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Thursday

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Title: [Know Why You are in The Souk](#)

DVD title: Stories of the Souk: The Sickness of the Sufi
Stories of Shaykh Yusuf Hamadani (ra)

I talked to you about the sweating clay pot last night. Many examples of your actions are a proof of your attitude, beliefs and reflections of your thoughts. Someone said, “*What is manifest is a clue to what is hidden.*” What we hide is known to Allah (swt), and also to the ones who are chosen among His Servants. If you meet one of them, it is said that you should behave in their presence, and repent of your sins before you go and see them. Be submissive and be small with them, humbling yourself to them. When you humble yourself before the righteous ones; you humble yourself before God Almighty. “*Be humble, for one who is humble will be raised high by his lord. Behave yourself when in the presence of your seniors.*” The Prophet (sal) said, “***There is grace and blessing in your shaykhs.***”

I have been talking about the metaphor of the *souk*. In tonight’s talk, I will carry on or end that metaphor, and move on to some examples, perhaps also. A person goes to the *souk*. It is said, on Monday I go to the *souk* and make great friends and get good prices. I’m very happy. I meet all these wonderful people. They bring me into their shop and give me tea, and we talk about things. They don’t rush me. They listen with rapt attention to what I have to say. Then on Tuesday, I go back to the *souk* and there is some strange attitude there. They didn’t seem as friendly. You walk in and they are talking with someone else and they don’t greet you, just sort of say hello to you. When you inquire about the prices, they aren’t as good today as they were yesterday. But, we made a friendship; and because I was their friend, I bought on the second day also even though the prices weren’t as good. I didn’t want to hurt their feelings. I paid a little more

because I felt comfortable in that place. After all, I had spent a lot of time there the day before. We had tea and talked. I had gone from store to store in the *souk*, and finally came into that store. I spent a lot of time there; met the person, shared some stories. Why not? I'll pay a little more money, and anyhow, I don't want to start all over again with someone else.

On the third day, you go back. Now I'm buying things I don't even want. But you want to show that person you really are their friend. They can trust your loyalty to their shop. Remember, three days ago you didn't know them from Adam. You knew Adam better, because Adam was your father. On the third day, you are not there just to buy the things in the *souk*. You are not there to barter. You don't barter any more. You bartered on the first day and got a good price. The second day, you were a little embarrassed to barter. The third day, you went in and bought just to prove what a good friend you are. Now on the fourth day, you don't even bother to barter. Now you are there to help him out. After all, look at all the rug shops there are, and all the trinket shops. You're going to help that person out, and prove that you are that person's good friend.

As long as you are in that town—probably one you will not come back to, or a *souk* you may never visit again except in ten years. You will go there every day and help him out by buying a few more things, or asking him to get things for you, which he will send a runner to do. You will drink his tea. You don't even notice the prices are going up. You don't barter at the other shops. He says it costs this many dirham, and you don't even ask. You are helping your friend out. I am describing to you the sickness of the Sufi. We make friends very easily, one-sided friends. We act extremely civilly in a very uncivil society, and we wouldn't trade it for anything; but there are things to learn from it. You stand back, and you don't notice it; or you notice it and you don't pay attention to it. You don't even realize that you need some guidance with it; or maybe you do, but Allah protects you.

He allows you to have these one-sided relationships, and benefit from that giving even though the price creeps up a little. It strengthens your *iman*. It doesn't increase your respect for humanity, necessarily; or make you feel that you will change anyone. But you become comfortable in your commitment and giving, in your side of the friendship; but it is a sickness. The only people who can catch that illness, however, are the Sufis. In the 13th century (1205 of the Christian era, 602 of the Hijra), Shaykh Hamid Kemani (ra) was living in the city of Konya. He related this story:

In this town, Khwaja Yusuf Hamadani (qss), one of our great shaykhs, spent more than 60 years of his life in prayer. He sat on the prayer mat of shaykhdom, spiritual guidance for 60 years. He was in his zāwiya one day, and his heart was moved by the desire to go out. That wasn't his custom, because he would only usually leave his prayer mat and meditation and his zāwiya only on Friday for the jumah prayer. The feeling entered his heart and was a very heavy weight on him. He went outside, got on his donkey and set out on the road. He gave his donkey free rein and said, "Wherever Allah(swt) wishes me to go, please carry me there."

The donkey carried him out of the city and moved toward the desert. They came upon a ruined masjid. He saw that someone was sitting with his head bowed down in muraqabah. After a while, that person raised his head. He was a young man filled with awe. He said, "O Yusuf! I have been confronted with a problem that is very difficult to solve." And he recounted to him the problem. The shaykh explained it to him, gave him his answer and said to him, "O my son! Whenever a difficult problem comes to you, come to the city and ask me about it. Don't cause me trouble, forcing me to come out here." The shaykh recounts,, "When I spoke to him like this, the young man said to me, 'Whenever I have a difficult problem, every stone is for me a Yusuf like you.'"

This tale was recounted by Shaykh Ibn Araby (ra). He now makes a *tafsir* on it: “*What I understand from this story is when a disciple is sincere and truthful, his sincerity endows him with the power to move the shaykh to his side.*” You see the heart of the real Sufi, the heart of the *shaykh*, the heart of the *murīd*, may be diseased. But it’s very important that you understand that this disease of true friendship creates an opportunity, a door. I think I’ll tell you another story.

Once upon a time, a few excerpts from the sayings of some of the shuyukh had come into the possession of Najib a-Dīn Buzghush Shirazi (ra), another great shaykh of the Naqshbandiyya. He said, “I studied and studied them carefully, and I found them very pleasing to my soul and my heart. In order to discover what came after them, and to learn whose sayings they were, I embarked on a quest for the missing parts. One night in a dream, I saw a white bearded man, a radiant, dignified elder. He arrived at the center of a khanaqah, and went over to the place for wudu, and performed his wudu. He was wearing a white robe upon which the Qur’anic Verse of the Throne (‘Āyat al-Kursi) was written. It had been written in liquid gold, and the inscription covered the robe from the top to the bottom. I followed in his footsteps, and he removed the robe and handed it to me. Underneath it, he had donned a green robe which was even more beautiful. The throne verse had been inscribed upon it in the same way, in gold, and he handed me that robe also. He said, ‘Take care of these until I finish my wudu.’

After performing his wudu, he said, ‘I shall give you one of these two robes. Which one of them would you like?’ I said, ‘I couldn’t choose between them, so give me whichever one you wish.’ And he presented me with the green robe, and he put on the white robe. He went on to say, ‘Do you recognize me? I am the author of those excerpts, the person you have been seeking. I am Yusuf Hamadani. I have given them the title, “Rutbat al-Hayat,” which means “The Degree of Life.” And I have also authored other works, all of which are very good,

such as “Manazil as-Sa’irīn. The Stages of the Travelers,” and “Manazil as-Sālikīn. The Stages of the Wayfarers.”’ When I woke up from my dream, I was very happy.”

These stories of Shaykh Hamadani are also stories of the *souk*. When you go into the *souk* (as I gave you those metaphors in two other talks), sometimes there are things you want to get: for yourself, for your friends, for your family. You are willing to spend a little more, and you play at the bartering. I told you the story of what happens—the disease [of the Sufi]. If you are a Sufi, the most important thing in the *souk* is the friendship. You go very rapidly through the desire, the pride, and settle into making the friendship. The *bazari* in the *souk* is a subtle mystical person. They make their living in ways you cannot understand at all. You think they just buy and sell; but they do a lot more than that. They have a *patois*, a means of talking. They have power and influence, sometimes politically, like in Iran. But they always have some kind of power. Other than that, they provide basic needs.

You have to remember in the old days, not too many years ago, travelers weren’t on vacation. They weren’t going to the *souk* just to visit Istanbul, Jerusalem, or Cairo on some kind of a tour. They weren’t tourists. They were there for a purpose. They were seeking out something. They were passing through in search of knowledge. They were there passing through for some reason, maybe escaping some tyrant. But they weren’t taking a two week vacation from their job on Wall Street. Remember that: this disease precedes United Air mileage. They were seeking out something, and they found themselves in the *souk*.

The *souk* is often a place where the teacher is, hidden as a merchant. Maybe he’s serving food, or he is a spice merchant. Maybe he’s sitting in the *masjid* in the midst of the *souk*. The *souk* can be humanity, and not a *souk* at all. It can be the milieu of humanity: over here is the carpet merchant; over here is the gold merchant; over here is the spice

merchant; over here is a person selling housewares and jewelry—something like that, the many faces of humanity. Amidst all this, you have these lessons to learn from the Sufi. The Sufi is really the true friend. The Sufi seeks to make loyalty and be the example of it, even if it makes no sense, even if it's one-sided.

When the *murīd* and *murshid* are in tune, the donkey will bring the *shaykh* to you or bring you to the *shaykh*. Now the *shaykh* becomes a metaphor also, *majāz*. He will bring you to the truth, to the knowledge, to the way, to the next step. Then there is the issue of trusting your insight. Shaykh Yusuf Hamadani (ra) never went out; but his heart moved him. He trusted that, got on the donkey and let it carry him. He trusted that insight; he wasn't motivated out of ego or any reward. He trusted it. I'll tell you another story about Yusuf Hamadani (ra).

*He was giving a dars one day at a college in Baghdad when a jurist by the name of Ibn Asaqa stood up and posed a question. The Khwaja said to him, "Sit down! I'm smelling the odor of disbelief on you from your speech. Perhaps you won't be a Muslim at the time of your death." Some time after that, a Christian came to the Khalif as an Ambassador from the Emperor of Byzantium, and Ibn Asaqa met him and sought his companionship. At some point, he said, "I wish to abandon the religion of Islam and become a Christian." So they went together to Constantinople (Istanbul) where he met the Emperor and became a Christian, and he died as a Christian. The interesting thing about Ibn Asaqa was that he was hafez of Qur'an. When he was lying on his deathbed, someone said to him, "Do you remember anything from the Qur'an?" He said, "I don't remember anything apart from one ayat: **"Perhaps those who cover up the truth will wish they had surrendered to Allah and were Muslims."**(15:2) That's all he remembered.*

If you are going to barter in the *souk*, you should know what your purpose is, what you are going there for. Often the purpose will eclipse the cost. If you are going there to buy

your wife a present, Allaudin, (which would be the first thing you would go there for) and you see something she would absolutely love, some bangle gold jewelry like she wears all the time, or bright red lipstick, like she wears all the time—she’s so perfect, your wife, *ma’shallah*—you would be glad to pay a higher price. You’ll barter a little, but you’ll pay a higher price, just like the markets in Vietnam you used to go to, because you know why you are there, in that shop.

I wanted to tell the story tonight about these lights [hanging here in the *masjid*]. I remember getting them in Morocco, in Fez, and everything we went through to get them here—a ll the bartering and everything that went on. I would leave the bartering and wonder, how much did I save? I would convert from dirham to dollars, and realize that I spent 4 hours drinking tea and bartering for 10%. The bartering was fun, and we made all these great friendships, of course with people we never saw again.

I do remember walking into a small road shop in Istanbul. There was a young man there. Really, I couldn’t afford any of those carpets; they were all silk carpets. I still remember exactly where that shop was in the Grand Souk. This young man was really seriously interested in Tasawwuf. I think I went back a day or two in a row, and had deep conversations with him about Tasawwuf. He never tried to sell me a carpet. My donkey carried me there. Let us remember what Ibn At’ala Iskandari (ra) said:

Travel not from creature to creature, otherwise you will be like the donkey at the mill: roundabout he turns, his goal the same as his departure. Rather, go from creatures to the Creator. The final end is unto your Lord. Consider the Prophet’s words (peace and blessings be upon him): ‘Therefore he whose flight is for Allah and his Messenger, then his flight is for Allah and his Messenger. And if his flight is for worldly gain and marriage, then his flight is for that which he flees to.’ So understand these words and ponder this matter.”

I gave that the other day. Now this has slightly different meaning to you, I hope. He also said, “*Do not keep company with someone who does not inspire you and whose speech does not lead you to Allah.*” He said, “*You might be in a bad state associating with one who is in a worse state, and it makes you see virtue in yourself. No deed arising from a renouncing heart is small, and no deed arising from an avaricious heart is fruitful.*”

Look at this in terms of the metaphor of the *souk*. It is meaningful to me because we are all in the *souk*. We are all bartering, putting prices on things, buying and selling. We are all traders. We are all trading, all the time—with ourselves, too. Sometimes you sit here, maybe at night, maybe in the morning at home (because I know you all sit in the morning and at night at home), and you think, “Ah, gee, I meant to do this today. I was going to do that. I was going to research that, or write about that, or do the history assignment the Shaykh asked me to do.” You should carry a pen and write that down. That should be the first thing you do either in the morning tomorrow or when you get home tonight. That’s the way to get out of that cycle. What is the cycle? The cycle of constantly bartering with yourself and with others, with life and with nature. Shaykh Yusuf Hamadani (ra) got on the donkey and said, “Wherever Allah takes me.” He was drawn by his heart. This was the heart of a man who was very pure and who trusted his *kashf*, who trusted what he was sensing through his *kashf*. This is a person who had nothing to gain and very little, if anything, to lose. He just lived his life as a pious individual.

He realized another thing Ibn At’ala Iskandari (ra) said, that good works are the result of good states. You realize that good states come from *maqams*, from stations where you have a spiritual realization and you are living in that *maqam*. What is your state? What is your station? We are all in some station. Not all stations are great, wonderful things. What is the *maqam* you are playing? What is the *maqam* you are living in? Ask yourself, how do I move to the next station? The answer, invariably, is something we know. We should make *dhikr*, remember God, invoke that Divine Presence. You either feel that Divine Presence or you don’t. If you don’t, make *dhikr*. If you do, make *dhikr*.

Because the worse thing is to forget. If you are making an invocation, and you forget, that's better than forgetting to make the invocation. If you are saying "Allah, Allah, Allah," and you forget, and your mind wanders, at least you had established yourself in that state.

When you are in the *souk* and you are bartering, you should know why you are there. Know what that sickness is. It is the sickness of love, of friendship. It is one-sided; don't expect anything from the other side. Don't be the friend because the person is befriending you; be the friend because you are befriending that person. You know the value of friendship, even if they do not. You know the value of association with Allah. The hope is this: if you begin your recitation, your invocation, your *dhikr* you have not forgotten to do it. If you move to a state of forgetfulness while doing it, the possibility is that maybe Allah will make you one day aware, vigilant, even though you forget. Maybe, you move from forgetfulness in the *dhikr* to vigilance, and from vigilance in the *dhikr* to awareness of the Divine Presence, and from one with the Divine Presence, to one where there's nothing but what you invoke.

The worst disease is not the one of friendship, not the disease of the Sufi. Maybe I shouldn't call it a disease, but I like calling it a disease. Maybe the illness is the health. The worse thing is when the heart doesn't feel bad over disobedience, over neglect, over abandonment of the practice; over abandonment of the prayer, over abandonment of the love of others, over duty and responsibility, and you don't feel sadness over the mistakes that you made. That's the real killer disease, the one that is fatal.

These teachers like Kwaja Yusuf Hamadani (ra) were inspirations. They were very disciplined people, very committed individuals. They often put themselves through some very rigorous things, not for the sake of gaining power or insight or awakening their *kashf*, but simply because they were aware of their state, and they desired to change their state. They didn't know when the state would change, but it would change. When

people like him became aware of their change in state, they weren't hesitant to say, "Sit down. I smell the odor of disbelief in your words," because they knew where their loyalty was. They knew why they were in the *souk* of human existence, and they knew what they needed. It wouldn't be a bad thing for us to remember this, and perhaps to yearn for it, and to realize that the greatest reward, the greatest blessing in our heart is probably the thing we think is the least important, that we take for granted. Probably the greatest blessing often is. *Asalaamu aleikum*.