

The end of the year in many countries draws near. December trembles on the very cusp of becoming January 2022 in some cultures. In other cultures the New year comes at different times. It is a convention but one that helps us mark a point of change. The days grow longer and the nights shorter.

It can be a time to take stock of our life and our direction of travel. If our concern has been for things of this world and this is highlighted by the concentration on acquiring goods and chattels then perhaps we should review our priorities. There is no harm in wanting some of the comforts of modern living but if what we really desire is peace of mind and spiritual development then these things should be put in perspective. What we really want cannot be purchased in a shop or even on line. It is no good complaining that we lack spiritual joy and a harmonious inner life if we are all the time so concerned with material prosperity that we get tension and anxiety from our pursuit of "things".

It is also pointless to complain of spiritual distress if we take the opinions of others about us as if they were of the greatest importance. We cannot live our lives to satisfy the opinions of others. Such opinions will in any case change like the wind, they will blow in one direction then another. It has been said, wisely, that it is not good to build on shifting sands and what are the opinions of others if not constantly shifting.

We should instead have in view what we want our lives to be. If things do not immediately go our way we should continue to pursue our goal of a better quality of life. This means that we accumulate inner wealth through our good deeds and acts. To do this we first attend to our thoughts because they are the foundation on which good deeds are built. Good thoughts inevitably one day become good deeds. Those deeds are a witness of our quality of character. They will speak on our behalf loyally when we face the end of our life. When we are questioned.

So let us begin, or continue, the process of life-building by dealing with our thoughts. The origin of thoughts may be from many things. They may come from our lower nature, they may come from Jinns and malign spirits, they may come from food or drink or drugs, they may come from others around us, they may come from books or films, or they may come from the lower angels or the higher angels, or from saints and prophets or even from Allah. So the first work is to objectify thoughts and not immediately accept them as our own. If a thought enters your mind look at it as a visitor knocking at your door. Do you want that visitor or not? If, on examination, the thought is one of anger, jealousy, hate, prejudice, corruption, greed, lust, treachery and so on we may choose to reject it and politely say 'Go away' or some similar phrase. We do not invite it in because it will do its best to destroy us. Maybe such thoughts will persist in knocking on our door. If so we can deliberately find its opposite and concentrate on that. So if the thought is one of hatred we can call on the thoughts of affection deliberately. When we concentrate on a thought it accumulates power.

Some thoughts that knock on our door are false but full of guile and tricks. They will try to persuade us to accept them. They tell us falsehoods or even lies. They twist the truth. Thoughts of a jealous kind for example change our perception we see things that are not really there. Say to those thoughts what Maulana Rumi says: "I have heard those lies".

Be careful, fighting negative thoughts directly may increase their power. Lord Jesus said "Oppose not evil". It means that by fighting such thoughts we make them stronger so it's better to replace those thoughts with good or positive thoughts instead. This the holy Quran recommends.

If we allow negative or bad thoughts to enter our mind what happens? Maybe at first nothing but that is misleading because one day that thought will turn into an action. Maybe in ten years or maybe in ten days but sooner or later it will have its effect.

So the first step is to recognise those negative thoughts and understand they are not ours unless we accept them. Second is to replace them with something better.

Mevlana Rumi puts it something like this. He tells us we are our thoughts, the rest is just flesh and blood. If our thoughts are good and pure then we are living in paradise but if our thoughts are mean and horrible then we are living in hell.

So if mean thoughts come to your door do not admit them. Instead look for their opposite or tell them to return to where they come from. You have the power to do this even though there will be thoughts in your mind telling you that you don't. Expel those thoughts they have been lying to you all this time. You have it in you the power to do so.

Clean the garden of your mind from the stones and weeds that make it a mess and start planting beautiful flowers. Dig the soil so that pure air can enter and make it fertile ground. Watch carefully for the kind of negative thoughts that hide like snakes. Thoughts like "I can't do this" or "I have tried this and it doesn't work". Such like thoughts are the very things making life miserable. Reject them.

There is one aspect of positive thinking which in itself has to be rejected. It is when it is used commercially to sell products for companies. Their literature extols positive thinking but in truth it is really just trying to make financial profits. Real positive thinking must have a true value base that is not concerned with monetary gain or even political manipulations. Dictators concerned with personal power may well abuse positive thinking, do not be fooled merely because they speak of highly of positive thinking. The eternal values of selflessness, charity, generosity, kindness affection, grace, truth, love, patience, mercy, concentration, humility, enthusiasm, vitality, justice, wisdom and so on are the true virtues in themselves. Do not contaminate them with commercial interest or political or pseudo religious dogma. The interest of the true virtues is to cleanse the soul not to make money or obtain political power.

Watch out for thoughts like: "I am too old or too set in my ways to change" or "I must first experience many things then later I can repent". They are both false thoughts and need to be rejected.

If we tirelessly and assiduously follow the prescription given and change the pattern of our thinking it is most likely that things that happen to us will also change. Zahurman used to say "As you think so you act. As you act that you become". It may take time and effort to achieve results but is there anything more worth doing with your life?

The end of the year 2021 draws near. It will die and pass into history as we all will and yet something will remain. What remains is not just memories, either negative or positive, it is the permanence of Being. The holy Quran refers to it as The Face of Allah which is not I think to mean a literal face with eyes, nose, lips etc. but the quality of essence, of celestial light. Whatever in our short life has about it the quality of permanence or the eternal light, lasts forever. Hafiz says "the heart that lives in love does not die, ever". Thus in all the varied adventures of life it is that permanent quality we must be concerned with. The holy book again says "He succeeds who purifies himself".

Another way of saying all this to say that Divine Love is the eternal reality and thus our aspiration must be for that love. When we have that object in view all the rest becomes transience; a passing shadow show. Shakespeare writes "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". As Zahurman puts it; "Take love as best and leave the rest".

Now the question arises as to how to get love. It's a false question. Love is a gift of Allah and He bestows it where He will. Serve Him by serving humanity and wait. Zahurman says 'first deserve then desire'.

No one says the struggle against Nafs or our lower nature is easy. It is constant work and yet it the only work worth while. It is service to Allah who rewards it far beyond anything we have the right to expect.

So the passing of a year as we slip into 2022 is but a moment of no real significance and yet we mark it with festivity and so on. There is no harm in that but neither is there much good unless it serves to remind us of our permanent struggle to remove impurity from our nature.

Now let us briefly recall the moments that marked out the old year even as we pray for better things. Firstly of course the Corona virus continued to affect all of us in different ways. People had to study or work on line, the Dergah that we would attend in Konya remained closed, access to the shrine of Mevlana was possible but required mask-wearing. In Ajmer as I understand it there were admirable efforts by the order, to provide vaccinations free to the poor. We celebrated in February the Urs of Khwaja Muinuddin Hasan Chishti in Konya, doing our best to keep to the schedule held in Ajmer including a flag ceremony that for us just consisted of marching round the flat and chanting praises to khawaja saheb. We raised our home made flag for the duration of the Urs. As far as I am aware this was the first time Khwaja Saheb's Urs had been celebrated in Konya and we are very grateful to Mevlana Rumi for permitting it. We sat as a group listening to Qwaali on cd for several nights. We also wrote a song for khawaja saheb. The Quran was read by different murids and completed by Jamil.

We made some appointments, Yasi and Naz to run a fund by opening a bank account. Any money donated to be used to help people financially who wanted to attend Urs in Konya but had financial problems in doing so. Final decisions were for Jamil.

Jeyran took on the responsibility for making sure supplies in the zahuri Manzil were always up to date. A job which she has carried out really well. Present with Jamil were Nur, Maryam Isfahani and Maryam Shirazi, Marjan, Jeyran, Yahya, Yasi and Naz. The Urs was splendid, we really felt Khawaja sahebs presence. Nur and others made the flag for the occasion and the murids made sweets for the neighbours. We washed Nuri baba's grave in rose water.

We left from Konya on 17th March. Abbas, Humaira and their family stayed in Zahuri Manzil for a few days in April whilst no one else was there. They left it in immaculate condition.

Ramadan, the fasting month, also included recital of the whole Quran by Jamil. This was done in Southampton for one hour every evening. It was followed by Zikr. There were three Urs celebrated at this time. The first was Saeenji Saheb's Urs which also marked the day when Jamil took bayat with Zahurmian. There was a celebration and as well as those joining on line, murids from Southampton also attended. On the 21st we marked the Martyrdom of Hazrat Ali the founder of the Sufi tradition. Finally on 28th and 29th we celebrated the Urs of Hazrat Nawob Saheb. Each event involved some Zikr and some Qwaali. People from Southampton attended live, including Mikail, Hussam, Ali, Farhana, Riaz, Arshad, Asif, Hussain and others.

Whilst on the subject of Southampton I must also mention with sadness the passing of Riaz's father on 14 January: Zulfikar the husband of Tahira and father of Farhan passed away on 11th March. Jamil visited both graves in Southampton courtesy of Riaz.

In October Yasi's father also passed away, in Kerman. We offer our condolence to all concerned.

Flights to Konya or elsewhere were very limited indeed by the epidemic but despite this Nur and Jamil managed to get to Konya in June after several months in their respective countries. By the summer things had improved somewhat and several people from Iran were able to meet up for a lovely holiday in Turkey by the coast. During this period Eti and Jhali joined the order. Jhali received the name Karamat from Jamil which is usually shortened to Kara. This group consisted of Nur, Naz, Jeyran, Kara and Eti as well as Jamil. Sina was our driver in the people mover we rented. We met ilnaz, the older sister of Nur, in Antalya. Nur booked the accommodation and we visited Antalya and Kash. In Kash we had a specially spacious flat with marvellous views of islands and sunsets and sunrises. On the journey back we passed mile after mile after mile of fully laden apple trees.

Jeyran stayed on in Konya and others returned. Maryam Shirazi visited for the birthday of Mevlana. Ali also came from England. There was a big surprise for Maryam when her husband secretly arrived. Her look of pleasure and astonishment was worth seeing. They both had a good time in Konya and the big shops in Kula citi did very well too!

Every one except Jamil departed for Iran.

During these months Jamil took up drawing a lot and some of those pictures are now on the wall of Zahuri manzil. Whilst she was in Iran Nur married Yahya and both families attended various ceremonies and many congratulations were given.

In October Jamil was alone in Konya and expected to celebrate his birthday only on line. He was in contact with Nur who it seemed was in Tehran shopping. She texted that she had sent a present by mail order so when he answered the door you can imagine his astonishment when it was actually Nur herself with Kiya from Tehran. Kiya later joined the order.

For the first time we held the Urs of Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani on 18 of November, the 11th of Rabi us Sani. He is a very very important saint and both the orders in Konya and in Ajmer are Qadri as well as belonging to other orders. Yahya kindly agreed to recite the Silsila of the Qadri order every month on the 11th of the Islamic month and this has happened since then. Farhana recites the Gudri Shahi Fatiha on the 5th or 6th of each Islamic month.

At around this time Nur was busy with three things. One was increasing her skill in Ney playing, Another was purchasing a flat for her and Yahya, and, as she was now pregnant, for the unborn child; the third was the English lessons she gave to neighbour's children. Her Turkish became very good and the help she could give on so many occasions was impressive and much appreciated. In the end she was fortunate enough to find a flat very, very close to zahuri Manzil. The weeks prior to Urs were occupied by the necessary arrangements. Including decorating and furnishing it.

Jamil, Nur and Kia went to Nuri babas house for the holy prophets birthday. Jamil and Kia also went to the shrine of Nuri baba to clean it for his Urs. There were also some murids from his order there and we performed Zikr together in the graveyard. In the evening we had on line Zikr.

We also had Zikr in the garden of Nuri baba. Some of the murids of Nuri baba were present and of course the current Sheykh Muharram Baba was there. Ali who is blind was also there as was Yusuf and many familiar faces. Yusuf's shop just outside Dergah has been turned into souvenir shop for a foundation set up by the order.

In November we went to Ali Baba's house for his Urs. We washed his shrine in the graveyard. This was followed by Zikr on line and the following morning Jamil read sipara 30 to complete the Quran reading made by murids. This was put live on line.

Then came the time for the Seb-I-urus of Mevlana. As mentioned a little before this Nur had purchased the new flat very close to Zahuri Manzil. We had to make all the arrangements for painters and plumbers etc but finally it was ready. Jamil's colour drawings were donated and now hang on the walls. Altogether there were about 19 people in the two flats. Everyone had passed tests for COVID. This included Shima, Hussain, Jamileh, Jeyran, Rabiah, Naz, Nur, Eti, Yasi and Kara, from Kirman; Maryam Isfahani, Ghazal, Marjan, Anna and Roya from Shiraz and Adam from England. The actual Zikr was held in Zahuri Manzil. On line were Maryam, her husband Hussain, Yahya and others who could not attend in person for various reasons. What a warm loving atmosphere!

It is too much to mention all the many gifts received but in particular two spring to mind. One is a red sheepskin given by Naz during the Urs of Mevlana and the other is a woven picture of Mevlana given by Rabiah Many thanks for all the gifts big or small they were all most welcome.

We are thankful to Parivash from Sirjan for the poem she recites every week after Zikr. We were glad to welcome her to the order. Previously she had donated money for a clock which hangs in the kitchen.

We ate out at restaurants for the evening meal since there were too many people for either kitchen. Our daily programme consisted of visiting the shrine of Shems and then the shrine of Mevlana. Then we would have a meal at one of the restaurants near Mevlana such as Hich and Mevlana Sofrazi. After this we would normally return to Zahuri Manzil for Zikr. This would be followed by poetry of Mevlana recited by various persons. During the Zikr Nur and Naz sang some

of the songs from the Dergah of Nuri baba. On one occasion Nur performed turning for us. It was particularly pleasing to have the full involvement of both Naz and Nur's father and mother. The finale of the Seb I-urus on the 17th was in the shrine room. The grace itself was covered by a white curtain which was removed at the end to reveal the new Chaddor or covering of the shrine. As far as I am aware this change had not happened at least for the 25 years I have attended.

The Urs was concluded by us with the completion of the holy Quran. There was also occasion for shopping for visitors before returning to Iran.

One evening during Seb-I-Urs we were specially invited to Nuri Baba's Dergah which was open to specially invited small groups only. It was conducted by Muharram Baba. The atmosphere and Zikr were excellent. Nur performed turning for a long time.

During the year there were various occasions when events including visits to Mevlana's shrine When it was broadcast from an i-phone to people in Iran and England. Thanks mostly to Nur for this.

The regular programme continued on line throughout the year consisting of Sunday Zikr, Maryam's group in Shiraz reading the Masnevi in Farsi on Mondays; the Wednesday Masnevi group in English and Farsi; the shorter Zikr on Friday evenings. In particular we are grateful to Maryam Teighmorhadam for her translation of Jamil's words from English into Farsi this is done in a most professional manner. She has a book on the saints of Shiraz that is awaiting publication in Farsi. It is also in the publisher's (Beacon Books) hands in its English edition.

The website is still active but for technical reasons we cannot add to it. We hope this problem will be resolved soon. Bahar and Karim are looking in to it. The radio version of the Masnevi English translation appears to have stopped working. We are looking at alternatives.

'The Golden Gate', as well as a cd that is currently available, is a long poem by Jamil and it is due to be published in book form soon by Bahar. We are also working with Mikail and Hussam on putting the text to music and presenting it as an audio recording on a flash drive.

Translations of some of Zahurmian's writing into Farsi is being worked on by murids in Iran. The Culture of the Sufis is currently in Yahya's hands.

Jamil has also written a prose book called 'Onward' and we hope the next year will see its publication.

We must also recall with gratitude the many kindnesses shown by our taxi driving friend Abdullah. On how many occasions has he gone the extra mile so to speak to help us out. May Allah reward him suitably. His friend Tahir has a temporary shop in a tented area at the back of Mevlana shrine whilst reconstruction work is underway in the area opposite the shrine.

We should also remember Bahar in Manchester who contracted long term COVID at the beginning of the outbreak. Her continuing struggle with it has been particularly hard. We hope and pray she will soon recover completely. We also give thanks for the recitation of the verses from the Quran that her children, Betty, William and of course Evelyn perform for us every week on line and the helpfulness of her husband, Karim, throughout a difficult time.

There were many other moments worthy of remembering, no doubt but these are main points that come to mind. We give thanks and praise to All-mighty Allah for all the many, many, blessings we have received from Him over the year. We pray for the continued flow of His help both material and spiritual.

Ya Allah, Ya Nabi, Ya Ali, Ya Khwaja, Ya Mevlana, Ya Ghaus Pak, Ya Nuri Baba, Ya Zahurmian. Amin.

Love came and carried of the ball, it took away the game,  
The moralists and the hedonists were covered with shame,  
Love came and sat in the ball park, unmoved in the centre of it all,

Love was not contained by mosque or church or shopping mall.  
When your heart beats with an unconditional affection it's there,  
When your look is so much softer than a newborn child its there.  
When to find any adequate means of expression you just despair,  
And day and night the longing of lover for beloved is everywhere  
When sun and moon and stars disappear and only love remains  
The lover to divine grace comes and love of the beloved gains.