

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Onward and Upward - Spiritual Evolution and the Sufi Way
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ONWARD AND UPWARD
(SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION AND THE SUFI WAY)

IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED TO

**HAZRAT ZAHURUL HASSAN SHARIB
OF AJMER, INDIA,
WHO PASSED INTO THE MERCY OF
ALLAH IN 1996**

AND TO

**KILCI MEHMET NURI BABA
KUCUKIPLIKCI OF KONYA,
TURKEY, WHO MADE THE SAME
JOURNEY IN 1998.**

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Intention and thanks

The intention of this book is primarily to provide disciples and others who have a genuine interest in self development with a handbook covering the kind of issues that affect their daily lives. It doesn't cover everything but it is the fruit of many years of active interest in the possibility of helping society evolve through changing ourselves inside. It is rooted in the Sufi Way of Zahurul Hassan Sharib of Ajmer and Nuri Baba Kucukplikci of Konya but it is not a Sufi manual as such.

If this book provides any individuals with help in their spiritual, emotional or intellectual development then it's purpose will be fulfilled and thanks for that will be due to Allah, his holy Prophet Muhammed, Hazrat Ali and the friends of God.

In particular immense thanks are due to Zahurul Hassan Sharib and Nuri Baba Kucukplikci who transformed so many lives including our own and who continue to support us after their passing into the mercy of Allah.

We also thank Nur Jamil for her continuing close support and Kara Fouladi for her labours in publishing the book and Jeyran Amiri Moghadam and Maryam Teimoori Moghadam for their contribution May Allah reward them.

Jamiluddin Morris Zahuri
Southampton
March 2022

Onward and Upward

(Spiritual Evolution and the Sufi Way)

Introduction

*Do not think of me as advocating something called Sufism. No not at all!
The real Sufis, are something else, they never took their eye off the ball,
Nor did they claim to be Sufis! Their love of Divinity was all, all the while.
These are the ones the Divinity loves. That love alone is real; without guile.*

*Zahuri**

We live in dark and difficult days. A virus, a small, virtually invisible, killer has brought the mighty world of commerce, politics, travel, entertainment and even ordinary human social contact, across the entire world, to its knees. Life as we knew it has changed. Even religious organisations have been deeply affected as churches, mosques, synagogues and temples have been closed or operate in a very limited way. The huge Hajj gathering has operated with a few thousand locals instead of the three million that might normally have participated. Shrines such as that of Khawaja Saheb* in India or Mevlana Rumi* in Turkey have been closed or operate with restrictions.

This difficulty has also not passed quickly. It remains a potent threat, interrupting life as we used to know it. In Ajmer the view was that this is due to the malign influence of Jinns and that the lighting of candles in religious places was the only thing that would help. I have no certain insight into this though I accept it as a real possibility. It appears to me that even if this is the case then it could only happen with permission of the All-mighty. This implies that it must be taken as a warning to mankind that despite extraordinary achievements in the field of technology and commerce man should not feel he is in charge and can do whatever he likes. The Divinity has pulled on the reins and the runaway horses must respond. Of course we hope by the time you read this what we are talking about is history, but Allah knows best.

Within the framework of all of this, our individual spiritual evolution continues. This evolution cannot be dependent entirely on external circumstances though it may feel the impact of it. Spiritual growth goes on within the mind and heart of the individual. The one, however, who participates in this process, though they may focus on their own spiritual growth nevertheless have a positive effect on those around them. It has been said that ‘No man is an island’ * and when we develop our own spirituality those connected to us through family or friendships or business or social contacts will benefit in many hidden and sometimes in more apparent ways.

Our concern is initially with our own purification not with its effect on others, but inevitably we will discover that there is a fine network of connections, a kind of lymphatic system, that links us, mostly unconsciously, to other people. We should not, therefore, see the function of spiritual growth as an asocial act that takes place entirely outside of our surroundings. The days when persons who sought spiritual freedom would retire to isolation in the desert have passed. They were seeking to follow the excellent dictum of ‘Do no harm’. Hafiz Shirazi* says that to ‘Do no harm’ is the very essence of holy law. This does not refer to only physical harm. The fact is our very thoughts can have a negative effect on others and it was part of the efforts of the ancients to isolate themselves so as to prevent this. Nowadays, as Hazrat Nawob Saheb* says, the spiritual seeker tries to be *in* the world but not *of* it. Such a person must aim to be like a leaf floating on the surface of a fast flowing stream, but not sucked into it.

Thus to master our thoughts and control them is to try to avoid to do harm to ourself or to others. It is a social and human imperative, just as keeping social spacing has been in relation to physical health during the corona virus emergency.

Some people are surprised! ‘Thoughts just come’, they say, ‘We have no control of them’. That of course is nonsense. It is true controlling one’s own thoughts is not easy. It’s a constant struggle but it is a necessary struggle both for our own spiritual development and for the benefit of others. In the pandemic social spacing brings a measurable improvement in the rate of

transmission. Control of thoughts may not be so easy to measure but there can be no doubt to the perceptive mind that it has benefits socially as well as personally.

The responsibility of the individual in society is thus clear. It is not just an issue of personal spiritual development but about the benefitting of others around us too. The Holy Qur'an* says '*in effect that charity begins at home*' (Sura 2: 215). In other words with those near to us; but from there it spreads outwards to those who we may meet or encounter in other ways. If we think, however, that by giving this inner charity we are doing good there may be little harm in that; but it is even better if we realise this is really for our own benefit and so do it quietly, not seeking social approbation.

So now we must turn to those negative emotional states that impact on our thoughts and make them difficult to control. I mean states like jealousy, anger, hatred, laziness, worry, frustration, lust, greed, despair, pessimism and so on. These emotional states are accompanied with negative thoughts and they give to the negative thoughts energy that make them hard work to control. In turn, if we accept them, these negative thoughts become actions. This is not immediate. It may be many years before a negative thought that has been accepted by someone manifests itself as an action, but sooner or later it will unless God decrees otherwise. In this way we write our own future by the thoughts we accept. Do not complain to God and ask as to why such bad things happen to you when you yourself are their author in this sense, and it is God's Mercy that ameliorates them. In this respect we owe gratitude to God for making the negative outcome of those thoughts relatively small. You cut yourself shaving or stick a needle into your thumb? Thank God, for it is surely because of a negative thought that actually merited some much more extreme punishment.

Before examining very briefly each of these negative feelings and thoughts let us recognise that negative emotional states are not intrinsically evil. If they were so then it would imply God had created them as evil. No! It is how we take them that makes them bad. If we master them they prove to be good and necessary, but only as servants not as masters. Our struggle is to

master them and free ourselves from slavery to them. We may also identify them as passions.

It is important to free oneself from the false notion that there exists absolute evil and absolute good. That idea implies there are two gods and is contrary to Islam in the deepest sense.

I quote in extenso from Zahurmian's* letters published under the title *Sufi Language*.

“Passion is a name given to the feelings of excitement and agitation which disturb the mind. These feelings.....are the reflection of some outward happening on the mind. These feelings affect the inward world of man; the mind and the heart. The outward and the inward world of men become so excited then that they become mutually responsive. The meeting of the two worlds results in the inward responses excitement and agitation.....which are the result of the outward world casting its reflection on the inward world.

If you ask me I would say that passion has its abode in the heart of man. Passion feels comfortable in a sensitive heart. If you ask me the part that it performs in human nature I would say that passion plays an important role in human life. Passion gives shape and direction to our life. It builds, shapes and completes our character. Our actions originate from our passions. Our activities likewise trace their source to our passions.....

Do you know what is the master passion in every human heart? It cannot be other than Self-love. Self love to the Sufis is nothing but idolatry. Self love gives birth to other passions.....there can be no doubt that to achieve our sanctification and our salvation and our very well-being and welfare, we must rise up and get mastery over our passions.”

From this it seems our passions are another name for what we have referred to as the ‘Nafs’. They are not negative in themselves but are terrible as masters. As slaves they find their rightful place.

Zahurmian further says: *'The control of passions constitutes the greatest ascetic practice.....the greatest conqueror is the one who has conquered his passions'*.

There is a story well known amongst Sufis and found in the Masnevi*of Mevlana Rumi*, that a king was riding out with his entourage when he encountered a poor dervish. Taking pity on that mystic the king asked him what he could do for him. The mystic replied *'How should you do anything for me when I have two servants who are your masters'*. The king was confused and asked how such a poor man could have servants who were his masters. *'Greed and lust are masters of you, but they are my servants'* the mystic replied. (Masnevi, Book 2: 1465-1468)

We have placed under different headings and on separate pages brief descriptions of the mystic's view of a variety of experiences of life. There are references to various religious and non religious texts. Nawob Saheb* said, *'The mystics of different religions are like beads on a single thread'*. I have included rhymed verses that I have written from time to time, to illustrate what is spoken about in the prose text.

Behind each of the emotional states that we have described as 'Nafs' (more accurately Nafs al Amarah) there is a hidden treasure. To find that treasure is a purpose that is worthy of a true man. To find the hidden treasure requires training. That training cannot be found in books, it requires the attention of one who knows where that treasure is concealed. The training is inner and sometimes outward.

*There is a spiritual wind that breathes a great blessing,
It is said twice a year that everyone it will be touching.
Most pause a moment, wonder, then get on with duties,
A few see in it the evidence of endless new possibilities.*

Zahuri

Anger

‘Anger I may tell you is a deadly poison’. Sharib

Anger has been described as ‘temporary insanity’. When we are overcome by anger we are not ourselves. Rational thought alone will not overcome anger. We have to turn anger towards its proper target. Our self. Anger or wrath is actually, when pure, a quality of God. The anger we feel must find an outlet and that proper outlet is towards ourselves, or we can say towards our lower nature. Some people use the word Nafs to describe the lower nature we could also call them our passions. It is not the same as saying anger must be turned towards our body. It is not the fault of our physical body itself that we have anger. To take vengeance on our innocent, neutral, physical body as in self-harming cannot be the answer although some religions and cultures rejoice in punishing the body and no doubt there are many virtues in discipline of the body.

In fact anger can be aroused by things like fasting, extreme physical exercise, fatigue and so on. One aspect of the formal Muslim fast is to avoid or to refrain from displays of anger.

Exercise that raises the heart rate excessively or is part of increased deep breathing can be associated with anger. Shallow gentle breathing accompanied with recitation such as (out) la Ilaha (in) ilallah can lower the likelihood of anger. The Nafs when roused can become very angry. It is better to approach this beast with caution and gradually tame him. A good walk at an opportune moment can help. Courage is required by the one who undertakes to tame anger.

During the process of self-development increased sensitivity may allow one to identify anger as a sensation like a tingling effect in the brain. This will be followed by actual feelings of anger. The most we can then do is modify our external expressions of anger or try to turn the anger against our lower nature.

Often associated with anger is physical violence. For the Sufi personal physical violence towards another person is not permitted except in defence of the guide. In the bible it is related that Lord Jesus* restored the ear of an officer who had come to arrest him when it was cut off by his disciple. Tolstoy* taught non violence and Mahatma Gandhi used this during the famous salt marches. There is a story in the Masnevi in which Hazrat Ali* is engaged in armed struggle with a non-believer. Hazrat Ali got the upper hand and was about to behead his adversary. Suddenly the man spat on Hazrat Ali. Instead of executing the man Hazrat Ali pulled back. The bewildered man asked why he did that. Hazrat Ali explained that for a brief moment he became angry and would not slay the man out of anger. (*Masnevi, Book 1: 3721- onwards*)

To rely on violence or intimidation is to fail in our duty of looking to God for a solution to our problems. For Muslims in general a retaliation equal to the original offence may be allowed but the one on the Sufi way prefers the option of forgiveness.

The anger of Allah is another matter. It is full of justice. It is said if Allah's anger was not tempered by His mercy no human being would escape retribution. The option of repentance however remains open.

*There are two ways your short life is seen, by the Divinity,
Either anger and wrath can dominate or divine loving mercy.
Ignore for now mercy and see with divine anger all you do,
See the self interest at the heart of every charitable act too.
The Divinity watches; your firm intention is heard of course,
Does your life now follow a new and a much better course.
If your intention is selfless and your good deeds now grow,
The Divinity, turning from anger, a forgiving love will show.*

Zahuri

As. regards our interactions with others Zahurman gives good advice when others show anger to us. He says : *In forgiving and forgetting do not be slow.*