

- New Year Message for 2018

Salam aleikum - Peace be with you

It is the time of year again to write a new year message. Of course, for some people the new year is at another time, but following on from a visit to the blessed city of Konya for the 'Urs of Mevlana Rumi and also from a recent visit to Iran it still seems a suitable time for our purposes.

In England, Europe and America the winter is here with its snow and cold. In some places like India and Iran it is just a little colder than usual. The outward conditions have their effect for sure, but the climate in our heart is much more important. The Prophets though out the history of mankind were sent to illuminate hearts with truth – outward conditions varied but the truth is essentially one albeit it manifests in various ways.

This is one of the secrets of the saints like Mevlana Rumi, Khwaja Gharib Nawaz, Hz Abdul Qadir al Jilani and so on. With them the sun shines at midnight. They are not subject to the outward conditions. Their place of operation is in the human heart. The heart referred to is not the cone shaped lump of flesh that is part of the body; it is the heart that is so large that it is said into one corner of it the throne of the All-mighty, of God, of Allah, can fit. You can think of it as another dimension if it helps, but for sure by thought and intellectual erudition the knowledge of the heart cannot be reached. The mystics reached up to it by God's grace. They prepared themselves with asceticism and discipline, but they could not reach the dimension of the human heart without Allah's consent. Read Sura Rehman in the holy Qur'an. It speaks of man not being able to pass beyond the boundary of this world to enter the Unseen without Allah's permission.

Our human frailty means we are dependent on the Mercy of God which may appear in the form of a guide or saint. We are also subject to God's anger. We must be made ready if we are to reach the exalted state of His Love or Mercy. It is a grace that His Mercy outstrips his Wrath. Most people look at themselves with a mixture of these two. We must however first look at our self with the eye of His Anger and only then with the eye of His Mercy. This requires self criticism. We should find no time to be critical of others. Our primary occupation is gaining self- control and control over our lower nature. It requires constant practice. Some of the methods that can be used for this are;

1. Reading holy books such as the Quran the the gospels and psalms, the Masnevi, the Secret of Secrets by Hz Jillani, the Meditations of Khwaja Gharib Nawaz. Other works of the saints like Hz Attar's "Conference of the Birds" etc. The implication of this reading is not merely formalistic for it requires attention and digestion. In some cases books must be read again and again till they yield something of their secret. It is true you will not find Love by reading books but in this busy world some good reading can help prepare the mind and heart.
2. Prayer both formal and informal.
3. Ensuring our behaviours are pure and such that they would not offend our Creator. This implies honesty, respect, devotion, enthusiasm and so on.
4. Zikr – the remembrance of Allah. This can mean verbal repetition with intensity either aloud or silently. It can also mean other forms of remembrance.
5. Listening to music with the intention of gaining audition or conscious awareness of the divine utterances.
6. Generosity in being of help to others to the extent our situation allows. This could mean giving money but more often a smile an appreciative or kind comment etc.
7. The constant practice of humility. This does not mean the kind of humility done for the sake of appreciation from others. It means to silently and secretly recognise others as better than oneself. There is a story about Shems Tabrizi – he stayed in a small place that drunkards frequently defecated outside of. . In the morning he would clean up the defecation.
8. One should seek to give justice others who are wronged. One should seek to act justly oneself.
9. Reciting the beautiful names of Allah or spiritual texts of one kind or another.
10. Concentration and visualisation. This can require the use of imagination as a tool. Visualising a beautiful object like a flower until it appears clear and crisp in the mind. Visualising the spiritual guide is a well- established practice.
11. Positive thinking. Negative thought is produced by the lower self and it has the power to ruin our life. Positive thought builds for us a better future.

12. Attending the 'Urs or death anniversary of holy persons.

There are many, many more exercises but the important thing is to recognise that we will only progress to the sphere of the heart in God's good time. The practises are preparation only.

Now let us speak of the events of the last year.

Firstly, we should say that the regular events continued and even expanded. The weekly Zikr in Zahuri Manzil on Sundays grew in number of people attending both physically and on line.

Secondly we added a Masnevi session on Wednesdays – going through the books of the Masnevi in English with Farsi contributions from Nargis of the Ney Nama and by Maryam of the Sura Rehman in Arabic.

Then of course there were the various 'Urs. Most notable was the 'Urs of Khwaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti. This lasted ten days and coincided at the end with the 'Urs of our beloved founder Zahurmian. This was a powerful time. At the end of it we thought to make a CD with musical accompaniment to some of the poems that had been written. This was exceptionally blessed. With only an hour to work out which poems to use we got into various vehicles and went to the recording studio at nearby Totton. We were given two hours – this was barely enough time to record all the nine tracks, without re-take. The results we leave you to judge for yourself but for those of us involved it was frankly miraculous.

We celebrated the 'Urs of Saeenji Saheb, Qazi Saheb and Nawob Saheb from Ajmer and we also celebrated the 'Urs of Nuri Baba from Konya.

Another important event was the release of the "Collected Ghazals of Hafiz". Volume one was released at the Bradford book festival. This is a four-volume set incorporating translations into rhymed English all the longer poems (ghazals) of the supreme, sublime and magnificent Sufi poet Hafiz. Transcription into roman script and the original Farsi make this a most important contribution to the awareness of Hafiz in the west. Only one volume was available at the time of the festival but subsequently all four volumes are out published by Beacon Books. The work was the outcome of about four years of work by Jamil and Maryam Moghadam via Skype.

A short talk about this was given at the by Jamil with help from Yasi Arjuman who beautifully read the Farsi. At a separate event some of Jamil's poetry was presented by him. Hussam, Ali and Farhana were with us – we were driven by Asif in his taxi. We also visited the Lake district, having a ride on a boat and an excellent meal of fish and chips. Then we drove to the peak district – staying with Bahar and her family. We performed Zikr whilst in her house and were joined by Arif from Manchester. It was an uplifting tour.

Bahar also visited us in Southampton with her two children and we went to various places like Lepe Beach and a hotel with marvellous grounds that we could walk in. We went along with Riaz and his family. It is only fair to say that I had suffered a stroke in January and can no longer drive independently. Riaz, Asif and Ali have been most helpful in taking us out and about. Riaz in particular was always phoning up and insisting on me talking a walk or visiting some place. During my initial period in hospital Faiz Ahmed one of Zahurmian's caliphs and a long-time friend came down from London to see me. Bahar also visited – a long journey from Manchester. The local murids such as Hussam, Adam, Arshad, Baby, Ali, Abbas, Humaira, etc were incredibly kind and helpful.

The next big event was the visit to Iran.

This had been long anticipated, but I wanted first to complete the translations of the ghazals of Hafiz with Maryam. The first volume came out in time for the Bradford festival the remaining three volumes came out just before the later journey to Konya in December. We had to be contented to go to Iran with only the one volume. With me were Ali and Asif and of course Farhana.

I am in the process of putting a photographic record of the journey on to the web site, so I won't repeat that here. Suffice it to say we were greeted with such warmth and hospitality that it cannot easily be described. From the moment we walked through the visa checks in Shiraz airport till our departure from Tehran airport we were given such love and warmth by the murids that I can hardly describe it and certainly can't forget it. Not only the murids of course but also parents and friends. Maryam's father for example who we had never seen ferried us around Shiraz in his smart car. We also welcomed some new people to the Zahuri Order. To list the shrines we managed to visit in two short weeks sounds a bit like a compendium of famous holy people. As well of course as Hafiz Saheb in Shiraz we visited Baba Kuhi's shrine, Hazrat Saadi, Hazrat Jurgani, Hazrat ibn Khafif, Hazrat Ruzbihan Baqli, the shrines of the seven saints, and the relative of Imam Reza. Near our next place of visit, Kirman, we visited the shrine of Hazrat Abdul Salaam and Shah

Ne'matollahi Wali. Following on from this we took a flight to Mashed a very holy city for the people of Iran and the resting place of Imam Reza. It was splendid – huge in scale – incredibly well decorated with room after room of mirror work. The main shrine is very crowded with people anxious to touch it. There was a separate side for ladies. At times I became tired as tends to happen to since the stroke but the beauty of the surroundings and the love of our dear ones revived us every time.

From Mashed we hired a private bus again – there were too many for any other kind of transport – and travelled to Nishapur where a hotel awaited us. We soon went to the beautiful shrine of Hazrat Fariduddin Attar. Both the shrine and the surrounding gardens were lovely. We also visited the grave of the great Bayazid Bistami. After that we visited the nearby burial place of Hakim Umar Khayam. We also went to Kharqan for the shrine of Hazrat Khirqani. Finally, it was time to catch the night train to Tehran and then to get our flight to Istanbul and then back to London. We did manage however to have a sort of final meal with the murids in the airport. I cannot say how sad I was to part from these lovely and loving people but there was a great compensation in knowing we would see many again soon in Konya, by God's grace.

During the year we were very pleased to hear that Humaira and Abbas had a child, and also to hear that Bahar and her husband Kay are expecting a third child. There were also of course the usual events in the Muslim calendar such as the fasting of Ramadan. Nili, Abbas sister, was also welcomed in to the order.

I continued to write poetry albeit at a less prolific pace than previously. Bahar brought out a book of the poems which are sold with the CD of the verses. Here is an example from many;

Ishq

I looked inside my head to see the state of my mind,
It should be no surprise that in that place you I find.
Your love and mine are inclined to mingle there,
How then should I seek that deep love elsewhere?
On the white pillow of purity your head becomes mine;
Words that sing themselves meet and they intertwine.
Every thought departs and only that ecstasy remains,
Each and every cell to the joy of union finally attains.
This strange state imagination cannot maintain, it flees,
Rationality begs on its knees for just a little more ease.

Vision is discarded; illumination is no longer necessary,
Love has come and invaded the mind, heart and body.
Were I to tell you more you would declare I was lying,
And yet somehow we became one without even trying.

Danish and Asma and their two children moved in downstairs and often attend the zikr in Zahuri Manzil. Abbas kindly put in some modern silent heating in Zahuri Manzil. Ali and Asif did some excellent work of re-building the arch that leads to the Manzil.

You will have noticed that we did not manage to get to Ajmer this year. We hope to make up for that by visiting early in 2018. We did not however neglect the various 'Urs.

Amongst the regular attenders to Zahuri Manzil we should mention Hussayn who at the tender age of eleven recites the "Cul" verses of the holy book. He also makes cakes or pudding for us every week without help. He sometimes comes with his grandfather who is very robust in the zikr. Riaz has suffered a lot from a painful knee and this was finally operated on just recently. It will take time to heal but we sincerely wish him a speedy recovery.

Mikail attends frequently and sometimes does some musical turn for us on the guitar. His playing on the CD was extremely fine. He and Bahar also participated in Diwali celebrations in Trafalgar Square, London. Husam is an early arrival every week and we are glad to hear of his forthcoming marriage to a lady in Bali. Adam comes to the Masnevi group early every week. Abbas and Ali provide very enthusiastic support for the Zikr. Asif not only keeps people amused with his ready wit but also recites excellent Durud (blessings of the holy prophet, Muhammed). It is however the (mostly) ladies from Iran who join us on line that make both groups of significant size. Every Saturday they also hold a Masnevi group in Farsi – at the end of this I join them on line for a brief talk and Zikr.

We had a lit archway to Zahuri Manzil but the high winds and general rust caused it to blow down. We have now replaced it with something more robust thanks to the labours of Asif and Ali..

So now we come to our very recent visit to Konya – the holy city of the saint of perfect love, Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi.

This year I travelled with Ali and we met many of the Irani contingent in Istanbul. It had been our intention to visit again the grave of Ayub Ansari a companion of the holy Prophet who is buried there. The taxi driver misunderstood us and took us direct to the train station. We decided to visit Ayub Ansari on the return journey. We had some hours to wait but eventually a group from Shiraz and a group from Kirman met us there and we all travelled together on the 'bullet train'. This part of the journey took a little over 4 hours. Later we were joined by Hussam and Adam from England and several other people from Iran. Together we made a group of nearly 20. Many of the people from Iran, of course, we had recently met there. It was so good to be re-united so soon. We were met by Hallit and he helped us get a taxi to our hotel. I stayed in the re-built Dergah Hotel at the insistence of Hallit's father Abdullah. He would not accept any payment despite my best efforts. May Allah thank him. Others stayed in nearby hotels – in general we would meet at the Sema Hotel where many stayed. A round of applause and much heartfelt thanks went from everyone to Hallit for all his work in getting hotels etc for people.

Of course we performed ziarat as soon as possible, visiting the shrines not only of Shems and Mevlana but of Nuri Baba and Ali Baba in the graveyard. We also went to Bey Hekim Effendi and Sadruddin Konevi, and then to Atesh Baz Veli and Tavus Baba and finally Jamel Ali Dede – which has now been much improved by some re-building.

We had an impromptu points system for any good actions performed by anyone. I can tell you in advance that Marjan won this easily and received as her prize a copy of a picture of Ali Baba. Anna was asked to keep all the points in her head as she claimed to be good at maths. Actually Shayla kept a written note as well but in fact Anna was remarkably accurate.

Of course, we attended the Dergah where Muharam the grandson of Nuri Baba is now the Sheykh. There were changes of course. Not the least was that for much of the time doing zikr we were standing. The group from Lithuania was smaller and as far as I was aware only attended for one evening. It was good however to see many familiar and much-loved faces.

We visited Essin at the Foundation and offered a set of the Hafiz books to their library. I havnt mentioned it yet but Miss E (Maryam Moghadam) played her usual lead role in organising things. Jeyran had made a special bag for me with her own hand. Nargis made a point of always helping me with my shoes and every other day took turns with Yasi to come to the hotel in the morning to make sure I took my medicine. I also took the opportunity to teach them the Fajr Namaz as I do it. Halim,

Hallit, and Hussam along with Ali would sometimes disappear for periods of time. I think they were overwhelmed somewhat by so many ladies in the group. Ali kept an eye on me and would sometimes insist it was time for bed if it looked like I was being made to stay up by the enthusiasm of the ladies.

We all went to the main Sema together – I think about 17 people. Whilst we were there Nargis took some extra-ordinary pictures with her camera. I have never seen better pictures of the Sema – which must be one of the most photographed things in the world. I have included them below. There was also an opportunity for Nargis to “dance” in the whirling fashion in the front of Mevlana’s shrine late one night.

From the dervish Brother’s shop we obtained leather socks for murids who wanted to learn the turning dance.

It was a pleasure to welcome three new murids into the order. Shima, Royha, and Yahya. Yahya is the first man from Iran to join. He comes from Isfahan and is studying to be a dentist. Bayat was given at the shrine of Ayub Ansari. We met him in Hich Khana – a sort of centre for Sufi music etc in Konya. Shima comes from Sirjan and has two children.





Above are two photographs of the Sema by Nargis. There is no doubt she is a very gifted photographer.

So finally, we come to our last night of the old year in the Zahuri Manzil. Though not everyone was present the place soon filled up. Bahar and her family were with us having come a long way. It was a much-blessed occasion. Of course, we were joined on line by the various murids in Iran, Jordan etc.

I hope and pray each and everyone of you receives the choicest blessings from Allah in the New Year both spiritual and material.

Amin.