

December 16, 2009

Wednesday



Title: [How to Study the Rules of the Order](#)

DVD title: The Way of Studying the Rules of the Order:
How to Make them Active in Daily Life

Dinner blessing: O Allah, we ask You for Your *Shifat*. Many people are ill, and we are hopeful that You will send Your Blessings of healing to them, and that we will be able to serve better in this way. And fulfill our hopes and dreams for our children by giving us success in our work, humility in our day to day life, good *adab* in our behavior toward one another, and a means to deepen our faith and our belief in our practices, so that our thoughts, words, and actions reflect that which is good. Let us be among those people considered to be good people. *Amin*.

Suhbat: *Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm*. The Rules of the Order are also called *sirri*, secrets. The reason for that was not because they were secret, but because a person who was studying and working in the ‘*ālam al-amr* (the world of command: *qalb, rūh, sirr, khafī* and *akhfā*), who was a student of the Khwajāgān and later, Naqshbandiyya and Mujaddidiyya, usually started with a transmission called *ahadiyat*. This was oneness, the transmission of unity. There were about 34 transmissions in the original set of transmissions. They were also given the Rules of the Order to study, and the way of studying them has pretty well been forgotten.

In some places it was emphasized. It was emphasized in some of the *khanaqahs* of the Northwest territories in Pakistan and in Afghanistan, and trickled down into parts of India. In India, most recently, it was studied formally by descendants of the Pathans or the Naqshbandī-Mujaddidīs whose lineage comes down to Idries

Shah and those people. But it goes way back. They were called secrets because when combined with *muraqabah* in the *latā'if*, the reality of these Rules would emerge from the individual, enough for the individual to identify which Rule of the Order was emerging. In other words, you would be schooled in the Rules of the Order.

You all know them by memory. From the earliest days of this *khanaqah*, I had people memorize the Rules of the Order. We recite them every Saturday night. You all know them, I think.

Because they studied them and not just read them, they would recognize through the *latā'if* and in their day to day life which Rule or Rules were rising to the surface of the consciousness. The mere fact that one studies them and works with them was seen, historically, as a commitment, a commitment to following certain of these Rules. Every tradition and culture has certain guidelines and rules, and a person who understands that tradition and culture is, in effect, committed to those guidelines. They are also reference points. Since traditions or cultures don't exist outside of people, and they exist because of people, when someone is committed to acting within a certain religious or cultural or spiritual tradition, then it stands to reason that one should know what that commitment entails. The difference between just plain cultural activity – and all cultures are mostly assumptions people agree to but don't necessarily think about. They assume that everyone else in their cultural milieu operates from the same basic assumptions. This is a pretty well accepted definition of culture, among people who teach cultures. It would stand to reason that one would like to understand what their commitment to these Rules means.

These are not just cultural rules. They were guidelines handed down by people who had achieved a certain state, a certain *maqam*, a certain level of reflection and

understanding. By definition, if one were to commit to those, one could assume that commitment would be a replacement of one term of reference to another, or a previous term of reference to these new terms of reference, the Rules of the Order. They are not the rules of society of the Pathans, or the Pakistanis, or the Indians, or even just the Muslims. They are a very specific frame of reference that are used by the Sufis of the Khwaja Khwajāgān and later, by the Naqshbandī Tarīqah. The expectation is you study these Rules. Among the *shuyukh*, you would be given ways to study them, and the assumption is if you study them correctly, your life will reflect them. This is not unusual: you find it anywhere. The Ten Commandments. We must remember the Jews didn't get the Ten Commandments until they went out of Egypt. They existed a long time before that, a thousand years maybe. Moses brought the Ten Commandments.

Why don't you recite them, and bring them to the front of your memory? (The assembly recites.)

When you give *bai'at*, when you commit to this teaching, just like anything else, you expect to know what it is about. When you read or recite these rules, you can see pretty well that they are very comprehensive, internally and externally. Indeed, what you come to realize is they can apply day to day, moment to moment, in your personal, work, and professional life and actions. As you absorb them, you realize that they are supportive, nourishing. They exert a force or influence over the way you act and the way you think, over your inner self. Because of this process, as one absorbs these Rules and follows them, certain actions can be taken that produce, externally, a way in which you can see the action of that Rule of the Order in the moment.

It's not like you take one or two Rules and say, "Today is Monday. I'm going to follow this Rule. Under all circumstances, I will watch my steps." [But] you could

be sitting down all day, [and] circumstances change throughout the day. Whether it's internal or external, professional or within your family, by yourself or in a group, whether you are in good health or bad health, tired or awake, energized or not—all these different things happen throughout the day. You cannot just say, “Today I am going to watch my breath.” Aside from the fact that if you do that, something quite unnatural is happening. You are imposing upon yourself a restriction. From our point of view, you would be not allowing what is natural to come about, and therefore not be dealing with reality in a real way. So, how do you deal with these? First of all, you don't see them just as some kind of a functional tool. You have to be very careful that your assumption about the rule doesn't determine, or isn't so restrictive, that it obviates or eclipses what is necessary in the moment for you to contemplate.

How do you use these Rules as the situations in day to day life change? As you meet different people, as your thought patterns go through different changes, you try to make them harmonize with you and with one another. Of course you can say, “Today I'm going to fast and sit at home in a room, make a *khilwa* and contemplate these Rules.” You can do that; that's fine. But it would require you to change your normal pattern. You could go into *itikāf* or *khilwa* for a day or two or three. You could fast, and contemplate the Rules or learn them and become familiar with them. That's okay. You can do that with the Rules, the meditation, the *latā'if*, where you're going to take responsibility and contemplate things over a day or two or three. But in the normal day to day life, the people you meet, the situations you encounter, the feelings you have change a lot.

As Sufis, the guidance we try to give a student of Tasawwuf is to bring everything into your Tasawwuf, everything into the context of your Islam. Yet, if you do that by some kind of a method where you are imposing the guidelines on your life, then you are inhibiting your own development. Not only that, you very well may

be inhibiting your communication with people, and your professional responsibilities. If you are practicing watching your breath, and you have a day of business meetings, someone will think you are pretty crazy (Shaykh acts out breathing and trying to participate in a meeting.) It sounds ridiculous, and it is. In other words, you can't fit the situations in life into the context of these Rules that you've already decided upon how you are going to do it.

We are back to *tadbīr*, choosing not to choose. You have to be familiar, ready, there, and know what they are. You have to be committed to them because you have committed yourself to that understanding, but you can't impose them. The tendency is to try to impose them. The didactic form of education or learning is, "I'm going to learn this and practice this today." Maybe you find yourself in a situation where you have to make a decision. There is a necessity, and you have to act in some way. Because of that, you run through all these Rules of the Order in your mind, and you pick this one and that one which you think will help you, guide you, encourage you, or create some understanding or creativity in your mind, or the specific circumstance you find yourself in.

You say to yourself, "I have this meeting with a very important person at 2:00. I want to be able to influence that person's mind." You try to magically pick the right Rule of the Order, and watch your breathing, and watch carefully how you walk into the room, and then you're going to remember Allah in the middle of the meeting.... You have it all planned out. You are still trying to predict something. This is not a magical situation. You can, of course, influence the situation today or tomorrow or in the future, but you are probably not going to do that by tarot cards and psychic phenomena. You do know [the recitation of] "*kaf ha ya ain sad*" from Hizb ul Bahr.

You know there is a situation, and you go into that situation prepared like you go into any meeting prepared. You carry a positive attitude into that meeting or contact, or situation, or just your day, and you divorce yourself from the emotions of it. “Oh, this is going to be tough meeting. I’m going to have a hard time with this. This person has a real reputation.” That’s negative, and if you put aside what you know (in this case we’re talking about the Rules of the Order, but it can be other things), and you just decide to react however you will react in the meeting, then you are just being a reactive individual. But if you take the time to think, and you take the time to apply the specific knowledge that you have, then when you go into a meeting, you hear what is being said. You think about it, and you have a measured response. You are positive, and because you are well-disciplined and you know your area of expertise, you are not just reacting in the moment but you are responding.

Then you have at your command [these Rules], because you have memorized them. You know them; you have thought about them and you have studied them. You have within your ability the opportunity to draw from these Rules of the Order. It’s very important that we as seekers in this way, on this journey, draw from our knowledge. If you are someone, for example who works with other people on a daily basis, and you are in contact with a lot of people, and you take the concept of *khilwa anjaman* (solitude amidst the crowd); you can’t have the attitude, “Oh, I wish these people would just leave me alone.” You are working every day with people. You can’t just say, I’m going to pick up and walk away from this situation. If you understand what “solitude amidst the crowd” really means, and how the methodology of going within your own self and feeling secure in your own inner awareness; if you have the experience of being in that Divine Presence, then you can draw from these rules.

The context of these rules (watching your steps, recollection, time pause, heart pause, remembrance) has to be within the context of a certain mentality of humility and of sincerity. You can't take them one by one and work with them, use them in your day to day life. They have to come from within you. They come from within a person who has a certain type of *khawf*/fear; a certain type of necessity, need. Fear in the sense of necessity. When a person's development of their *nafs*/ego is at a point where they can actually embrace the idea that they have *khawf* and *raja*h (fear and hope), then these things that one recites, the Rules of the Order, reveal secrets to that individual. They bring from within the individual an understanding of recollection, an understanding of time pause, of heart pause. Without this foundation in *ikhlas*, *khawf*, *raja*h, and *rida*, without this Islamic foundation, the Sufi will be nothing but a person who is perpetuating tradition, a person who is repeating by rote rules and regulations and guidelines which they, themselves, have not engendered.

When someone asked Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra) about *khawf*, he said that there are different kinds of *khawf*/fear. There's the *khawf* of someone who has done something wrong and feels guilty about it. There is the kind of anxiety that applies to a person who does worshipful practice. Then there is the kind of fear, *khashiya*, apprehension that applies to the person who is an *alim*. Then there is the kind of *wajal*/timidity that applies to the lovers. There is a kind of awe that applies to those who know by direct experience something—the *'arifin*. The fear experienced by the sinner is the fear that punishment will come to them. The fear of the worshiper is due to the uncertainty about the spiritual reward of their acts, and they don't know if they will be rewarded by Allah for all these things.

The fear of the person who has knowledge, an *alim*, is of committing *shirk*. They fear some hidden *shirk* they are not seeing. [They have this fear] because they are *alims*, and want to do everything exactly right or they feel that are associating

something with Allah. The fear experienced by the lovers is the fear they might miss the meeting with the beloved. The fear experienced by those who know, the *ārifin*, (the Sufis who know by direct experience) is a kind of reverence or awe. This is the most intense kind of fear. All those other fears will fade away: the fear of being punished by the sinner will go away when he is punished. But the fear of the ‘*ārifin* won’t go away. In all the other ones, Allah shows His Mercy or Compassion. When the result takes place, even if something bad is done, even if there is hidden *shirk*, or the lover fears missing the beloved, the Love and Mercy and Compassion of Allah comes, and the fear is lifted. But for the ‘*ārifin*, it never goes away, because this is the awe and reverence one feels for Allah.

As *khawf* progresses (I’m just using *khawf* as one example. I’ll also use *rida* tonight), then these Rules of the Order you should memorize and study and try to understand. Don’t try to apply them as much as you try to understand them. How you apply them is that you learn to see the opportunity. You are in a group of people, and you find there is a lot of distraction that is coming into your mind, and you are not able to operate as well as you normally are able to. You allow recollection to come into your mind. Or you are in a group of people, and there is a lot of distraction coming. You see that what you need to do is withdraw from the conversation for a few minutes, listen to what is going on, remember what your values and principles are, and then try to bring compassion to it.

Now you have three of the Rules: solitude amidst the crowd, recollection, and *wuqūf-i-qalbi*. The reason you are doing this is you have a sense of anxiety and apprehension about what will happen if you don’t do it. If you are a Sufi and an ‘*arif*, then you are in awe of the whole process itself. In the same way, when Abdul Qadir Jilani (ra) was asked about *rida* (hope), he said, “*As far as the awliyā are concerned, hope means having a good opinion of Allah. It has nothing to do with desiring any benefit. It has nothing to do with the removal of harm, because*

those who are worthy are the people of sainthood, and know full well Allah has taken care of all their needs. That knowledge makes them realize the value of being transparent, fana. To have a good opinion of Allah is more meritorious than hope itself.”

“*But,*” he says, “*hope cannot exist without fear.*” Because if someone hopes to achieve something, then they are bound to fear they might lose it. If you have a good opinion of Allah, it means you recognize Allah in the beauty of His Attributes/*Sifat*, and you base your expectations of Him on what is relevant to Him, not what is relevant to you, what’s meaningful to Allah, not what is meaningful to you. So you are sitting in a meeting. You have these Rules of the Order, and internally you are mapping out what you are going to say. You are actually physically going to approach a person; you are watching your steps. You see that you are anxious, so now you watch your breath. Then you bring compassion to it and watch your heart.

You see what is relevant in the moment, and you see it is *fī sabīli-Llāh*, not for your own benefit. You have your work, your business, Legacy, whatever your work is. Of course you want the benefit to come to your work, but you have to remember what that work is for. You want to remember this is for the highest value of humanity. You want what you are doing to be beneficial. Therefore, you know that the work you are doing, the intention that you have is good. You know it is not just for your personal benefit. You know that whatever benefit comes to you, it is because benefit has come from someone else. So you do what is relevant for Allah. That’s what *fī sabīli-Llāh* means.

This expectation has to be based on the knowledge that Allah’s *Sifāt*/Attributes include beneficence, generosity, compassion, subtleties and graciousness, kindness and mercy. You know that. Now your application of these Rules is empowered by

that knowledge, that Presence, because you have given *bai'at*. You have been given these guidelines and secrets, but they become alive in the context of your awe and your hope. To have a good opinion of Allah really means to attach your own hopes and aspirations—whatever experience you have had of the Divine Presence, the compassion, mercy, love, the patience, the tolerance, the miracles, the kindness, the *ummah*, the benefits of prayer, the company of good people, your hopes and previous experiences—and direct your heart toward Allah in a way that is positive and hopeful (full of hope) that your good intentions will be fulfilled.

Now you have extra ways of making that happen. You watch your breath. This is a state of remembrance. You recollect your thoughts. You are moving towards your goal. You are restraining your actions, all these things. Nothing can come that you don't know, and nothing is useable that you can't define. You have to know these things, and have the definitions in your mind, but allow them to come naturally. Everybody has hopes. But for something to be called *rajah*, the hope has to be valid and deserving; otherwise, people will say it's hope, but it's no longer *rajah*. It is greed. So there has to be this kind of sense of *khawf*.

Abdul Qadir said, “*When you have hope without fear, it is a sense of security. Fear without hope is despair.*” I think maybe that was a little better way of explaining how these things are used. The Prophet (sal) said, “***If the fear of the true believer could be weighed, and his hope could be weighed, the two would not be equal in weight.***” The implication is, at least in my understanding, you need to have more *khawf* in order to have sufficient *rida*. The more awe and fear you have (in the sense of the ‘*ārif*), the more overwhelmed you are, the stronger your hope will be.

Again, if we are sitting in *muraqabah*, that's one thing. If you are contemplating the Rules of the Order, that's another thing. But if you are in your day to day life,

the issue is how do you bring those Rules of the Order to become active, so you know that is what is happening? “Ah, I’m in a state of recollection. Ah, I am watching my breath.”

In watching your breath, you see the result. How do you do that? You establish the foundation for that in your relationship with the Divine Presence in *muraqabah*. You establish your ability to do that by knowing them and bringing them to the forefront of your mind. You can study them like anything else, but not controlling them. Do you understand? I don’t know if I did very well in explaining this to you tonight. You can do with it what you will.

Q&A

Student: You said you have to study the rule but not control it. I’m not sure how one would control it.

Shaykh: Don’t try, unless you are sitting in meditation or *khilwa* at a time when you are just studying the rules. In your day to day life, don’t try to select a Rule and then put it to use; rather, allow that Rule or that secret to come to you and note that is what it is. The only way that happens is when you are totally familiar with something. Then you can recognize what it is. In every profession, a person in that profession does that. Something happens, and they recognize what it is. Also, human beings have this very strong tendency to try to make something happen. That’s why I gave you that ambiguous example. You want to win someone over, or get their assistance for something, so you have an intention to get something to happen. But you don’t try to do something magical to get it to happen. Even “*kaf ha ya ain sad*” from Hizb ul Bahr has to be understood properly.

You are trying to create a situation where goodness, compassion, and mercy, the Attributes of Allah, can dominate. To do that, you use all the skill you have and all the ability you have been given and the tools you have, to make that happen. But you are not trying to make something happen for your own selfish interests. You are not trying to take a Rule and apply it; rather, as you see the circumstance, your knowledge of that Rule comes to the surface, and then you take what's on the surface. You don't go looking for it. Does that make sense? That's why I use the word *latīf*; the subtlety of it is very, very important.

This is why you find among the really adept *awliyā*, the really adept Sufis, these incredible capabilities to create situations or move things. It looks like a power, but it's not really that. It's being able to seize the moment in the proper way, because you are using the right tools for it. They are tools, not some kind of magic formula. When you observe what that tool does, it looks like magic. It's like saying, a chisel in the hand of a sculptor creates the kind of statuary the Greeks created, or things of great beauty. But in the wrong hands, the tool doesn't do anything. You have to have the combination of what the tool is, which are the Rules; and the individual who knows how to use them.

If you grab the tool but you are not ready to use it, it will not do anything good. I could be talking about law, or Shar'īah. I could be talking about *hudūd*, it doesn't matter. I could be talking about the rules and regulations that all these Salafis and Wahabis throw at people. You see what it does. It kills the human spirit. It kills creativity. It makes things *bida* that are not *bida*. It's terrible. They take rules and regulations and force them on situations, instead of having them evolve in a normative way. These are not rules like how many times a day you pray. These are ways of character development. They have to come at the right time, under the right circumstances. But you have to see that's what they are. You have to take them, consciously. Otherwise, you are just in a cultural, traditional frame of mind

and you are not changing. You have to change in order to ascend in consciousness. At least, most people do.

Khalil: You said in order to use a rule you need to be able to define it. That made me think, in order to use a rule, I don't have to understand it.

Shaykh: What I meant by that is, you have to understand its applicability. Understand it means someone who understands it has to help you understand what it is. Over thirty-five years, I've talked about the Rules of the Orders probably a hundred times at least, and every time, there is something new to say about it. As obvious as it may be, "watching your steps" doesn't mean don't slip on the ice. There are depths to these things. We need guidance in how to understand them. I'm talking about absorbing them.

Student: You said something that clarified everything, but I lost it. I hope you can help me get it back... you were talking about when the Sufi applied the rules, when they weren't trying to control it...

Shaykh: When you set aside your own desires and your own personal interests, then...

Student: It was because you had such awe of the process.

Shaykh: You have achieved this level of the '*ārifin* where you have this kind of *khawf* and awe of the Divine Presence, and that never ends. So in that awe, you are not involved in your *nafs*. When you are in this state of awe, you know you cannot control. You go outside and see the stars at night, you are in awe of the stars. The last few nights the stars have been beautiful. There is no thought in your mind that you can control it; that you have anything to do with that. You are merely an

observer of it. You have no control over it. All you can do is control whether you see it or not by closing your eyes. There is nothing you can do. An *'ārif* is in that state of awe a lot, if not all the time. You are still walking under the stars. You still have things to do at home. But you carry with it this understanding that in reality, you can't do anything about anything, except what you can do something about, that you are allowed to, that you are permitted to, that you have the capacity to. But you should remember, it is for the sake of Allah, for something good. If you keep it in the context of doing it for something good, then even the work you do that you *can* have some apparent control over, you are assigning it to Allah. Just like the stars are assigned to Allah.

So you carry that sense of awe into the things you normally have control over—and you do, to some extent. You can decide whether to turn on the light or turn off the light, or make a phone call or not. You can even decide whether to be friendly or not friendly, or kind or not kind, or appreciative or not. You can make certain decisions like that, but the more you are in awe, the more those decisions will be positive. The more they are positive, the more they will reflect those Rules and the *niyyat*, the purpose of human existence, human life. Do you follow? You have to have that fear or that *khawf*, that awe in order to accomplish anything good, to have the hope that anything good will come about.

Again, I don't mean to get political, but people in Washington, they have no fear. They don't think they are sinners, so they are worried about being punished. They may think they are worshipers, but they don't have the fear of the worshiper. They may think they are lovers, but they don't have the fear of the loss of their beloved. They have no fear of punishment or retribution. (I'm using Christian terms, not our terms). Remember what I said, Allah can always step in with compassion and mercy for all of those except for the *'ārifin*. The *'ārif* never loses

his awe, his *khawf* in the form of awe and humility. But those people have no humility; they have no shame. *Asalaam Aleikum*.