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Thursday



Title: The Rules of the Order: Solitude Amidst the Crowd

DVD title: The Rules of the Order: Solitude Amidst the Crowd
Developing the Capability of Detachment

Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. We have discussed this *safar dar watān*. What else did we discuss? *Nazar bar qadam*: watching your steps. Today we will discuss *khalwat dar anjuman*: solitude amidst the crowd. In journeying in one's homeland: *safar dar watān*, we talked about the *salik* turning away from some of the human attributions. We talked about the subtlety of that process and the positive ness of that process. Another way of saying it is if one turns away from the human qualities toward the angelic qualities. It implies, of course, that these are the positive. We adopt the qualities of the angels, the *malak*. When we do that, our heart becomes like a mirror which reflects the images of what is real. The heart itself signs with the lights of the Divine Presence. In the heart, one has epiphanies. In this state, the *salik* will have continual remembrance, recitations along with their breath. We will talk about that later when we talk about the *wuquf*.

In the *khilwat dar anjuman*, we develop the ability to detach ourselves from circumstances, distractions, things that are distractions, confusing, that, in a sense, steal our energy. It is called *khilwat* because it is like in retirement. We retire to the company of our own self, our inner solitude. We do this for a brief period of time. It does not mean that we end our associations with the world. It means that we develop the ability to be alone in the midst of distractions, in the midst of others, in the midst of crowds. We are able to distance ourselves from tension. We are able to distance ourselves from things that disturb us by using remembrance/*dhikr*. [It will take] different forms: watching our breath will be

one form. Remembrance as a Name of Allah is another form. There are many forms of *dhikr*. We use it for a brief amount of time. One of the most brief ways, we call the *wuquf qalbi*, the ones that Bauhudin Naqshbandi (ra) added. We say: Turn your attention to your heart and say three times the name of Allah. This is a brief form of *khilwat dar anjuman*. The idea is that it is not how long you detach yourself, it is the quality of your detachment. It is the capability you develop to protect yourself or defend yourself from the onslaught of distractions, or from people or circumstances. This is done with the help of the *murshid*, the *shaykh*, who will give certain instructions, certain du'a to be used in *khilwat dar anjuman*.

This ability to be able to detach yourself from your circumstances or your surroundings, really is a means of detaching yourself from things that create tension or difficulties. Because circumstances, even just noisy circumstances create tension. If you are, I think I told you this story, every time recently I have had to go to a restaurant, we find ourselves sitting next to a group of boisterous people who are probably drinking alcohol or something, laughing loudly as though they are in the privacy of their own home. They have no concern for anybody, no concern for anybody else, as if they own the place. The last time we, Mitra and I, went to a restaurant, I picked up and walked to the other side of the restaurant and got another table. Not only is there no *adab*, it was also distracting, and it caused great tension.

This concept of *khilwat dar anjuman* is also to reduce tension. You detach yourself from circumstances that are hostile to having *sakina*/tranquility. You have to realize the importance of that. These people who will think badly of us anyway, and who don't give a darn about us anyway, and who couldn't concern themselves about anyone around them anyway, why are we hesitating to get up and move to another table? We don't want to be thought badly of by people who are ignorant and coarse? But we have that feeling. It is very important to realize

that you need the strength and courage to move towards this tranquility, towards this *sakina*, to reduce the tension. It is not to keep yourself purposely in a tense situation.

Remember this is not to retreat yourself to a mountain cave. This is for a brief period of time. Why? Because if the idea of *khilwat dar anjuman* is that you never have any kind of tension or you just protect yourself all the time, then it is counterproductive. You have to be able to operate within the context of the world, but you have to be able to at will do the things and choose to do the things that bring you tranquility and solitude. This ability to detach ourselves from those problems and situations has to be accompanied by the willingness to do it. It is a form of transferring, in a way. It is said that when you go out, turn down your water heater and turn off your lights. It is a way to close off certain things that are not necessary. If you are not using it, shut it down. If you are not using it, turn it off. If you need it, leave it on, to whatever degree you need to leave it on, whether your attention, your sight, your hearing, your sense of smell.

If you have to pay attention to something by hearing, some people close their eyes to listen better—shut off your eyes. If you have to watch something, shut down your ears, so you are not distracted by other senses. Each sense that you use, each thought that you have takes some kind of energy, some kind of attention. The idea is that eventually to pay attention only to what needs to be attended to, to pay attention to Allah, to pay attention to that Divine Presence through whatever means you can best pay attention in that moment. You should retire from everything else. So you can also call it retirement in the company of others. You retire from the things that are not necessary.

You close down certain things and open up others. You do what is necessary. You don't exert energy that you do not need—conserving and directing of energy.

The purpose is to achieve a certain kind of detachment or solitude or retirement of things for three minutes, five minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, or 40 minutes in meditation. Then you move back into the circumstances. But you develop the skill that you can direct that energy in other ways, to detach oneself and attach oneself to Allah. It can be both a defense against things that are distracting and take your energy, and a process that develops your capability, your capacities, your sensitivities. Every day in our life, we experience situations or periods of time where we are distracted or cause tension or cause frustration. To be able to retire from that state is *khilwat dar anjuman*.

The other thing is to realize that those distractions should be considered to be negative. The process of turning your attention away from them, removing your attention from those circumstances and keeping only what is necessary is a way of developing more capacity and more sensitivity. As you do this, you realize that you are doing this in the midst of a process of being given transmissions in different *latā'if* and different transmissions. You have capabilities, other tools that you are developing, things to focus on other than those distractions. It is not just removing yourself from a distraction, but you are involved in something else. You are involved in a certain developmental process through transmission.

You are not sitting in meditation, necessarily. Maybe you are sitting in a car in a traffic jam. But your *niyyah* should be operating. If you are in a state of ritual purity, if your intention is right, then, instead of sitting there and complaining, as most of us do, stuck in traffic, or some situation, if you retreat in the *dhikr*, then your *niyyah* is operating. Do you understand? This is multi-dimensional. Just like there is the law of the Universe on conservation of energy, this is a spiritual conservation of energy.

This *khilwat dar anjuman* is part of the process of day to day life. It is not some sort of monastic process where, defensively or fearfully or for some apparent spiritual purpose, a person retires entirely from the world and stays away from people. Rather, you could even say that the distractions or the circumstances that necessitate you to choose this temporary retirement, momentary retirement, are given for exactly that purpose, so you can choose to turn away from them. Aside from the psychological knowledge that you can handle a situation better if you isolate the variables in that situation, you don't allow yourself to be pulled in.

In effect what you are doing is you are in a situation or with a person and you are measuring. You say: "Well, in order for me to sit here and listen to this person talk who drives me up a wall, I have to take a certain portion of my consciousness and remove it from the circumstance. Circumstances require me to be here, but I don't have to put my full attention to what is happening. I only give the necessary attention. The rest of it is being retrieved, going into myself. This is also "solitude amidst the crowd" on an individual basis. As you do that, you have to understand that you are creating a positive energy, a positive force.

Our predecessors, in teaching how to withdraw your attention from the worldly things (for example, as you sit in *muraqabah*) [show you how] you are gaining *baraka*. You are generating positive force, positive energy. For the period of time that you are doing that, you are retiring. For the period of time that you do that, the positive energy is going to stay with you. The trials and tribulations, the vicissitudes, the challenges of life that play in your mind all the time, the telephone call you just got, the confusion you have about something, the problem at work, the misunderstanding you just had at home, these things are provided to us by Allah so that we can learn how to develop the capabilities that we have to learn how to be in control of ourselves, and to be able to watch our steps, to be able to travel in one's homeland. Everything has a purpose.

From the point of view of the Khwajā Khwajāgān, these situations in life are there so that we can develop these Rules of the Order, and use them as a means of understanding our role in life and how to balance our life. You have to have the possibility for total distraction in order to be able to pull away and to be able to select only what to attend to. If you knew what you had to attend to, you say, “Well, you attend to Allah, to the Divine Presence.” But how do you do that? Allah also provides the distractions that we practice with. As you realize that and you watch that—as we said last night, watch how you generate your thoughts and your consciousness—then you realize that everything really is created for a purpose.

Now, we over react; we are overly sensitive. We use our senses too much. We react visually. Then we react orally. We show disgust in a certain way. But we have to know only what to do, what to measure. What is sufficient and necessary is there; what is excessive is removed. When things are sufficient and what is necessary, then you are generating positive thoughts, positive energy, positive circumstances. This is not an escape. “Solitude amidst the crowd” is not an escape. When you focus on this Rule of the Order, the means have been given to you by your *shaykh*, but your ability to practice this rule is up to you. If I walk into a room and see that you are tense about something, and say, “*Khilwat dar anjuman*” and you know exactly what I mean. But you are living your life every day through circumstances, and you have to be able to tell yourself “*Khilwat dar anjuman*.” I give you the means; you have to be able to use it.

If you are going to say, “Every time I get into my car, I am just going to retire to ‘solitude amidst the crowd’ and do *dhikr*. That is what I am going to do every time I get in the car.” Well, you are not always going to be tense every time you get into the car. Maybe you get in the car with someone you love, and you are

going to have a wonderful conversation. But you decide instead that you are going to [do this] practice, because you have been tense in the car before. You decide that every time you get in the car you are going to practice *khilwat dar anjuman*. It makes no sense. You might be sitting next to a miserably disgusting person in an airplane, then you practice it. You may be sitting next to someone who is a very interesting individual, then you don't practice it. But you have to have the capability to practice it. You have to have the sensitivity to make that choice.

All these rules are about consciousness, being aware. When you practice it, you do the *dhikr*. You repeat your *niyyah*. Maybe you do *dhikr* with your eyes reading Qur'an. But you understand something else. And that is that you are connected with a tradition that is very old and very proven. There is a certain *madad* that comes with it. You get assistance from the tradition itself. Christians say, "I love Christmas. I always feel so good at Christmas." Why? Because they have pleasant memories from Christmas and there is a tradition. They like the tree and they like the egg nog and the Christmas carols. They retreat from the world into Christmas. We retreat from the world in Ramadan or in 'Eid. There is a different energy that goes with them.

You also realize that when you are sitting in meditation and you have made your *niyyah* and you are drifting (and I mean drifting, not sleeping), you are still aware at a very subtle level. You are aware of where you are and what you are doing. But you are in that *ghunūgi*, that state of drifting. You have removed yourself from the distractions; you are aware of where you are and you are in this state of drifting. In other words, you leave part of your mind aware in order to watch and monitor the situation of where you are and what you are doing; but another part of your consciousness moves to a whole other level. At that level, you are doing

another kind of work, another kind of attention and you are creating positive energy, positive blessing.

You see it in nature. You see it in the cat who is sleeping, but with the slightest move, the cat opens its eyes like this. The cat doesn't wake up slowly, but looks attentively. It retires from total awareness to partial awareness of the external world. If you are following this practice of "*khilwat dar anjuman*, solitude amidst the crowd," it is important that you are very careful, and that you understand what solitude means. What is solitude? You have to understand that it is beneficial for you (for all of us) to remove ourselves from certain negativities and disturbances or confusions, and retreat into ourselves for a brief period of time and concentrate on our self and our *dhikr*. We came to that conclusion last night with "know your self and know your Lord." I am sure there are people who were given this rule to study, "solitude amidst the crowd," and every time there were more than two people around them, they went and hid in a corner somewhere. But that is not what it means. It is important to know the value of this solitude.

Any questions?

Q: You had talked about in "journey in one's homeland" that you look at yourself without judgment and it seems to me that judgment creates a tension, a dissonance.

S: Yes. Absolutely it does.

Q: Developing a skill of observing without doing [creating a judgment] would inform the ability to have the detachment in "solitude amidst the crowd."

S: Yes. That is correct. Because if you make judgment, you create tension and you will not be able to have “solitude amidst the crowd,” the purpose of which is to rid yourself of tension. Anything else?

Q: I was thinking about “I seek refuge in Him Who Alone exists?” Is that the same thing.

S: Yes. Very good. It is very important to look at these recitations, not just as something that you are reciting. For example, if you say [from the invocation usually recited before *dhikr*], “Let us pray for the blessings of God and the Prophets upon our Pir o Murshid” who is praying? Who is the us? What is your state when you are making that *du’ā*? What would make your prayer effective. If you were tense, if you were distracted, if you are absorbed in something negative, what good would your prayer be? It would have no power. “Let us pray for the blessings of Allah and the Prophets upon our Pir o Murshid, our Silsila, our founder.” If I intellectually ask you if you sincerely want to do that, you say, “Yes.” But you have not divested yourself of your tension.

You have not been able to have “solitude amidst the crowd.” You have not been able to “travel in one’s homeland.” You have not been able to “watch your steps.” So you are in a state where your intention may be good, but you do not have the capacity, the capability of making anything other than a momentary sincerity. In a way I might be able to make the case that we recite that [invocation] after the *dhikr*, because a person after the *dhikr* is going to be in a different state than they are before the *dhikr*. Maybe we should try that once. Do you understand what I mean? We have all the good intention but you are not prepared to. It is like having the best surgeon in the world come in for an emergency surgery after he has spent the last three hours drinking at a wedding. He has the potential skill. But he is compromised.

Try to have a decent conversation with someone after you just had an argument with them. You are wiped out. You don't have the energy. All the positive energy is gone. You say, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. We should not have had that fight." So you have to retire and regain that energy. It is not just gaining energy, you have to change the default. You have to change the foundation. So yes, when you say, "I seek refuge in Him Who Alone exists," that is a form of "solitude amidst the crowd." When you say that Allah is your refuge or the Prophet (sal) is your refuge, it means that this is a source of positive energy and security and safety. It is not just for your own personal security and safety, but to be in harmony. You know where to go. You know how to go there. You know when to go there. Then you have to have the courage to do it. I have been telling you for years and years, this is a very deep recitation. It is very, very deep. Glad you thought of it. *Asalaam aleikum.*