

NASIR KHOSROW:
THE CHARACTER OF THE BELIEVER
Seek Until You Find

by
Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

Lecture presented at the Zaawiyah of
Shaykh Nooruddeen Durkee
Charlottesville, VA
30 March 2014 29 Jumada Awwal 1435



Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem

Sura al Fatiha

**AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L- ABSĀR.
ALLĀHUMMA ThABIT QULŪBANA ḌALA SIRĀTIKA-L-QAWĪM,
WA-JḌALNĀ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHĪN,
WA ṢALLI ḌALA-Sh-ShAFĪḌI-L-HABĪB,
RAḤMATIL-ḌĀLAMĪN,
WA MANĀRI-L-NAJIYĪN, WA MARSĀ-L-ḌĀRIFĪN**

Praise be to Allah, the Turner of the hearts and sight.
O Allah ﷻ, fix our hearts on the best of Your ways,
and make us face You in our way,
and bestow blessings on the beloved intercessor,
the mercy of all the worlds,
the lighthouse of the survivors, the harbor of the knowers.

**Allahumma Salli wa Sallim ‘alaa Mutaa’in
Salaatan tutee’unaa bihaa, Shari’ata’l Muhammadiyyati
Wa Tariqata’l Ahmadiyyati
Wa Haqeeqata’s Sarmadiyyati
Wa Ma’rifata’l Illaahiyati bi ita’aati
Atee’ullaha wa atee’urrasool**

O Allah! Bestow blessings and peace on the one who is obeyed;

**Such blessing by means of which You may make us obey
 Sayyidina uhammad's Shariah Sayyidin Ahmad's Tariqa
 The eternal Haqiqa and Allah's Marifa.**

INTRODUCTION

In this series of *duruus*, we have “traveled” with Al-Khidr ربه as he guided Musa ربه through the rigors of trust, we met Salman Farsi ربه one who was exceptionally devoted, loyal, and trustworthy; a believer, a seeker, a finder. Now we meet another traveler on the path of truth: Nasir Khosrow and spend a day with him and his journey, his poetry and teachings. He affirms the value of seeking until one finds, of being a true and determined believer.

Who is this man and what does he have to teach us? His writings and poetry are filled with wisdom on every subject, from the mundane to the profound. One of the repeating themes we find in his writing is that of *'ilm* and *'aql*. According to him, knowledge it is not innate; but it is acquired; you have to seek it. He writes, “*ilm is the concept (tasarrur) of a thing as it exists.*” An *'alim*, for example, who possesses *'ilm*, intellectual knowledge, is the one who conceives of a thing as it is.

He describes it in these very simple terms: whatever skills you have, whatever professional knowledge you have, whatever craft you have, you learn it through tafakkur/contemplating it or thinking about it. You are drawn to it by *ilbaam*/instinct. You practice something because of *wahy*/you are inspired by it, or you are inspired by others. Sometimes, you are inspired willingly and sometimes you find inspiration because of constraints that are upon you. No matter whether you're talking about some profession, or learning a language, or a philosophy or religious knowledge, this process of *'ilm* is the dynamic. It is the active aspect of *'aql* and of *ma'rifa*.

Whether it is experiential, or strictly something you learned mentally or educationally, the attraction to and value of knowledge is innate. When you have a yearning for it, it resonates within you. It resonates in your soul, your heart, your intellect, and your mind. It lifts you up. When you fully understand something, and you fully attain knowledge through conceptualizing something, you experience it, directly or indirectly.

Nasir Khosrow offers in his teachings an example to illustrate the difference between conceptual understanding and real understanding: the difference between the two is the difference between conceiving of pain and the feeling of pain. I would say you can make the same analogy with regard to love: there is a world of difference between one who talks about the concept of love and one who understands the undeniable grasp of love on the heart.

Nasir Khosrow was living in a world where people conceptualized things, but they didn't feel them. We too live in a world filled with complex concepts and many who believe they understand them, but very little real experienced understanding. Every day we see how people sublimate or totally discard their deeper ‘feelings’ and replace that with material items, objectification of other, and ritualistic behavior that lacks understanding and meaning.

Many people today seem to lack even the means to change behavior or beliefs...seeing only ways to confirm and reinforce preexisting bias or forms, without grasping their relevancy and their limitations. It is called

confirmation bias and we see it everywhere today in the so called “Islamic world,” indeed in all the world: Western, Eastern, Christian, Jewish. This confirmation bias can mean that we disregards the ‘truth’ or the ‘Proof’ of falsehood, no matter the evidence.

This is the seen world, the world that Nasir Khousru saw was corrupted and lacking essence and he set out to find another way. Much as many of us did years ago. But I don’t want to get ahead of my story.

We are among the few who cultivate and seek the understanding and experience of the unseen world—those who take time out of our week, our day, our hours, to contemplate the esoteric, to seek the Truth—not the intellectual concepts of Truth (or pain or love), but the real experience of them. Indeed, we are taking time IN our day and week to seek what is real, what is true and what is our trust. We are seeking to see, to understand, to receive.

The practices of anyone who is traveling on the esoteric path include the engagement of all the senses, both inner and outer: the *lataa’if*: *qalb, ruuh, sirr, kbafee, akhfaa*, from the *‘alam al-amr*, but also earth, air, fire, and water, and self. We can say that when these ten essential senses are engaged the human being, through their intellects and their hearts; through their own *dhaat*/essence, and through the help of both our external senses and our internal organs of perception, can begin to be able to discern the Truth. I will return more later to this discussion of the senses (inner and outer) and the role of the *lataa’if* and intellect in discerning the true reality.

. He says in one of his texts:

*Human soul has the essential sight,
 which is not the physical sight.
 It has all the acts parallel to the external sense perceptual acts.
 The essential acts of the human intellect
 are more exalted than the accidental acts.*

These are the hidden mysteries we will discuss today in this dars. Every aspect of creation has a hidden mystery to it. Every sense has a mystery to it. Every organ has a mystery to it. Every function has a mystery to it. And the knowledge of that, of those hidden mysteries – the hidden, intelligible knowledge – are all attained through the engaging of both the sensory and mental capacities of the human being, and the essential, subtle, or esoteric capacities.

In Qur’anic terms, it is called *‘ilm al yaqeen*, the knowledge of certainty, or seeing with the *‘ayn al yaqeen*, the eye of certainty.

SEEKING THE VANTAGE POINT

The 18th century Moroccan Sufi, Ahmad ibn ‘Ajiba’s wrote a commentary that offers further insight into this balance of inner and outer. He wrote on the Prophet’s saying, **“Every verse has an outer aspect and an inner, a limit and a vantage point.”**

[This] means that the outward is for those such as the grammarians, the experts in language and declension. The inward is for those concerned with the meanings of words, the commandments and prohibitions, parables and narratives, the affirmation of God’s oneness, and other like teachings of the Qur’an, such being the domain of the exegetes. The limit is for the juridical scholars (al-fuqaha) who are concerned with the derivation of rules from the verses, who come to a verse and then carry its arguments as far as possible but without addition. The vantage point (al-

muttala'u) is for the people of spiritual truths among the greatest of the Sufis, where, from the outward meaning of a verse, they look down, as it were, into its inward meaning. Then are unveiled to them, through reflection upon the verse, are its mysteries, teachings, and mystic sense.

Literally, muttala'u means any place from which one may look down upon something from its highest to lowest point and this word is mentioned in a sound hadith referring to the 'terror of the vantage point' by which is meant a place of approach from which one will look down upon the events of the Last Day. Thus too can it be said [in Arabic], 'Where is the vantage point of this question?' meaning its point of approach, which is literally an elevated point from which something may be seen from its highest to lowest limits. In a like manner do the people of spiritual truth look down from the outward meaning of a verse into the mysteries of its inward dimension and then plunge into the depths of the ocean. And God Most High knows better.-- Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba, Al-Barh al-Madid (The Immense Ocean)

Seeing and understanding this “vantage point” is the goal and result of many of the writings and teachings of Nasir Khosrow. To achieve a place of inner clarity, a place from which you can look down upon something from its highest to its lowest point; a place from which you can approach Allah ﷻ, and look down upon the events of your life, look down upon the events of the Last Day. Is that not the kind of clarity that we all seek?

We can ask the question, where is the vantage point of this moment? What is the point of approach? It is in the subtleties, the esoteric approach, that one finds the higher approach. The people of real spirituality look down from the outward, meaning through the ayat, to the inner dimension, and its mysteries are revealed. Then they dive, if you will, into the ocean of that knowledge. And Allah knows best what that means.

This search for the means to dive into the inner mysteries is the search we see in the life of Nasir Khosrow. His life exemplifies the journey of one who seeks and finds the clear vantage point, the place from which one can see and understand: the Search for Truth, as my Shaykh called it.

Nasir Khosrow writes,

O brother! You asked what is the meaning of 'alam, the world? And what is that entity to which this name applies? How should we describe the world in its entirety? And how many worlds are there? Explain so that we may recognize. Know, O brother, that the name “alam” is derived from the word 'ilm, knowledge, because the choices of knowledge are evident in all parts of the physical world.

His understanding, which we see in the verse, was that everything in this world had traces of the knowledge or the essence of Allah in it. You need to know how to look. Khosrow found that not many people knew how to look, let alone even seek to see “reality”. Rather, they (and we) seek what they want to see, hear what they want to hear, believe what they want to believe.

That observation about the vast majority of humanity was true at his time, as it is true today. Then, and now, people were getting more and more wrapped up in the form, and the rules and regulations of the religion. So he wandered, and he sought the truth. He met the Imam of the time, who was Mustan Surr Billah, who was the 18th Imam of the Shi'a Ismailis; the 8th Fatimid Khalif who ruled in Egypt in the mid-11th century. His meeting with this Khalif was similar to the meeting of Rumi with Shems Tabrizi. He fell madly in spiritual love with him.

We see in all the stories we have studied in this series, the thread of change, of devotion, of seeking. Sidna Musa ربه has to change under the guidance of Khidr ربه. Salman al Farsi ربه started as a Zoroastrian,

then studies with the Christians and becomes a Christian. Then he winds up being a slave to the Jews, and then became a Muslim at the hand of Prophet Mohammed ﷺ. We see this pattern in these *awliyaa'u-Llah*. One of the things the pattern tells us is that a certain personality, a certain type of seeker, can transcend place and sect and rules.

In the true seeker, the love and attraction for Allah, the attraction for truth, marginalizes every other thing. These people whose lives we are discussing didn't hesitate for a second to move towards whatever is really attracting of the heart or of the truth. But when they arrive at the teaching or the teacher, they stay true, regardless of the social pressure or difficulties they encounter. We see in their stories both the restlessness of the constant seeker and the loyalty of the heart.

TRAVELING WITH NASIR KHOSROW

Nasir Khosrow wrote,

With an inner sight, look at the world's mysteries. The outward sight cannot discover it. This world is the stair leading to the higher world, and we must mount its steps.

Who is this man Nasir Khosrow? Before we continue with his teachings, let me tell you something more about his life. He was a poet, he was a philosopher, he was an explorer, a traveler. He was Hujjat of Khorasan. He was a very important individual in the 11th century in Iran. His name was Abul Moinuddin Nasir al Khusru. He was the son of a small landowner in Balkh. He was born in 1003 C.E., during the time of the Sultan Mahmud Gasnavi. That was an era which produced some very interesting people, such as Omar Kayyam, Hasan bin Sabah, Al Muayyid al Shirazi, Imam al Ghazali.

Nasir Khosrow was called the Ruby of Badakshan. He is considered one who had real *hikmah*, real knowledge, real wisdom. But who was he? He was a seeker after truth. Always a curious person, the story of his life is of one who is a sojourner on the path to Allah ﷻ with Allah, in Allah swt.

He devoted about 30 years to seeking knowledge, and he became extremely well versed in almost every field of knowledge of his time. He memorized the Quran. He became an expert in the *tanzeel* and *ta'weel* of Qur'an. He also studied the *Injeel* and the Torah as well as also other religious texts. He studied the teachings of Ptolemy and the geometry of Euclid.

He studied chemistry, physics, logic, music, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy, astrology. And he knew Hebrew, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Greek. He also studied Socrates and Plato, and Aristotle. He studied the letters of Al Khidni and Farabi and Avicenna. He refers to his own knowledge in his Diwan: *No knowledge remained in the world from which I was not benefited more or less.*

As a young man, he entered government service in the Seljuk administrated areas. He was employed as a secretary and a revenue officer. He was obviously a very intelligent young man; and he took 30 years to study all the schools of thought available.

He went on a pilgrimage as an orthodox Muslim, and found what he sought in the Ismaili inner dimensions of Islam in Egypt. Many people question this choice or dismiss his teachings because of the affiliation. But my belief, after studying his writings and his approach to teaching, is that to him the only truth was Islam. Sect did not matter; he wanted to know what the truth was and how to apply that knowledge. He realized that the truth meant a really authentic understanding and interpretation of the Deen, which he realized could only be receive from a guide and which had to be grasped internally. What

he grasped was something beyond form and certainly beyond what he saw was entropic forces within Sunni Islam in his native land.

He gave two statements regarding his embracing of Ismaili thought, at the beginning of his journey. One is a confession in the form of a lengthy *qasida*. On a certain night, he reported that he saw in a dream someone saying to him,

“How long are you going to go on drinking the wine that ruins human reason? It's high time for you to become sober.”
 He answered in the following words,

“The wise have not invented any better means for the purpose of reducing sorrows of the world.” The addressor in the dream said,

“Senselessness and unconsciousness do not bring peace of mind. One cannot be called wise man, if one leads people to unconsciousness. It is necessary that one search for something that flourishes wisdom, and increases reason.” He asked,

“Where can I find that?” And the addressor said,

“Those who search will find.” And waved his hand in the direction of the *Qibla*, saying nothing more.

He resigned from his work after seeing this dream, and went on his journey.

He knew he was causing a lot of damage to his reputation and place by doing this, but the dream had such an effect on him that to him, it was as if the Prophet had appeared to him in a dream. Though difficult, he felt there was no question that he had to leave and travel. He had no choice.

It is clear from his writings that he was very much against practicing religion without understanding its essence and implications. He renounced, literally or figuratively, the “wine” and undertook this journey of pilgrimage to Mecca. He was about 40 years old at that time. The details of the journey are interesting and bespeak of a most sincere and devoted seeker of truth.

He performed his ablutions, and went to the mosque of Jazjanam where he made a vow of repentance, and he set out on his journey and 437 AH, or 1045 CE. His younger brother, Abu Sayed, also joined him; and they had with them an Indian servant. He traveled by the way of Shaburqan to Merv, and they proceeded to Nishapur, which had always been a great center of learning. He visited the tomb of Bayazid Bistami at Qumis. He went to Demghan and Samnan where he met an Ustad named Ali Nisai, who was a pupil of Avicenna, and a lecturer on geometry, mathematics, and medicine. Then he reached Tabriz in Safar, in 438/1046.

Then he made his way to Van, Akhiat, Bittis, Arzan, Mayfaraqin, Amid, Aleppo. From Aleppo he went to Ma'arratun-Nu'man, where he met the great poet and philosopher Abul-ala-af-Ma'arri. From there he went to Hama (which is barely standing today unfortunately in Syria), and to Tripoli and Beirut, to Sidon, Tyre, Acre, and Haifa.

He spent some time in Syria, visiting the tombs of the prophets and other holy places, including Jerusalem and Bethlehem. He made his first pilgrimage to Mecca in 1047 CE by way of Damascus to Jerusalem. Then he proceeded by land to Egypt, and arrived in Cairo in 1047 CE in the month of Safer.

He was attracted by the fame of al-Mustansir. He came from Khorasan into Egypt, where he lived for seven years. Muayyid, was a great teacher and he converted to Ismaili under him.

The Ismaili Fatimid mentality captured his mind and his heart. Not for political reasons, but only because he thought the search for truth was deeply influenced by their approach to life, and especially to their approach to *tawheed*.

That was of course the turning point in his life in the Fatimid dynasty. He writes about this time and his conversion,

Feeling that to me, my own body is the dearest; I inferred that in the world, there must be someone who is the most precious of all that has been created. Just as the falcon is the noblest of all birds, or the camel among the quadrupeds, or the date palms among the trees, or the ruby among the jewels, just as the Qur'an among the books, or the Kaaba among the houses, or the heart among the organs of the body; the sun amongst the luminaries.

In his book, "Safarnama," he described the city of Cairo, the administration, the wealth, the contents. His biographer says, His description of Cairo, its mosques, its gardens, buildings and suburbs is admirable. The details of Fatimid administration given by him are most valuable. He was impressed with the discipline of the Army, the maintenance of laws, peace, and order in the country, describing the excellent administration in beautiful words.

At that time, in the Golden age of the Fatimid dynasty, there were people who were visionary inventors, superb doctors, scholars, philosophers, thinkers, and scientists in Cairo. He wrote of the people and time,

The sun shines forth like Fatimids as it ascends the slope from its winter exile, its rays as bright as [Zulfikar], the sword of Ali; giving figure to the Rose, as to the pearl white steed of Ali.

From his journeys and his studies it is clear that he concludes that Islam had diverged from the true path, and only these teachers of Ismaili philosophy could really deliver on the truth. He went to the court of the Fatimid Caliph Al Mustansir billah, and met Kwaja al-Muayyid Shirazi, who was one of the 12 "hujjats" (proof or authority) of the Imam. He discussed with him the Qur'an, especially the allegorical aspects of it, and other secrets of the sharia. He accepted the Caliph al Mustansir Billah as his imam. He said,

I searched the world for tawel-e-mujtashabihat (the meeting of allegories of the holy Quran) but I could not find it anywhere except in with the Fatimid Caliphs.

He was searching for understanding and truth, and with the Fatimids is where he found it. I appreciate this search from my own journeys; years and years ago, when I went to the Svat Valley, searching for the truth from the Kabbalists, I couldn't find it there. I wound up finding it in India with my Shaykh Hazrat Azad Rasool.

In his Diwan, he says of his teacher,

From the heart of Al-Muayyid, God has opened for you the doors of wisdom. Kwaja changed my night into a shiny day by his arguments, right like sun. He showed me both the worlds in my person, he made me behold them openly as well as secretly in one in my person.

We all like to believe in miracles. We like to think that we could go, knock on the door, opened it, and, "poof" we will have all knowledge! But the thing you need to understand about is the receptive quality of

the student. The search for truth is not the search for a some magical thing, a “holy grail,” or the right place, it is the search that transforms you into the right person.

Nasir Khosrow was receptive. He hungered for; he was starving for, thirsting for knowledge. He was willing to leave everything he had, in order to seek it and find it. Some of you should be able to relate to that. He had to learn a new way of seeing and thinking, a new vocabulary or definitions of concepts and principles that he knew from before but now saw in a different light or through a different lens.

After he found his calling, he was sent by his teacher on various journeys, and finally back to his native country where he was appointed to the propagation of dawa in Khorasan, and given the title of “hujjut-i-Khorasan” and became one of the 12 “hujjuts” in the court of the Imam in 444 AH. All this took only seven years.

RETURN TO THE HOMELAND

He returns to Persia, to Khorasan, and began to propagate dawa. He is trying to tell people the essence of the Deen; people who are already Muslims. He's not calling people to Islam, he's trying to clarify it for them, responding to their call for understanding and direction; encouraging people to ask questions, seek the truth, to see beyond the material world.

To most Muslims, *da'wah* is promoting Islam, branding Islam, calling people to Islam. But what I have said for many years is that *da'wah* is responding to a call; answering a question, being tuned to the need. It is responding to Allah's call to you. What is the difference? One difference is that in one mode you are trying to promote something while in the other you create such beauty that people's natural inclination is to come to that beauty, to that truth, seeing that everything has a voice that speaks of the Divine Presence and calls us to that Source.

This subtlety of *da'wah* can be seen in the life of Nasir Khosrow. When he returned to his homeland he returned as one who had answered Allah's call to him and one ready and willing to help to answer the call of others.

Da'wah is a summons, summoning humanity to the recognition of *tawheed*, oneness, just as Nuh tried to do for 950 years, or Ibrahim ؑ or Musa ؑ. This is the recognition of the esoteric understanding, the call, the leadership, the uniqueness, the honorific focal point of Truth. The essential purpose of the personality of the prophets, of the *awliyyaa' Allah*, of the imam, is to summon human souls to *tawheed*.

We recognize in the Shuyukh and *awliyyaa'* that guidance, that leadership. We recognize the *walāyat* of an individual, teacher, guide, imam, and we give *bay'at* to that person. *Bay'at* also is responding to a call. It is the beginning, the true beginning of the *sayru-s-suluuk*, of the journey, towards that one Truth, Allah ﷻ. Recognizing the value of what your heart desires, necessitates; selling something of value in order to acquire it. *Bay'at*.

The spiritual journey within *da'wah* has many, many different levels: initiation, purification, *at-tazkiyyat*... the realization comes step by step until one recognizes, sees clearly, discerns with the eye of Truth, with the *baseerah*, the *'ayn al-haqq*, the recognition of *tawheed*. *Laa ilaaha illaa-Llaah*. There is only Allah. That is the simple and complex message of real *da'wah*.

And yet, the average person is not necessarily listening for that call. The average person is just trying to put food on their plates, keep a roof over their heads, and stay out of trouble. That's what the average person is doing. But we are all capable of more, and more is demanded of us. Nasir Khosrow wrote in his Divan,

*Your true abode is the bright and everlasting world,
 Not for you the lowest world.
 Light the candle of reason within your heart
 And go quickly with shining heart on to the shining world.*

(Divan, 78:14-15)

What is he saying? Is he calling people to a new religion? No, they are already part of Islam. He's trying to help people understand the *baatin* and the *dhaahir* of their own lives; to rise above the outer and dive into the inner. He wanted them to understand the inner secrets as he had come to understand them.

If you don't understand how difficult that is, believe me, it was difficult then and it is difficult now. Then, as now, there are always those who distort or darken the truth.

He writes this about the dogmatic mullahs of his time.

*From pulpit tops, they preach to the common folk,
 dazzling them about paradise and the food to be had there.
 ... They crow and cry in hope of food;
 Asses always bray when you speak of barley.
 And if you do not preach that heaven is a place of eating and sex,
 They'll send arrows of ridiculous rage flying from their eyes at you*

(Divan, 68:21-4)

This is a thousand years ago. Yet we could say that nothing has changed. He has all this great knowledge and he is speaking "truth to power." This of course caused the Abbasid '*ulamaa*' to rise up against him.

He was persecuted, and had to flee from Balkh, and took refuge in Mazindaran. Then he entered Nishapur, and had to face the same misery in that place. So he left Badakhshan and finally settled in the remote valley of Yamgan, which is now in Eastern Afghanistan, where he becomes an ascetic.

He writes about this flight and exile:

*The wise man wastes no words on a board of idiots.
 They call me unorthodox. Bah!
 What do they know of Islam, except its name?*

And also,

*Everyone has turned away, repulsed and disgusted at my words,
 Even my neighbors, my relations, my countrymen.
 No one reads my writings, no one speaks my name;
 The ignorant out of ignorance, the scholars trembling at trouble.*

(Divan, 44:15-16)

Sound familiar? His Diwan is full of these kinds of statements. Through his writings we get a picture of a man who is deeply in love with Allah; who seeks out truth and who has little tolerance for those who would cover and obscure the truth.

He has left everything and embraced the pure Truth. This may seem hard to conceive of, and yet there are people in this room who have made similar choices, some of you whose own families have even rejected, chastised, or castigated you for choosing Islam or for choosing the Sufi path. So we each have something in common with Nasir Khosrow, no matter how you came to the path, we each have the potential, at least, to be that kind of pure and dedicated seeker.

Now in Yamgan, he lives an ascetic life, and sings songs of praise to Allah. He writes,

*O Beloved! When I proclaim your name,
 roses spring up from your blessings.
 When your servant speaks your name,
 the vale of Yamgan fills with dancing stars.*

And yet, he also feels the sting and longing of this exile, writing:

*The scorpion of exile has stung my heart so,
 You'd say heaven invented suffering just for me*

(Divan, 6:1)

He writes with great eloquence of longing for his homeland. A longing and experience of separation reflected in the lives and poems of many of the seekers and Sufis. A longing born of separation from the beloved.

*Who asks, from this miserable, sad exile,
 'O Khurasan, how goes it without me?'
 Are you still as I saw you in springtime?
 Send news, if still you are the same.
 Are your trees still draped in multi-hued streamers,
 Your willows still bound up with turbans of red?
 In April, do eastern breezes still cover the face of the desert
 With veils of yellow from China and red from Byzantium?
 In late winter months, do breezes still scatter the coins and
 The jewels of all colours on the heads of the brides in the orchards?
 Do they still make the crown for narcissus
 Out of gold from the treasure chest and pearls of fine luster?
 If you are still so, and this is how it goes,
 May your nights be sweet and your days happy and full.
 But for me, things have been quite different for some time now,
 Even if you, without me, have not changed.
 Little by little, the hand of time has washed
 The silken turban from my head.
 Fickle time has swallowed my rosy complexion
 With too many washings in yellow water.
 By the tyranny of time, my body, once straight as the letter alif
 Is now changed into the round letter nun, the letter nun!*

(Divan, 65: 1-11)

Fariuddin Attar, another great Persian poet and mystic, was inspired by his story and wrote a poem called, "The Tale of Nasir Khosrow and His Seclusion." Attar writes about Nasir Khosrow,

The cry of Nasir Khosrow when he dwelt in Yamgan arched even passed heaven's nine story vault. A little corner he took, to hide himself away, hearing the Prophet himself had named that very spot. Not a man to enter into the fighting fields of dogs. Like the Ruby of Badrakshan, he hid himself away. Amid the hidden hearts of mountains, he chose the corner of Yamgan so as not to have to look upon the hard faces of his foes. Now I, too, like the great prince, have found a little corner for myself. Since in search for deeper meaning, he provided the provisions.

One thousand years later, where are we? We are still in need of the Khusrus. And not far from his home, either. We need the voices of Nasir Khosrows, Salman Farsis (ra), all the carriers of the light of truth, in the world today. We need people to light the fire of reason, to light the fire of love. To show the real spirit, the true essence of what Islam is. We need to reclaim the mentality of a Nasir Khosrow and reintroduce into the world the richness of our tradition, our history and culture and heritage of Islam. Again, Nasir writes,

*With shining minds we construct towers of debate
 As high as the heavens, and lavish them with gold.
 Warriors we are, in the army of the Qur'an and the Sharia;
 For we are the Shi'a of Ali, the persistent.
 Sick people think sugar isn't sweet.
 No wonder you think we are unbelievers.
 One of me and a thousand of you; though you swarm like
 Snakes and ants and we are not many,
 An army cannot be five hundred mounts on one man;
 Better we not even count your army.*

(Divan 33:36-42)

He turns toward the light. He doesn't say the name of the light, it doesn't matter. The flower doesn't ask where the sun is. The flower will grow through all kinds of obstacles, just to reach the light; and will do it in one day. Nasir Khosrow cuts through the obfuscation, and reminds us that sweet is sweet, light is light, and we must defend the good and the right and the just.

We live in a time when we have to distinguish between what is true and what is false, what is clear in what is confusing. To pick up a weapon to spread the message of Islam was never the way of Islam. It never was, no matter what anybody says. Our weapon is good character, service, and truth. Our weapon is the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

The people who pick up the guns and bombs today, and try to say they are spreading the message of Islam, are just the same crazy people who were chasing him over 1000 years ago. What did he choose to do? He chose to spread the message of Islam and of Tasawwuf through poetry and through love.

As our own Benjamin Franklin said: the pen is mightier than the sword. There is absolutely nothing that you or I or our children are going to quote from any Taliban leader 100 years from now, or 10 years from now, or five years from now, or three years from now. And 1000 years later, we are still quoting words from the pen of Nasir Khosrow.

DISCERNING INNER AND OUTER

I have shared with you something of the outer journey and teaching of Nasir Khosrow, but there is much more depth and spiritual complexity to his teachings. I wanted to begin by giving you an idea of who we are talking about, his struggles, his travels, and his inner journey.

His writings are filled with examples of simple and practical wisdom, reminders of the passage of time, and the importance of remembrance and the power of separating truth from falsehood.

Have you heard? A squash vine grew beneath a towering tree. For only 20 days, it grew and spread and put forth its fruit. Of the tree it asked, how old are you? How many years?

Replied the tree, two hundred it would be, and surely more. The squash laughed and said, look! In 20 days what I have done. And what of you? Tell me, why are you so slow?

The tree responded, oh little squash, today is not the day of reckoning between the two of us. Tomorrow, when winds of autumn howl down on you and me, then shall it be known for sure which one of us is the most resilient.

He wrote often of the passing of time and the aging of the body, reminding his reader of what is truly important in this life:

*That strength of you, that heavenly face –
 O mindless body of mine, why did you ever leave them behind?
 When your body was beautiful you acted pretty ugly,
 Now that you're ugly, you should beautify your actions.
 Time has made your torso feeble:
 Yesterday a peacock, today a porcupine.*

(Divan, 174: 1-3)

At some point in each of our lives we are going to have to be able to distinguish between the *dhaahir* and the *baatin*, to distinguish the outwardly beautiful from the inwardly meaningful. We each have the choice to direct our lives towards the Haqq of Allah or to fill our time with the meaningless chatter of the peacock. Ask yourself, “What is burning in my heart and your soul?” Even if they are just embers, blow on them!

Nasir Khosrow’s poetry is filled with the fire of devotional love, but his poetry is also built on a very subtle understanding of the human intellect. Not just intellect as mentality, but the force of consciousness that distinguishes us from the animal, and distinguishes one human being from another human being in the spiritual realm.

He contemplates this, and tries to comprehend this manifestation of Allah as given in intellect of human beings. He writes,

What did Allah give us alone, of all the other creatures? The intellect by which we lord over all the beasts. But note that virtue in intellect which makes us lords of donkeys is the very same traits that binds us as slaves to the Lord. With intellect, we can seek out all the hows and whys. Without it, we are but trees without fruit.

Nasir Khosrow was one of those who asks questions, who questions everything in his search for the truth. And he asks and contemplates, again and again:

*Why were we given an intellect if, even with this intellect,
 We sometimes sin and sometimes worship God?
 Why did God command us to do good and avoid evil,
 If we are not alive and free to choose?
 Why is the vicious wolf not condemned before God
 For his acts, while we are held responsible for ours?
 Why, with its meaningless crowing and cawing
 Is the crane not held in contempt, but we are?
 Why are you and I weighed down with prayer and fasting,
 While deer and other creatures we hunt are not?*

(Divan, 33:23-7)

We can understand from this poem the constant search, the anxious asking, the desire to understand the subtleties of this life and creation.

There is no running away from the subtlety, from the esoteric. Quite the contrary – our task is to try to find both. These are the secrets of the inner and the outer, the seen and the unseen; the inner dimension of the text, the discourse.

Shaykh Ahmed Zarruq (rah) said,

The perspective of the Sufi is more specialized and that of the exegete, the scholar basing himself on the science of Hadith. For the latter to express rules and meanings and nothing else, while the former answer that a search for spiritual allusion. But this is only after having affirmed what the latter have also affirmed. If not, then he is a batini, and outside the religious law; let alone Sufism.

At the beginning of my dars today I quoted the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ who said, **“Every verse has an outer and inner, and a limit and a vantage point.”**

Are we among those who can see both the inner and outer? Or are we too preoccupied with the outer to accept the importance of the inner? Remember the story of the grammarian who got onto a boat and began ridiculing the boatmen because he was illiterate and didn't speak with proper grammar. Then the boat hit a rock and began to sink. As the boat was sinking, the boatman said to him,

“A lot of good your grammar is going to do you now! You can speak properly, but you don't know how to swim. I know how to swim.”

The inner is for those of us who are really concerned with the meaning of words, and of statements, and phrases, admonitions and prohibitions, parables and stories; all of which need to be seen to affirm *Tawheed*, the oneness of Allah. The inner is the real of the soul, of the lataa'if (subtle centers of perception).

Nasir Khosrow writes about the spirit “*jan*” of the human being. The word *jan* in Farsi, meaning life soul spirit, is interchangeable with “*ruh*” in Arabic. When the *ruh* reaches us, it becomes the inner *jan* or life-force. It can only be recognized, but it can never be understood. When we talk about the senses and landscape of the inner, it is the lataa'if we are talking about. And just as I explained about pain or love at the beginning of my dars, we can talk and talk about the concepts, about what they do, but to really understand the opening of the lataa'if you have to experience it. You can recognize it when it opens, but you can never understand it. As Allah says in Sura Az-Zumar:

**“HAL YASTAWĪ ALLADHĪNA YA‘LAMŪNA WA-LLADHĪNA LĀ YA‘LAMŪNA”
 INNAMĀ YATADHAKKARU ULŪ AL-‘ALBĀB.**

“Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding. [39:9]

We can recognize Allah in His manifestation and His beauty, and in Allah's creation, and attributes and qualities; but we can never understand Allah. Nasir Khosrow gives an example of this distinction with a conversation between Aristotle and a student,

In a dialogue between Aristotle and his student, seeking to know the difference between ma‘rifah and ‘ilm, Aristotle asked him whether he had visited a certain city; and if so, to describe what he saw on the way. The student describes that he saw villages, some running water, some parts of the desert, and the river until he reached that city which was populated. And it's description was such and such. Aristotle then says to the student that what he has described is ‘ilm. It is knowledge that he has acquired. Aristotle then asks him, if there are any lands and cities beyond that city, and if he could describe them. The student replies, I know of their existence; but I don't know what they are like. At this, Aristotle remarks that this is called ma‘rifah / awareness. You know a thing exists, but not how it exists.

It is unvarying in man from the time of his childhood to the time of his old age that the ma‘rifah of thirst, hunger, fear of something which you don't know; the ma‘rifah of shapes and colors and other sensibilia; the ma‘rifah of pain and other things which man knows by nature. But the names of those things he must learn from someone else. Many animals are completely formed, and share this ma‘rifah with man. In the language of the Quran it could be called “fitri,” or essential knowledge. ‘Ilm on the other hand is a trace of the ‘aql. It is not innate, but it is acquired.

Here we are getting to something that is very important to us as Sufis. Here he starts to talk about *tasawwur*, and the different aspects of it. This is very important to the practicing Sufi to understand *tasawwur*: how one attends, how one turns our knowledge, our intellect toward the objective. As you see, he is a poet and a scholar. But he is also a very profoundly deep Sufi philosopher.

BETWEEN INTELLECT AND FAITH

Not only does Nasir Khosrow make this subtle discourse on the origin and essence of intellect, soul, and life, but he also offers further teaching on the proper use and training of the intellect, in balance with the heart and soul, as tool of faith, belief, and understanding. The intention of his poetry was to teach, to remind us of what is important. He wrote,

*Kindle the candle of intellect in your heart,
 and hasten with it to the world of brightness.
 If you want to light a candle in your heart,
 make knowledge and goodness its wick and its oil.*

Its wick is knowledge, its oil is goodness. The relationship between the intellect / ‘aql and faith has always been fundamental. Indeed the Arabic offers an interesting play on words. The word “aql” in Arabic is derived from the verb that means ‘to hobble’, like you hobble a camel. It also means ‘to pay blood money, to restrain, and to comprehend’. ‘Aql is generally understood to be an immaterial kind of substance within

itself, but when we try to comprehend the reality of something, we are constrained in some way by our comprehension of it.

We restrain the camel, so the camel doesn't run away. In the same way, you have to restrain your tendency to run in the mind and intellect, so it doesn't run to other places that it shouldn't be; so it can keep serving you as you should train it to serve you. Nonetheless, you still have to tether your camel, because it may run away.

Each of us has this capability, the capability of the intellect. But the intellect can wander off, as we all know, immersed in the pleasure of superficial knowledge that serves the ego and obscures the more important and necessary quality of humility and gratitude.

The attractor of intellect under the control of the ego (*nafs-i-ammaarah*) can be an almost erotic fascination, proof of self-importance. So it has to be restrained and trained and directed and, yes, hobbled, and with that comes trust and loyalty. Just like a camel, this is necessary for it to perform its duty properly.

What Nasir Khosrow feared and saw happening in his homeland, in Balkh, was that philosophers and teachers were running away with their intellect. They were running wild. They had no real understanding of Allah; they had no real guidance, indulging in self-gratification at the expense of the essence of Islam, the true revelatory nature of the Qur'an and Hadith, the humbling experience of Divine Presence. When in the company of a person of true sight there can be no mistake of authenticity.

In his day and, to our detriment, today all over the world, those apparent fakirs, often (knowingly or unknowingly) fakers have all the forms down pat. They are weeping and crying, they have all the costumes and use philosophy in compelling style and language, but it was (and is), in his opinion, totally wrong because they do not use their intellects properly. They don't use the intellect to see through the form and understand the essence. He writes,

*The world is a stinking, old mother. Do not be seduced by her,
 If in rank you are worthy to receive a houri in paradise.
 Do not marry your mother for your mother is forbidden to you
 If you are one of the people of religion.*

(Divan, 8:5-6)

While this metaphor may be repulsive to us, it conveys the message. Do not be deceived by the things of this world, choosing the false because it is here and convenient. The world's pleasures are a seductive trick, he seems to say, which keeps believers away from the path. Use your intellect! Don't be a blind sheep.

*O oppressing sber, O sister of Abriman,
 Why don't you admit what has happened between you and me?
 You've turned me soft and yellow like an apricot,
 With the clear intention of devouring me.
 This yellowing and wearing out has happened to the shirt of
 The soul; for the body is the covering of the soul and the mind.*

What is this 'aql that allows us to see through the veils to the true essence? Nasir Khosrow defines 'aql as virtually an immaterial substance that exists within the human being, like an essence. A capacity within the human being that is not material. It is a substance which has immortality associated with it. Its essence

derives directly from Allah. The human intellect is an innate intellect that we are born with. He uses interchangeably the innate intellect and the *nafs-i-natiq*, the speaking soul.

The distinction he makes is that everything is born with an innate capacity. Even an animal is born with an innate intellectual capacity. But the human being has the ability or the faculty to express what they understand, and what they see. In that expression, they influence other human beings.

An animal cannot influence another being to change its nature. Maybe it calls its mate, or warns of danger; but that's about it. The human being has the ability to express. If it is expressed in a way that is incomplete, or comes only out of the five senses; or its power is being usurped by a human beings' *nafs ammaarah* – then the intellect is crippled. The *'aql* is being used in an improper way.

This was one of his major teachings: pointing out the misuse of the intellect to the detriment of the soul. Consequently, the power to reason, the power of the arts, music, and poetry; the power to organize (*mu'assisa*), to create organizations that would serve Allah is either suppressed or usurped. People become very rigid and limited. Now this hobbled camel is staying hobbled and becomes restless and cripples itself. What Nasir Khosrow teaches is that there is a universal, spiritual, essential intellect. That universal intellect that pervades everything in some way is linked to the Source.

The people who do not qualify to hear it are the people who were not able to move from sharia to *tareeqah*, *ma'rifa* to *haqeeqah*. They began to redefine sharia, therefore; there was no *tareeqah*. Where there was no *tareeqah*, what they claim to be *ma'rifa*, cannot be *ma'rifa* but only an extension of or deviation of *share'ah*. It isn't real gnosis. If a person wants to seek perfection, they need a perfect guide. And that perfect guide has to be under the sway of the perfect guides.

The human being's most essential desire, if you will, is the desire of that essence to return to its source. This is the motivation of the human being to seek perfection, not for anything else. If the camel is trained, and allowed to run free, he will return back to his home. He returns to the source of the water.

You have to train your camel. Then it is naturally inclined to return to its source. Now, for the human being, the hobbling (or training) is strictly not to have the intellect wander here and there, away from Allah as we have limited time and need the right sight, *basira*, to be able to seize the moment (*waqt*).

You don't want the heart and the mind wandering away from Allah. You train it so that everything reminds you of Allah; and Allah is calling you to him all the time. And you are hearing the call, just like the whale hears the call to migrate. Or the sea turtle finds its way back to where it was born. Or the salmon finds the stream where it was born. Allah is always calling her back to her natural place, if there is nothing blocking it. Indeed, that is the *aql* of the animals. They have this capacity to return to their "material source."

THE DHAHIR AND BATIN OF SALAT

Let us look at an example that we can all relate to, the making of Salat (prayer), and not just speak about what we can illustrate. In fact each element of Sharia, each of the Pillars of Islam can be seen in this light. I have spoken and written extensively on this subject and you are welcome to pursue it in order to sensitize your self to the process of 'seeing'.

I want to give you this in-depth example of the teachings that Nasir Khosrow was given...try to follow the thinking as well as the content. Try to understand how this approach appealed not only to him, but also to those who sought a means to awaken within themselves capacities of insight, inspiration and purification.

While seemingly simplistic, prayer is a wonderful example of a space in our life to which the proper application and training of intellect can open whole inner dimensions and ways to grasp the value of the *Dhaahir*, as it represents a deeper meaning of the *baatin*.

Sayed Nasir Khosrow says in a writing, “the *ta’weel* of *salaat* is the *da’wah*.” In that context, we can look at the *ta’weel* or the *baatini* of *salaat*. The *baatini* of *salaat* was explained by Sayed Kadir al Numan who said,

The outward, dhaahir, blessing of salaat is performing it outwardly, including all of its genuflections and prostrations, compulsory and permissible. Correspondingly, the baatin, the hidden blessing lies in establishing the summons of truth—da’wah al-haqq in every generation, day and night, as is done in performing the visible salaat.

It is easy to understand what the outer *salaat* is. It is doing the specific physical activities that we all know. But the *baatini*, the hidden blessing, is what we should be equally concerned with. The blessings of the outer *salaat* is doing everything, the *fard*, the Sunnah, the nafl properly, with good intention, in the right way. The blessing of the *baatin* of *salaat*, lies in establishing the summons of truth so that the One who is summoning, *al-Haqq*, summons you.

This is done in performing the visible *salaat*. But it also must be done by establishing and cultivating an inner necessity, practice, responsibility that reflects the outer necessity, practice and duty as the outer Practices. .

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ, said, **“Derive pleasure from prayer.”**

Derive pleasure from the prayer, meaning from both the *dhaahir* and the *baatin*. If you find the *dhaahir* difficult, maybe you should put your attention on the *baatin*.

Salaat is obligatory to all Muslims because it is a means through which to refine our attunement to the call, it is a *majaaz*, a tunnel, a channel through which Allah Showers His fayd, His abundant blessings/ effulgence, His bounties, His *fadl* (grace and generosity) , His blessings, His mercies, His sweetness, upon all human beings.

Nasr Khusru said,

The exterior meaning of ritual prayer is the worship of Allah with the body, by advancing towards the qibla bodies, which is the Kaaba, the house of Allah, exalted in Mecca. The esoteric interpretation, the ta’wil or baatini, of the ritual prayer is the worship of Allah with the rational soul by turning in the quest for knowledge of the book and the law / Sharia, toward the qibla of spirit, which is Allah’s house. This is a house in which Allah’s knowledge resides; the Imam of truth.

The etymology of the word *salaat*, is to invoke or pay homage. The esoteric meaning of *salaat* is precisely that attitude. The *ta’weel* of it is to adopt a supplicant posture (inwardly as well as outwardly). To follow the call to the invitation, the summoning of the *naatiq* one who is decisive, absolute; the *ambiyaa’* or the imams, or your Shaykh and the established and respected Shuyukh of the Order(s) of your *bay’at*.

Each stage of the *salaat* has a *ta’weel* meaning to it, which corresponds to the *baatini* or the reality of that call. For example, the *ta’weel* of the *takebeer*, the glorification, is to take the *bay’at* and accept and agree to a *mithaq*, a covenant, an agreement, with Allah ﷻ, with the Prophet ﷺ, through his representative. During the *takebeer*, the worshipper remains, silent. Raises his hands to his ears and this symbolizes the fact that the mureed pledges the *bay’at* and he says, “I hear you and I obey you.”

Martin Lings wrote, “In the *takbeer* which opens the *salaat*, the hand placed on the ear is a ritual enactment of the words, ‘we hear and we obey’ which follow the Qur’anic ayat

**ĀMANA-R-RASŪLU BIMĀ UŅZILA ILAYHI MIR-RABBIHI WA-L-MU’MINŪNA
 KULLUN ĀMANA BI-LLĀHI WA MALĀA’IKATIHI WA KUTUBIHI WA RUSULIHI LĀ
 NUFARRIQU BAYNA AHĀDIM-MIR-RUSULIHI WA QĀLŪ SAMI’NĀ WA ATA’NĀ
 GHUFRĀNAKA RABBANĀ WA’ILAYKA-L-MAṢĪR.**

The messenger of Allah believes in what He has sent down to him from His lord and he believes that all of them securely believe in Allah and His angels and His book and His messengers. We make no distinction between any one of His messengers. They each say, ‘we hear and we obey. Grant us forgiveness, our Lord and upon you is our final destination.’ 2:285

The showing of both hands in many traditions is showing you have nothing that you are hiding, that I am doing this from my own free will.

Martin Lings continues, “The hand here symbolizes the free will, which man alone of all earthly creatures possesses and which makes him alone capable of deliberate obedience, unlike animals which are bound to follow their instincts.” The *ta’weel* of standing is that the Mureed stands by the covenant, of his contract with Allah, the *mithaq* with the imam or the Shaykh or the *mujaddid* or the *qutb*.

The *ta’weel* of the *qira*, the recitation, is that the mureed listens to the *haqiq*, the *hikmah*, the wisdom that is in the discourse, in the *dars* of the *da’ee*. The caller. And who is that? Allah. Therefore, every representative of Allah ﷻ and the Prophet, in giving *dars*, *waz*, *bayan*, gives them based on what Allah ﷻ has provided: The Qur’an.

The actual recitation of the Qur’anic surah, *Allaahu akbar*. *Bismillahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Rabeem* for example, is the *tanzeel*, the recitation. The actual recitation of the Qur’an is the exoteric revelation of that message. While the discourse of the *da’ee* reveals inwardly the *ta’weel* of the Qur’an. The *dars*, even just the recitation of the knower, contains the esoteric aspect of it. You are hearing the *tanzeel*, the outer, but it also contains the inner. Just as the flower in its beauty contains not only the nectar and the pollen but also the honey that will result in the interface with the bee. *Al-hamdu li-Llaah*.

The *ta’weel* of the *rukut*, is the mureed’s awakening to the fact that there is someone before him. Here is another way to think about this. When you walk into the tomb of many saints in India, how high is the door? Very low. Why? You have to bow down. When you go before a king, you bow down. You lower your gaze. You lower your head. So the *ta’weel* is recognition of the *baab*. What is the *baab*? The gate. The entrance. Remember: “I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate" "For whoever I am his Leader (*mawla*), ‘Ali is his Leader (*mawla*).

The *ta’weel* of *sujuud*, prostration, is the mureed’s acceptance of the Prophet ﷺ in the greater scheme or greater circle and then the imam or the *qutb*, then the *shuyukh*. Moving from the major circles, to the minor circles; to our gateway, to our own Shaykh.

The *ta'weel* of the *tashabood* is the recognition of the *da'ee* who summons us to the recognition of the *imam*, the *mujaddid*, the *Shaykh ut-tariqah*, the *qutb*, or the *anwars* or the *abrars*.

And finally, the *salaam*. The *ta'weel* of *salaam* is that the mureed has obtained the knowledge and the wisdom. "I'm looking to you on my right and my left and

AYNAMĀ TUWALLŪ FA-ThAMMA WAJĀHU-LLĀH.

Wheresoever you look there is the countenance of Allah.

You now know that you have attained to the knowledge and the wisdom to speak to others, and to guide others to respond to their inner yearning to respond to Allah's call.

Not that this is often where the confusion comes. There are many who feel that just because they make the exoteric prayer; and just because they have knowledge of something, because they have memorized the Quran or hadith, that this empowers them to teach. This compulsion to teach has both a negative side and a positive side. It's negative because it doesn't qualify them, having only superficial knowledge and practices. The positive side of it is that the inner meaning of Qur'an is so powerful that even the average Muslim senses a feeling that they have some duty to inform others, but often forgetting that they must not compel others. As we know from Sura Baqarah:

LĀ IKRĀHA FĪ-D-DĪNI QADĀ TABAYYANA-R-RUSHDU MINA-L-GhAYYI...

There is no compulsion in religion—the path of guidance is clear from [that of] error...[2:256]

This is the kind of *'aql*, of guidance that Nasir Khosrow was seeking and found and that is so beautifully presented in his poetry and teachings.

We have the seven steps of *salaat* which also represent the mureed's journeys through the seven stages of the *da'wah*. What are the seven stages? *Nafs ammaarah*, *nafs lawvaamah*, *nafs mutma'innah*, *nafs mulhama*, *nafs radiyya*, *Insan-i-Kamil*.

In addition to the stages of *salaat* we also have the five times of *salaat*, which also have an esoteric, *baatini* meaning. Since the *salaat* symbolizes the *da'wah* / calling, the five prayer times symbolize the five *da'wahs*, or the five speaker-prophets, *naatiq*, who preceded the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: Adam, Noah, Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ not only represents the culmination of the revelations of Allah swt but is also the model of the individual who exemplifies the epitome of all the roles a human being who is divinely inspired and awakened can and must play.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ institutes the five daily prayers after his *Israa Mi'raaj*, which is a *majaaz*/metaphor in itself. It is an analogical reality; an allusion, or symbol for the respective calling of each of those

prophets to the people of their time period. Generation after generation, we have kept going up until this present day. Whenever a prophet or imam or qutb or Shaykh or the Shuyukh is commanded by Allah to establish the *salaat*, the inner meaning is to establish the *da'wah* of the true religion.

CONCLUSION: RESPONDING TO THE CALL

I want to conclude today by returning to the concept of *da'wah* —the life's journey and work of Nasir Khosrow. Ask yourself if you have heard the call (as he did) and if you have responded. Ask yourself if you have witnessed the call of others and if you have responded, offering your service, humbly and sincerely. Ask yourself how far you have traveled (inwardly and outwardly) on the journey of the search for truth. How much further would you go in this journey of refinement of the intellect and discernment of inner and outer? For Nasir Khosrow there was no journey too far, no transformation or sacrifice too great in search for the bounty and pleasure of Allah ﷻ.

In the Qur'an, Allah says that mankind receives the bounties both in the realm of the *dbaahir* and the *baatin*. He says in Sura Luqman:

ALAM TARAW ANNA-LLĀHA SAKh-KhARA LAKUM MĀ FĪ-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA MĀ FĪ-L-'ARDI WA ASBAGhA °ALAYKUM NI°AMAHU DhĀHIRATAÑW-WA BĀTINATAÑW-WA MINA-N-NĀSI MAÑY-YUJĀDILU FĪ-LLĀHI BIGhAYRI °ILMIÑW-WALĀ HUDAÑW-WA LĀ KITĀBIM-MUNĪR

Don't you see that Allah has subjugated to you everything in the heavens and in the earth and has bestowed His Grace—outer and inner—upon you? Yet among the people are some who dispute about Allah, without guidance or knowledge, and without a Book that gives light. [31:20]

We see that there is an inner and outer for everything that Allah has given us. So *salaat* has its inner and outer just as every aspect of the Deen has its inner and outer. In the giving of Zakat, the outer is to give money, the inner is purification. The outer of the jihad is physically moving, a physical struggle. The inner is the jihad ul-akbar the greater struggle with our *nafs-i-ammaarah* and our tendencies to wander, to objectify, to worship false gods of material world/ life. The outer of the *hajj* is the physical movement to the *hajj*. The inner *hajj* is the migration from this life to another world. The giving up of everything in this world, symbolized by being wrapped in ihram, as if you died and it is the last day of awakening and your purification of your soul.

Whether it is in the text or whether it is in movements or whether it is recitations, there is a part of every practice that is seen and a part that is unseen. The bounties of the reality of the hidden, of the *khafee*, of the *akhsaa'*, of the hidden and the most hidden, relate to what we call *tareeqah*. Whereas the outer *salaat* relates to the *share'ah*, the *baatin* relates to the *tareeqah* and its practices.

Just like on a larger scale, all Muslims are called to prayer through the *adhaan*, in the unseen realm very specific individuals are invited, called to receive an esoteric knowledge of *tareeqah*.

If you are called to *tareeqah* by the inner self, by the Shaykh, by circumstances, by relationships, by relatedness, by nisbat, however you may be called to the *da'wah*, you respond. While the call may seem to come from the external, you are really responding to Allah. Allah placed you in the right place at the right time, *inshaa'a-Llaah*, to hear the call.

Is that not beautiful? How does it make you feel? To know that you are invited to do something that very few people are invited to do? How would you respond to that invitation if it were an invitation of the outer; for example, if you were to join a humanitarian organization and asked to be the Chairperson or leader of a respected institution? Most of us would be honored and would strive to do well at it. We would feel embarrassed if we didn't do it well. If you knew you represented something of great benefit to humanity that was really important and you were chosen to do it, you would (most likely) be humbled and honored. Why then do we not have the same attitude towards *tareeqah*?

Instead, many struggle with a negative or self-referencing inner narrative: "Why me? I am not prepared for this. I have this attitude. I have that personality. I have this character fault. I am wrapped up in my state. I am wrapped up in my physical body all of the time. I am worried about my own problems. I am complaining. I am grumpy..."

What would you do to rectify that situation? First we must remember that each of us has already received the invitation, each of us is called by Allah ﷻ in this way to perfect our self so we can not only be students but effective servants, providers; humble human beings that reflect the Divine attributes.

Not very many people are even aware of *tareeqah* not many people are called to *tareeqah* and there is a responsibility to it for those who are. If you are listening to this dars today then your invitation has gone out, you are already among the ones who have been called.

The search for truth is more than just traveling on the path in ease and convenience; it is a search for understanding at any cost. It comes in many ways and it encounters many obstacles. When you come up against the wall, and you realize there's nothing you can do, you can either turn to Allah and accept it, or turn away from Allah. But if you turn away you will always know there was something you missed.

If you turn away from the truth you will always ask yourself if there was something more that could have been done; if you had thought of it in this way, if you had not been so hardhearted about that, or hardheaded about this; or so submitted to those people, or this or that thing. You may even say, "I know there was a way; I just didn't have the time (or the energy, or the patience, or the determination) to see it through."

If we are honest with ourselves we will look at how much time we waste; every day. If we could just gather a few minutes from every day and dedicate that to your study, to your knowledge, what would we accomplish? Today in the study of the life of Nasir Khosrow we saw what can be accomplished when one has a burning desire for knowledge, when one believes in the efficacy of seeking the Truth.

What happens, you might ask, if you don't have that burning desire? What happens if you don't yearn for knowledge? What happens if you are comfortable with your priorities as they are? The answer: at least "Yearn to yearn." Nobody has an excuse. Yearn to yearn. If you don't yearn to yearn, then yearn to yearn to yearn. None of us has an excuse, especially those of us who have chosen and entered the path, or who were born to it.

And yet, even after you make all the effort, even if you have the burning desire, and you are creative, knowledgeable in all these philosophies and languages, still something more is needed.

As Nasir Khosrow points out the human soul is not receptive to all forms of knowledge, because the human soul is only potentially perfect, but practically imperfect. He calls the rational soul, the soul we live with every day, basically imperfect. There is a space: an esoteric space, between potential and reality. We can try to seek out your potentiality and increase it, but there has to be something more that bridges that space.

There has to be a divine assistance. There has to be something that the Prophet ﷺ, the imams, the *awliyyaa'u-Llāh*, the *ambiyaa'* provided: a catalyst for conduit for the *rahmat*/ the mercy of Allah. We need the mercy of Allah to complete this journey. No amount of studying, no amount of knowledge can take you all the way. The soul resists it. It demands something more. It demands the mercy of Allah; it demands the direct input.

Hence, the necessity of the *bay'at*. And now we begin to understand from his point of view and from some other points of view, why the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was sent as a mercy. Not just to be merciful and compassionate, but to fill that space. Allah says in the Quran,

**YĀ MA[°]SHARA-L-JINNI WA-L-'IŅSI INI ISTATA[°]TUM AŅ TAŅFUDhŪ MIN
 AQ[°]TĀRI-S-SAMĀWĀTI WA-L-'ARDI FA-ŅFUDhŪ LĀ TAŅFUDhŪNA ILLĀ
 BISULTĀN.**

O company of jinn and men, if you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass beyond. You will never pass beyond save with [Our] Authority. [55:33]

Nasir Khosrow interpreted this verse in the following way, saying: “*men and jinn cannot penetrate through their substance and discover what is in the heavens and the earth, except through some training by the proof/ *hujja* of Allah on the Earth.*”

And who is the proof of Allah on the Earth? The *qutb* or the *imam* of the time. Human beings access to the spiritual realm, the higher intellectual realm, is facilitated through the assistance of the divinely guided, divinely assisted *imam* of the age, or *qutb* or *awliyyaa'u-Llāh* or mujaddid. And all power and all Authority comes from Allah ﷻ.

For us, in our Khanaqah and Orders, all of the shuyukh, all of the lines come from Sidna Ali except the Naqshbandi/Mujaddidi line, which comes from Abu Bakruni-s-saddiq.

We see the gathering of the various teachers and approaches amalgamated in these five Orders; Naqshbandi, Mujaddidi, Shadhuli, Chisti, and Qadri not only outwardly but also in the way we approach the inner dimensions and practices. Practices that not only affirm our belief in outer actions and service but also turn us deeper inwardly as we continue the journey through life.

In some way, all of us who chose *tareeqah*, or were chosen for *tareeqah* and responded affirmatively to that Divine Offer, are walking in the footsteps of Nasir Khosrow.

CLOSING DU[°]AA

Allahumma lakal-hamdu anta noorus-samawaati wal-ardi wa man fihinna, wa lakal-hamdu anta qayyimus-samawaati wal-ardi wa man fihinna, wa lakal-hamdu anta rabbus-samawaati wal-ardi wa man fihinna.

O Allah! For You is all Praise – You are the Light of the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in them, and for You is all Praise – You are the Guardian of the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in them, and for You is all Praise – you are the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in them.

Antal-Haqqu wa wa'dukal-haqqu wa qawlukal-haqqu wa liqa'uka haqqun, wal-jannahtu haqqun wan-naru haqqun, was-sa'atu haqqun, wan-nabiyyoona haqqun wa Muhammadun haqq.

O Allah! You are the Truth, Your Promise is True, Your Speech is True, Your Meeting is True, Paradise is True, the Hellfire is True, the Hour is True, the Prophets are True and Muhammad is True.

Allahumma laka aslamnaa, wa bika aamanna, wa alayka tawakkalnaa, wa bika khaasamna, wa ilayka haakamna, faghfir lanaa maa qaddamna wa maa akhkharna, wa maa asrarna wa maa a3lanna, antal-muqaddimu wa antal-mu'akhkhiru laa ilaaha illa ant.

O Allah! To You have we submitted our souls, in You have we believed, upon You have we relied, for You have we argued, to You have we taken our judgment, so forgive us all that we have done and what we have not done, what we have hidden and what we have disclosed. You are the Promoter, and You are the Delayer, there is no God but You.

Ilayka nashku da'fa quwwatina, wa qillata heelatina, wa hawanana 'alan-naas, ya arhamar-rahimeen. Anta rabbul-mustad'afeen.

To You we complain of our weakness, our failure, our shame before the people. O Most Merciful! You are the Lord of the weak and oppressed.

Wa anta rabbuna, ila man takiluna, ila ba'eedin yatajahharuna, wa ila 'aduwwin mallaktahu amrana, in lam yakun bika ghadabun 'alaynaa fala nubaali, ghayra anna 'afiyataka hiya awsa'u lana.

And You are our Lord, to whom will you entrust us? To a distant person who will treat us with enmity, or to an enemy You have made over us. If You are not angry at us, we would not care, for Your pardon is greater for us.

Na'udhu bi noori wajhikal-ladhi ashraqat lahudh-dhulumat, wa saluha 'alayhi amrud-dunya wal-akhirah, ay-yahilla alayna ghadabuk, wa ay-yanzila bina sakhatuk, lakal-'utbaa hatta tarda, wa la hawla wa la quwwata illa bik.

We seek refuge in the Light of Your Face for which darkneses shine, and with which the affairs of this life and the Hereafter become good, from Your anger or displeasure falling upon us. You have the right to admonish until You are pleased, and there is no power and no might except in You.

Fa ilayka nashku da'fana, fa ilayka nashku da'fana

So to You we complain of our weakness, to You we complain of our weakness.