

Suhba and Tarbiya

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Q) We have been taught that suhba is important so how do we reconcile this for the murids living outside Egypt (away from the Shaykh), what is suhba for them? If someone can not be close to the Shaykh, is there a limit to the spiritual progress of the murid?

The great scholars and shaykhs of tasawwuf like Sidi Abul Hassan al-Shadhili, Sidi Abul Abbas al-Mursi, Sidi Abd al-Qadir al-Jaylani and Sidi Ahmad ibn Idris had students in different geographic locations throughout their lifetimes, with the students often meeting their Shaykh only once. Those students would not have the suhba of their Shaykh but would rather benefit from the knowledge and advices of the shaykh in place of his physical presence.

Shaykh Salih had a connection to Sidi Ahmad ibn Idris without ever meeting him. This connection was established and nurtured by way of meeting with the grandson of Sidi Ahmad ibn Idris (Sidi Muhammad al-Sharif), taking the tariqa from him and then embarking on a journey of studying the works, knowledge, wisdoms and legacy of Sidi Ahmad ibn Idris. This is the example of the relationship between a murid and his shaykh. It is established through direct connection with someone with a spiritual and educational connection to the Shaykh (in the above example, Sidi Muhammad al-Sharif) using a reliable chain to the Shaykh. It is correct to say that suhba for the murid (both those living near the Shaykh and those who live far away) is in the awrad, the salawat and the prescribed activities of the path (seeking knowledge of the path and reciting the emphasised adhkar). In doing these things, the murid learns directly from the Shaykh or they learn from 'the one who learned from the Shaykh'.

We know from the famous works of tasawwuf that reading the awrad of the Shaykh forges a spiritual bond and connection between murid and Shaykh, which supersedes any bond based on physical proximity.

Q) In the Ja'fari tariqa we do not have any progression of dhikr techniques i.e. we will always continue to read the same dhikr every day (awrad and salawat) but in other tariqas, a murid will be given a new dhikr for every stage of his tarbiya. Do we have something similar in this tariqa?

In this path, the dhikr we recite from: the awrad, the salawat, attending the hadra, reading the Kanz al-Nafahat, the Diwan, and indeed reading anything from the turath of Mawlana Shaykh Salih, is a complete level of dhikr for the murid and as such, we do not need or rely on progressive stages of dhikr for the murid like other paths. In such matters, Shaykh Abd al-Ghani would advise the brothers not to compare different turuq and Mashayekh. There is a saying in Arabic: "Every Shaykh has his own tariqa". So your question regarding if the murid requires short term improvements and progress before the next stage of dhikr, in this path the answer is that we the dhikr of Mawlana Shaykh Salih and Mawlana Shaykh Abd al-Ghani is complete in every sense, and if the murid commits to this with faith, love and sincerity, this will be enough for every murid and he will find success.

حَدَّثَنَا قُنَيْبَةُ بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ جَعْفَرٍ، عَنْ أَبِي سُهَيْلٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ طَلْحَةَ بْنِ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ، أَنَّ أَعْرَابِيًّا، جَاءَ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ثَائِرَ الرَّأْسِ فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَخْبِرْنِي مَاذَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ فَقَالَ " الصَّلَوَاتِ الْخَمْسَ، إِلَّا أَنْ تَطَّوَّعَ شَيْئًا ". فَقَالَ أَخْبِرْنِي مَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ مِنَ الصِّيَامِ فَقَالَ " شَهْرَ رَمَضَانَ، إِلَّا أَنْ تَطَّوَّعَ شَيْئًا ". فَقَالَ أَخْبِرْنِي بِمَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ مِنَ الزَّكَاةِ فَقَالَ فَأَخْبَرَهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ شَرَائِعَ الْإِسْلَامِ. قَالَ وَالَّذِي أَكْرَمَكَ لَا أَنْطَوِّعُ شَيْئًا، وَلَا أَنْقُصُ مِمَّا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ شَيْئًا. فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " أَفْلَحَ إِنْ صَدَقَ، أَوْ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِنْ صَدَقَ ".

A bedouin with unkempt hair came to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) and said, "O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! Inform me what Allah has made compulsory for me as regards the prayers." He replied: "You have to offer perfectly the five compulsory prayers in a day and night (24 hours), unless you want to pray Nawafil." The bedouin further asked, "Inform me what Allah has made compulsory for me as regards



fasting." He replied, "You have to fast during the whole month of Ramadan, unless you want to fast more as Nawafil." The bedouin further asked, "Tell me how much Zakat Allah has enjoined on me." Thus, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) informed him about all the rules (i.e. fundamentals) of Islam. The bedouin then said, "By Him Who has honored you, I will neither perform any Nawafil nor will I decrease what Allah has enjoined on me. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "If he is saying the truth, he will succeed (or he will be granted Paradise). – Bukhari.

So let the brothers complete what has been prescribed and taste spiritual success.

Q) How does a mureed take tarbiya from Sidi Shaykh Salih from the Barzakh?

The dust (of the grave) has not veiled us from you
And we are not absent like those who have disappeared
Rather we are in the hearts, still remaining
And in the hearts descend our speech (and teachings)
And if you see, then you would have seen
Pouring down, fertile and abundant rain and it is all-covering
And the one who sees us like dust, we become
Veiled to him and we depart from him

The relationship between Shaykh Salih al-Ja'fari and the murid is a very special and private one. The privacy of it is emphasised by our Mashayekh, meaning it is a secret between the Shaykh and the murid and not to be shared with others. The murid will come to know of his relationship by way of spiritual visions and the fruition of those visions in the form of messages (i.e. actions in this world). The Shaykh protects his murid, raises him and nourishes him spiritually. This connection is established by following the instructions of the Shaykh, namely the daily devotional practices. In the poem, 'He accompanies the Shaykh of knowledge and the Book', Shaykh Salih has detailed the connection between the murid and the Shaykh in the barzakh. (Translator's note: you can find an English translation of this in our forthcoming Diwan al-Ja'fari translation).

Q) Shaykh Salih wrote about the 14 salawat of sidi Ahmad ibn Idris that they work on 14 different aspects of the soul. The first seven salawat deal with the 7 stages of the nafs and the next 7 salawat deal with the ascent of the ruh (spirit). Do we have any similar discussion or understanding of the awrad and salawat of Shaykh Salih like this?

No, in Tariqa al-Ja'fariyya we have not discovered anything like this in the writings of Shaykh Salih al-Ja'fari or Shaykh Abd al-Ghani. As mentioned before, we do not have progressive or incremental stages of adhkar. Rather, the daily spiritual routine of the Shaykh is complete and comprehensive, and the murid will find success in these works and activities.



With regards to question 2 and 5:

Besides the Quran, awrad and salawat, a murid can add to his daily repertoire: the Husn al-Quraniyya (once in the morning and once in the evening), Husn al-Jafariyya (coupled with the husn al-Quraniyya in the evening), Kanz an-Nafahat, the adhkar after the obligatory prayers (and extra based on this – such as the salaah al-Azeemiyya which Shaykh Salih recited 2000 times every night).

In addition to the answers above, there is a general answer for all the questions in the following lines:

وَمَنْ رَأَى كَالْتَرَابِ صِرْنَا فَذَلِكَ مَحْجُوبٌ وَعَنْهُ سِرْنَا
بَلْ نَحْنُ فِي الْقُلُوبِ لَا نَزَالُ وَفِي الْقُلُوبِ يَنْزِلُ الْمَقَالُ

And whoever sees us (as if we are) like dust, we become -
Veiled to him and we depart from him
Rather we are in the hearts, still remaining
And in the hearts descend our speech (and teachings)

Explanation

Whoever thinks that we are gone and buried in the dust, we will be of no benefit to him (i.e. we become as the murid thinks of us). This creates a block and a veil between the Shaykh and murid and the Shaykh will leave him. Remember o Murid! We are present in your hearts and our words and teachings are in your hearts and will continue to reach and benefit your hearts!

