

# Taking *the* Path

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# 1

## The Shaykh & the Murīd

*An Excerpt from Bahishtī Zewar (Heavenly Ornaments).  
By Ḥaḍrat Ḥakīm ul Umma, Mawlānā 'Ashraf 'Ālī Thānwī.*

### The Benefits of becoming a Murīd

There are several benefits in become a murīd. The ones listed below are just a few. The other benefits are acquired by those whom Allah ﷻ has favored, and they can only be known by acquiring and experiencing them.

1. One can often err in the different methods of reforming themselves. The Shaykh shows the correct path in this regard.
2. At times the effect and benefit that one derives from a book is not as great as what one would have obtained from the guidance of a Shaykh. One gains the *barakah* of the Shaykh. Furthermore, if the Murīd displays any shortcoming in carrying out a good act or commits an evil act, he will be ashamed of this in front of his Shaykh.
3. One develops confidence and love for the Shaykh. Based on this, he is inclined to follow and emulate the ways of the Shaykh.
4. If the Shaykh is strict in giving him advice or displays his anger, the person does not feel offended and endeavors to act upon this advice.

## Qualities of the Shaykh

If a person wishes to become a murīd, he should first look for the following qualities in the Shaykh. If the latter does not possess these qualities, then do not become his murīd.

1. The Shaykh must know the *masā'il* of *Dīn*. He should not be ignorant of the Sharī'a.
2. He must not possess any quality that is contrary to the Sharī'a. His *'aqā'id* (beliefs) must be the same as those that are mentioned in Part One of *Bahishtī Zewar*. He

should not possess any quality that contradicts the rulings pertaining to the matters of reformation of the heart that have been mentioned in this book.

3. He must not make *Tasawwuf* and *iṣlāḥ* a means of sustenance. (That is, he must not be engaging in *iṣlāḥ* for financial gain, nor should he take on murīds for profit).
4. He should be regarded as a pious person by the majority of righteous people.
5. He should be spoken highly of by righteous people.
6. His program of instruction should be one that develops a love and inclination for *Dīm*. This can be gauged by looking at the condition of his murīds. If even 50-60% of his murīds are good, consider such a Shaykh to be effective. Do not doubt him by looking at the condition of a few murīds. You may have heard that pious people have a lot of effect. (Looking at the condition of his murīds) is the criterion whereby one gauges the effectiveness of a Shaykh. Do not gauge the effectiveness of a Shaykh through any other means, such as: his accurately predicting something to you, someone getting cured through his touch, a *tāwīdh* that he wrote working, or a person becomes completely entranced when he fixes his gaze upon him. Never be deluded by any of these “powers.”

7. The Shaykh must not make considerations due to the status of his murīds when giving them advice of *Dīn*. (Meaning he does not favor his murīds when it becomes necessary to reprimand them in matters of *Dīn*). He stops them from useless and foolish things.

#### *For Women*

Once you have found such a Shaykh, seek permission from your parents (if you are unmarried) or from your husband (if you are married), and become a murīd of such a Shaykh solely for the purpose of putting your *Dīn* in order. If your parents or husband do not permit you to become a murīd, do not become one as it is not *fard* to become a murīd. However, it is *fard* to tread the path of the *Dīn*. You should therefore continue treading this path even if you are not a murīd of a Shaykh.

## Rules Connected to the Shaykh and Murīd

1. Be respectful to your Shaykh. Remember the name of Allah ﷻ in the exact way shown to you by your Shaykh. Have the following belief regarding your Shaykh: “The spiritual benefits that I can gain from this Shaykh cannot be gained from any other Shaykh.”
2. If the murīd’s heart has not been reformed properly before the Shaykh passes away, he must become the murīd of another Shaykh in whom the previously mentioned qualities are found.

3. When you come across some *waz̄īfa* in a book or read about the ascetic life of someone, do not act upon what you read on your own accord. Ask your Shaykh about it first. If any good or evil thought enters your heart or you decide to do something, consult your Shaykh first.
4. Women should not remove their *parda* in the presence of their Shaykh. At the time of becoming a murīd, they should not physically hold his hand. It is permissible to take the oath of allegiance (*bay'ā*) by holding one end of a cloth while he holds the other end. A verbal *bay'ā* is also sufficient.
5. If you mistakenly become a murīd of a person who acts contrary to the Sharī'a, or if he was initially good but later changed, then sever your contact with him and become a murīd of some other pious person. However, if your Shaykh commits a sin which can be overlooked, then think to yourself that he is not an angel, but a human. He has made a mistake that can be forgiven if he makes *tawba*. Do not allow your conviction in him to dwindle over trivial matters. However, if the Shaykh persists on such acts, sever your contact with him.
6. It is a sin to believe that your Shaykh has full knowledge of everything you do.
7. Never read books that have stories of dervishes that appear to be contrary to the Sharī'a. Similarly, you

should not read poems that are contrary to the Sharī'a.

8. Some dervishes maintain that the path of the Sharī'a is different from the path of the dervishes. Such dervishes are astray. It is *fard* to consider them to be liars.
9. If the Shaykh asks you to do anything that is contrary to the Sharī'a, it is not permissible to act upon it. If he insists that you carry it out, sever contact with him.
10. If, due to the *barakah* of taking the name of Allah, you experience a good state in your heart, you have a good dream, or upon waking up you hear a voice or see some light, then do not mention it to anyone other than your Shaykh. Do not inform anyone of the *wazīfas* that you read or the *'ibāda* that you make, because by doing so, this good fortune will go away.
11. If your Shaykh asks you to recite a particular *wazīfa* or engage in a particular form of *dhikr*, and after some time you still do not experience any delight in this, do not be disheartened and do not lose your confidence in your Shaykh. Instead, think to yourself that the greatest effect is that your heart is making an intention of remembering Allah and that you are being given the opportunity to do good. Never think that you deserve to be blessed with having pious people appear in your dreams, to begin to have knowledge of things that are going to occur, to be able to cry profusely, or to become so engrossed in your



*‘ibāda* that you should be oblivious to other things. These things occur at times and at times they do not. If they do, express your gratitude to Allah Most High. If they do not occur, decrease after having occurred frequently, or cease to occur altogether, then do not be saddened. However, if, may Allah save us, you display any shortcoming in following the Sharī‘a or commit any sin, then this is definitely something to be distressed about. You should immediately make an effort to put your condition in order. Inform your Shaykh about it and act upon his advice.

12. Do not be disrespectful to other Shaykhs or other Ṣūfi orders. Nor should you tell the murīds of other Shaykhs or other Ṣūfi orders that your Shaykh is greater than theirs or that your Ṣūfi order is greater than theirs. By engaging in such unnecessary and foolish conversations the heart begins to darken.
13. If your Shaykh pays more attention to a fellow murīd, or if a fellow murīd gains more benefit from his *wazīfas* and *dhikrs*, do not be jealous of him.

## Guidelines on how a Murīd<sup>1</sup> should Spend their Days and Nights

1. Acquire knowledge of the *Dīn* according to your needs. You could acquire this knowledge either by reading books or by asking the *‘ulamā’*.

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<sup>1</sup> And every other Muslim.

2. Abstain from all sins.
3. If you commit any sin, repent immediately.
4. Do not hold back in fulfilling anyone's rights. Do not cause anyone physical or verbal harm.
5. Do not speak ill of anyone.
6. Do not have any love for wealth, nor any desire for name and fame. Do not concern yourself with extravagant food and clothing.
7. If someone rebukes you for a mistake or error, do not try to justify your action. Admit your fault and repent.
8. Do not embark on a journey without any dire necessity. This is because many unconscious and unintended acts are committed while on a journey. Many good deeds are missed out, there is a shortcoming in the different forms of *dhikr*, and one is unable to accomplish their tasks on time.
9. Do not laugh or talk excessively. You should take special precautions to avoid talking with *ghayr mahrams* (those with whom the observance of *parda* in incumbent) in an informal way.
10. Do not go about repeating or mentioning an argument that may have taken place between two persons.
11. Always be mindful of the rules of the Shari'a in everything that you do.
12. Do not display laziness in executing any act of *'ibāda*.
13. Try and spend most of your time in seclusion.
14. If you have to meet and converse with others, meet them with humility and do not display greatness.
15. Associate very little with rulers and those who hold high positions.
16. Stay very far from irreligious people.

17. Do not search for the faults of others. Do not have evil thoughts about anyone. Instead, look at your own faults and try to put them in order.
18. You should be very particular in offering your Ṣalāh in the proper manner, at the proper time, and with great concentration.
19. Always occupy yourself in the remembrance of Allah either with your heart or tongue. Do not be neglectful in this regard at any time.
20. If you experience any satisfaction in taking the name of Allah and your heart feels happy over this, then express your gratitude to Allah.
21. Speak in a nice, humble way.
22. Set aside specific times for all your different tasks and abide strictly to these times.
23. Consider whatever regret, sorrow or loss you may experience to be from Allah Most High. Do not be despondent. Instead, think that you will be rewarded for this.
24. Do not continuously think about worldly matters, calculations, profits and losses, etc. Instead, think about Allah.
25. As far as possible, try to help and benefit others irrespective of whether it be in worldly affairs or *Dīnī* matters.
26. Do not eat and drink so little to that you become weak and fall ill. Nor should you eat and drink so much that you feel lazy in carrying out the different acts of *‘ibāda*.
27. Do not desire or have greed for anything from anyone except Allah Most High. Do not allow your mind to fantasize about any place thinking that you

will be able to gain certain benefit or profit from there.

28. Be restless in your quest for Allah.
29. Be grateful for the favors that are bestowed upon you irrespective of whether they are plentiful or few. Do not be depressed with poverty and destitution.
30. Overlook the faults and mistakes of those who are under your control.
31. If you learn of anyone's faults, conceal them. However, if the person plans to cause harm to someone else and you learn of it, then warn the other person beforehand.
32. Be in the service of guests, travelers, strangers, '*ulemā*', and the pious servants of Allah Most High.
33. Choose the company of the pious.
34. Fear Allah all the time.
35. Remember death.
36. Set aside a certain time daily wherein you think about all of your actions during that day. When you remember any good action, express gratitude. When you remember any evil action, repent.
37. Do not ever speak a lie.
38. Do not ever attend gatherings that are contrary to the Sharī'a.
39. Live with bashfulness, modesty and forbearance.
40. Do not become conceited by thinking to yourself that "I have such and such qualities in me."
41. Continue making *du'ā*' to Allah ﷻ asking Him to keep you steadfast on the straight path.

# 2

## The Daily *Tartīb*

*By Ḥadrat Aqdas, ‘Ārifillah, Mawlānā Shāh Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar Ṣāhib (May Allah have mercy on him). Translated by Shaykh Tameem Aḥmadī (May Allah preserve him).*

### Ṣalāh for *Tawba*, *Hāja* & *Tahajjud*

Perform two (2) *rak‘āt* of *Ṣalāt-ul-Tawba* (the Prayer of Repentance) daily for all those sins that you have committed. If you shed some tears of regret then well and good. If not, then at least try to imitate a crying person.

After the *du‘ā*, one may supplicate thus:

*“O Allah! Forgive all of my sins, and save me from the evil effects of my wrong-doings. Save me from the harm that it has caused to my sense of shame and modesty. For through this shamelessness from sins, one is deprived of the status of mushāhada.”*

Mulla ‘Ālī Qārī writes:

فَإِنَّ حَقِيقَةَ الْحَيَاءِ؛ أَنَّ مَوْلَاكَ لَا يَرَاكَ حَيْثُ نَهَاكَ. وَ  
هَذَا مَقَامُ الْإِحْسَانِ يُسَمَّى بِالْمُشَاهَدَةِ.

“...For the reality of shame and modesty is that your Master should not see you in that state which He has forbidden you. And this is the rank of *Ihsān* (perfection in consciousness of Allah Most High) which is also known as the status of *mushāhada*.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition, perform two (2) *rak‘āt* of *Ṣalāt-ul-Ḥāja*, (the Prayer of Need) and ask Allah ﷻ with sincerity to purify you of your spiritual diseases and grant you the ability to abstain from all sins. If it is possible, one should supplicate with the words that are established from the *Sunnah*.<sup>3</sup> A quicker acceptance is hoped by supplicating with these words.

To pray two (2) *rak‘āt* before going to sleep, with the intention of *tahajjud* Ṣalāh will suffice for both of the above ‘*amāl*. One can make *istighfār* and *du‘ā*’ of *tazkiya* at that time, and one will also get the reward of *tahajjud*. Remember that *sālik* who does not perform *tahajjud* will not reach the stage of the *kāmilīn* (the perfected ones).

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<sup>2</sup> *Mirqāt*, 1:70

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for Arabic text, transliteration and translation of *Ṣalāt-ul-Ḥāja*.

## Recitation of the Majestic Qur'ān

A person should try to recite as much Qur'ān as possible.

One should be punctual in reciting Sūra *Ya Sīn* every morning.<sup>4</sup> After reciting Sūra *Yā Sīn*, one should supplicate as follows:

*“O Allah! We have recited your blessed words. And we have recited the ‘heart’ of your words. O Allah, through the blessings of the ‘heart’ of your words, purify our hearts and grant us complete purification, and bestow upon us sound hearts.”*

One should also read Sūrah *Dukhān* and Sūrah *Kahf* on Fridays.

Ḥaḍratwala (may Allah have mercy on him) has emphasized the correct recitation of the Qur'ān *Sharīf* in the *Khānqa* to such an extent that he says whoever does not correct his recitation according to the rules of *tajwīd*, he has wasted his time in the *Khānqa*. Whoever does not have true love for Allah Most High's *kalām*, has in actuality no love for Allah Most High Himself (*nā'ūdhu billah*).<sup>5</sup> One who is reading the Qur'ān incorrectly is committing a major sin.

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<sup>4</sup> It has been narrated by *Aḥmad*, *Abū Dāwūd*, *Nasā'ī*, *Ibn Mājah*, and *Tabarānī* from Ma'qal ibn Yasār that Rasūlullah ﷺ said: “Sūra *Yasīn* is the heart of the Qur'ān.”

<sup>5</sup> “We seek refuge in Allah.”

## Dhikr (Remembrance of Allah ﷻ)

In the state of *wudū'*, wearing clean clothes, with perfume applied, facing towards the *qibla*, do the following:

- Dhikr of *Nafī/Ithbāt* (لا اله الا الله) one hundred times.
- Dhikr of *Ism al Dhāt* (الله, الله) one hundred times.

### The Method of Making Dhikr of *Nafī/Ithbāt*

Meditate over the fact that your grave is before your eyes. Before everything else, negate your own self. Thereafter negate all non-Allah as you recite *Nafī/Ithbāt* 100 times.

When you say “*lā ilāha*”, make the meditation that all the beloved things of this temporary world and all of the carnal desires in your heart, which have taken the form of false idols are being negated.

When you say “*il-Allah*” meditate that a pillar of light from the ‘Arsh of Allah ﷻ is entering your heart.

### The Method of Making Dhikr of *Ism al Dhāt*

Make *dhikr* of *Ism al Dhāt* by taking the blessed name of Allah ﷻ 100 times. Imagine that along with your tongue, your heart is also saying the name of Allah. It should be done with *Jahr al Khafīf* (in a soft voice), so that you can hear yourself. One should have the pain of love and crying in one’s voice even if one must pretend in doing so.



Our *Mashā'ikh* have advised females not to read the *Ism al Dhāt* due to the intensity of its effect on the emotions and spiritual state.

Thus, in place of the *Ism al Dhāt* they are required to recite one hundred (100) times:

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَبِحَمْدِهِ ، سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ

To continue, Ḥaḍratwala (may Allah have mercy on him) says that he who does not make an effort to make *dhikhrullah* will remain *nāqis* and will die *nāqis*.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from adopting the company of a Shaykh, one must punctually engage in *dhikhrullah* without a break.

To neglect *dhikr* is to starve the soul. One way of practicing constancy upon *dhikr* is to starve one's self from food the day he neglects *dhikr*. In this way the *Rūḥ* will receive its nourishment and at the same time one become steadfast upon *dhikr*. The *Rūḥ* will then yearn for *dhikr*.

One who inculcates an evil or undesirable habit (like smoking, for example), when unable to satisfy it will

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<sup>6</sup> To “remain *nāqis* and die *nāqis*” means to remain deficient and die deficient or incomplete in one's *sulūk*. Due to *dhikr* being an integral part of one's relationship with our Beloved, he who neglects it, always remains inadequate in his *sulūk* and will thus die that way. May Allah protect us from the darkness of His separation. Amīn. TA.

somehow strive to continue it in secret. If a person can have a craving for an evil habit, how much greater will his craving for a noble act like *dhikrullah* be, which is nourishment for the soul itself?

Also, the sign that a person truly has love for Allah ﷻ is that he takes time out for His remembrance. This is because one remembers his beloved. He who does not make an effort in doing so, let him know that his claim for love of Allah Most High is fake.

The *Rūḥ* gets strength from *dhikr* and *‘ibāda*. The stronger one’s *dhikr*, the stronger one’s *Rūḥ*; the stronger one’s *Rūḥ* the easier it is to defeat the *nafs* and *shayṭān* in abstinence from sins and guarding one’s gaze.

In addition to the *dhikr* of *Naḥī/Ithbāt* and *Ism al Dhāt*, one should do the following *dhikrs* daily:

1. *Durūd Sharīf*, 100 times:

صلي الله علي النبي الامي  
*SalAllahu ‘alan-Nabiyy-il-Ummiyy*  
O Allah, bless the Unlettered Prophet

2. *Istighfār*, 100 times:

بوالغفو الحم و انت خير الراحمين  
*Rabbighfir warham wa anta khayrur-Rāḥimīn*

My Lord, forgive and have mercy, and you are the best of those who show mercy.

3. Read one *manzil* of *Munajāt-e-Maqbūl* (ideally in English and Arabic).
4. Read about the harms of evil glances and love affairs daily, also for three (3) minutes.
5. Make *tawba* and *istighfār* from all the evil glances one has committed from the time of puberty until the present day and make *du'ā'* for the protection of Allah ﷻ from this sin (for 1 minute).
6. Engage in *tafakkur* (deep reflection) of the bounties and gifts of Allah ﷻ from the beginning of your existence until now, and thank Allah ﷻ for them (3 minutes). See section on *Tafakkur*, for this and the other *murāqabas* mentioned below.
7. Engage in *tafakkur* of death and scenes of the grave (3 minutes), as well as the Resurrection, the Judgment, and Hell-Fire (3 minutes).
8. Engage in *tafakkur* of *Allahu Ḥādirī*, *Allahu Nāẓirī*, *Allahu Mā'ī* (*Allah is present, Allah sees me, Allah is with me*), i.e. that Allah is watching me at all time. Do this for three (3) minutes.
9. Engage in *tafakkur* of the fact that you are the lowest of all creation. See next section. Do this for 3 minutes.

Those who suffer from depression or have weak hearts should *not* do the above meditations because it will lead to overstressing the mind and heart. The main purpose of the abovementioned meditations is to remove unmindfulness of Allah Most High, and that can be achieved in other ways, with the advice of one's Shaykh.

## *Tafakkur* (Reflection)

The murīd needs to develop a habit of engaging in *Tafakkur*. *Tafakkur* is related to the word *Fikr*. *Fikr* is simply a superficial thought – one that requires only minimal exertion (for example, when one thinks that they need to go to the car to get their phone). *Tafakkur* however, is a more intensive thinking or pondering. It requires significant exertion. The word “reflection” in English is a good way to understand it: a mirror reflects something back to you – it *gives you something*. In the same way, a deep, effortful reflection, *gives you something* in return.

It is crucial to understand that *tafakkur* is the foundation of *sulūk*. It is what gives life to one's *sulūk*. It is the very *rūḥ* (spirit) of all one's actions in the *Dīn*. It is what gives power and meaning to actions. Without it, actions are empty husks. Ḥakīm al Ummah Thānwī رحمته الله described *tafakkur* as the second hand on a clock. The second hand moves the minute hand, which moves the hour hand – in other words, it is that small needle, that subtle movement, that causes the movement of everything else. In the same

way, it is the deep thoughts of *tafakkur* that make your *sulūk* move. Without it, a murīd will remain stagnant. *Tafakkur* is the highest form of *dhikrullah*.

There are different ways one can and should do *tafakkur*.

Here are three examples:

1. A person is performing *ṣalāh*. During the *ṣalāh* he imagines that he is standing before Allah. He is reflecting on the bounties that Allah has blessed him with from the time of his birth until that moment. He feels that he is praying to Allah out of gratitude for all these gifts. *Allah did not have to create me. He did not have to give me Imān. He did not have to place me here before Him praying. Allah sustains me at every moment. At every moment He gives me the blessing of life. At every moment He gives me the blessing of Imān. He could take it away in the next moment. I have sinned so much. Yet He continues to give to me. I am so grateful to you my generous Rabb! You have brought me in front of you as a believer despite all my sins and deficiencies!*
2. Before one engages in a particular act of devotion: recitation of Qur'an, fasting, *nafl ṣalāh*, he brings to mind the specific rewards mentioned in the ḥadīth associated with that act. Reflecting on the fact that with each *harf* of the Qur'an he reads, Allah ﷻ is blessing him with a reward, and each reward has a spiritual effect on his heart. *With each letter I recite, Allah is rewarding me, drawing me closer to Him. What a ni'ma that He has given me to recite His Speech. He must*

*love us so much to give us a reward with each and every single letter.*

3. In any action, one tries to make one's intention solely for Allah. *Niyyah* is the intention one makes in a particular moment. *Tafakkur*, however, is like a prolonged *niyyah*. It is reflecting, pondering, taking one's *niyyah* and extending it throughout the action. For example, before giving a gift to someone, one does *tafakkur* on the rewards mentioned of doing so, and the effects of doing so. One reflects on the fact that he is giving this gift to increase love and remove bad feelings between himself and the recipient of the gift. *This is a servant of yours Yā Allah. He is a heart you have created to love you. You have promised great reward for those of us who build ties with each other, make amends with each other, increase love amongst one another. Yā Rabb, I give this gift to my brother for your sake, because I know it will be pleasing to you. I give it to increase love between us, to dispel any bad feelings between us. You are my witness to this.*

In general, whatever you make *tafakkur* on, it *makes* you as a person. How you think is what you become. A person who makes *tafakkur* – who constantly has an ingrained thought in himself – that, *I am a very honorable person, people should serve me, people should say salām to me first*, will inevitably engender pride or conceitedness in himself. Note that it is not necessary that one actively thinks this, but it may be a deep, persistent thought present beneath the surface of his superficial thoughts. People will then hate this person, for everyone hates the one who is full of themselves and has expectations of others. A person

however who has no expectations of others, and reflects upon the fact that, *I am not worthy. I should say salām to all these people who are truly the beloveds of Allah, and Allah has allowed me to be in their company and to serve them. I am a servant, I am a servant*; this person will be loved by people, for people love those who are humble. Having this humble attitude is something that does not come naturally to most people. Therefore, doing *tafakkur* on it repeatedly is the way to embed it into one's consciousness.

The *awliyā* mention that the *tafakkur* of one moment is more superior than the worship of a thousand years. They point out that Shayṭān (may Allah curse him) worshipped Allah for a thousand years, but because he had not reflected on his lowliness before Allah and was proud, he disobeyed His command to prostrate before Adam ﷺ. He did not see that Allah has placed a *rūḥ* in Adam ﷺ – he simply saw clay. Why did he become Shayṭān? He did not reflect. If he had reflected for even a moment, he would have preserved his 1000 years of worship.

The following are foundational points of reflection/*tafakkur* of all *sālikīn*.

1. Death.
2. *Allahu Ḥādīrī, Allahu Nazīrī, Allahu Mā'ī.*
3. Any good that comes to me is from Allah (the bounties of Allah).
4. I am the lowest of Allah's creation.

The method of engaging in *Tafakkur* is to sit down quietly for a specified 4-5 minutes daily, while facing the *qibla* preferably.

The above four points should be reflected upon specifically. The following examples and points may assist one in reflecting on each, though reflection can occur through many other ways.

#### REFLECTION I - DEATH

Think about whatever is concerning you at this time. Studies, work, family relationships, finances. Then reflect on the fact that millions of people before you, generation after generation, have spent their life thinking, planning and pondering about these same things. Where are they now? Where are their plans now? What awaits them in the grave? How many people made plans that were cut short by their death, whereas they had been imagining that when they reached such and such point in life they would live in a specific place, have a certain kind of home, have achieved certain things in life. Now what is their condition? At one point they were concerned about where their funds for their education was going to come from, and now – are they witnessing the horrors of a pit from Hell? Being bitten again and again by scorpions and snakes? Suffering from an unfathomable regret that this may be their lot for eternity? Or are they wandering about in an open expanse? When they are raised up, and Hell is brought in front of them, with it being held back by its chains from prematurely devouring those destined for it, what will be his state? Will his worries in this world



have been for him or against him? What is he doing now for that Day? Etc...

Making the reflection pertinent to one's specific circumstances and coupling this with visualization/imagination of the unseen is one method of doing this *Tafakkur*.

Recite and reflect upon verses from the last *Juz* of the Qur'an that speak of the Day of Qiyamah.

**REFLECTION 2 – “ALLAH IS PRESENT WITH ME,  
ALLAH SEES ME, ALLAH IS WITH ME.”**

One may close one's eyes and focus on one's breathing. Notice each inhalation, each exhalation. There will be random thoughts. One should not fight to suppress those thoughts, but simply recognize that they are there, and then and with each one, let it go and redirect one's presence of mind to one's breath, and slowly to one's spiritual heart, the sense of the soul at one's core, with the words, “*Allahu ḥāḍirī, Allahu nāẓirī, Allahu mā'ī.*” *Allah is present, Allah sees me, Allah is with me.* The practice of returning one's focus back to Allah using the above words, while keeping the mind clear by focusing on one's breathing, will eventually create a sweetness in one's heart that one can then experience whenever they close their eyes and focus in this way. This is a difficult exercise, and requires persistence. The best way to maintain persistence is to commit to doing this for five minutes every day, at the same time, no matter how difficult or “unsatisfactory” it may seem at first.


As an aid, one may reflect on the greatness and grandeur of Allah. *Allah. He creates the universe and everything in it, upholds it in every moment. Without His continuous attention to it and everything in it, all would simply cease to exist. What power He has! I feel I have power over an ant if I see it crawling beneath the shadow of my shoe. Yet Allah's greatness compared to me is unfathomable – it is incomparably great. This same Allah is present with me, sees me, is with me. Not only that, He wants that I remember Him in this way. He wants that I love Him, be close to Him. Allah is present, Allah sees me, Allah is with me. How can I disobey Him when He wants me to worship Him, know Him, and love Him? How can I sin when He has created my heart for Him and Him alone? He is so great, and yet he refers to our heart as His home? Allah is present, Allah sees me, Allah is with me. How much He must love me... and how much, if we disobey, must He scrutinize and have complete knowledge of me. I will have no excuses when I stand in front of Him. When I committed that sin, Allah was present, Allah was seeing me, Allah was with me... how can I disappoint my Allah? How can I disobey Him and risk the Hellfire when He has created me for Jannah with Him...*

### REFLECTION 3 – “ANY GOOD THAT COMES TO ME IS FROM ALLAH.”

*Allah has complete power over me. He creates me in every moment with life, with Imān, with sight, with feeling, with hearing. He is giving me another moment before taking me to final account. He just gave me another moment, another moment, another, another... each one of these moments is a gift. In my body, in every moment, millions of things need to happen in order for me to simply live, move, think, talk. Most of them I have no awareness of. He sustains them and keeps them going. I pray. But how can I take credit for such prayer*

*when it is He that sustains me in every moment. If He turns His attention away from me for one instant, I cease to exist, let alone not be able to pray. That I am not crippled and able to stand is a bestowal from Him. That I am sane and able to focus is a bestowal from Him. After I have prayed, whether He accepts it or not is also an acceptance, a bestowal from Him. He is so grand, so great, so majestic, and we are severely limited creations – how can anything we offer Him in terms of prayer, dhikr, service, match what He has given us. How can we possibly fulfill His right on us? We simply cannot. Anything He accepts from us and rewards us for is out of His generosity alone. Anything we do for His sake is out of His generosity is alone. Everything is from Him and returns to Him, and we are simply witnessing His generosity to us.*

#### REFLECTION 4 – “I AM THE LOWEST OF ALLAH’S CREATION.”

‘Arifbillah Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Shāh Muḥammad Akhtar Sāhib  advises in his *Solutions to Spiritual Maladies for the Lovers of Allah*:

Considering oneself to be insignificant and trembling out of fear of one’s death have been the hallmarks of the righteous and accepted servants in the court of Allah Ta’ala, whereas self-conceit is the quality of flagrant sinners. Continue reading this statement.

Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā also advises that one reflect upon the fact that one is the “most insignificant and contemptible of all Muslims at present, and more insignificant than animals and disbelievers in their future state.” I.e., one does not know the present state of heart of any Muslim – even the open sinner – nor does one know what that

Muslim's rank will be on the Day of Judgment. It may well be that the Muslim one is looking at sinning right now may be elevated in Jannah, while the onlooker (oneself) is being dragged off by the *Malā'ika* to Hell. In other words, even if another Muslim is openly sinning in front of one, one still has no proof of what that person's state of heart will be in the moments that follow (or what they were before), nor on the Day of Judgment. Meanwhile, one is *definitely* aware of all the dark deeds and sins one has committed, and all the deficiencies present in one. By this method, one can rationally understand that one has proof of one's lowliness through knowledge of one's own sins, but absolutely no definitive evidence for such lowliness of any other Muslim one looks upon. Thinking poorly of another in the absence of proof is nothing but a sin in and of itself, for which one will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment.

As for the animals and the disbelievers, if one does not die on Imān, one will enter the Fire for eternity, whereas animals shall simply cease to exist. Their state, then, would be unfathomably better. As for disbelievers, one of them may accept Islam before their death, making their entire life pure of sin, and their eternity inshā' Allah secured, while one may have had Imān but either died without it or despite their Imān lead a life of sin, and they will then enter the Fire for eternity or thousands of years, respectively. Who would then be in a better state? The disbeliever who spent his life in disbelief and his moment before death in Imān? Or the Muslim who spent his whole life looking down on disbelievers only to be thrown headlong into the depths of the Fire.

Ḥaḍratwala ﷺ recommends repeatedly in his *Solutions to Spiritual Maladies* that one repeat, “I am the most insignificant and contemptible of all Muslims at present, and more insignificant than animals and disbelievers in their future state,” in one’s *tafakkur*, reflecting on its meanings, three times in the morning and three times at night.

In the *Path to Perfection*, it is mentioned by Shaykh Wasiyullah Khān ﷺ that to consider oneself the lowest of all creation is the first step on the path to Allah Most High.

# 3

## *Sulūk*

### *Dhikr & Sulūk*

One should not miss out on one's prescribed, daily *wazīfas*. One should specify a time for performing them. If they cannot be performed at that time, they should be made up at a later time. If they cannot be performed that day, then they should be done the next day. One should never become hopeless of gaining consistency and thus leave his *wazīfas* completely.

The cure to “*susti*” is “*chusti*” – the cure to laziness is becoming active. If a person feels lazy and weak and takes things lightly, this is because he has no discipline. The cure to this is to just get up and overcome his *zālim* (oppressive) *nafs* and say, “You are my *ghulām* (slave) and not vice versa!”

*Inshā’* Allah, if we bring ourselves to follow a daily *tartīb*, after practicing upon it for a period of time, these *maʾmūlāt* (deeds) will become second nature and we will become spiritually disciplined.

All of these *maʾmūlāt* take about 30-45 minutes to complete. If they cannot be done in one *majlis* (sitting), then they can be divided into two sessions.

If one is extremely busy and cannot take out any time for these *maʾmūlāt*, then he should perform them while driving to work (for example, by keeping hand on the steering wheel and the other holding the *tasbīḥ* (*dhikr* beads)). *Inshā’* Allah, before he reaches his worksite he will have completed all of his daily *maʾmūlāt*.

Alternatively, one can perform them while walking from one place to another while running errands. In reality, these are all actions of the heart and tongue that will not be noticed by anybody other than Allah Most High.

While you are at work make the aforementioned *murāqabas* instead of thinking about useless things. One should occupy one’s mind with these thoughts, which will be regarded as *tafakkur* (the highest form of *dhikrullah*).

If due to being too busy or some other overwhelming circumstance, a person cannot complete one hundred *dhikrs*, then he should reduce the amount to fifty. If that still cannot be done, then down to thirty-three. If even that cannot be done then one should not go to sleep until he has at least done his *dhikrs* ten times.

This is like the example of a person who is traveling. Everyone knows that on a journey one cannot have a home-cooked meal and enjoy himself like he can at home. But does this mean that he should remain hungry and thirsty? Of course not. Rather, one will at least have some chips and juice on the go so that he does not become starved or dehydrated. In this manner, one should be just as afraid of spiritual dehydration and not deprive oneself completely of spiritual food, even if it might be a small amount. Missing *dhikr* is depriving the soul of its sustenance, just as missing a meal is depriving the body of its nourishment.

It should also be remembered that along with practicing these *ma'mūlāt* one should completely rely upon the *fadl* of Allah Most High, without which it is impossible to perform any action.

Another essential point to remember is that if one does not experience enjoyment and ecstasy in *dhikr*, then know that the fact that one is taking the exalted and blessed name of Allah Most High is the greatest endowment of all.



Un-enjoyable *dhikr* is sufficient for attaining the closeness of Allah ﷻ and the unveiling of His special proximity.

If one feels weakness or anxiety in the performance of *dhikr*, then with the consultation of one's Shaykh one should lessen the amount of *dhikr*. Without consulting with one's Shaykh, *dhikr* will be bereft of benefit. To keep contact with one's Shaykh is necessary. One should first inform him of one's condition, then follow his consultations having complete confidence in them. He should comply completely with his instructions.

### Fulfilling the Rights of the Shaykh

Ḥaḍrat Thānwī (may Allah have mercy on him) used to say: "There are four rights towards the Shaykh, and *one will never benefit* from the Shaykh if any of these rights remained unfulfilled." Khwāja Ṣāhib has mentioned these rights in the following verse:

*Remember there are four rights towards the Shaykh: Ittila' (inform),  
Ittiba' (follow), I'timād (have confidence), Inqiyād (show  
compliance).*

Whoever fulfills these rights will gain maximum benefit. Correspondence with a Shaykh is necessary (if he lives in a far-off place), and if one has the means, one should visit him. Ḥaḍrat Thānwī (may Allah have mercy on him) said, "These days, one should spend at least forty days, if not more, in the company of a Shaykh with the intention of self reformation. He will surely acquire his objective."

Alas! Today people say they have no time. They cannot free themselves from their offices and jobs. What if the doctors were to inform them that they have been afflicted with a grave illness and can only be cured by spending a few days in the hilly areas of *Simla* or *Murri*?<sup>7</sup> They will heed the doctor's instructions regardless of the cost involved, even if they have to sell off their wives' jewelry.

One should be punctual in attending the gatherings and spending time in the company of one's Shaykh. In his absence, one should study those books that the Shaykh recommends.<sup>8</sup>

## Necessary Spiritual Practices

- I. The most important consideration is that every action should be performed according to the Sunnah of Rasūlullah, may Allah's peace and blessing be upon him. One should find out what those sunnahs are and apply them to one's daily life, such as the sunnahs of eating, drinking, sleeping, going to the bathroom, etc. One should also memorize the *du'ās* taught by the Beloved Messenger ﷺ for different occasions and apply them in one's life.

The reward of reviving one sunnah in our times – wherein mischief is rife and neglect of the *Dīn* and

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<sup>7</sup> These are areas that have healthy, natural environments where people go to in order to recuperate their health.

<sup>8</sup> See the section on *The Iṣlāḥī Curriculum*

Sunnah is common – is like attaining the reward of a hundred martyrs.

2. One should visit the graveyard from time to time and take from there the lesson of the temporariness and futility of this world.
3. One should visit the pious people of one's locality from time to time and get their blessings and prayers.
4. Protect your gaze from the faces of attractive men and women (who are not permissible for you to look at). *Shayṭān* leads the seekers of Allah ﷻ away from Him by occupying them with lust for temporary beauty. He lures them into wasting their passions and love, which was meant for the True Eternal Beloved, in the forbidden, short-term lust of these worldly corpses.
5. One should make a sincere effort to abstain from three deadly sins in particular:

A) *Lustful Glances*

The heart becomes defiled through this sin. One should immediately resort to *tawba* and *istighfār*. It is also recommended that one should pray a few *raka'āt* of *nafl* and give some money in charity.

Allah ﷻ has told us that the performance of good deeds does away with sins. Rasūlullah ﷺ

also has advised us in the *ḥadīth sharīf* to follow up one's slips and mistakes with good deeds, and they will eradicate one's sins.

B) *Unnecessary Suspicion*

Do not have ill thoughts or suspicions of your Shaykh, pious people, or of any Muslim in general. Rather, you should consider yourself the lowest of all creation. If any good deed or righteousness is being performed, then consider it to be the bestowal of Allah ﷻ and thank Allah ﷻ for granting you the ability to do so.

C) *Backbiting (Ghība)*

Most backbiting occurs due to pride and self-conceit. However, if we consider ourselves to be the most (spiritually) diseased, how can we talk about the condition of others? How can a person who is suffering from a terminal illness laugh or talk about someone with a common cold?

Abstinence from these three sins in particular will make it easy to stay away from all the other sins.

If a person becomes habituated to a sin and is unable to abandon it, then one should fully explain one's problem in detail to the Shaykh and consult with him regarding its treatment and remedy. After practically implementing the Shaykh's prescription, one should inform him of any

progress or regress. One should make an effort and strive to abstain from sins.

However, remember that not being able to overcome a habitual sin does not mean one should also abandon good deeds. If one cannot leave *ghayr* Allah (other than Allah), then one should not abandon Allah Most High either. What foolishness it would be that because one cannot leave strangers, one leaves the Beloved?

*Inshā'* Allah, if a person continues to struggle and in spite of returning back to sins, continues to lament and shed tears of repentance and does not forsake the path to Allah, then in the end, with the mercy of Allah Most High, this person will be rewarded with victory over his *nafs*, *shayṭān* and evil deeds.

After only a few days of effort and *mujāhada* in this temporary world, *inshā'* Allah there will be everlasting comfort and ease.

In these few moments before before Maghrib on the day of *Jumu'a* (which is a very blessed and auspicious time during which *du'ās* are accepted), I make *du'ā* to Allah ﷻ that He accept this booklet out of His Infinite Mercy and that he make it beneficial for all the *salikīn* and *Mashā'ikh*.

*Amīn.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Combined from the writings of Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Ḥakīm) Muḥammad Akhtar (ʿafAllahu ʿanhu) 22<sup>nd</sup> Jumada al-Thānī 1392 & 7<sup>th</sup> Safar 1427

## The *Iṣlāḥī* Curriculum

This is a curriculum compiled mainly from the works of Ḥaḍrat Thānwī for the gradual spiritual nurturing of those treading the Path. The journey to Allah ﷻ is a lifelong process that requires a lot of patience, sincere struggle, and prolonged companionship of a qualified Shaykh-e-Kāmil. Books do not make people, people make people, and as the proverb goes, “None has reached Him except through the accompaniment of one who has reached Him...” Books are however a guide and a roadmap for the *sālik* to assist him on the arduous journey to his Beloved.

Ḥakīm ul-Ummah said, “If a person finds a spiritual compatibility, then these books will prove to be a sufficient lifelong guide for him; i.e. *Qasd-us-Sabīl*, *Ta’līm-ud-Dīn*, *Tarbiyat-us-Sālik...*”<sup>11</sup>

Please note: the books with an asterisk require supervised study.

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<sup>11</sup> Ma’āthir Ḥakīm al-Umma, pg. 326

## BEGINNER

1. Complete one *chilla* (forty days) not missing any of your *wazā'if*.
2. Path to Perfection with five page detailed analysis of the book.
3. Reformation of Character
4. Taking the Path (this book)
5. *Qasd-us-Sabīl*
6. The English books of Ḥaḍratwala: Connection to Allah, Virtues of Tawba, Reality of Taṣawwuf, etc.
7. Nurturing the Lovers of Allah (also under the title, “Solution to Spiritual Maladies for the Lovers of Allah Ta‘āla”)
8. *Ta’līm-ul-Ḥaqq* (Ṭaḥāra, Ṣalāh, Ṣawm, and Zakāh)\*
9. *Tajwīd* for beginners – Last 10 Sūras and 5 hours of *Tajwīd* practice with a Qārī\*
10. *Shawq-e-Waṭan* (A Desire for the Hereafter)
11. *Behishtī Zewar* Parts 1 and 7
12. Ten *Iṣlāhī* letters

## INTERMEDIATE

1. Two *chillas* (eighty days) not missing any *wazā'if*
2. Sharī‘a & Tarīqa (Ḥaḍrat Shaykh)<sup>12</sup>
3. *Dars-e-Mathnawī* (Ḥaḍratwala)
4. *Mashā’ikh-e-Chisht* (Ḥaḍrat Shaykh)
5. Rights of Islam (Ḥaḍrat Thanwi)
6. *Jazā’ ul A’māl* (Ḥaḍrat Thanwi)
7. The Rights of Brotherhood (Imam Ghazzālī)
8. Memorizing the last Juz (certified by a Qārī)
9. Virtues of Ṣalāh & Salām (Ḥaḍrat Shaykh)

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<sup>12</sup> Ḥaḍrat Shaykh Muḥammad Zakariyya, may Allah have mercy on him

10. 'Aqīda *Tahāwīyya*\*
11. *Nūr-ul-Idāh*\*
12. Thirty *Iṣlāhī* letters

#### ADVANCED

1. Three *chillas* (120 days) not missing any *wazā'if*
2. *Ikmālush-Shiyam*
3. *Imdād-ul-Sulūk*\*
4. Ṣūfi Manual of Ḥadīth
5. Book of Illumination\*
6. Path of the Worshipful Servants\*
7. *Mathnawī* Part 6\*
8. *Ḥayāt-us-Ṣaḥāba*
9. *Mukhtasar Minhāj al 'Ābidīn*
10. *Kūmiyay-e-Sa'ādāt*\*
11. Forty *Iṣlāhī* Letters
12. *Shifā'* of Qāḍī Iyyād\*

If one has read any of these books in the past, they will need to cover them once more in the correct order once they begin this curriculum.



# 4

## The *Khanqa*

The way of the Şūfis is *taqwa*. The Khanqa is the environment where *taqwa* is cultivated. It is a center of *taqwa* and *hidāya*. It is a place that fortifies those on the path and unifies those who have the similar objectives. It is a place where *sālikīn* aid one another on this path of purification and *taqwa*. These rules help the Khanqa fulfill these purposes, and comprise the *ādāb* of the Khanqa.

### General *Ādāb* and Purposes

All who attend should try their utmost to make everyone who comes to any of the programs feel welcome. It is a

privilege to serve one's brethren on this path. The Majlis attendees represent the Shaykh and must be welcoming and affable equally to those in and outside of the *ṭarīqa*. A hospitable person is not domineering, but regards himself as a servant. If you are unaware of how to deal with people, or what is proper *adab*, seek advice.

One must leave one's nafs beside the door when one enters: no grudges, negativity, ill-feelings, or personal remarks are permitted. The concern of whether so-and-so is present or not should not even enter into the mind of a true murīd, since the Lord of that person is present.

The Majlis imparts a high-level spiritual science that requires one's full attention to absorb. Like other disciplines taught at an adult level, whether literature, medicine, or mathematics, its purpose is to educate those endeavoring to master the discipline. To be distracted during the lesson or inconsistent in attendance will cause one to become an easy target for the devil.

The Khanqa activities are a program of *tarbiya*. It is not a time to be entertained or pass by weekend nights. If you are not interested in your own *tarbiya*, then you do not belong. The Khanqa is like a freeway, if you stop in the middle you will hinder and harm those that are moving forward. Therefore, if you feel compelled to stop, move to the side (For example, if you feel the need for games and entertainment, then move to the side because this path is not for you).

The point of a Khanqa is *tarbiya*: the process of taking people in different states and nurturing them intellectually and raising them by successive degrees to the desired perfection. People are elevated through the *ṣuḥba* of the *Mashā'ikh*, by internalizing their teachings, by living according to the mandates of *Dīn*, and by constant *dhikr*.

The rules herein help promote an environment in which the *tarbiya* can take place. Whoever disregards them undermines the Shaykh. It is important for everyone to realize, regardless of how long they have been around, that they came as guests of the Shaykh, and were welcomed, accommodated and helped by him. There is no sense of entitlement. Do not try to remind the Shaykh of your favors to him, as he owes you nothing.

Those who find these rules excessive or restrictive should not try to exempt themselves, because in reality they would be undermining the Shaykh. Rather, it is better for them to take a step back and remain in the programs meant for the *awām* (the general public). If there is a dire need, the Shaykh may grant certain individuals exemptions from certain rules. The Shaykh alone will determine this, after the issue has been formally discussed with him.

## Attendance and Application

All attendees must fill out the application. Upon filling out the application, the applicant will be contacted and informed of the conditions of attendance. No one will be

allowed to attend until their conditions have been fulfilled.

Guests are only accepted and invited by the Shaykh. Nobody should ask the Shaykh to bring a guest; rather if anybody would like to attend they should be given the application and told to apply. If you would like for someone to benefit bring them to any of the other programs. Do not look to your convenience in this regard. If someone would like to bring their *parent or elder* to Majlis, you must notify the Shaykh at least 48 hours in advance.

Majlis will begin the moment it is scheduled, and the door will be locked so people realize that they are responsible for making allowances for traffic or their personal circumstances to arrive on time.

Attendance may be taken any given week. Repeated or frequent unexcused absences may lead to suspension. If a person cannot attend they may listen to the live-stream, but must notify the Shaykh in advance. If it is a last minute issue, then they must notify him *in writing* the reason for missing the Majlis within 48 hours prior to that session of Majlis.

The Majlis may only be attended by adults and by children who sit as quietly and attentively as adults, without anything in their hands, for the entire duration. This applies to all children. Mothers with children too young to attend should listen in via the live-stream.

## Leaving the Majlis, Suspension & Removal

If after attending the Majlis your heart has changed with regards to it, then you may stop attending without any notification. It will not be taken personally, as this is not the path for everyone. However, if you are complaining about Majlis but are still trying to attend, then you will be removed from attending.

Anyone who violates the rules of the Khanqa, may expect to be removed from the Khanqa. This may be for one day, up to 40 days, or may require re-applying depending on the violation. This is the Shaykh's prerogative.

*Taqwa* and Good Character is mandatory on this path. If you cannot exhibit this for the brief period that you are in the Khanqa, then this demonstrates a lack of seriousness for this path. A person may be removed for the Khanqa for this reason.

Good Character includes giving others the benefit of the doubt, not thinking ill of them, finding excuses for them, overlooking faults, forgiving, forgetting, and abandoning grudges. It means wishing well for people, preferring others to oneself, being generous, cheerful, and positive in attitude. It means gratitude to Allah ﷻ for His many blessings, thanking others, humility and kindness, good manners, respect for elders and teachers, consideration of others' needs, and accepting the larger benefit of the community over one's personal wishes. It means always

looking to be a part of the solution rather than the problem, holding back anger, having patience, and all noble and praiseworthy qualities.

## Specific *Ādāb*

1. Men wear white with Khanqa *topīs* (hats). Women black with *niqāb*.
2. Everyone must bring a pen, paper, and *tasbīh*.
3. *Islāhī* letters and *Maʿmulāt* sheets must be submitted on a monthly basis.
4. Everyone must join the *sālikīn* email list.
5. Respect the neighbors late at night. Do not speak loudly outside after Majlis is over.
6. Everyone attending Majlis must be in *madrasa*, employed, looking after children, or in school. If a person is unemployed he must actively be searching for employment, acquiring enhanced training that will enable him to find a job, or otherwise be occupied with fruitful activity. This is not a path for the lazy.
7. Phones must be silenced and put away for the duration of Majlis. Looking at phones may lead to removal.
8. Majlis attendees should not be on social media. If there is a valid excuse for being on social media, permission must be taken from the Shaykh to remain on it. This permission should be renewed annually.
9. Simple refreshments may be had, or occasionally a full meal. However, everyone should expect to pay

for themselves and not put the burden on another. This may be paid for voluntarily, on a rotating basis, or by collecting funds. Any funds collected will be scrupulously counted, and recorded. This account will always be readily accessible.

10. All the audio recordings of Majlis are copyrighted material. It is not permitted for anyone to post them on any website or share them without prior permission.
11. Respect the entrances for the Khanqa. Men on the men's side. Women on the women's side. Do not have discussions obstructing either entrance.
12. An *Iṣlāhī* letter drop box will be put up. Put your *Iṣlāhī* letters in the drop box every month. A checklist will be maintained to see how often letters are being turned in.
13. Shoes must be placed in an orderly fashion on the shoe racks. If there is no space, then in order by the door.
14. If there is food or a snack, you must clean up after yourself. If you are assigned to clean up duty, do not leave until clean up is complete and you have taken permission.

The Shaykh may change these rules or make exceptions as he sees fit. Be concerned with your own *iṣlāh*, and do not concern yourself with others.

# 5

## Reformation of the *Nafs*

### The Two Foundations

Often people who decide to tread the path of *Taṣawwuf* by connecting themselves to a Shaykh have the notion that they will magically reach the status of *wilāya* (friendship and closeness to Allah) merely through their *bayʿa* and link with their Shaykh. This is an absolutely erroneous and misleading notion. The duty of the Shaykh is nothing but showing the murīd the path, not to carry the murīd on his back. The murīd must traverse the



path to Allah ﷻ himself, receiving guidance from the Shaykh along the way.

Our beloved Shaykh, Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Shāh Ḥakīm Muḥammad Akhtar Ṣāhib ﷺ said that there are two main foundations of this path of *Taṣawwuf* (derived from the Qur’ān):

1 - *Ṣuḥba*. Adopting the company of the pious.

واصبر نفسك مع الذين يدعون ربهم بالغدوة  
والعشيّ يريدون وجهه...

“...And withhold yourself (in the company) of those who remember their Lord, morning and evening desiring His Sublime Being...”  
(18:28)

2 - *Mujāhada*. Struggling to fight the *Nafs*.

والذين جاهدوا فينا لنهدينهم سبلنا...

“And (as for) those who strive hard (struggle) for Us, We will most certainly guide them to our paths....” (29:69)

Thus, the essence of *Taṣawwuf* is to struggle to acquire *iṣlāḥ-e-nafs* (rectification of the character) through the companionship of a qualified Shaykh.

Rectification of the character consists of beautifying oneself with *akhlāq-e-Muḥammadiyya* (the Prophetic

Character), and ridding oneself of *akḥlaq-e-raḍīla* (evil, *shayṭānic* character traits).

Thus, if a person wants to acquire the essence and objective of Taṣawwuf he must endeavor to rectify his character more than anything else. The method for this is to have an *isḥāḥ taʿalluq* (a reformative connection) with one's Shaykh.

Someone wrote to Ḥaḍrat Ḥakīm al-Ummah رحمته saying, “I do not know the way to rectify myself and acquire “*isḥāḥ-e-naḥs*”. I am totally ignorant of this matter. Please, for the sake of Allah, advise me in this matter.”

Ḥaḍrat Thānwī رحمته responded, “The method is that you should write to me your spiritual ailments one by one and ask me for their remedies. I will prescribe for you the appropriate remedy and after practically implementing that remedy you must inform me of your condition.”<sup>13</sup>

## The *Isḥāḥ* Letter

*Alḥamdulillah*, this *isḥāḥ* legacy of Ḥakīm al-Ummah Thānwī رحمته is still being carried on through the blessings and efforts of our Ḥaḍratwala رحمته the form of *isḥāḥ* letters.

The *isḥāḥ* letters are letters that a murīd writes to his Shaykh to inform him of his spiritual state and in turn receive the remedy and advice towards rectifying his condition.

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<sup>13</sup> *Tarbiyyat-us-Sālik*, 2: 20

Ḥaḍrat Ḥakīm al-Ummah Thānwī ﷺ has mentioned that there are four conditions that one needs to meet in order to benefit from having a Shaykh. Otherwise making *bay'ā* is just another custom for the sake of name or show.

One will hear people proudly boasting, “I am *bay'ā* to such and such Shaykh...” but when you look at their *akhlāq*, *a'māl*, and life, there is no significant difference between their life and the life of someone who is not connected to a Shaykh. The reason for this is because there is no *iṣlāḥī* activity taking place, whether it be through *ṣuḥba*, *iṣlāḥī* letters, or *mashwara* of one's condition over the phone, etc.

The four conditions mentioned by Ḥaḍrat Thānwī are:

### اطلاع

To inform the Shaykh of your spiritual condition. This is mainly done through *iṣlāḥī* letters, etc.

### اتباع

To blindly follow the Shaykh's advice.

### اعتماد

To rely upon the advice and counsel the Shaykh gives you.

## انقياد

To firmly adhere to and implement whatever the Shaykh advises one to do for one's reformation.

All of these points are directly connected with the *ṣuḥba* of the Shaykh and/or the *iṣlāḥī*-letters.

Some people make the excuse of not writing to the Shaykh by saying that they have a difficult time “expressing” themselves in writing. The solution to this is simple: you do not need to “express” yourself and write a whole three-hundred page auto-biography. All you need to do is write your spiritual condition, just as you would tell a doctor about how you are feeling.

Here is an example of an *iṣlāḥī* letter and its response.

*Hāl*

*Respected Shaykh, As-salāmu ‘alaykum,...*

*For a long time now, I just do not have the ability to control my gaze. However much I try, I still fail in controlling my eyes. Any woman that passes by, I glance at her lustfully. Please counsel me as to how to save myself from this disease.*

*Was salām. ‘Abdullah.*

*Reply & Remedy*

*Wa ‘alaykum as-salām.*

*The statement you made about not having the “ability” to control your gaze is incorrect. It is a known fact and an established principle of human nature is that if a person has the ability look, then he definitely has the ability not to look as well. If he has the ability to sin, then he definitely has the ability not to sin.*

*The fact of the matter is that you are not using that God-given ability. Ḥadīrat Ḥakīm al-Umma Thānwī (may Allah have mercy on him) said, “There is no other remedy for the disease of continuous sinning (whether it be casting evil and lustful glances or any other sin) except to do 3 things:*

*1. To use your Himma – your God-given abilities. Have courage and face your “fears”. That fear that, “What if I don't look at her? What will happen if I lower my gaze? If I leave sinning then I will get bored and go into depression. Maybe I should go slowly into Dīn or else I won't be able to handle it. I'm still young and strong, what a waste of my youth.”*

*These are all whisperings of shayṭān, who wants you to delay with these childish and cowardly excuses so that your heart totally becomes black in sinning which will lead to never being able to make tawba again.*

*Tell yourself:*

*“I can do it. Sinning is not good for me. If sins were good, then why did Allah forbid it? Sins are candy-coated poison.”*

*Sins are like an itch, it feels really good to scratch it, but after you're done and your skin is ripped up and bleeding, then it doesn't feel good anymore.*

*Tell yourself:*

*“I will not use this body which Allah created for His obedience to commit sin and live a life of a disobedient servant. O Nafs! This body does not belong to you! It belongs to Allah, so don't exploit it by doing what shayṭān tells you to do!”*

*Use your Himma. Be strong! Fight your nafs and say that you can.*

*2. The second remedy for continuous sinning is to make du'ā' to Allah Most High to help you use the Himma and ability He granted and to take you away from a life of sin.*

*3. The third remedy is to ask the pious servants of Allah Most High to make du'ā' for you so that you use the ability to stay away from sin.*

## Some Notes regarding *Iṣlāḥī* Letters

One should not seek *fatwas* through *iṣlāḥī* letters. These letters should strictly contain questions about spiritual diseases and their remedies. If however there is a *mas'ala* related to one's spiritual disease, then there is no harm in mentioning it.

One should mention only *one spiritual disease or problem* at a time. Once the response is received, it should be practiced upon for two weeks. Thereafter, one should write another letter informing the Shaykh of whether one benefited or not. In this way, one can continue to the next disease, and the next, and so on...

Sometimes one feels that they have *no* spiritual condition. If one feels this way, i.e. they feel they are in a spiritual slump, then this in fact should be mentioned. For example,

*“Respected Shaykh, I have no spiritual state/ḥāl at the moment. Please make du‘ā’ that Allah Most High rectifies my character and grants me the Imān and Yaqīn of His beloved servants...”*

Ḥaḍratwala (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned that as long as this letter remains (with the Shaykh's *du‘ā’* in it) then Allah ﷻ will continue to shower down blessings upon the person. Even if the Shaykh has passed away, the words of his *du‘ā’* are preserved on paper.

May Allah ﷻ give us the ability to value this great opportunity.