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Thursday

Title: [The Ancient Tradition of Gathering in Community](#)

DVD title: The Ancient Tradition of Gathering in Community
The Secret of Transmissions Connecting the People of Tariqah

Last night you may remember I was talking about how the transmission is transmitted. But there is an element that is extremely important in the spiritual transmission that makes it especially effective, and makes the way easier for a person. The whole topic of the topic of transmission is the topic of Tariqah, going from one place to another, a path, a means. It's not by any error or mistake that we call the Sufis, "the people of Tariqah." Obviously, by the definition, we are people who want to move from one place to another place; from one state to another state, from one level of understanding to another level of understanding. That's obvious. Then why is it not so obvious that success on this journey is not just individual? It is individual success, and an individual pursuit of Allah's Divine presence; yet, the reality of Tariqah is the community itself. [It is a] community that's formed not by a tribe, not by race, not by language or some other demographic reality. It's a community that is formed by the *fuqara*.

In this spiritual community, we are recipients of guidance and teaching, and we are also bestowers of service, of friendship, of love, of brother and sister. It is considered by most Sufis that the word *tariqah* is synonymous with a group of individuals, not just a journey from one place to another or a path. It is assumed by and accepted by most Sufis, practitioners of Tasawwuf, seekers of truth that the Tariqah is an absolute necessity. We know *shar'iah*, *tariqah*, *marifah*, *haqiqah*. But think about it: Shariah defines a path way, a well-trodden path, but [with] guidelines for an individual and a group of individuals. Tariqah also talks about a much more specific group of individuals. Marifah talks about a

group of individuals who have attained to a certain state of knowledge.

This unhidden secret of community is extremely important in Tasawwuf and for one's spiritual success. The more we give, the more we receive. The saying is, give what is in your pocket and Allah will give what is in his mystery. This mystical dynamic transformational reality of giving begins with giving *bai'at*. Only when we are giving can we be in a position of receiving, according to the teachings of Tasawwuf. You find it in the Injil, "*Give and you shall receive.*" You find it in every mystical path. "Be forgiving and not for getting." Allah will give to you. Take some steps toward Allah; Allah comes running toward you. One way of giving [is] in the context of Tariqah and community, and [it is] what makes us so unusual, even though it is the historical and preferred form of participation and teachings over a millennium and a half—pre-Islamic, in terms even of the Prophet Mohammed who said, "***I existed before Adam,***" pre- what we know is Islam.

There are also these communities of believers that one found in Judaism, found in Christianity. You find at the time of the Prophet Isa (as) there were the Essenes. These people were not gathered by tribe, but by a certain form of training and teaching. You found at the time of Jesus that some others had gathered, too. This is traditional. We are part of a long, long tradition of people. Not just people gathered together, but people who practiced some thing, very specific—the specific teachings of Tariqah in order to gain a specific type of knowledge and to represent a specific aspect of what we call the truth, the *haqq* of Allah.

The principle is, then, the consequence of one's giving of oneself, of one's time or material wealth, or material knowledge and skills is you receive from Allah deeper and deeper knowledge, wisdom, humility and understanding. One way to give, and a most profound way to give in the world, is to be very active in the community. All too often,

people think, “I’ll be useful to others only after I’ve grown enough, learned enough, experienced enough, received enough, made enough money, developed all my skills. Than that’s when I’ll be useful.” This is a great self-delusion, and also a stumbling block to success. According to the tradition, according to the knowledge and understanding of the people of Tasawwuf, of the communities of Tasawwuf and of Tariqah, it’s only when one serves the community that one can be in position to receive.

Whatever you receive, other than in service to the community, is very ephemeral. It builds arrogance, fear, greed. It builds desire for power. It builds fear of loss. When you serve the community, whatever you receive creates humility and understanding, and is a means to deeper knowledge. They are really opposite. Are there exceptions? Of course. There are always exceptions. Of course, personality plays an important role. Not everyone is gregarious and articulate. Not everyone is skilled. Some people are very laconic and have to be drawn in. Some people are more modest than others. Some are not quite sure how to participate and they have to watch for a while. Some people have trouble engaging fully with other human beings. But the fact is no one ever is fully ready. No one ever feels ready; especially, the more humble you are, the less ready you feel.

A person should never feel that they don’t have anything to add or contribute to the community of believers, because every person (to say it in modern terms) is a value-added component. That’s why we have little sayings like when a person comes to sit and they want to help, we say “After you have been here three times, then you can help.” In other words, there is a sense of immediacy. A person should get involved as quickly as they can, and not have any excuses not to be involved fully in the Tariqah. The idea that Tariqah is a meeting that happens once a week in South London, or in New Zealand, Poland, or the US, is something you know I have resisted and not abided by. That’s why we have Monday and Wednesday night dinners, guaranteed sittings on Mondays and

Tuesdays, a Wednesday and Thursday dars, a Friday khutbah, a Saturday dinner. It's not to go sit in your houses and do your meditation, but try and come to the *masjid*. It's very important to gather in *jamah*. This is an age-old tradition.

There are places in this world, like in Egypt and Sinai today, that people never think about not being with other people. They always gather. They go to their tent to sleep; everything else is in *jamah*. There are levels to those gatherings. A Sufi, a real seeker of truth, feels inside of themselves a real yearning to serve—not just to serve like we do in our work in Indonesia, Central Asia or Russia—but to serve right where we are. If you are wondering what people intuitively feel and see when they come here and see you (and thank God they don't know you well enough to see you or me), what they glean is that they are seeing from almost a limbic brain memory of what things should be like, from an essential, core memory of the *ruh* as we spoke of last night. They see from this secret, hidden place something that resonates as true. We may call it a Muslim community in Bedford, or Shaykh Rashid's community, [but] what we have is an expression or manifestation of something quite ancient. And still, even after 40 years, we are not all comfortable with it.

There are justifications and reasoning for spiritual community. The greatest justification, the most profound way to understand, or to explain the spiritual community is to understand the two sides of the heart of the community. Every heart has two sides (and four chambers). The beating heart of the community is comprised of the *murshīd* and the *murīds*, someone who has been authorized, who understands that role, and who is capable of transmitting the transmissions of the spiritual *fa'īd*. [This is] something that was received and stays alive and has to move forward, pass through. [It is] not from their own will, but from the *'ālam al amr*, the place of the Divine command. This spiritual energy received and then transmitted by the will of Allah is the secret, the *sirr*. When we say,

“*Khudassirru*,” it means protect the secret, protect the transmission and the means of transmitting that Divine light/energy/lesson.

Sirr is not describing something that is hidden/*khafī* or *akhfah*, but something that cannot be articulated, but can be transmitted as a spiritual energy that creates the life of the Tariqah, that keeps the Tariqah alive. It is the teaching passing through the *murshīd* that keeps the Tariqah alive. “Allah, Allah, Allah... (said with the cadence of the beating heart).” Sometimes in that heart, as we know, there is a murmur. “Allah ha, Allah ha, Allah ha.” If you look through the history of Tasawwuf, this dynamic secret, the *tajalli bari ta’ala*, this *fa’īd* is transmitted in many different ways. Sometimes it *is* hidden, not the secret, but the transmitter, like a *qutb*. Sometimes the *shaykh* is hidden in the community of believers, and he is a cobbler or tea server. Nobody knows except a very few people. Sometimes, such a person is like *malamy* or mast; he seems crazy and so is not bothered by anyone in society. But most of the time, in the history of mysticism, the teachers are open and available.

They have a place, a *khanqah*, a *zawiya*, a *tekkia*. Where that teaching is given openly, inevitably a community is established around the person. Many of the people in the Westernized world we live in today don’t grasp this concept of community. They have gated communities for retirees. Still, there is the urge to gather around. People have become so obsessed with their own independence, their own freedoms, their own idea of decision making, and they don’t understand *tadbīr* of Allah, and they don’t understand the role of the *shaykh*, so they create loose communities, like in Charlottesville, around the Center. People come all the time, then they go off. It’s fine; certainly better than nothing. Even the *shaykhs* have to adjust to that. “Well, so and so is here, for however long that is.” I’ll hear from people like Hajji Noura saying, “People being for 30, 35 years in one place is unheard of.” It is not really unheard of, but unmanifested in most cases.

Though we did see elements of that when we visited Shaykh Osman Sirajjudin Naqshband, when we were with Shaykh Kaftaro. We've seen it with our own eyes. We've seen it around Dede Chelebi in the old country. In some cases, it has been institutionalized in the US, like among the yogis. You can see it in Satchitananda's group. That's because there is a strong, historical tradition that some people just can't resist.

You people, most of you, cannot resist that calling. It's nothing unique just to you. You are part of a long tradition, not some kind of spiritualistic gathering, but really a community that is created only for the purpose of this secret, the sacred secret. The *raison d'être* behind the community, its members, and the interrelationships of the members exists only because of that teaching and the teacher, thanks to the *idhn* and the *ijāzah*, the license or authorization given to the *shaykh* to communicate that secret to the *muridīn*. As a consequence, one could say that the success of the Tariqah of the community lies in the relationships of the members of that community. The reality and the success of the community is to the degree that the members of the community have dedicated to that true teaching, the *sirr*. The whole purpose of these relationships, *nisbat*, is to communicate and manifest what is being transmitted both spiritually, internally and externally, manifested in the greater community of believers, and to have a place where others can come and find that teaching.

If it's really, really successful, which we can and cannot claim to be depending on what aspect of the work we are looking at and how we are looking at ourselves, there is certainly a great deal of room to be more successful—and there is some success. One could say the teaching is the sperm so to speak, and the *murshīd* is the mother that gives birth. The success of the *fuqara* is to the degree they are educating and teaching/*tarbiyya* others. The community is a transmitter of the teaching and the people who receive it.

You may say, “No, no, the *shaykh* is the teacher.” But the *shaykh* gives birth to the concepts, ideas, inspiration, and guidelines to grow, and to manifest those teachings, just like he was given birth to, by someone else. I was given birth by my Shaykh and my teachers, and you carry on the teaching.

How do you carry on the teaching? What do you do? Do you work at an organization? Do you do physical therapy? Do you do occupational therapy? Do you do website design, art? Do you cook, clean, teach children? Do you take care of the elderly? Are you a good husband or wife? What do you do? Why do you do it, and to whom is it dedicated? How does it reflect the secret, the *sirr*? How does it reflect the *tajalli*, the transmission you are receiving? What do you do? Or you can say the teacher is like a spring coming down from the mountain, carrying something that is necessary, not just to live by but grow crops by and benefit. You can make all kinds of metaphors. Or you can say, as one poet said, the glance of the *murshīd* is like a match that lights the embers that creates a fire that consumes whatever you put in it. But the *fūqara* are the people who have to go and gather the things to put into the fire.

As we talked last night about the *idhn*/authorization and the transmission, we have to understand it takes this place. The Tariqah is dynamic, alive. It is living. It has its own life, and the community is not just a social place, or a place you happen to live. It has a very profound spiritual function to the level that the people (the dervishes) in it are functioning, themselves, spiritually. Each of us is connected by the transmissions, and each one of us is a link in the “golden chain,” as the Naqshbandis say. Each one of us has a role and a responsibility, and a way in which we are also transmitting that secret, by our work, by our intentions, by our actions and our words, by our thoughts. You’ve seen this happen many times: when someone joins and starts to work in the Tariqah, they pick up where you are. You’ve been at this 40 years, and someone comes in a year or two ago,

they can pick up where you are. Why? Because they are brought in at that point by Allah to receive and also to transmit something that needs to be transmitted.

Everyone is important. Every link in a chain means something. Every strand in a rope makes it stronger. Every little thread in these rugs makes it colorful and patterned. But you have to remember that we are here to serve something much greater than we are. The community is a way towards serving that ultimate truth, that source of knowledge of the *sirr*. In this way, the teaching and the path is the life of the community. So whatever blocks that communication, that transmission, has an impact not only on individuals but on the community. Each one of us has the duty and responsibility to not only affirm but insure that we are not blocking or stopping that transmission in any way; that we are receiving what has been given to us, and are letting it pass through us and transform us. As it comes through us, it gains another quality, another characteristic and it goes on to promote the work, to make the world peaceful, to help the world understand something, to draw more people to the path who are destined to the path; to create goodness in the world. It has to pass through us; we shouldn't stop it.

One way we stop it is by not fully participating in the life of the community. I don't mean just in meetings or decision-making, but in receiving the transmissions, and in doing whatever it is you do to the best of your ability. Of course there are guidelines and rules, laws and regulations in this world; otherwise, there would be total anarchy. So too in Tariqah there are guidelines and rules. When Mustafa plants the garden in the spring, there are certain things you have to do. You have to put the seed in at a certain depth, water it, fertilize it, weed it. Then you have to protect the plant from the deer, and all the rest of it. In the same way, in order for the teaching to spread, there are certain ways in which that happens. One way that doesn't hold back the teaching is to respect one another, not just respect the teaching or the *shaykh*, but one another, and to assist one

another. It takes a lot of people to make the gardens grow every year. It takes a lot of people to make and put out dinner on Saturday and Wednesday night, and many people to keep the road up. Even though Jehan makes the decisions, she consults with others. None of it can be effective without everyone in the community doing it.

It's so obvious to us that the community is a metaphor for something of spiritual growth and development: as above, so below. To respect one another is to respect the fact that everyone has a place, that Allah has placed us in this place, and we are all aiming at the same purpose. No one's yearning for truth and understanding, safety, security and knowledge is better than anyone else's. The other thing is about power. Though there may be authority vested in the *shaykh* and other individuals, in the successful Tariqah, no one is power hungry. The power lies in the free flow of knowledge and of the transmission. The power lies, for example, in the *sema*, the *dhikr*, the *hadra* when the free flow of that love is happening, and we are all assisting one another. I'm assisting you; you are assisting me; everyone is assisting everyone else. That's an example of power in Tariqah. The[re is] power in prayer, the power that comes in fasting at Ramadan.

The other characteristic in Tariqah is to refrain from being judgmental, which of course is extremely hard for some people. The attitude one should have in Tariqah is, "I am so busy with my faults that I don't have time for anyone else's." That should be the attitude. "If it wasn't for me, I'd be judging you." Each one of us, therefore, has a place in receiving the transmission from the guide or *shaykh*, but also in transmitting whatever we understand and know of this path and of this teaching, through our means, to whoever it is we serve or for whatever purpose we dedicate our outer life. But also [we have the role of] re-transmitting it to our heart and our soul every time we sit in meditation, and returning the favor/*fadl* of Allah back to Allah, the *nai'ma* of Allah—returning the favor .

That's why in the East there is a tradition. If I invite you for dinner, you bring me something. If you leave the container, the container comes back filled with something. We find it in Jewish households, Arab households, Persian households. You find it even in Southern hospitality. The container comes back with something in it.

In a sense, each one of us is a very important link. Each one of us who really participates in receiving the transmission step by step, circle by circle, order by order, has something to transmit. [What is transmitted is] not just what we learned 30 or 40 years ago, not just what we built in our theoretical mind or practical experience, but the transmission adds to and clarifies and transforms us, and we become more and more transparent. The more transparent we are, the more we can give and share. It's that transparency that brings us closer also—closer to each other and closer to the source, because there is less resistance. This is why the community should be transparent. We hear these words being spoken in the political sphere today: “transparency in government,” “working together,” “cooperating in order to build a better country.” Translation: community. This is the natural inclination of human beings. A good, moral and ethical human being will think this way. It's a sign; it's an *āyat*.

It's a sign that says, “At least they know the words. If they perform the actions, then we know.” This is a very basic, spiritual perspective. The greatest transparency should be in the hearts of our *shuyukh* who desire to serve whoever is in front of them, and desire only to have the power of Allah to do whatever they do with it: to build a better community, to heal, to create more knowledge, to develop schools, to create better mechanisms for food, whatever it is. Eventually it is to free us from any deception or distraction and to serve Allah. It's toward this kind of clarity and transparency that each one of us should be turned, that the community should be turned to. By focusing on this kind of clarity and transparency we can communicate it to others.

It becomes pretty obvious why it is important to deal with the *nafs ammāra*. Everything I have described is antithetical to selfishness and how the *nafs ammāra* operates. Of course, the only way to get to that place is through the many means of *dhikrullah* and through our practices. I think most of us realize that once one is a member of such a community of believers, especially when you experience the collective practice, if you contemplate what it would be like if everyone were really doing their practices, really diving into the transmission, you realize that what we have been given so much of for so little effort on our part, you realize that every aspect of our existence, every quality we have, every sense we have, every capability we have is a way to receive the transmission. So why wouldn't we want to be dynamic, living threads in the rope to which Allah says, **“Hold fast to the rope of Allah.”**

Who is the rope of Allah? What is the rope of Allah? He didn't say, “Hold fast to Allah,” but to the rope of Allah. Guess what? We are the rope of Allah, those of us who participate. When that happens, then our community grows, and we make progress individually and collectively. Then you understand that other side of what I was talking about last night: the *idhn*, the *ijāzah*, the transmission. But how is it manifest? How is it magnified? How does it do its job in the world? It fulfills its purpose through the community of Sufis, *insh'allah*. It is something that we all benefit from remembering on occasion. This happens to be one of the occasions. Who knows? Maybe it will be the last. *Asalaamu aleikum*.