

October 28, 2009

Wednesday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Keep the Company of Good People: the Fuqara.](#)
(Description of the levels of nafs)

DVD title: The Fuqara: Keep the Company of Good People
Strive to be Like Them

Dinner blessing: O Allah, what a beautiful day You gave us today: the leaves and flowers, the animals and the birds, and the raccoons running on the road in front of my car. So much to be grateful for, and we forget. We are grateful for the presence of our friends here for dinner, and the presence of our families, and of our children. We ask You, Allah, to send Your Blessings upon all of them, and on all people. Bring some sanity and clarity to this world. Give our leaders courage to do what is right, and not what is expedient. And help us help ourselves to stay aware of Your Divine Presence. *Amin.*

Suhbat: Ibn At'ala Iskandari (ra) you know from the [Hikam](#). He also made a commentary on *qasidas* of Sayidi Abu Madyan (ra). It is a very profound text, because it talks about the *fuqara*. In that sense, it talks about who we should strive to be like, if we have the courage. It's also a text that is dealing with the bottom line of everything in spirituality, which is humility. In thinking about what drives people or (doesn't drive people) to really embrace or engage in the process of *akhlaq* and *tajdid* through *muraqabah*, through *fikr*, through *tafakkur* and *tawbah*, as a constructive means of refining one's character and reaching into the depths of one's own spiritual potential, I keep coming up to the conclusion that at the core of it is humility.

What makes a person truly humble? Sometimes it's humiliation. Sometimes it's service. Sometimes it's awakening to the Divine Presence. Sometimes it's the overwhelming reality of that Divine Presence in your life. Since Islam is so much based on companionship, the *ummah* and the *jamat*, the gathering together of Muslims for faithful practice; and since Tasawwuf is so much based on, not just the personal experiential effacing of oneself in that Divine Presence, but also on *suhbat*, these teachings and *tafsīr* that come through people like Iskandari (ra) are very profound. The reality is that Allah (swt) has placed us among people, but He has placed us among people whom Allah loves. Perhaps you don't realize that. Setting me aside, because you know me too well and are too close, think of the people who I know that you know: Hazrat (ra), Shaykh Kaftaro (ra), Shaykh Osman Sirajjudin an-Naqshband (ra) and others you have met; Shaykh Rafai (ra) and Shaykh Batawi (ra). Allah has placed us among people He loves; and in that, He has given us a nearness to Himself.

I am going to speak like this today without my normal caveat, because I want to speak in the Shadhhdhilī tradition. But you understand what my caveats are about "Him" and "His". As such, He has given us practices, texts, and books. He has given you, people like me, who as limited as I am try to give you some taste of what the meanings are behind those words. In other words, He has given us nearness to Him, and has given us the taste of some of the drink that is drunk by those whom He loves. In addition to that, He has enabled some people over periods of time, sometimes over many decades of time, to have the security of the path by giving the constancy of contact. Consequently, we have less of an experience of the "shunning and averting of Allah." In other words, He has given us access to his 'abds/slaves, to whom He has given the privilege of His teachings and messages.

These are the people, it was said in the tradition, that *“He mended their broken hearts when they, themselves, realized their eyes were not perceiving Him, even by the light of His own tajalliyat.”* I often speak about not seeing the ocean, even though you are there, or not seeing the beauty of nature. In his monologue, he carries on another metaphor.

He opened the meadows of nearness for them, and blew on their hearts some of the waridat of His Fragrances.

Indeed, in the company of some of these people, you have smelled the fragrance of that Divine. You learn to love the scent of the beloveds of Allah, like the lover loves the scent of his beloved. He goes on: *“He made Him witness His management as proceeding from them, so they surrendered the reins to Him and He unveiled to them the hiddenness of His Luft in His preventing them. So they came out of contentiousness and stubbornness, and they surrendered to Him and entrusted all matters to Him.”* This goes back to *tadbīr*. He showed people His Management beyond their management, and His Strength beyond their strength, His direction beyond their direction. These are the people. Now, it goes into something I really want to talk about.

A man will be gathered on the dīn of his close friend, so let each of you look to the one he takes as a friend. O full brother! Since you know this, do not take someone as a friend unless his states awaken in you and his words direct you toward Allah. And that one is a faqīr. That one is a person who casts off other, and turns toward the Master. Pleasure only exists in taking as a friend, that person. And happiness only exists in serving him, and keeping his company. For that reason, the shaykh (talking about Abu Madyan) said, “The pleasure of life is only in the company of

the fuqara. They are the sultans, the masters, and the princes.”

Who are the *fuqara* (the plural of *faqīr*)? A *faqir* is a person who casts off all secondary causes, and turns away all distractions and hindrances, and has no *qibla* except Allah (swt). He discards everything except Him. He has realized the meaning of *lā ilāha illa-llāh Muhammadan Rasūlullāh*. The company of such people gives you not only a taste of the path, but he pours the nectarian drink of his knowledge in the hearts of the people. It is that person who makes you recognize that the path exists, let alone where it is and how to tread it. It is that person who will help you climb the steep mountain roads along that path, and that person who will remove the impediments or stones from the path in front of you. It is a form of *zakat*.

That person will remove the stones, the impediments from your heart. Not only that, but in the presence of that person, if you are courageous enough and strong enough, and if you allow it to happen (because it's a terrifying experience sometimes), he will awaken the *himma* in you. Most people don't like to yearn for something they are not sure they are going to get. Whoever is like this, that person is a sultan. That person is, in reality, is a master over all the people in the path. He is the prince in the court of the seer, and has control of the *basīr*, the inner eye. He says, don't oppose it, strive. *“If you are a serious journeyer, then strive in every way you can to gain such companionship.”* And get this person's company, and have the *adab* of these types of people. Be in their assembly, in the *suhbat*, because by the *bāraka* of such company, every impediment will be removed. So he says, *“Therefore, keep their company and have adab in their assemblies. Leave your portion behind you whenever they send you forward.”*

Keeping the company is a form, but the *adab* in that company is the *rūh*, the spirit of it.

If you join the form, the *suhbat*, the assembly of these people, then you must bring your full spirit to it, your full soul to it, and then you will benefit. If you don't, then you could be sitting among them like you are sitting among corpses. You could be sitting with a dead corpse, and you wouldn't know the difference. It's all in the *rūh*, the living spirit that you bring to it. You can't bring your head to it. You can't bring your desires to it. It won't give life to the assembly. If you think about it, you'd think it would be the other way around: that the assembly would give you life. Think of it this way: there is life in the assembly, but you can't connect to that life. You get nothing from them, unless you add your soul to it. You can't just walk in there and get overwhelmed by the *bāraka* of it. You have to bring your soul to it, your sincerity, your effort, your submission and *adab*. This is the *adab* of this *jamat*, of the *fuqara*. So what can you get from a corpse? Nothing.

One of the most important things is the *adab* you have in the company, so that you leave behind you everything but your *himma*, your desire to obey the commands, the instructions, the guidelines that come from the *'ālam al amr* into that assembly through the *shaykh*, into your heart, which has become awakened by the sincerity of your *himma*. When that happens, it's acknowledged. There's gratitude. What does that mean? It means you feel the gratitude of the *fuqara*. You feel the gratitude of the *shaykh*, of the *shuyukh*, come flowing to you, because you have joined the assembly, and they are grateful for your presence. If you actually mold yourself around that concept, and you set out and try to seize that moment, seize the presence with sincerity, in the gathering, in the *muraqabah*, in the *dhikr*, the recitation, and in the *hadra*, immediately you are raised and your *himma* will be raised. He says it this way: "Seize the moment, and always be present with them. Know that *rida* is bestowed on those who are present."

What happens in this process is you find you are being counseled by Allah from everywhere. You can stop a stranger on the street, a beggar on the street, and that person will give you good counseling, because that person will be a conduit for the truth. Or, even better, you will stop a stranger on the street, and that stranger will be a *faqīr*, because you will be drawn only to the person who has the quality. You become familiar with that quality because you are in the *jamat*. You are in the *suhbat* with the *fuqara*. You will be shown the way to place your *adab* in such a way that the *tajalli* of the light of the *fuqara*, the light of the *shuyukh*, will be shining. Wherever you sit and walk, and whoever you come into contact with, becomes like you. Wherever you walk, there's light. Wherever you sit, there's knowledge flowing to you. Meaning, in the company of the right people, you are always bathed in the light, knowledge.

It can be knowledge of anything: knowledge of the world, of the financial crisis in the world today, or the health issues in the world today. [Whatever knowledge it is,] it will be infused with light, and your insights will be infused with light. When you internalize that light, then that's what we call in English "enlightenment." When you turn that light inward, you realize that your insight is providing light, and you are, yourself, a lamp unto others. More important than that is a simple realization: when you sit with someone who is sad, you become sad. If you sit with someone who is joyful, you find joy. Sometimes you are not in a good mood, so someone wants to put you in a good mood. They tease you, they do this and that. They know this will make you laugh. A person who is happy makes you happy. A person who is sad, makes you sad. A person who is angry, makes you angry. A person who is heedless of the truth, makes you heedless of the truth. A person who is distracted will distract you, and a person who is critical will make you critical. You can't protect yourself from it for very long. If you don't know it on the conscious level, it acts on the unconscious level, and your behavior changes.

If you are filled with love, clarity and piety but on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and Friday you are in the company of some people who are heedless, disbelievers and critical, when you come back to the other people on Monday, you are not going to be the person you were the previous Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Now you have to absorb those people again. That's why he says to stay in the company of the good people. Stay in the company of the *fuqara*. We have practices (in the 2nd circle in the 4th, 5th and 6th transmissions) that tell us if you are in the company of wrong people, under some stress or strain, even if giving good advice, to sit in *muraqabah* for ten minutes, in those *latā'if* and those transmissions. If you sit with the people of *dhikr*, not only do you remember Allah, but something else happens. You are going to now become conscious of your own heedlessness, and you will awaken to that *nafs lawwama*.

If you sit with such people, you will not become upset or miserable or feel at a loss. And yet, he says, "*I have masters. Because of their might, their feet are upon their brows. If I am not among them, I might have might and rank in their love. Know that this is rida.*" (In this case *rida* might translate as "pleased.") It means when you are in the company of such people not only are you pleased, but you are pleasing to them. When you are with someone that you love, and you are not distracted, heedless or angry; when you are in a group with people who are so uplifting that you are so pleased to be there, they are equally pleased that you are present. They are not drawing from your energy, because their strengths are sapped. They are not trying to pull you into something. They are giving and receiving.

When you have the *adab*, and when you come out of your state of *nafs ammāra* (in the

Shadhdhilī teaching they say, “you adorn yourself with abasement and contrition”), it means you are humble. You are contrite about your own weaknesses that you are now seeing because you are in the company of such people. You wouldn’t see it if you were in the company of the other people. Only in the company of the good people do you see it. If you have the courage and humility to be contrite, then that humility gives you clear sight of your own self and of who you are. He’s saying to come out of yourself. Throw yourself down and be contrite. And in that, *“you’ll taste the pleasure of the presence. Seek help in that by clinging to silence.”* He doesn’t mean just verbal silence, but quiescence. *“And let the light of joy and happiness overflow on you and be silent internally.”* And be silent externally. Realize that the only knowledge you have is the knowledge of the beauty of the company of those people.

This is the environment that is constructed for us—if we can put our attention on it, and not become so distracted by whatever is happening in day to day life—that will lead us through the different stations of *nafs* and stages of development, and seven levels of awakening, and all the different steps and states. One of the masters of the Khwaja Khwajagān said it this way:

When anyone wants to live with Allah, he must wash with the holy water of truth. And each time he washes, he returns himself to his real self. But he must open his heart and ears to be washed in the water that takes him from this earth and this body to the world of the soul and the heart of Allah. He is cleansed of everything and reborn in the heart. Everyone needs to walk, to return, to live in that real freedom. This is the true place of the birth before one came into this world. You are like a child who first drinks milk from the mother. After a while, he eats food. In the same way, you walk step by

step to know yourself. If you open your heart, you can; and he will help you. No one can reach to be the complete light in a dark world, unless Allah helps him walk through those stations.

I take the hand of the student and walk him through each station, making the way easy for him, guiding him from the darkness to the light. I give my heart to any student to help him to know Allah. If you can give your heart, then you understand what I mean. Go through me and go through my children. If you give everything in one day, He will give you everything in one day. If you give everything in one hour, He will give everything to you in one hour. This is difficult, but at the same time, it is easy.

What you must do is remember the name of Allah. Do not listen to any other voice, only the voice of Allah, for He wants to help you. Remember the name of Allah as you pray and walk. Continue and do not stand still: give mercy and strive hard. After that, you will walk through the stations of completion. There is no end to that walking. If you begin to know the secret, you can touch it inside yourself and you can know the meaning of everything. But first walk from station to station to understand just the meaning of what it means to walk.

He goes on to talk about the stations. In every station that you walk, by definition, you become closer to Allah, which means more awakened to Allah. I like particularly what this *shaykh* said about the seven stations, his definitions of them. They are not normal definitions. He says,

Nafs ammāra is listening to the orders from darkness. Nafs lawwama is the station of still questioning. Nafs al-amina is the station of faith and trustfulness. Nafs al-mutma'inna is the station of security. Nafs al-radiyya: not obeying anything from the nafs. Nafs al-mardiyya: accepting without asking. And insani kamil: the perfection of the nafs itself.

Aren't those nice? This is a very beautiful way. Then he goes into each one, like the seven stations of the heart, of *rūh*, and of *sirr*, and the seven stations of all of them.

In the seven stations of the heart, these are the things to practice: tawbah, returning to Allah; taslim, surrendering to Allah; adab, politeness; al-khawf, the fear of Allah; al-sidq, the station of righteousness; al-haqiqa, the station of truth; and al-mahabba, the station of love.

This is what happens in the heart. Another time, I'll give you more about that. This is the merging of these two Orders.

You wrote me a question, and you ended it with, how can you love a metaphor? If everything is a metaphor, and Allah is not a being, how do you love Allah? Think about it. I'm not going to ask you if you love your wife. But your wife is not a metaphor; she's a reality. (Remember, I'm not asking you the question.) You can understand how you can love a reality, yes? Good - explain it to me. What is it we love? It was a beautiful day today, I loved it! Did you love today? What is that we love, really? Isn't it assigned, in a sense? We assign it to an individual. We investigate it and develop it. It's in front of it, and the person is in front of us, and we try to remember it. Isn't it something that's

assigned? You assign that capacity of love to an individual, and they accept it. Then there are ways of sustaining it, maintaining it, or losing it, abusing it, forgetting it, being distracted from it, destroying it—even sometimes unintentionally. I could drive around my driveway very fast, skid, and run into the tree and destroy it. It could happen. If I did that, I would be negligent. It would be hard to destroy that tree: it's in the ground; Allah is watering it; it's growing. I would have to do something to it to destroy it. And people do that.

I do talk about dynamic systems, but the engine in that system is love, compassion, and mercy. It's love that makes you attracted/*jedhb*. It's love that makes you sustain, even at times when there is difficulty and disagreement. Sometimes you feel you keep coming back for more abuse. "If I say this, I'm going to be blamed. If I say that, I'm going to be blamed." If it's all a Divine System, how do you love a system? You don't love the system. The system operates on love. You are given a capacity to love, and you become resonant with that system. In that system, Allah gives us microcosms of experiences of love, compassion, mercy, truth, and trust and all these things, which we tend to screw up pretty badly.

The point is, you don't love a system. The system itself is powered by love. When you have the capacity to love another individual, nature, beauty, truth, [and when you are] in the company of the good people, that love is sustained. You remember it, *dhikr*. If we are all *fuqara*, we can't sit together without remembering Allah. If you sit together in any group of 2, 4, 6 or 8 of you, and there is no mention of Allah, then you are not of the *fuqara* in that moment. When you have that kind of love, it's not that you just talk about God. You know that you are talking about Allah when you are sharing the beauties of nature and truth (and also the stresses and vicissitudes of life), but from your heart, from

your soul, with contrition and, as he says, with abasement. You don't wait until someone abases you. You don't wait until you are beaten into contrition. You, yourself, are contrite. You abase yourself. It is a very, very high form of life.

So you don't love a system. You don't love a metaphor. The metaphor/*majāz* is something specifically created by Allah for us to express that awe and that sense of beauty. Because if we just detail it – a maple tree, 17 feet tall, with red leaves, in the fall – what do you get from that? You need some kind of metaphor, or you need to see it. You need to match it with your heart and your sense of beauty and majesty. You can't just describe it. "I love my wife, because she is 5'1", brown eyes..." Why? The poet in you has to come out. Maybe you don't express it in words. Maybe you express it in a drawing, or in spoken words, with emotion, love, with gifts, kindness and trust. It's a big thing...deep. That's the answer to your question.