

October 14, 2009

Wednesday



Title: [The Adab of the Suhbat](#)

DVD: The Good People of Suhbat  
The Way is Recognized by their Practices

*Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm*. I think I'd like to continue tonight on the Tarīqahs. I've opened up so many doorways, each leading to many different rooms, *alhamdulillah..*

Among the Sufis, there are people called the *Ikhtiyār*. *Ikhtiyār* means “the good.” According to Sufi tradition among the Khwajagān, there are 300 *Ikhtiyār* (of the good people) at any given time in this world. Usually, they are not easily found. I think whether you believe there are or not, it's important to strive to be considered a good person in Sufic or mystical terms.

One of the requirements for really making progress along this path or any path is *suhbat*. It is the foundation of Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī and Shadhilī teachings. It's the foundation of all Sufi teachings, but stressed in these: Naqshbandī, Mujaddidī, Khwajagān, especially the traditional Shadhilī teachings. It is said that each group or gathering of people of Tasawwuf, of Sufis, have a particular means or process or practice. By persevering in that practice over a period of time, one reaches their goal. That statement is actually a statement that is a traditional statement: each group has its own particular practice of

persevering in that practice to reach the goal (Reads some Farsi). I try to say these things in Farsi, because this is where the tradition comes from—from Persian speaking regions. According to historical records and letters, the way the Tarīqah is recognized or defined is by their practices.

For example, there are the Sufis of *khafī*/silence, the people who do silent *dhikr*, or the people of *dhikr jahri*/loud *dhikr*, or the people of *muraqabah*, or the people of *tawajjuh*, attention and concentration. Some of these groups practice *rābita*, and some practice *khidma*/service. It is *khidmat* in the sense of servitude in relationship to one another and the *shaykh*. Some are people of *jedhba*/attraction. Some are people of *suhbat*. Some people are of all or most of those. One of the reasons why it has been said, and not just by the Naqshbandis, that the teachings of the Naqshbandī touches all the Orders is because (you can see from that list I just gave you) we do almost all of it. We actually do all of it, we just don't concentrate on *rābita*. Even in our transmissions, we talk about *muraqabah* and *tawajjuh*, *dhikr khafī*. We have permission for *dhikr jahri*. We emphasize *jedhb* and *suhbat*.

When a person associates with us, they associate with all of them. They don't know that, but it's the truth. They associate with a group that does *dhikr jahri*, or they associate with a group that is more *fiqh* oriented. When they associate with us, they associate with a group that does (or should do) all of it. You will also notice that in that group, you will find people to serve and people to be served. That is because among the group we know there are different socio-economic and socio-religious subgroups. You find in the history of the Tarīqah that Ubaydullah Ahrar (ra) was a landowner and had a lot of political influence. The grandson of Shaykh Ahmed Kashani was a founder of the line of Naqshbandis that go to the Uighurs in Sinkiang in China. He also was a political figure. His name was Khwaja Afaq (ra).

When you look around you see humanity in these groups do different things, with different educations, different interests, different capabilities. This is very much indicative of Tarīqah. Though it may be indicative of every group of people, it is utilized by the Naqshbandiyya. I'm talking about all our five Orders. The thing that binds the Orders together is this comprehensiveness of the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidī line. This kind of integrated spirituality stands as an alternative focus to the focus on the *ulema* and *fiqh* way of thinking. It doesn't exclude, it obviously. We follow the *fiqh* and Shar'īah, and listen to the *fatwas* of the *ulema*. But it's very clear that the *ulema* and the *qaris* and such people are distinct from the Sufis, at least in the Turūq.

Kashani (ra) describes Tarīqah in terms of companionship and relationships as we still do today. This is going back many centuries to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, over ½ a millennium ago. He warned the people of the danger of dealing with people who are exoteric. He said not to talk to the *ulema* too much. Chat with them, sit with them, but don't sit with people who seek *tasfiyyat* (interpretation). Don't sit with people who are caught up with people who want to interpret Islam in ways that promote a kind of *salafī* point of view and remove the mystical from it. Don't sit with people who will interpret everything in order to remove the spirituality from it—*tasfiyya*. It's not a common term. He said, "Rather, be among the Sufis. Have good and close relations with the people of Tarīqah." And he meant specifically, the Khwajagān, the Masters of Wisdom. We still practice this today; that's why I'm bringing you this historical discussion.

The activity that is proper among the people of the Khwajagān is *suhbat*, gathering together, companionship, the spiritual discussion between the *murshīd* and the *murīdīn*. He said, "It's the best of activities." The best thing is to have *suhbat* with the *murshīd*, and to be in the companionship of fellow seekers—nothing else. Don't waste your time

with anything else, because life is short. It is the model of Rasulallah (sal) and the *sahabah*: this is the precedent. It's more important in our Tarīqah than it is in others. Everybody knows the benefit of getting the *bāraka* from others and being in the company, but this is very much more important. This was especially important in the time of Khwaja Ubaydullah Ahrar (ra), and of course, his *murīds*. There is certain *adab* that goes along with this. The result is, you become a good person, a person of goodness. It is very highly evolved, this *suhbat*.

You start hearing of it in the *Awarif al Ma'arif* of Suhrawardi (ra) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There are three chapters devoted to the *adab* of the *murīd*. The spiritual environment (which we take for granted, by the way) needs to be maintained. It's not immune to the hostile, exoteric interpretations. You see people who come from other countries to the US from Pakistan or Afghanistan, places where there is still traditional Sufism. They go to the *masājid*, and the first thing they encounter are Salafī exoteric interpretations of Islam, and they get confused. They feel somehow maybe they weren't practicing Islam correctly. Here are all these erudite people telling them they never practiced it properly. This mystical, social, spiritual reality that you live and that we have constructed and maintained here for over 30 years is traditionally around a Pīr, and appears as an organizational reality we call Tarīqah, or a *khānaqah*. But it requires, as you know, something that most people will not do, or people will begin to do, and then become very complacent. That is, you have to change your life and behavior.

He says: “*Since life is only a few breaths, since the past is dead and the future is not yet born, since this taifa (tarīqah, path) considers each breath the last one, the person who wishes to enter Tarīqah needs to practice constant concentration.*” He gives you the reason and the reality. (Reads the quote again). This concentration he is talking about is the last part of the *kalimat qudsiyya*, the 11 Rules to which Bahaudin Naqshband (ra)

added *wuqūfi adadi* (remembering), *wuqūfi zamani* (awareness of time), and *wuqūfi qalbi* (keeping the heart constantly attentive to Allah), which is a very specific practice I give you to do. The emphasis is on the *dhikr*/remembrance of Allah in the heart. This remembrance has to be practiced until it becomes natural to us to do *wuqūfi adadi*, *wuqūfi zamāni*, and *wuqūfi qalbi*.

It's very important that we practice this until it becomes the *sīfat al qalbi*, the articulation or description of the essence of the heart—*dhati qalbi*. It is to be done without any struggle, which means that when you find you are struggling and your heart resists, I have a transmission for that. It is to expand the opening of the heart a little, to remove the pain or the squeezing of the heart; therefore, whatever you do that makes the remembrance of Allah secondary, that eludes or evades or dismisses the *dhikr* is gone. You won't be able any more to do that. You won't be able to dismiss it. You won't be able to be distracted; you won't be able to put it off.

This is why we say, do *wuqūfi qalbi*. Every time you can, stop for a minute and do *wuqūfi qalbi* in the heart. It's a reality, and it's also a metaphor for saying that a Sufi can't withdraw from the results of their spiritual practices. If you do them, you attain them, and you can't withdraw from them. You move through these irreversible *maqam*/stages. Most people don't do their practices deeply enough or intensively enough or continuously or sincerely enough. They fill in all the spaces with guilt and upset, and all these kinds of things. (Guilt is good in this case). So they are constantly struggling, and you get tired. But if you do it and achieve this *maqam*, you get a rest. It's like climbing a mountain and getting to a plateau. Coming down is always easier than going up.

In that process, certain mystical awareness takes place, certain states/*halat*. These are gifts from Allah. Certain qualities come, certain attributes. Certain impressions are made

on you, and certain revelations, insights come. I sit here and talk to you and sometimes these revelations come to us because of the subject I'm talking about. I share them with you immediately. They come through me. Sometimes people get a little intoxicated, and sometime people go into states of ecstasy. They see saints, or angels, the *ambiyā*, or the spirit of the *ambiyā*. They feel the *rūh*, the presence of the *awliyā*. When I got my *ijāzah*, we went to the tombs. We put my *ijāzah* on the tombs and then we waited. What were we waiting for? We went to the Shadhili tombs, the Naqshbandiyya tombs, the *dargahs* of the Chishtiyya, and of the Qadiriyya. What was it we were waiting for?

In a sense, we are waiting for the invitation by these *awliyā* to experience certain spiritual states. The idea here is you have these trials and tests. Often we saw them sitting together in a circle. It was like a trial or test, to see... He says it this way: “*We will see if he is resolute on the path or not.*” If the individual indulges in the experiences they propose, they leave them alone. They offer certain experiences. If you indulge in them, they leave you alone because you are not firm on the path. If the person rejects these experiences, no matter what the offers are, and says, “No, all I want is to move on this path. I don't want power or recognition,” [they are firm on the path]. How do we do it? We say, “I offer the rewards of this practice to...” It's one of the ways we do it. You have to do it seriously—not just say the words. Then they feel you are firm on the path. You will have the *madad* of these *awliyā* on the spiritual journey.

Don't tell me that every Muslim doesn't believe in *madad*. Every Muslims makes *du'ā* and supplication to the Prophet Mohammed (sal) and asks Allah for blessings upon the Prophet (sal) and asks for guidance/*istikhar*. What is that? So you remain unattached to these kinds of visions and powers and you make *tawajjuh* on the *dhat*, the essence. “I only pay attention to the essence.” I turn my attention to the heart, and my heart pays attention to the essence. If something from the Divine truth is revealed, *alhamdulillah*.

Whatever knowledge you have, you grasp it and say, “I want more of this. This is what I want. I want more of this insight, this knowledge. I don’t want more power, more visions, more dreams.” People wander around in these visions, dreams, and associations. Yes, of course, everything is Divine. The trees talk, the cat talks to you, the dog talks. Everything has a conversation going on. These things are very pure; they are praising Allah. They don’t have to make any human decisions. But don’t get caught up in that. Want only the *haqiqah al marifah* of Allah.

However, that’s not enough, because we have to have outer discipline also. How do you do that? The advice is you have to also avoid certain types of people. Stay among your own people as much as you can. Avoid strangers. Avoid those who are low-minded people, who have no sense of what is right and good. Don’t be influenced by them. Don’t become like them. Keep good company. He makes an interesting statement, “The novice would be better to break with the *qari* and join the Sufis. The former (the *qari*) are interested in just the call—the *dhikr*, and the latter are only interested in the called—the One Who is being called, Allah.” He calls the seeker “*talib*.” We call them *murīd*. A *talib* is a student, one who is seeking knowledge.

He says, “*He should remain indifferent to the affairs of the world and even to the affairs of the heavens. But be content with the basic necessities of life.*” Who is this man? He is the *murīd* of Shaykh Khwaja Ubaydullah Ahrar (ra), a very wealthy man. He owned a lot of what is now Central Asia. What is he talking about? He is talking about attachment. He gives very clear guidelines about the inner and outer. Overall, he’s saying to avoid both the inner temptations and the outer ones, because Tarīqah is both inner and outer, as we see, even in our own community. They are inextricably intertwined with each other. The more you become involved in the business, the work, the organization and process of the Tarīqah, the more that intertwinment becomes harmonious. It’s not like you go to

work, and then you go to church. You go out to work, and then come to meditation. No, they are inextricably intertwined.

What was Shaykh Ahrar's (ra) work? Look at how much land he owned. He had all these people farming and doing things for him. He was helping in the lives of thousands of people, helping them build houses, tend their fields, bring things to market. Read his life story. It's not that you just live within the confines of the four walls of the *khanaqah*. So, what, kind of a day should there be? This is what he said the day should be like. You will see how similar it is to what we say. He said that first you begin with *muhasabat*. You make an accounting of your spiritual schedule. Not the *muhasabat* you make at the end of the day, where you check and see how well you did. This is at the beginning of the day, your spiritual to-do list. After the *namaz al-asr*, you come home. Work day is taken care of, and you pay attention until the evening comes. Maybe you take a rest. Then you make *tawbah*. Then you make *istighfar*.

In those days, they did seventy *istighfar*. You repent and implore Allah. You maintain that attention to the presence of Allah by doing your practices and in your devotion. You speak, eat, drink, stand or sit, all the things you do in your life, but with consciousness. You do the practices as they are given. I don't have to repeat what they are. This is the way they have been given for many centuries. Then you make *muhasabat* again, and take account of how the day was. You realize at the end of every day you have taken another step forward. Kashani says an interesting thing. "*The beginning of the contemplation consists of seeing the Divine truth in the world,*" seeing how Allah manifests the truth in the world. He said, "*Look at the divine truth in the world like a thirsty man looks at water.*" He gave these visual metaphors. Look at the world and see how Allah has created the world, as if you are a thirsty man looking at water. He says that if you do that, you will begin to see the Divine Presence everywhere. "*There won't be any resistance,*

*pain, or difficulty for you. Then the ego, the self (nafs) begins to see things as easily (or naturally) as the eye sees and as easily as the ear hears. You will begin to see that Divine Presence everywhere. Whatever the Sufi does to remove that capability, he won't be able to remove it."*

When you come to that point, to that degree on the spiritual path, you have attained to *tawajjuh*. You have really attained to *tawajjuh*. He even says that a kind of battle takes place. The five attributes of the *nafs* will go against the five formal faults. What are they? One, "*don't say any meaningless words or anything contrary to the Divine truth.*" In other words, remain mostly silent. "*Don't eat excessively, so you maintain a slight hunger. Don't sleep for too long a time. Stay awake.*" These come naturally. "*Don't deal with strangers,*" meaning people not of Tasawwuf. "*And perform dhikr, wuqufi qalbi, continuously. These are the five attributes, the rules of life for the members of the Tariqah.*" Obviously, this is very difficult for a beginner.

Most of you may think, "Well, if I look at my life, it's pretty much like that. I don't have lots of friends outside of the Sufis. I do a lot of practices to remember Allah." You don't really see clearly how much you have attained. For a beginner it's very difficult, and also perhaps for the young people. But if you concentrate your efforts and direct your thoughts, you will come to this state. It is very difficult to do it outside of Tarīqah. When you go to northern Virginia and places like that, they are trying to find something in the *masjid*, in the study group, in the study of this text or that. Why? Inherently, we know to keep good company and remembrance. However, if you don't have the *bāraka* of Tarīqah in it, maybe you'll get something from it, and maybe it will keep you from wandering astray, and you will stay in the company of "Muslims." But you will not be plumbing the depths of your capability and moving through the levels of *nafs*. For that, you have to understand *suhbat*.

The effects of these activities in *suhbat* depend on companionship with people, the discourse you have with the *murshīd*, the person who has *ijāzah* (meaning the authorization), and the discussion that takes place. You have to have an authorized teacher, companionship with others, and you have to engage in the discussion. He (and the Khwajagān) repeats again and again that the best of every activity is *suhbat* of the Pīr, providing that you know the *adab* of Shar’īah, providing you know the rules.

There are rules of discussion with the *murshīd*. [Let’s say,] tomorrow you will go visit President Obama. You won’t just think of what you will say to him, but how you will say it. You will go and say, “Mr. President...thank you very much...” Adab. There are rules. In the military, there are rules about how you talk to officers, and the person above you. *“One of the conditions of suhbat is to be passionate in it (ishq) to such an extent that the listener has to sit in a way (like you all are sitting) that a bird would stay on his head without being frightened by any movement—then he repeats the oft-times misunderstood statement—like a corpse in the hands of the body washer, to remain immobile and silent. Do not talk, do not hear, do not drink, do not move, do not stay, do not leave, except by order of the shaykh.”* I’m quoting. I’m not telling you this. He is.

Then there is other *adab*. *“Don’t ask for anything to eat or to wear, since it is He who knows better than you what you need.”* In that case, he was referring to *khierka*. *“Also, if you reach the degree of near to, being close, and giving preference to others over yourself, one of the moral values we should hold, don’t leave suhbat, even if you become close to the point where you think of others before yourself; otherwise, you won’t benefit. Even if your shaykh is excessive in testing you, do not give up because this kind of test is frequent. Indeed, what occurs to you, thanks to the discussion with the shaykh, is jedhbah/attraction.”* *Jedhbah* means once you have that kind of testing and discussion

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going on, you are very near. You are on the path. *The more you are involved in listening and accompaniment with love (mayyat al hubbi) and participating in the life of the Tariqah, and in the life of others in the Tariqah, the more you are progressing in your spiritual quest. The more you are involved in suhbat with each other, by adding to the suhbat, you are adding to the dhikr. By adding to the dhikr, you are adding to the fikr. By adding to the fikr, you are adding to the awakening, the collective and personal practice. This is the adab of suhbat.*

*Asalaamu aleikum.* But there's more..