

THE SHAIKH WRITES:

translated by: Nasir Kamal

(Following is the translation of an article from the book "Mazameen e Kaif" by Shaikh Dr. Shah Meerza Ikhtiyar Hussain Kaif Niazi. This book is a collection of articles from the Sufi point of view that he wrote from time to time.)

This article is written as a result of an encounter, which I had with a religious scholar. Besides, it is further substantiated by some contemporary writings on the subject of religious versus spiritual issues. Clarification is necessary beforehand so that there remains no doubt in understanding of *Tareeqat* (Esoteric aspect of Islam) in a sense it is used here.

I had the honour of meeting a religious scholar who was not only a graduate of *Dars -e-Nizami* but was an M.A. in Islamic Studies and a holder of two other post graduate degrees. On an academic front, he was undoubtedly more knowledgeable than me. Our conversation encompassed *Tareeqat*, *Shariat* (Exoteric aspect of Islam) etc. during, which he strongly supported *Tareeqat* even to the extent of saying that *Deen* (Islam) could not be completed without *Tareeqat*. Coincidentally, subject of *Tasawwuf* (Spiritual aspect of Islam) also surfaced up during the conversation that seemingly disturbed him. He said that *Tareeqat* is pure Islam however *Tasawwuf* is heresy and a cause of distraction. According to him, *Tasawwuf* is not even remotely associated with Islam.

Certainly a large number of people are also of this opinion about *Tasawwuf* that has compelled me to write this clarification in the form of article below. *Tareeqat* is regarded as a synonym of *Tasawwuf* in this article. Everyone has the right to differ and one's opinion cannot be imposed upon others. Likewise, we also have the right to express our views.

SHARIAT & TAREEQAT

The aspect, which requires attention relates to unreasonable division of exoteric and esoteric dimensions into separate compartments that makes them appear as two different entities. A human being is a combination of body and soul. Both components are equally important to complete a personality. Imagining musk without fragrance or pudding without sweetness is meaningless. Both are complementary to each other and become meaningful only when they exist together. In view of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the purpose of worship cannot only be restricted to the strict observation of physically visible rituals while ignoring the actual spirit of it. This understanding is the very foundation of *Tareeqat*.

In this framework, the Sufis use four terminologies (i) *Shariat* (Exoteric dimension of Islam) (ii) *Tareeqat* (Esoteric aspect of Islam) (iii) *Haqeeqat* (Reality of Existence) (iv) *Ma'arfat* (Knowledge of God). A detailed discussion of these terms is out of context here, but is casually mentioned in order to formulate the Sufi point of view. Hazrat Imam Ghazali (RA) uses an analogy of a walnut to explain religion. He says, 'Just as a walnut has four components i.e. (i) shell, (ii) inner covering, (iii) kernel, and (iv) oil/essence; likewise *Deen* can be classified into four parts i.e. (i) *Shariat* is the shell, (ii) *Tareeqat* is the inner covering, (iii) *Haqeeqat* is the kernel and (iv) *Ma'arfat* is the oil/essence. A complete walnut is comprised of all four and will be incomplete even if a single component is missing.

The literal meaning of *Shariat* is 'path' as defined in the dictionary while as a religious term; it refers to the Islamic way of life. Islam not only reforms outer and inner aspects of human life but also makes it possible for mankind to realize the zenith of humanity. Hence, for living both the aspects perfectly, Islam has formulated necessary rules and regulations – collection of which is called as "*Shariat e Mutahirra*" (as displayed by the acts of Prophet Muhammad –SAW). However generally, the regulations related to extrovert form of worship are called *Shariat* and the rules for governing the introvert aspect of worship are termed as *Tareeqat*. *Haqeeqat* and *Ma'arfat* reflect stages of *Qurb* (Nearness to Allah) that lead to the ultimate destination of Union with Allah. Precisely, in the words of Imam Ghazali (RH), it is the kernel and essence, which is the real objective. In this way the religion of Islam is a collective name for *Shariat*, *Tareeqat*, *Haqeeqat* and *Ma'arfat*.

"*Shariat e Mutahirra*" displays all the above-mentioned parts perfectly and is not limited to the exoteric aspect only. When it is said that *Shariat* and *Tareeqat* are complementary to each other and *Shariat* without *Tareeqat* is misleading while *Tareeqat* without *Shariat* is heresy, it refers to commonly understood *Shariat*, otherwise "*Shariat e Mutahirra*" encompasses not only *Shariat* and *Tareeqat* but also *Haqeeqat* and *Ma'arfat*. Obviously, the acts and sayings of the Prophet (SAW) not only cover exoteric dimension but esoteric dimension too. In other words, Islamic path of spirituality is the one where both the exoteric and esoteric

(contd. on page 2)

ED's NOTE:

I am not aware in detail of difficulties faced by the Eskimos. I can only imagine about living in a freezer to avoid cold as this is what Eskimos do; live in houses built of snow to avoid cold. I don't even know what religion they follow. I guess it must be the Lord Survival that they respect and come up with ingenious ways of worships. They eat raw blubber out of the seals and large fish. They also hunt down bears for food and fur. But the best part about their habitat and their own nature is that they have adapted fully to the harsh environment where they live. They must often say to each other: "Gosh! How can people live in the overcrowded large cities burning hot under the sun while we enjoy the peaceful and serene ambiance in the wilderness of white snow? How cool!!" Carrying my imaginations beyond the thresholds of sanity, I place myself in the neighborhood of Eskimos. Assuming a tolerant society and cordial people, I envision myself being the only Muslim living there. Here the woodpecker of reality starts picking on the smooth wall of my imagination. How will I get up in the morning to offer *fajr* prayer if the sunrise is at 2 a.m.? Is it possible to have *fajr* prayer so soon? How will I bring the courage to perform ablution (*wazu*) with snow or water below freezing point? How will the Ramazan be during winters when the sun never sets for approximately six months? A never ending fast for this extended period perhaps! Is eating a seal or a bear halal or haram or *makrooh*? Can I offer prayers wearing bear's fur?

The woodpecker keeps knocking and finally smashes down the wall of imagination which falls with a loud noise sounding similar to the word "Ijtihad". Eureka! And I run out of my imagination into the real world with full clothes on. We have the tool to chisel out our way of life within the limits of our religion. Ijtihad not only enables us to adapt to different environments but also to the changing times. Had anyone thought of offering prayers in space and which direction to face when offering prayers in space? The history has it; when the first Muslim astronomer went into the space, he offered prayers. The Muslims and especially the scholars need to understand the importance of Ijtihad and its application in the current times. We all need to ride the wave with the rest of the world and must not be kept away by the notion that it's a waste of time.

Talib

THE SHAIKH WRITES:

(contd. from page 1)

aspects of human life need to be disciplined in order to attain to the state of *Qurb*. As per the Islamic teachings, execution of apparent acts is not enough. The magnificence of character and essence of worship cannot be achieved without pure intentions and inner awakening. This is a difficult path to tread, where without the guidance of *Ishq* (Love for Allah), neither the journey gets completed nor one gets closer to God. Hence the true lovers of Allah consider *Ishq* to be the basis of every form of worship.

Their cause is the highest, their way of life is the greatest, their vision is profound, their hearts are spacious and their acts are pure and benevolent for the humanity. Their purpose of life, focus of worship and most of all their beloved is God ... and only God. They pray to God for the love of God and serve the humanity out of the same love. They sacrifice their egos at the altar of their Beloved hence lifting the veil between the lover and the Beloved. This very state is called "*Fana Fil Haq*" (Annihilation in God).

Some people try to segregate *Tareeqat* from *Shariat* for unknown reasons whereas, if a little attention is paid towards the sayings and lifestyle of the Sufis, misunderstandings can easily be resolved. We do not find any prominent Sufi whose life was not completely in accordance with the *Shariat*. Even in trivial matters, such people did not go against *Shariat*. The teachings and sayings of Sufis have always emphasized on following the *Sunnat*. In reality, true Muslim is the one who follows both *Shariat* and *Tareeqat*. Every Sufi Master insists on following the *Shariat*, without which, path to Godliness cannot even be imagined.

All the Sufis are unanimous on the point that pursuing *Shariat* is absolutely essential and that even the minor aspects of *Shariat* cannot be ignored. They follow footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and their lives reflect both the aspects of *Shariat* and *Tareeqat*. All the well-known Sufis of the different orders of *Tareeqat* like Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jeelani (RA), Hazrat Khwaja Moenuddin Chishti (RA), Hazrat Shahabuddin Soharwardi (RA), Hazrat Bahauddin Naqshband (RA), Hazrat Mujaddid Alf Sani (RA), their successors, and the successors of their successors have all emphasized on the importance of *Shariat* in their writings, speeches and letters. In some cases, slight digression may appear but there are several reasons, which need to be considered before passing a judgment. There have been instances where writings and literature of the Sufi scholars have been corrupted which should also be taken into account. Based on certain exceptions, it is

extremely unfair to blame all the Sufis. Some so-called Orientalists have also propagated such a prejudice. In the books of certain Sufis, some material may be found that is apparently against the *Shariat* but either it is the altered version or it may appear so due to symbolical or metaphorical use of language. These should not be taken literally rather require deep vision and exposure. Quran itself uses metaphors and allusions in several *Ayats* (verses). There are Quranic verses that apparently seem to contradict each other and require interpretation in order to decipher the correct meaning and for retaining the sanctity of the holy book. Giving examples here will result in another long discourse, which may appear as a digression from the main topic. However, this reality cannot be ignored that a few black sheep exist in every society and Sufi path is no exception to this. There definitely are some pseudo Sufis who tarnish the true teachings of *Tasawwuf* but these are not the real Sufis.

There is a famous quote by Hazrat Imam Malik (RA): "Whoever follows *Tasawwuf* (*Tareeqat*) without *Fiqh* (*Shariat*), becomes a hypocrite and whoever learns *Fiqh* but does not follow *Tasawwuf* becomes "*Fasiq*" (disobedient to Allah), and whoever follows both, finds the *Reality* (*Haqeeqat*)."

72ND URS OF HAZRAT DR. MEERZA MURTAZA HUSSAIN (RA)

The 72nd Urs of Hazrat Dr. Meerza Murtaza Hussain was celebrated on January 8th, 2011 in Karachi, Pakistan and on January 22nd, 2011 in Jabalpur, India.

In Karachi, the venue was Khanqah-Ikhtiyaria. Hazrat Dr. Ikhtiyar Hussain Meerza, who is the present Sajjada Nasheen, graced the occasion with his presence despite ill health. Quran Khwani took place after Asr prayers followed by Sama'a. Bahauddin Qawwal troupe rendered soul enriching qawwalis for a couple of hours. The ceremony culminated on recitation of Fateha and serving of langar to the devotees.

Hazrat Pir O Murshed Dr. Ikhtiyar Hussain Meerza arrived in Jabalpur, India the very next week after the Urs at Karachi. Urs ceremony in Jabalpur started with a procession initiating from the tomb of Hazrat Qibla Nizami Saheb (RA) and culminating at the tombs of Hazrat Meerza Agha Muhammad (RA) and Hazrat Meerza Murtaza Hussain (RA) in an hour and a half. On its way, qawwals, shahnai players and musical band continuously paid tribute in their own manner. A particular band had come to participate in the Urs ceremonies from Bhopal. After Fateha khwani and sandal ceremony at the tomb of Agha Saheb (RA),

RUMI's CORNER

Explanation of a couplet Of Maulana Rumi (RA)

First couplet:

*Too Karimi Mun Kameena Barda Um
Laikin Az Lutf E Shuma Parwarda Um*

You are Compassionate and I am ignoble
Still your kindness takes care of me.

It reminds me of the famous couplet by Pir Mehr Ali Shah (RA):

*Kithae Mehr Ali Kithae teri sana
Gustakh ankhiyan kithae jaa ladiyan*

What is the status of Mehr Ali that he dares to praise thee?

Where have these insolent eyes dared to gaze?

When a soul, brimming with love and joy does not find enough words to thank and praise his benefactor, such verses gush forth to translate his heartfelt emotions.

The state of intoxication is very private and can only be experienced on an individual basis. Just as a person has to digest his own food and carry his own cross in this world of cause and effect, likewise feelings of love cannot be shared. An outsider may get a glimpse of love from lover's aura, behaviour, poetry, music etc. but he cannot enter lover's *Kaaba* (focus) of love unless and until he goes through the same experience on his own. Love in its refined form is called '*Ishq*' which is an end unto itself. Here a lover does not demand or expect anything from the beloved. Just the presence of beloved makes him content and peaceful. We, followers of the Sufi path aim for '*Ishq*' as nothing less will be of any help! Most of us have seen such lovers and some of us may have been experiencing such a state on their own.

Once the colour of '*Ishq*' takes hold in lover's life; roots of desires are burnt to ashes. From then onwards, he exists as a monarch ruling the sultanate of self. With that awareness, inner contentment stabilizes and a sense of utmost humility arises due to the simple fact that gift of '*Ishq*' is inimitable in comparison to his efforts. In such a state, he bows before his Murshed in gratitude for the immense treasure of spiritual dawn in his life. This is how such a couplet is born.

the procession arrived at the tomb of Hazrat Dr. Meerza Murtaza Hussain (RA). Again, Fateha khwani and sandal ceremony took place. Short qawwali sessions also took place at both the tombs. Fateha was also offered at the other two tombs of Hazrat Zareena Bibi (RA) and Maulvi Nazeer Ahmed (RA). The procession settled in the Sama khana where Qawwali was performed for several hours. Lastly, Fateha and langar took place.

ROSES BLEED

by: Hasan Nizami Meerza

Within a short period of time, terrorists have hit three prominent Sufi shrines located in Pakistan. Bomb explosions and subsequent chaos left carnage of an indescribable nature. Proponents of both for and against the Sufi path condemned such inhuman acts. However, particularly the people who are against the Sufi ideology raised some pertinent questions. First and foremost relate to the lack of supernatural display by the Sufi saints during such occurrences. The Sufis, who are considered as the saviours could not even save their own places of veneration. Why those Saints could not make the offenders blind before they committed such a dastardly act of spreading terror? Such beliefs about the Sufi Murshed where he is portrayed as the super-human come from the blind followers of the Sufi path who are directly responsible for creating such misunderstandings about the Sufis. Onus of such beliefs goes to them.

In fact, this is the dilemma with every religious path whether exoteric or esoteric in nature that with the passing of time, it is taken over by the believers for their own worldly benefits. In case of the Sufis, a dead Murshed in particular is projected as the super-human. People go on pilgrimages to shrines of such Sufis and ask for help in matters that could very well be handled by the worldly means. Such pilgrims have no interest whatsoever in finding the Truth. What a paradox! A spiritual abode is approached for worldly gains. Caretakers of such places take full advantage of gullibility of needy people. Unfortunately, people want immediate solutions and tend to forget that worldly problems can never simply disappear with a poof. As Mirza Ghalib has appropriately said:

*Gham-e-hasti ka Asad kis sae ho juz marg ilaaj
Shama har rang mein jalti hai saher honae tak*

Suffering of life, Asad, cannot be cured by anyone but death
The flame burns in every hue till the dawn breaks

A Sufi path has a different goal altogether. It has a sole motive of bringing a seeker to an understanding that life on earth is capable of opening a door to self-awareness or the spiritual realm. Once, he is able to experience the spiritual dimension of life to an extent of absolute certainty (*Haq-ul-Yaqeen*), his life takes a drastic turn towards another reality. Temporal and ever changing phenomena of material realm loses its attraction and his energies are directed towards the eternal presence of Allah. Only then, it can be said that the power of the spiritual sun that rises from within overshadows worldly problems

in a psychological sense. Quran says about such people:

Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve. (10:62)

This is what the state of a Sufi is! His life revolves around Allah; hence light (*Nur*) of Allah dispels shadows of fear and grief and such a human being only can truly be called as the Perfect Human Being (*Insan-e-Kamil*). However, it is incorrect to project Sufi Murshed as the God with all the supernatural powers. Such an understanding only reflects inferiority complex of the disciples, when they consider their Murshed parallel to God. As a matter of fact, relatively speaking, a genuine Sufi Murshed is more human in disposition. His distinct feature is his loving nature for all the humanity. His presence generates ripples of love all around and genuine seekers catch fire of glorious love emanating from the Sufi Murshed to find spiritual fulfillment. Love never dies! It is the only alchemy a Sufi radiates from his presence that is capable of transforming egoistic human beings into humble souls. This is the biggest miracle that he performs during his lifetime. When one meets such a Sufi, somehow God seems close by. When a Sufi Murshed departs from the material realm, he is survived by the eternal perfume of love. To pay homage to such a beautiful human being, his lovers build a shrine to keep that flame of beauty alive. As the shrine has a connection to his physical body, it becomes an important place for his lovers. He is no more found in his physical body, but lovers are capable of feeling his spiritual presence through the power of love. His magnetic charm does not lose its vigour and remains available to sincere seekers. Just as a sensitive visitor feels an inner connection to a peaceful scenic place likewise a sincere pilgrim finds a blissful milieu at the shrine. Just as a waft of fragrant roses or a haunting melody revives the past into the present, similarly presence of a physically departed Sufi Murshed remains fragrantly available to the sincere seekers. Such pilgrims are attracted to the Sufi shrines not for any worldly reasons but for an inexplicable spiritual thirst. A soul with a sincerity of purpose for finding awareness in this life is likely to be attracted to the Source of Godliness whether in body or in a shrine. As said in the Quran:

He whom Allah, guides is rightly guided; but he whom Allah leaves to stray; for him wilt thou find no protector to lead him to the Right Way. (Quran 18:17)

Again, such a feeling is only restricted for lovers of Allah, since like attracts likes in a spiritual realm. This is why; it is said in the Sufi tradition that unless and until one is invited by the physically departed Sufi Murshed, he cannot reach His tomb.

Hundreds of people go, but only a few are invited. Majority of the people who partake in celebrations of the Sufi ceremony are physically there yet spiritually not there. Unless and until, sincerity of purpose is there, visibility is not visibility at all. Quran says about such a situation:

It was not you (Prophet SAW) who threw when you threw (a handful of dust); GOD is the One who threw (Quran 8:17)

Coming back to the question raised about the omnipotence of the Sufis regarding destruction of the shrines, a simple answer is that the Sufi Murshed is not powerful as per the ordinary definition of power and revenge. A more advanced reply will be that the humanity is reflective of ninety-nine attributes of Allah. If He is '*Muhyi*' (Giver of life), He is '*Mumit*' (Taker of life) too. If in a God's world, 'evil' continues to live side by side with 'good' then what to say about a shrine of a Sufi Saint. An analogy can be given here:

There can be two brothers in the same garden. One may enjoy perfume of roses, other may like smell of manure; one prefers flowers, other wants thorns; one wants to attain to heights of the trees, other one is looking for the depth of roots; and on and on!

Garden helps them both!

SUFI POETRY

"Even after all this time
The sun never says to the earth,
You owe Me.'
Look what happens with
A love like that,
It lights the Whole Sky"

by Hafiz Shirazi

Who is man?
The reflection of the Eternal Light.
What is the world?
A wave on the Everlasting Sea.
How could the reflection be cut off from the Light?
How could the wave be separate from the Sea?
Know that this reflection and this wave are that very Light and Sea.

by Maulana Jami

You've no idea how hard I've looked for a gift to bring You.
Nothing seemed right.
What's the point of bringing gold to the gold mine, or water to the Ocean?
Everything I came up with was like taking spices to the Orient.
It's no good giving my heart and my soul because you already have these.
So- I've brought you a mirror.
Look at yourself and remember me.

by Maulana Rumi

EL GHAZZALI

(b. ca 453/1061, d. 517/1123 or 520/1126)

by: *Murtaza Meerza*

A few months ago as part of an online discussion our attention was directed to a docudrama about Imam Ghazzali by the name of "Alchemy of Happiness." Named after his famous book "*Kimiya'e Sa'adat*," it drew on the personal journey of the legendary scholar cum Sufi and his impact on the world of Islam. It also catalogued his journey from the proverbial "*madarsa e aql*" (school of reason) to "*maikhana e ishq*" (tavern of love.) The above-mentioned docudrama has an interesting personality that hovers at the edge of the more famous Abu Hamid al Ghazzali's life; his younger brother Abu Fotuh Ahmed. Usually mentioned as a footnote in the banded about history of Islamic philosophy, his life remains veiled through relative anonymity, and is referenced in history usually where it intersects that of his brother. It is interesting however that within the circles of *Sufis*, and those with knowledge of Persian literature, the younger has as definite a claim to fame as the elder. His biographical details, although available, are not as familiar when contrasted with his acclaimed elder brothers. A certain cause of this paucity is that most of his life was certainly spent out of the public eye, unlike Abu Hamid who enjoyed the patronage of courts, regularly interacted with the most significant political figures of the day, and simultaneously exerted a tremendous influence on religious thought and exegesis. While there is no doubt as to the vast literary output of Abu Hamid, Ahmed Ghazzali's output is not only uncertain but stands in remarkable contrast to his brother's, mostly, philosophic and prosaic style. For Ahmed Ghazzali was a poet.

What is more; his poetry was devoted to Love. And herein lies his significant station in the temporal chain of literature; more specifically Sufi literature. He is amongst the first to add to Sufi literature the specific use of verses, and amongst the first to use and develop a language of Love. His most recognized work to date, "The Sawanih", is a book written solely as an expression of Love. It is rather remarkable that these two massively influential personalities were both born in the same household and grew up together. Their paths were certainly different at first; unlike his scholarly elder brother Ahmed Ghazzali turned to Sufism at an earlier age, becoming the disciple first of Hazrat Abu Bakar Nassaj Tusi (d. 487/1094) and then Hazrat Abu Ali Farmadi (d.477/1084). He was regarded to be well advanced in Sufism when he was asked by Abu Hamid to teach in his place at the Nezamiya University in Baghdad. During this same period he also looked after Abu Hamid's family during the elder's absence due to his own spiritual search. Like many contemporary Sufis, Ahmad was a prominent

traveller and travelled extensively in his capacities as a Sufi master and a prominent preacher, treading to such varied destinations as Nishapur, Maraga, Hamadan and Isfahan. He died and is buried at Qazvin, having trained and initiated many eminent disciples such as Ayn-al-Qozat Hamadani and Abu'l-Najib Suharwardi, founder of the Suharwardiyya order. His relationship with Ayn-al-Qozat is said to enjoy significance comparable to other illustrious teacher-disciple relations such as Shams Tabriz (RA) and Maulana Rumi (RA).

It is from this personage that "The Sawanih" found its expression, and came to be one of the first outpourings of the Love that had been nurtured secretly in the breast of the Sufis. "The Sawanih", roughly translated as "Inspiration from the World of Pure Spirits" was a book not written for widespread circulation but rather, as the author himself points out in the prologue, written with the purpose of providing consolation to one "Sa'in al-Din" whom the author considered "dearest of all the brethren (of the Path)".

With this express purpose "The Sawanih" sets off with a prologue that provides an illustrative and necessary caution; that although the book attempts to convey the '*ma'ani*' (meaning) of '*ishq*' (profound love), essentially such a thing 'cannot be expressed in words nor contained in sentences'. The prologue also says "this indefiniteness of words exists only for those who have no 'immediate tasting' (*zauq*)."
This apparent dichotomy between the inner and outer meaning is then elaborated and elegantly resolved by the author stating that 'in the innermost heart of words is concealed the sharp edges of a sword, but they can be perceived only by inner vision (*baseerat*)...if in all of the chapters (of this book) something is said which is not comprehended, then it must be one of these (esoteric) ideas." The overall purpose then being to provide consolation in times of helplessness;

"If I thirst for the water in her mouth (and yet cannot attain it)
I use wine as a substitute.
But how can wine take the place of that water?
Nevertheless it can sooth an ailing heart"

The book itself is short, consisting of seventy-seven brief chapters written in prose with interspersed verses. The quality of the prose itself borders on the poetic, owing both to its depth of allusive meaning and the sheer force of its eloquence. This particular translation of the Sawanih, from its original Persian to English, was done by Nasrullah Pourjavady who does a service by listing several of the more abstract Persian words next to the translated one. Of course the book loses a degree of its potency due to this switchover. As Annemarie Schimmel says of the original

degree of refinement, the words and sentences are so fragile, that any attempt to render them into a Western language and keep their flavors intact would be futile." But that it remains powerful cannot be doubted. Following are a few extracts from the text that are intended to convey an impression of its content. To attempt anything more would be impertinence and injustice considering the sheer depth of meaning that flows through the book. Hence a few glimpses:

"When the spirit came into existence from non-existence, on the frontier of existence, love was awaiting the steed, the spirit. I know not what kind of combining took place in the beginning of existence-if the spirit was an essence, then the attribute of that essence was love. Having found the house vacant it resided therein." (Ch. 1. no 2)

"Love is covered and no one has ever seen it revealed.

How long will these lovers boast in vain?
Everyone in his fancy boasts of being in love,
While love is free from these fancies and being 'such and such'." (Ch 3 no 3)

"..it is not the case that all in-accessibilities are due to greatness and exaltedness; sometimes inaccessibility may be due to subtlety (*latafat*) or the excess of nearness (*qurb*).

The extreme limit of knowledge is the shore of Love. If one is on the shore, he has some understanding of the ocean. But if he steps forward he will be drowned, and then how can he give any report? How can the one who is drowned have any knowledge?

Your beauty exceeds my sight.
Your secret is beyond my knowledge.
In your love my singleness abounds.
In describing you, my ability is impotence."
(Ch.3 no 4)

"The moth who has fallen in love with the fire, has its nutriment (from the flame, only) when it is at a distance from the illumination. The outpost of illumination welcomes the moth with hospitality and invites it, so the moth continues the flight of love with its own wing(s) of effort in the air of its quest for the fire. Once it reaches the fire, then there is no more advancing on its part. It is then the fire which advances in it. Moreover, the moth no longer has any nutriment but it is the flame which has its nutriment. And this is a great secret. The moth becomes its own beloved for one instant. This is its perfection."
(Ch.39 no 2)

Sources:

- *The Sawanih* - by Ahmad Ghazzali translated by Dr. Nasrullah Pourjavady
- *Encyclopedia Iranica* - Ahmad Ghazzali
- *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* by Annemarie Schimmel
- *Alchemy of Happiness* (docudrama)

ENCOUNTER ATA HERMITAGE

contributed by: Murtaza Meerza

This story is said to have been told one day by Emir Hamza (died 1710) in answer to the question: 'In what manner could you relate to us an equivalence of your power to live in a world other than ours?'

It is related that he could slip 'into invisibility just by taking a sideways step, when his feet were at right angles to one another.' About this, as about other wonders, he said: 'I forbid you to relate any wonder of mine without adding that the performance of wonders is for a purpose of self-improvement or passing power, not amazement or faith, to others.'

The story relates to Shah Firoz who died in 1660, and in popular repute is still alive, in a new form, as one of the Hidden Guides of the Sufis.

I had walked to a hermitage in the Hindu Kush to visit its Sheikh, and also to see if I could find some way of stilling my doubts about a method of proving the real existence of the Hidden Path. It was only after many adventures that I at last came across the friendly sight of smoke rising through the chimney hole of that simple building.

A man, plainly dressed, an honest expression on his face, was sitting quietly at the door of the hermitage.

He said, 'Welcome, brother.' Far from feeling glad, I was disturbed to find so little respect for me in this man, who was surely the watchman.

'Are you the watchman?' I asked.

'I am called that,' he said.

'I am looking for the Ancient, the Guide,' I told him.

'I am called that,' he answered.

And then I was glad that the great teacher had called me brother. As we went into the house a small dog ran to the Sheikh's side, delighted that he had come back.

'Welcome, brother,' said the Sheikh to the animal, and I was again downcast to think that by this greeting I had been put on a level with the dog and that I had not been honored. But being the guest, I said nothing due to politeness.

Soon we were seated before a bowl of yogurt; when the Guide spoke, it was to recite a poem.

'A puff of smoke against a mountain - the heart grows glad

A kind word to a little dog - the heart grows sad.'

I was amazed that he could understand my secret thoughts in this way, and uneasy, and rather ashamed.

Persian; "The language has reached such a 'Teach me,' I said.

He answered:

'What do I sing, and what does my lute sing? You and I are not in harmony, although I understand your thoughts. What have you already taught yourself? What have others taught you? You are uneasy because you have come so far and at the end of your journey have found someone who can read your thoughts. And you feel that perhaps you could learn this power, and then use it to your heart's content. I seem acceptable to you, as people sometimes think of doctrines as being acceptable to them. But are you acceptable to me? People never bother to think that the doctrine may not accept them.'

For the first time I was overcome by real fear; alone with this man of power in such a lonely place, I began to tremble.

And the Guide continued:

'You must go away. You are still too raw for a teacher to develop; a fruit must be touched by the right things, by those elements which ripen it. Go away, strive, and work in every possible way. When you are nearer maturity you will be able to properly understand the experience of our master, Ben-Adhem, who gave away the throne of Balkh to be with us.

'For he was walking along the road one day when he saw a stone on the ground. It had written on it, "Turn Me Over And Read." So he picked it up and looked at the other side. And there was written:

"Why Do You Seek More Knowledge When You Pay No Heed To What You Know Already?"

Turning from the Sage I thought to myself, 'I wish that everyone could have an encounter like this, so that at least it would be common knowledge that teaching of this kind exists in the world.'

He went on, 'Often the penalty of knowledge is to be laughed at. Tell people of our discussion here and they will think you mad. In this way, real knowledge protects itself.'

I made no attempt to shape words, but in my heart, as earnestly as I could, I framed the thought, 'How can I serve?'

And also without words, Shah Firoz spoke directly to my heart:

'Increase the desire to serve and a chance of service may be given you.'

Only when through frequent effort I had reached this stage did I realise the true value of my encounter with him who is called 'Shah Firoz.'

- Extracted from: "Wisdom of the Idiots" by Idries Shah

GOD AND REAL LIFE

contributed by: Sheeza Asim

Muslim Tradition

A blind man was begging on the road to Makkah, when a pious Muslim came over and asked whether the people were giving generously – as the Quran commands. The man showed him his little tin, which was almost empty. The traveler said:

"Let me write something on the card around your neck"

Hours later, the traveler returned. The beggar was surprised, for he had received a large amount of money. The beggar asked:

"What did you write on the card?"

The pious man replied "All I wrote was: Today is a beautiful spring day, the sun is shining, and I am blind"

Christian Tradition

A protestant priest, having started a family, no longer had any peace for his prayers. One night, when he knelt down, he was disturbed by the children in the living room.

"Have the children keep quiet!" he shouted.

His startled wife obeyed. Thereafter, whenever the priest came home, they all maintained silence during prayers. But he realized that God was no longer listening.

One night, during his prayers, he asked the Lord: "what is going on? I have the necessary peace, and I cannot pray!"

An angel replied: "He hears words, but no longer hears the laughter. He notices the devotion, but can no longer see the joy."

The priest stood and shouted once again to his wife: "Let the children play! They are part of praying!"

And his words were heard by God once again.

Jewish tradition

Dov Beer de Mezeritch was asked:

"Which example should one follow? That of pious men, who devote their lives to God? That of scholars, who seek to understand the will of the Almighty?"

"The best example is that of the child," he answered.

"A child knows nothing. It hasn't yet learned what reality is," people commented.

"You are all quite wrong, for a child possesses three qualities we should never forget," said Dov Beer. "They are always joyful without reason. They are always busy. And when they want something, they know how to demand it firmly and with determination."

- - Extracted from "Wisdom of the Idiots" by Idries Shah