authority of Seydina Nuh {as}
Higher Reality	From the reality of Seydina Madhi {as} (Khalifa of the Last Days)
Sense	Sight – Spiritual Vision of Realities
Color	Red
Meaning	Sacrifice of the ego – red is for the color of the blood of the ego
Secret Meaning	Coming of the Imam in the time of the Spiritual War {Jihad an Nafs} Secret of Tariqa as the Arch to save oneself from the flood of ignorance.
Zikr	Ya Sahib
Relation to Sound : Listen to Zikr, Sallawat, Sufi Songs – Listen to the spiritual Guide	

3rd Station	
Name	Sirr as Sirr (Secret of the Secret)
Characteristic	Knowledge of the Shaykh of the Tariqa
Prophet	Under the authority of Seydina Ibrahim {as} and Seydina Musa {as}
Higher Reality	From the Reality of Seydina Abu Bakar as-Siddiq {ra} (First Khalifa)
Sense	Touch
Color	White
Meaning	Purity of the Soul – Station of Sincere People {Siddiq}
Secret Meaning	Secret of Nur ala Nur (Light Upon Light) Crystal of the Heart pure as a Light to receive Heavenly Light Secret of spiritual Pigrimage and of Amal (Good Deed) Secret of Binary Numbers – Speaking {1} and Hearing {0} White Moon of Guidance in the night of creation
Zikr	Ya Siddiq
Relation to Sound : Listen to the Heavens - Conversation with the Heavenly Voices	

4th Station	
Name	Khafa (Hidden)
Characteristic	Hidden Knowledge
Prophet	Under the authority of Seydina Isa {as}
Higher Reality	From the Reality of Seydina Muhammad {SAW}
Sense	Smell
Color	Green
Meaning	Life of the Spirit which comes to inhabit the purified body
Secret Meaning	Life of the Natural Elemental world is Life of the Spirit – Secret Ruh Secret of Resurrection – Qiyama Secret of the Amr (Command) leaving Qudra and dressing the soul Secret of the Word – Seydina Isa {as} as a Word from God
Zikr	Ya Sayyid
Relation to Sound : Listen to Hidden Sounds contained in words	

5th Station	
Name	Akhfa (Most Hidden)
Characteristic	Seclusion from creation
Prophet	Under the authority of Seydina Muhammad {SAW}
Higher Reality	From the Reality of Allah {SWT}
Sense	Taste
Color	Black
Meaning	Disconnect your Self from creation and face the Creator
Secret Meaning	Secret of the Cave - Annihilation (Fana) in Divine Presence Secret of True Meaning of Abd Secret of Balzakh (Dwelling of “deceased” Soul) Enter Energy Ocean of Barhul Qudra Secret of Prayer, Sallawat and Musical Energy - Energy means Angel Secret of Ayat “Allah and His Angels Pray on the Prophet {SAW}”.
Zikr	Ya Allah
Relation to Silence : Perfect Silence in Seclusion – only voice is the Voice of the Truth	

Last Words

We hope that you enjoyed this presentation. The realities of Sound, Silence and the 5 Stations of the Heart are eternal oceans of Knowledge that are always expanding. There is always a new Knowledge coming from these beautiful oceans of the Heart and we hope that our Guides on the Way continue to nourish all of us with this Heavenly food.

May Allah {SWT} send endless blessings upon His Prophet {SAW} and upon his blessed family and Companions, and may Allah {SWT} send his special Love to our GrandShaykh Mawlana Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al Haqqani {QS}, to our spiritual Master Mawlana Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani {QS}, as well as our mentor As-Sayeed Shaykh Nurjan Mirahmadi.

We invite you to visit Shaykh Nurjan’s web site in order to learn more about the secrets of the 5 stations of the Heart as well as other Naqshbandi secrets.

Please visit: www.NurMuhammad.com