

March 18, 2009

Wednesday



Title: [Stories of the Khwaja Khwajagan](#)

DVD title: Stories of the Khwaja Khwajagan: Great People of Balance
Contemplate our Expectations of this Path

Dinner blessing: O Allah, endless are the bounties You shower upon us, the provisions You give to us, and the protection You surround us with. The love You sustain us with, and the compassion and mercy that You show to us in times of need. We ask You, Allah, to make us worthy at least by remembering these gifts and these mercies, in this Fadl of Yours. We ask You, Allah, not only to make us worthy but to make us conduits and examples of those qualities and attributes. We ask You, Allah, to send Your protection, mercy, love, and healing to those who are ill and among us, and to those who have sustained and are recovering from their operations, and to those who are in the midst of their tests and trials. We ask you for protection for those who are traveling and those who will travel. Make our gardens bountiful this year and our friendship deepen and our sense of community profoundly deeper and more expressive of Your divine Will. Deepen our practices, deepen our understandings, and deepen our humility. *Amin.*

Sohbet: It's hard to understand the quality of some of the people who came before us. The people who came before us, at least the ones we hear the stores about, were pretty amazing people. They knew how to balance their lives. When we think about balancing our lives, I think we think about going to work, doing our jobs, sitting at our computers, coming home and meditating for maybe ½ hour—maybe, doing our prayers five times a

day. We consider that balanced; consequently, the question can be raised, “What is it we think we can get from spiritual practices, even if we include *suhbat* in it, which is a cornerstone of Naqshbandi, Mujaddidi, and Shadhili teachings? Even when we add that to it, how much are we deceiving ourselves about balance? Throughout the Qur’an, Allah tells us to be balanced, to be the *ummata wāsita*, the middle nation. Perhaps we think that because we come from an historical line, somehow all the goodness of those people accrues to us, as if the *rizq* (provision) Allah gave to them somehow accrues to us. Collectively as well as individually, we become very satisfied with this kind of situation.

When Allah tells us to be balanced and harmonious, what kind of attitude do we have that we feel somehow we can attend Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday nights, and that’s all that is needed—*suhbat*. Then we look at the lives of people like Khwaja Ubaydallah Ahrar (ra), or Bahaudin Naqshband (ra), or Khwaja Allaudin Attar (ra) and others, and we hear their stories. Some might say these are stories of the past, and these kinds of things don’t happen anymore. If they don’t happen anymore – and of course they do, in some cases – is it maybe because you don’t have the pious people who are making it happen? People used to sit on their knees all night long, at the head of the tomb of a *shaykh* and contemplate, and become lost in the *wajd*, the ecstasy. It is not a question of who of us could do this; but who of us would even try to do it? Who would care to do it? Who of us would really believe that doing it was worth anything?

The question comes, what are our expectations from this path? What do we possibly hope we can get from it? Of course the opposite side of that is, is it a straw man we set up to blame as we aggregate all of our weaknesses and inconsistencies, and we need some place to focus on, to say this is because of this? “I gave my life 30 - 40 years to this path.”

But did we really? Look back at it from age 70, or 60, or 55 and say, “I didn’t make the same effort I did with other things in my life, like my work or my pastimes.” Khwaja Ubaydallah Ahrar (ra) told a story. When he was in Samarkand, he suffered a terrible pain in his eye that lasted for forty days. But at that same time, he wanted to visit Khwaja al-Khaliq Ghujduwani (ra), as he said,

I had heard many accounts of his special qualities. But I had never had the opportunity to see his blessed face. So I set out for Bukhara and entered a mosque along the road one day. I noticed that a radiant man was standing in the corner of the *masjid*. My heart was attracted to this old man, and for three days, I never parted from his company. On the third day, he said to me, “For three days you have had fellowship with me. What was your purpose? You may be thinking, ‘This man is a *shaykh*, so let me witness his charismatic talent.’ If so, do not look for anything of the kind in me. If you enjoy our fellowship, and if you sense a transformation in yourself, may it be a blessing for yourself and for me.” Could that old man have been anyone but Khwaja Ghujduwani? How else could the pain in my eye disappear the instant after it lasted 40 days?

Where are such people? Is it possible that such people exist because there are people who want to meet them, who yearn to seek them? Not a day goes by without someone asking me for a blessing for something. *Alhamdulillah*. I just say “*Bismillah*” and turn it over to Allah. Ubaydallah Ahrar (ra) was an example of a great man of balance. He had incredible land holdings. He owned probably a third of what is now Central Asia. He owned much land and was noted for his kindness to his tenants. One of his major

messages was, “Work on things we have taught you and never stop working. As for the things you acquire without working, they have no continuity and no permanence.” Only the things we work on have any value. Only the things we really work hard for have any permanence. They are the things that will speak for us on the *Yawmi Qiyama*.

Those are the things that will come to our favor in the grave.

He went on and said,

It is not proper to seek any way to refrain from labor. Whatever destiny contains will surely become apparent in due course for the seeker. Just as an essential requirement to link and consign everything to the will of Allah, work is also a most valuable requirement in its proper place. To refrain from work is simply to go astray and to experience loss. Correct are those who prefer to link work to destiny, relying on the Qur’anic verse which states that Allah gives only to the worker, and in its proper place, work is superior to submissiveness. Equally true are those who give priority over work to submissiveness and the acceptance of destiny.

These views seem to be in contradiction, but they are not.

The example is like in Hizbul Bahr. The wind carries the ship to its destination. People on the ship have no option but to wait for the wind. Yet at the same time, the ship can’t get to its course unless someone is laboring to get it to its proper destination. These things are not mutually exclusive. There are two sides to everything. One side is to work and to do the practice; and the other side is to trust in Allah, and understand that destiny is playing an important role. Some of us have the disposition or tendency to devote ourselves to surviving by the *Fadl* of Allah, instead of as he would say, “buying and selling.” Yet, even for that person, it is necessary to spend some time to fulfill the

preconditions necessary to be a qualified seeker. Also there are some people who naturally are submissive and trusting. They are the people who would rather be guided than to guide, to serve rather than to be served, who would rather follow than to manage.

He gives the example that if someone is going to the Ka'ba, partly by land and partly by sea. It's important when crossing the land to make clear movements. You are going under your own power or the power of an animal you are guiding. But when you get on the boat, you are making no movement. The boat is making the movement, and someone else is guiding the boat. If someone tries to walk and doesn't have the control and direction he needs, he'd be foolish. If someone who is on the ship but doesn't know how to manage the ship, he would also be foolish. If you know the real nature of your own life and your own journey, you know when you are on the ship and on the land, when it's time to be submissive and when it is not. The inclination is, when you are new at spiritual development and the journey, you try to manage where you shouldn't, because submissive is difficult. It's not like it has been terribly different over the years. It's just that people don't make the effort now to see what they really have, and seem not to have a real yearning to seek guidance.

Institutions have developed around this in Islam. They would rather study the law, or *fiqh*. They would rather think that Islam is all the rules and regulations than it is the truth and personality and way of the teaching. You have schools all over the world like that, madrasas and movements. Not that they are bad. They really are modernist movements. They reflect the modern attitude of de-personalization of the journey, and make it easier to aggregate people around rules and regulations. These are really modernist movements that really have lost the taste of the teaching, though not according to the people who

follow it. They think this is what Islam is and what Islam is supposed to be, but it's not. It never has been. If people would take the time to really study the Sīrah of Prophet Mohammed (sal) they'd say this was anathema. This was what he clearly warned against, but the Salafy movements are that. Many people in Northern Virginia or Cairo or Jakarta think they can replace one thing with another. They feel they can replace the teaching and personal effort and personal experience of Allah Swt with some kind of rules and regulations, or with just reciting Qur'an and studying *maqasad shar'īah* without the personal taste or experience of Allah Swt. It's a very Catholic approach, unfortunately. Those of you who were raised Catholic can identify with it.

To really understand *suhbat*, and to stimulate your inner being to the point where you are sensitive to what is happening; sensitive truly to the bounties of Allah Swt; this takes balance and effort, much more than most of us put out. We live in a social / psychological milieu of the post-modern world, so we always like to cover our backsides and have something to blame for our own failures and paralysis or anesthetized mentality. One of the things we can say is, "That was then. This is now, and those kind of people don't exist anymore." But they do exist. Khaled has met them. I have met them. Some of you have met them: Uthman Sirag ad-Dīn an-Naqshbandi, Ahmed Kuftaro, Hazrat – may Allah give them rest; Shaykh Kata'ni we just met recently in Washington, and Shaykh Khalil. They exist.

But everybody who entered that *masjid* would not have seen the glowing man in the corner. Just like you live here and think, "This is the place we live. These are my brothers and sisters, my aunties and uncles." But someone else comes and sees something else. They see light here and devotion and all these things, which of course should

humiliate us to no end, or at least humble most of us. You can say, “They see that because that’s what they are looking for.” Yes. That is true, and they are able to discern something different, to discern the light. It becomes all too familiar to us, and we don’t see it. But you could see it if you really, really trusted the way, the practices. Allah provides for everyone. Look at Ubaydallah Ahrar (ra). He had all this land, this power, everything. He had influence over the rulers. He was thrown in jail for a while, and he was so powerful they had to let him out, and he remained a humble man. He said,

I lived with the venerable Khwaja Allaudin Attar for forty days. One day, while discussing the charismatic talents of the venerable Khwaja Bahaudin (Naqshband), his power of dispensation and fellowship, he said, “As for the fellowship of the leaders of the present time, it is a rich bounty even if it is not at the level of the great ones who have passed away. As one of the great saints said, ‘A live cat is better than a dead lion.’”

That’s the way it always is. That’s the way it always appears. At the time of Khwaja Allaudin’s (ra) death, Khwaja Abdu-n-Nasr Parsa (ra) preached a sermon in which he said, “Khwaja Allaudin was a shelter for us all. We were safe and comfortable in his care and protection. Now that he has attained to the Mercy of Allah, we need to be fearful and apprehensive.” Such was the attitude. Maybe telling the words of these *shaykhs* is much more inspiring for you than hearing my words only. Maybe they can get you to understand how important it is to spend the time.

There was a great saint at this time. His name was Shaykh Sirajudīn Khalal Pirmasi (ra). He attached himself to Amir Hamza (ra), who was later a disciple of Bahaudin

Naqshband (ra). Khwaja Ubaydallah Ahrar (ra) noticed Shaykh Sirajudīn (ra) at the very beginning of his spiritual development. He made friends with him. It was the way at the time that the elders and people of knowledge would see the light on someone and bring them close to them and try to guide them in the right way. He said,

Once on the road from Bukhara to Samarkand, I entered the village of Shaykh Sirajudīn. I was 23 years of age at the time. He tried very hard to get me to stay by his side. Since my heart was reluctant, I begged permission to take my leave. I did spend two or three days in his company, and derived great benefit from his *suhbat*. He worked at the potter's trade by day, and devoted most of the night to friendly conversation. In whatever posture he sat at the meeting, he maintained that posture like a statue, and never changed his style of sitting. Whenever a guest came to his house, you could find every space swept clean. He would see the Shaykh with a cup in his hand. He explained: "A guest is coming to visit. They let us know we need to make everything ready."

One day Shaykh Sirajudīn related, "I happened to meet several of Abul Hasan's affiliates. In the course of the conversation, they assumed that my purpose was to persuade them to become my muridīn. They said, "O Shaykh! Don't waste your time. We are filled with our love for Shaykh Abul Hasan." Pointing their hands at their throats they added, "Nothing else can fit inside of us. You will find no space within us for your own fellowship and connection." As a result of this assertion, a burst of energy rose inside of me involuntarily. I suddenly noticed they had fallen to the

ground and started ripping their shirts apart. I recognized the need for another act of dispensation in order to bring them to themselves, so I did what was necessary to correct the situation. They clung, one by one to the hem of my gown and started to implore. I said to them, “We drink water from the same fountain, Shaykh Abul Hasan and I. To be attached to him is to be attached to us. The perception of difference resides in the dervishes. Among the spiritual guides, there is no difference.”

It’s very important to understand this in the context of people who spent the time. They didn’t just get born this way. When you spend the time [practicing], and are brought to these states of understanding, identification, self-identification and companionship, that’s where these stories come from. What can be the goal? Is it to meet important people, to see such glowing light on the faces of these people, to be able to count yourself among those who have met the important teachers? No. The goal of each teacher is the same: to find *sakīna*, to find *rahmāt*, to find *salām*, *taslīm*, *salima*, to understand *sulh*, *adl*, to understand the Haqq of Allah. This is the internal goal of the people who sit in *muraqabah*, who spend their night on their knees, who at least try to find their time in their day for prayer and reflection. At the least, they recite the Qur’an and sit a few hours, and trust that the way will be made open to them. Because as the Khwaja Khwajagan (later called Naqshbandiyya) taught (and as others have taught), if you can’t achieve *sakīna* (tranquility) in your heart while you are young enough, healthy enough, strong enough, alert enough, and open enough, it will be very hard to find it when you are sick, older, distracted, and have so many responsibilities that you don’t have the inclination or the time to do that. You have to acquire the skill before you can use

it, in anything.

One of the reasons why the Friends of Allah pray for those who are ill and try to encourage and give strength to those who are young and seeking; and who are older and reflective, and encourage them never to give up, is to give a spiritual inoculation. You take the baby to get immunizations. Only this is an inoculation of spiritual force, *bāraka*. So that at least, when the time comes for us to migrate from this world to the next, we can do so with knowledge and preparation, and in an orderly and humble way. Because at that moment, everything we know is removed from our mind. We see when disease comes to us and weakness comes to us, it's hard to see what benefit we have gained except among the noble people. People who are pretentious and arrogant find it does them no good at the moment of death. Khwaja Ubaydallah Ahrar (ra) told a story. He said,

At the time of Ruhanidīn Khawafī's migration to the Hereafter, we were at the beside together with Shaykh Bahaudin, Umar, and the venerable Maulana Sa'idin Kashgari. Maulana Khwaja, one of the venerable Maulana Ruhanadīn's intimate disciples was also present, as well as a young boy in his service. Maulana Ruhanadīn disapproved of Imam Al Ghazālī's "Investigations of the Truth," so he forfeited all his grace and perfection since he would do nothing other in that state but assert his own belief and repeat the affirmation of oneness. As for the identity of Maulana Saifudīn, the one who was honored as the recipient of the blessed acceptance of this venerable Khwaja Bahaudin, he seems to have been Maulana Saifudīn Bukhari. He went to Khawazan from Bukhara for the purpose of trade, and

there he gained the friendship of the venerable Allaudin Attar. Then on his return to Bukhara, following the venerable Allaudin's advice, he joined the venerable Khwaja Bahaudin from whom he learned the practices of Tasawwuf, and attached himself tightly to the path of the Khwaja Khwajagan.

As for Maulana Saifudīn who incurred the venerable Khwaja's wrath, he is the one who bore the nickname Balakhana. This Maulana Saifudīn used to spend night and day in the company of him. (The paternal uncle of Khwaja Mohammed Parsi). Then when Maulana Saifudīn Khoshkam joined the venerable Khwaja Bahaudin, their meetings were spoiled. One day, they were together in the home of Maulana Saifuddīn Khoshkam and they were discussing the perfection of Bahaudin. Khoshkam insisted his brother should enter the same path and thereby attain to great felicity. He said to them, "I encountered him one day. He was wearing a new fur, which I found very attractive. I wished from my heart that he would give it to me. As soon as I expressed what I was feeling, he gave me the fur. I bear witness to its perfection. Kindly meditate on my behalf, and introduce me in his service." he said.

The point being that there is a proper way to be in the company of these *shaykhs*, and an improper way. Even when you come to the state where you may be aware of a certain level of their greatness, your own arrogance may turn it in a way that is not beneficial to you. How can you avoid that? I should give you the refrain and you can repeat it. We all need to make our lives more balanced.

Perhaps some of the fear of committing and disciplining oneself to the sitting and to the deeper understanding of the relationships between the *shuyukh* and one's own self, one's work, and one's spiritual life lies is the fear of giving up the material things of this world. So much has been written on this subject. Certainly, one of the aims of spiritual practice is to repudiate the material and physical attachments, and to turn oneself toward the inner realms. The objective of that in the spiritual journey is to deliver oneself by one's own power and volition and efforts from the attachments that stand in the way of understanding the truth, understanding what Allah Swt is trying to guide us to understand. I think most of us don't really understand that.

What these Khwaja Khwajagan, especially Allaudin Attar (ra) and others, try to teach is that whatever form of attachment the seeker sees, if he or she does not perceive that their heart is tied to the attachment, then the attachment ceases to be an obstacle. But if you feel a desire for those things, or that thing, it means the attachment has grabbed you and stopped your progress on the path. So it's not the idea of giving up all the material things, and all the things that are pleasureable in the world, but it is to be able to get to a state where you can turn into your heart and say, "What is my attachment to this? What is my commitment? What am I committed to, and what am I attached to? Am I attached to the path, or am I attached to these things, and to what degree?"

You might remember that every time Bahaudin Naqshband (ra) got any new clothing of any kind, he would wear it as if it were borrowed. Someone would say to him, "O Shaykh, that's a nice thobe." And he would say, "This is borrowed." It's not that he didn't have it, but he practiced having a mentality that everything he owned was borrowed and

didn't belong to him. Also, the question came up about *rābita* the other day. It's not really a necessary practice, because according to our way of understanding things, one should have their heart linked with the heart of the *shaykh* and the *shuyukh*. The seeker/*salik* negates the attachments to others, because you keep the attachment to the *shaykh* open in your heart. The attachment to the *shaykh* is the attachment to the *silsila*, all the way to the Prophet Mohammed (sal). Instead of having a horizontal kind of mentality, you have a vertical mentality.

It's important for the *salik* to persevere in their attachment to the *shuyukh*, because only in that do all of us face certain challenges in our own self. If we defer, then we are avoiding certain mental and emotional states that are necessary for us to affirm our commitment on the path. For a person not to stray, these Khwaja Khwajagan tell us, you have to have something that will confront you with deep-set questions, needs, desires, fears, or anxieties. Often this comes in the form or way of the *shaykh*. Now we see two sides of it. One is these miraculous people with light coming out of them, who in an instant put you in a state of *wajd*. Then you see someone whose mere existence causes you a whole line of questions and challenges. Both are under the umbrella of submission.

I'll return to the beginning. It's not that things have changed so terribly much. It's not that there is nothing to see, and nothing to gain from the *suhbat*; or there is everything to gain from the *suhbat* and nothing to gain from the *muraqabah* or the *tawajjuh*. It's not that we are any lazier than those who came before us. We are only hearing the stories of the people who weren't lazy. We are not hearing the stories of everyone else. The people who could keep the company of the *shuyukh*, and say that there were in the line of these great teachers, were able to see the importance of that only because they enabled

themselves to see it. Did they work less? Was their work less difficult than our work today? Were the demands on them less than ours today? Were their hopes and aspirations as human beings different than ours? Were their concerns different? Their lives in most cases were much more difficult than ours, yet they found the time. And in finding the time, they gave us names to remember and people to emulate.

We have to strive to succeed. At the same time, you have to look around and see where your destiny has placed you, and accept that Allah Swt has placed you where He wished to place you (When I say He, you know what I mean, right?), and be diligent in our study, in our work. He may provide us with – who knows – maybe a bonus at the end of the year. Even though the *shaykh* historically may devote his attention to the *murīd*, to the student, unless the student works hard to absorb that attention, that *tawajjuh*/turning, the effect only lasts for hours or days. You can see what happens. You come to the *shaykh* and ask for a blessing, and something happens. But the effect of it only lasts a short period of time – or at least the memory of it lasts a short time.

It is said that in the company of Bahaudin Naqshband (ra), there were people who were striving day and night. Very few people could remember a time when the students around him were not striving day and night. Can you imagine? What happens is that a spiritual state arises in the heart of a person who does that during their striving, and the person will witness inside of themselves that state. They won't know what that state is until it happens. Then it becomes a *maqam*, a station. It's hard to say that any of us wouldn't want that state; but you have to have faith that such a thing exists. You can't experience it until you experience it. When you experience it, you know that's what you wanted all along. But until you experience it, you will never want it as much as you do when you

experience it. This element of trust and striving is very important. Anyway, I thought that a few stories of the Khwaja Khwajagan *would be helpful for us today, and I hope it wasn't too distracting for you. I wouldn't want any of us to get distracted from our ease. Asalām Aleikum.*