

A Sufi related: “I used to direct my prayers to Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya.⁸²² Once I saw her in a dream saying: ‘Your gifts come to us on the dishes of light wrapped up in the napkins of light!’” It is related that Sammak⁸²³ b. Harb said: “When I went blind, I saw in a dream someone who told me: ‘Go to the Euphrates, immerse yourself in it, then open your eyes!’ I did so, and my eyesight returned to me.” It is related that someone saw Bishr al-Hafi in a dream and asked him: “What did God do to you?” He said: “When I saw my Lord – may He be great and exalted – He told me: ‘Welcome, Bishr! I took you to Myself on the day I took you to Myself and there’s no one on the [entire] earth whom I love more!’”

Spiritual advice for Sufi novices (*wasaya li’l-muridin*)

The master and imam [al-Qushayri] said: “After we have mentioned some episodes from the biographies of the [Sufi] folk and complemented this with chapters on the stations [of the Sufi] path, we would like to complete this epistle with some spiritual advice (*wasiyya*)⁸²⁴ for [Sufi] novices. We ask God Most High that He help them in properly executing this advice, that He not prevent them from fulfilling it, and that He not use it as an argument against us.⁸²⁵ The first step of the [Sufi] novice on this [Sufi] path requires that he be sincere, so that he could build on a sound foundation. Sufi masters have said [about this]: “They were deprived of the arrival [in God’s presence] (*wusul*), because they neglected the foundations (*usul*).” Likewise, I heard the master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq say: “The beginning [of the Sufi path] requires a sound belief that binds the servant and God Most High – one that is free from uncertainty and doubt, devoid of delusion and innovation, and derived from [irrefutable] proofs and arguments.” It is revolting if the novice should espouse a teaching that does not belong to this [Sufi] path. If a Sufi happens to adhere to a teaching of those who deviate from the Sufi path, //477 this is but a result of his ignorance of the teachings of the followers of this path. For their arguments in support of their beliefs are clearer than anyone else’s and the foundations of their teachings are firmer than the foundations of any other teaching. People [belong to two classes]: they are either adherents of received knowledge (*naql*) and transmitted reports (*athar*), or supporters of [rational] knowledge (*‘aql*) and speculation (*fiker*). The masters of this community (*ta’ifa*) have risen above them all. What others consider to be unknown is but a manifest [truth] for them. The knowledge that other people can only aspire to is rendered real to them by God – praise be to Him. They are those who have arrived [in the presence of God], while the rest are guided by argumentative reasoning. They are as the poet described them:

822 The celebrated female mystic from Basra, who figures prominently in the Sufi lore; she died in 185/801; see *IM*, pp. 26–32.

823 Or “Simak”.

824 This term can also be translated as, for example, “instruction”, “bequest” and “counsel”.

825 That is, in case they prove to be incorrect.

My night has turned to dawn thanks to your face
 While its darkness spreads itself among people
 They are enveloped with darkness
 Whereas we roam in the bright shine of the day.

There has never been an age in the history of Islam without a master of this community who was proficient in the science of the oneness [of God]. There has never been a leader of the Sufis to whom the greatest scholars of his epoch would not subordinate themselves and pay obeisance and seek blessing of. Had they not had the distinction and special qualities to them, this would not have been so.

Once, as Ahmad b. Hanbal was sitting with al-Shafi'i,⁸²⁶ Shayban al-Ra'i⁸²⁷ came to them. Ahmad said [to al-Shafi'i]: "Abu 'Abdallah, I'd like to draw your attention to his lack of knowledge,⁸²⁸ so that he would busy himself with acquiring some of it." Al-Shafi'i exclaimed: "Don't do this!" However, Ibn Hanbal did not desist. He asked Shayban: "What can you say about someone who forgot [to perform] one of the five [canonical] daily prayers and cannot remember which of them he forgot? Shayban, what do you think he should do?" Shayban replied: "Ahmad, that is a heart that was neglectful of God Most High. Therefore, it must be educated [in good manners], so that it would never ever be neglectful of its Master." [On hearing this] Ahmad [b. Hanbal] fainted. When he came to, al-Shafi'i – may God have mercy on him – said: "Didn't I tell you to leave him alone?!" Shayban al-Ra'i was an illiterate man. If an illiterate Sufi like him had such a stature, one can only fathom what their leaders were like!//478 It is related that the teaching circle⁸²⁹ of the great jurist named Abu 'Imran used to assemble [in the mosque] next to al-Shibli's teaching circle. Whenever al-Shibli spoke, the members of Abu 'Imran's circle would migrate to him. [One day] the members of al-Shibli's circle asked him a question about menstruation in order to embarrass him. [In response] al-Shibli mentioned [all] the teachings pertaining to this issue as well as disagreements over it. [On hearing this] Abu 'Imran stood up and kissed al-Shibli on the head saying: "Abu Bakr, I have heard ten statements about this issue which I have not heard before. Out of that which you said [about this issue], I knew only three teachings!" The jurist named Abu 'l-'Abbas b. Surayj⁸³⁰ was passing by the teaching circle of al-Junayd – may God have mercy on both of them – and heard him speak. Someone asked him what he thought about that speech. He answered: "I do not understand what he said, but I felt in his words the strength that an idle talker can never produce."

826 Both were the most distinguished scholars and jurists of their age, who founded legal schools named after them.

827 That is, Shayban "the Shepherd".

828 Ibn Hanbal apparently implied the knowledge of the transmitted [prophetic] reports and jurisprudence.

829 Before the emergence of religious colleges (*madrasa*) each distinguished scholar conducted his teaching session in a mosque, surrounded by the "circle" (*halqa*) of his disciples.

830 A distinguished Shafi'i scholar who died in 306/918.

Someone asked 'Abdallah b. Sa'īd b. Kullab: "You have debated the teachings of every [scholar] you have heard. There is a man named al-Junayd. Go and see if you can challenge him." 'Abdallah attended al-Junayd's circle. He asked al-Junayd about God's oneness (*tawhid*). When al-Junayd responded, 'Abdallah became confused and asked him to repeat what he had said. Al-Junayd repeated the same point but used different words [to express it]. 'Abdallah told him: "I am unable to grasp this; can you say this again for me?" Al-Junayd repeated this to him using different expressions. 'Abdallah told him: "I am unable to grasp what you say. Can you dictate this for me?" Al-Junayd said: "If you [are ready to] traverse it,⁸³¹ I will dictate this to you." 'Abdallah stood up, recognized his [al-Junayd's] superiority and acknowledged his exalted status. The foundations of this community are the soundest foundation, its leaders are the greatest and its scholars are the most learned of men. Therefore the novice who has faith in them, if he travels along [their] path and aspires toward their goals, will share in the unveilings of the unseen [that they witness] and will have no need in the meddling of anyone who does not belong to this community. If he aspires to the path of [pious] precedent and is not independent in his spiritual state, if he strives to depart from the domains of blind imitation in order to arrive at the true realization (*tahqiq*), then he must follow in the footsteps of its founders and tread the path of this generation [of Sufis], for they are better than anyone else. I heard Shaykh Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard al-Shibli say: "What do you think about knowledge compared to which the knowledge of the learned may seem doubtful?" I also heard Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Mukharrimi say: I heard Muhammad b. 'Abdallah al-Farghani say: I heard al-Junayd say: "Had I known that God has created a knowledge under the sun//479 that is nobler than what we together with our companions and brothers are teaching, I would have aspired and striven toward it!" After the seeker has established a pact between himself and God, he should obtain – either through his own realization (*tahqiq*) or by means of asking the religious authorities – the knowledge of the Divine Law that allows him to fulfill his religious duty. When the rulings of legal scholars vary, he should adopt the most comprehensive of them and seek to avoid any controversy. Dispensations from obligatory requirements (*rukhas*) are intended for the weak ones and those who seek to shirk [their duties] by referring to their [mundane] needs and concerns. As for this [Sufi] community, they have no concern except for observing the rights of God – praise be to Him. Therefore, they say that if a Sufi has taken recourse from the rank of the True Reality to a dispensation from the requirements of the Divine Law, he has departed from his pact with God and violated that which has existed between God Most High and himself. Now, the novice must be educated in good manners by a [Sufi] master. If he does not have one, he will never succeed. Abu Yazid said: "He who does not have a master,

831 That is, the Sufi path.

Satan is his leader.” I heard the master Abu ‘Ali al-Daqqaq say: “The tree that has grown on its own without a gardener will bring forth foliage, but will never bring any fruit. Likewise, if the novice has no master to take his teaching from breath after breath, then he worships nothing but his personal whims and will never achieve what he aspires to.” If the novice wants to walk along the [right] path, he must seek refuge in God from any slip and abandon all errors – be they manifest or hidden, small or great. He must seek to obtain the pleasure of his adversaries, for he who fails to satisfy his adversary will not achieve anything on this [Sufi] path.

Thus they have proceeded until they have begun to cut all ties and pre-occupations of this world, for this path rests on the emptiness of the heart [from all mundane preoccupations]. Al-Shibli told al-Husri at the beginning of his novitiate: “If something other than God Most High enters your mind from one Friday during which you visit me to the next, you are prohibited from visiting me.” When the aspirant seeks to cut ties to this world, he should first abandon [his] property; property distracts one from God. There’s no aspirant in this affair of ours⁸³² who remains attached to this world. If he does keep this attachment, //480 then it will soon drag him back to what he aspired to leave behind. And when he abandons property, he must also give up his [social] status (*jah*), for clinging to one’s love of rank is a major obstacle. If the aspirant is concerned by other people accepting or rejecting him, nothing [good] will come out of him. The worst thing that can happen to the aspirant is that people begin to take notice of him [looking at him] with an approving eye and [seeking his] blessing. For the [common] folk have no inkling of all this, while the novice has not yet made right his aspiration [to God], so how can one seek to obtain his blessing? [Sufi] novices are required to abandon their renown, for it is a deadly poison to them. After the aspirant has given up his property and rank, he should make good his pact with God Most High and not oppose his master in anything that the latter prescribes to him. For opposition to one’s master during one’s novitiate is a grave deficiency, because one’s initial state is the best indicator of [what will happen to him] during the rest of his life. One condition for success is that there should be no opposition to the master in his student’s heart. If it occurs to the aspirant that he has any value or power in this world and the next, or that there’s on the face of the earth someone who is more lowly than he, he has no right to [aspire to God]. For one must exert oneself in order to know one’s Lord and not to seek power for oneself. There is a great difference between a person who aspires to God Most High and a person who aspires to self-aggrandizement, either in this life or the Hereafter. Next, the novice must preserve his secret from his ilk, except his master. If he has concealed even one breath from his master, he will have betrayed him in his right of companionship. Should he happen to disagree with what the master has commanded to him, he must confess this in front of his master immediately. He then should submit himself to the master’s judgement as a

832 Namely, Sufism.

punishment for his transgression and objection. This may be an [expiatory] journey assigned to him by the master or [some other] penance, as the master sees fit.

The master has no right to overlook the failings of his novices, for this is but the forfeiture of the rights due to God Most High. As long as the novice retains any of his [mundane] attachments, the master is unable to instill in him the [proper] remembrance [of God], for he [the master] must first test him. When the master's heart bears witness to the novice's proper intention, the master must stipulate that the novice on the Sufi path should accept all the verdicts of God's decree [in his regard]. The master must also establish a pact with him [demanding] that he should not depart from this path despite any harm, humiliation, poverty, illness or pain that may afflict him and that his heart not be diverted to easy ways and have recourse to dispensations during the attacks of need and want. Nor should he prefer rest or be overcome with laziness, for coming to a halt for the aspirant is worse than becoming lax. The difference between them is that laxity means a departure and forfeiture of one's aspiration [to God], while a halt means resting from the [hardships] of travel in favor of the pleasures of laziness. Nothing good will come out of the novice who makes a halt at the beginning of his aspiration. Once the master has tested the novice, he instructs him in a method of remembrance as he sees fit and commands him to mention a certain name [of God] with his own tongue. He then orders that the heart of the aspirant recollect God alongside the tongue. He tells him: "Keep this remembrance with you//481 constantly as if you were always present with God in your heart. Nothing but this name should flow from your tongue, if you are capable of this." The master then orders that the aspirant always maintain ritual purity, that he should not sleep unless overwhelmed [by sleep], that he reduce the amount of his food bit by bit until he has grown accustomed to it. A report says: "He who allows his riding animal to perish on a journey traverses no distance nor has a back to carry [his goods on]." The master then orders the aspirant to seek solitude and retreat and, while in this state, spare no effort in banishing mundane thoughts and distracting promptings from his heart.

Know that no aspirant in this state at the beginning of his aspiration is free from evil whisperings that may corrupt his determination, especially when he possesses an adroit heart. Few are aspirants who do not encounter such states at the beginning of their progress. Such are temptations that the aspirants usually encounter. When the master observes adroitness in the aspirant, he must direct him to rational proofs, for there is no doubt that one who aspires toward [religious] knowledge rids himself by it from the evil whisperings that accost him. When the master discerns in his disciple the [necessary] strength and determination in following the [Sufi] path, he orders him to be patient and to constantly recollect [God's name] so that before long the lights of his acceptance [by God] would begin to shine in his heart and the suns of arrival [in God's presence] would rise in his innermost self. These rules apply only to few aspirants. In most cases, one has to treat them by referring them to speculative reasoning (*nazar*) and the witnessing of [divine] signs, provided that the aspirant has acquired the

knowledge of the fundamentals of religion in accordance with the need that is peculiar to him.

Know that aspirants are particularly vulnerable to the temptations of this sort.⁸³³ When they withdraw to a place where they engage in the remembrance [of God] or participate in listening to music and recitation and so on, they may hear whisperings in their souls or blameworthy thoughts might occur to them. They know for sure that God – praise be to Him – is far above all this. They have no doubt whatsoever that it is but falsehood, but it persists and they undergo severe suffering due to this, to the extent that they experience the ugliest of curses, the ugliest of insinuations, and the most repulsive of thoughts. The aspirant, however, is unable to utter them with his tongue, nor display them to anyone else. This is the worst thing that can happen to him. In this case, he should pay no attention to such thoughts, constantly remember [God] and pray to God, asking His protection from this.//482

These thoughts are not the whisperings of Satan. Rather they are the promptings of one's lower soul. However, if the servant of God pays no attention to them, they will soon come to an end. Part of the rules of proper behavior for the aspirant – indeed an obligation pertaining to his spiritual state – is that he should remain in the place where his aspiration started and not travel anywhere until the [Sufi] path has accepted him and his heart has arrived in the presence of his Lord. Travel at a wrong time for the aspirant is but deadly poison and not one of those who has traveled at a wrong time has ever attained the place he has hoped to reach. If God wishes good to the aspirant, he makes him firm from the very beginning. If, however, He wishes ill to the aspirant, He will keep sending him back to his initial state and profession. And if God wishes to test the aspirant, He will banish him to the wastelands of alienation from Him.

Now, this applies to the aspirant who is destined to reach his goal. There are, however, young men who are best suited for the path of outward service to the poor.⁸³⁴ Such an individual is lower than them in his rank pertaining to the path. He and the likes of him are content to imitate the outward customs [of the Sufi folk]. They dedicate themselves to travels. The most they can achieve on this path is to journey [to different lands], to visit places to which people aspire, and to meet [Sufi] masters in a purely outward manner. Therefore they witness only the outward aspects of things and are content with that kind of travel. Such people should travel incessantly so that idleness would not prompt them to commit things that are prohibited [by the Divine Law]. For if a young man enjoys rest and idleness, he enters the arena of temptation (*fitna*).

It is very detrimental for the novice to find himself amidst an assembly of [advanced] Sufi masters and [their] companions. If one happens to be tested in this manner, one should show [great] respect for the Sufi masters, render services to those in their entourage, never oppose them and should make them feel at

833 Namely, doubt and devilish promptings.

834 Namely, the Sufis.

ease. One should also seek that the heart of a Sufi master not be alienated from him. In dealing with Sufi masters one must always take their part against oneself and never one's own part against them. One should always consider oneself indebted to each of them, while at the same time not considering them in any way indebted to oneself. The aspirant must never disagree with anyone. If he knows that he is right, he must keep silent and show his agreement with everyone. If the aspirant laughs, or is prone to anger and debate – nothing [good] will come out of him. If the aspirant finds himself amidst an assembly of Sufis – be this on the road or at gathering – he must not disagree with [any aspect of] their outward behavior – be it food, fasting, rest, or movement. If he feels disagreement with them in his innermost self and in his heart, he should keep his heart with God – may He be great and exalted. If, for instance, they invite him to eat, he should eat one or two morsels and not allow his lower soul revel in its appetite.//483

A constant and ostentatious recitation of [Sufi] litanies is not part of proper manners among the aspirants. The [Sufi] folk engage in the purification of their thoughts, improving their morals and banishing forgetfulness from their hearts [inwardly], not by multiplying the acts of piety. They, however, must observe all prescribed rites and follow [the prophetic] customs. As for the supererogatory prayers, a constant remembrance of God in one's heart is better for the aspirants. The aspirant's principal fortune is his [ability] to tolerate everyone in good spirit, to accept everything he encounters with contentment, to patiently withstand hardship and poverty, and to give up demands and opposition [toward anyone] in both little and big things that he receives as his allotted share. If he is incapable of tolerating these things, he must go back to the marketplace. For if he desires what the ordinary people desire, he must obtain it from wherever people obtain it – from the toil of his hand and the sweat of his brow. After the aspirant has adopted a constant remembrance of God and has gone into a retreat, he may find there things that he has not witnessed before – which may occur to him in his sleep, in his waking state and in a state between these two. He may hear speeches and contemplate images that contradict the customary order [of things]. He must never preoccupy himself with any of such things, nor find repose in them, nor anticipate their arrival. For all this is but distraction from God – praise be to Him. Under those conditions he must describe all this to his master, so that his [the aspirant's] heart would be emptied of this.

The master, in his turn, must protect his secret, keep it away from others and make it look unimportant in his [aspirant's] eyes. For all this is nothing but tests, and reliance on it is a ruse [on the part of God]. Therefore the aspirant should be on his guard against this and pay little attention to this, for it has little significance beyond this. Know that the most detrimental thing for the aspirant is that he may take delight in the signs of proximity and special favor that God – praise be to Him – casts into his innermost heart, as if He is saying: "I have bestowed special favor upon you and singled you out from among your peers." However, when he decides to reject such suggestions, he will find himself elevated above this [stage] by means of veridical unveilings that will manifest

themselves to him. Books, however, cannot provide a [detailed] explanation of this.

If the aspirant cannot find someone who could instruct him in the place he lives, it is incumbent on him to travel to someone who is renowned//484 in his age for [his] guidance of novices. He must stay with this teacher and never leave the door of his house except for the canonical prayers. Know that one must give precedence to the knowledge of the Lord of the [Sacred] House⁸³⁵ – praise be to Him – over visiting the [Sacred] House, for were it not for the knowledge of the Lord of the House, visiting His House would not have been required. Those young men from among Sufi novices who go on a pilgrimage without the advice of their masters are driven by the promptings of their lower souls. Even though they may display the outward signs of this [Sufi] path their travel [to the pilgrimage site] is without [any] foundation. One evidence of this is that the more they travel, the greater the detachment of their hearts is [from God]. Departing even a few steps from their own lower souls would have been more beneficial to them than a thousand journeys.

The aspirant who pays a visit to a Sufi master must observe certain conditions. He must show respect to the master upon his entry and look at him with humility. Should the master choose him for any service, he should consider it to be a great favor.

Section

The aspirant should not ascribe infallibility to Sufi masters. Instead he should concede their states to them [as they are], think well of them and observe the limits set by God Most High in everything that the master instructs him to do. [His] knowledge is sufficient to him in distinguishing right from wrong.

Section

Every aspirant in whose heart the things of this world retain any value and significance can be associated with aspiration [to God] only metaphorically. As long as there remains in his heart preference for the pleasant things that he has given up, while he performs an act of righteousness or deals with a certain individual, then he is faking his true state and there is a danger that he might return to this world. For the goal of the aspirant lies in cutting and abandoning all ties to it, and not striving to [ostentatious] works of righteousness. It is absolutely inappropriate that the aspirant should [first] give up his property and inheritance and then become a captive to his [new] profession. Instead, he should seek a state when having and not having make no difference to him, so that he would not shun any poor person on account of it nor oppress anyone, even a fire-worshiper.//485

835 That is, the Ka'ba.

Section

When the hearts of Sufi masters accept an aspirant, this is the clearest proof that he will achieve salvation. As for he whom the heart of a master has rejected, he will inevitably see the consequence of this, even though this may take some time. If someone is destined [by God] to show disrespect toward Sufi masters, he has already displayed an unmistakable sign of his wretchedness [in the Hereafter].

Section

Seeking the company of youth is one of the gravest afflictions on this path. It is the consensus of Sufi masters that if God has afflicted someone with this sin then this person has been humiliated and deserted not only by God – may He be great and exalted – but also by himself, even though God may have granted him thousands upon thousands of miracles. Even if he has attained the rank of the witnesses [of faith] (*shuhadaʿ*), as alluded in a transmitted report, isn't it [a fact] that the heart may become preoccupied by a [mere] creature? Even worse than this [affliction] is that the heart considers this too trivial and regards this as totally unimportant. [About this] God Most High said: “You reckoned it a light thing, and with God it is a grave thing.”⁸³⁶ Al-Wasiti said [about this]: “When God wants to humiliate His servant, He throws him among evil-smelling trash and corpses.”

I heard Abu 'Abdallah al-Sufi say: I heard Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Najjar say: I heard Abu 'Abdallah al-Husri say: I heard Fath al-Mawsili say: “I kept company with thirty [Sufi] masters, who were considered to be among the Substitutes (*al-abdal*).⁸³⁷ When I was about to leave them, each of them gave me one and the same advice: ‘Stay away from the company of youth and do not mingle with them!’” There are, however, those who claim to have overcome the depravity pertaining to this issue⁸³⁸ and who argue that this is but a test of the [human] spirit that does no harm. [As their proof] they recount the insinuations of those who teach about the “sign” (*sháhid*)⁸³⁹ and the anecdotes about certain Sufi masters and the sinful behavior that they have exhibited, which it would have been more appropriate for them to conceal [from the public]. This kind of talk approximates to polytheism and amounts to [sheer] unbelief. So may the aspirant avoid the company of youths or mingling with them, for this easily opens the door//486 of [his] abandonment and rejection [by God]. Let us take refuge in God from evil behavior!

836 Q. 24:15; 24:14, according to Arberry's translation.

837 One of the most elevated ranks in the Sufi spiritual hierarchy. They were thus called for their ability to maintain their presence in several different places at the same time.

838 Namely, keeping company with youths.

839 Namely, a young boy or man, whom they consider to be a reflection of divine beauty (mis-guidedly, according to al-Qushayri).

Section

Another grave sin that may afflict the aspirant is the secret envy of his brothers that may penetrate his heart. It may occur as a result of the special treatment that God – may He be great and exalted – accords to his peers on this [Sufi] path and which He deprives him of. He should know that what happens is but portions [that God bestows upon His creatures] (*qisam*). The servant can purify himself from [envy] by finding his satisfaction in God's existence and eternal nature rather than in His generosity and grace. Whatever you see, O aspirant, has been predetermined by God – so carry His burden [patiently]. This is the custom that is followed by the cleverest of the seekers [of God].

Section

When the aspirant happens to find himself in a company of people, it is his obligation to give preference to every single one of them [over himself]. He should put above himself every person, regardless of whether that person is hungry or sated. He should seek instruction from anyone who displays signs of masterly features, even though he may be more knowledgeable than his teacher. He⁸⁴⁰ can only arrive at this stage by divesting himself of his own power and capacity, and by being guided to it by God's might and beneficence.

Section

In regard to the aspirant's behavior at a listening session, it is never appropriate that he should move during it on his own accord. He can only be excused, if a divine visitation [commanding] movement descends upon him, in which case its intensity should not exceed the strength of the power (*ghalaba*) that overwhelms him. When this overwhelming power ceases, he must sit down and be still. If, however, he continues to move seeking pleasure in ecstasy without such an overwhelming power and necessity, then this is not right. When he has accustomed himself to this [rule] he holds [himself] back and does not display any [divine] realities imparted to him. The most he can hope for when he has attained such states is to take delight in them in his heart.

In general, movement takes a toll on everyone who engages in it and detracts from his spiritual state regardless of whether this is a master or an aspirant. The only exception is that it is dictated by one's [mystical] moment (*waqt*) or an overwhelming power that deprives one of one's [sense of] discernment (*tamyiz*).⁸⁴¹ However, when the master instructs the aspirant to move and he engages in this movement in accord with the master's instruction, then there is no harm in it, for the master is one who has authority over him. If [advanced] Sufis instruct the aspirant to join in their movements,⁸⁴¹ he should join them in

840 That is, the aspirant.

841 That is, in their dance and body postures.

what they are doing, and perform what is necessary in order to prevent their hearts from alienating themselves [from him]. Now, if his spiritual state is sincere, it will prevent the hearts of the [advanced] Sufis from questioning him when he joins them.

As to the throwing off of one's clothes [during a listening session], the aspirant has absolutely no right to take back anything that he has given away [in this manner], except when a Sufi master instructs him to do so. He then treats it as a loaned thing in his heart and takes it back only to give it away later without alienating the heart of the master. If the aspirant who has not done so before [finds himself among] a group of Sufis whose custom is to throw off their robes – and the aspirant knows that they return them [to one another] and there is no master among them to whom he could entrust his embarrassment and his uneasiness – it is best that he join in their custom and choose to cast his robe off before the singer,⁸⁴² even though they may take theirs back. He is also allowed not to cast it off, because he knows that they are accustomed to taking back what they have cast off [before the singer]. For the impropriety lies in their custom of taking back [their] robes and not in his opposing what they do. Nevertheless, the best way is to cast off [his robe] in accord with them, then not take it back. Under no circumstance should the aspirant make demands of the singer, for it is the sincerity of his [aspirant's] spiritual state that causes the singer to repeat certain things, while causing others to follow [him].

Whoever seeks blessing from the aspirant does injustice to him, for since he has little spiritual power, this may harm him. Therefore it is incumbent upon the aspirant not to display his [spiritual] status in front of anyone who ascribes to him blessing and [high] status.

Section

When the aspirant is tested by [worldly] renown, a secure and abundant livelihood, friendship with a youth, attraction to a woman or the [comforting] belief in an assured source of sustenance, and there is no master next to him who would suggest to him how to rid himself of this, then he should travel and move away from his place of residence, in order to distract his ego from this condition. //488 There is nothing more harmful for the heart of the aspirant than to achieve [worldly] renown before extinguishing his human nature.

One of the requirements of proper behavior is that the aspirant's knowledge of the [Sufi] path should not be ahead of his actual [spiritual] stage [along it]. Should he learn the ways of this [Sufi] community and imitate the acquisition of the knowledge of the issues and [spiritual] states that they face before actually realizing his true status [vis-à-vis them] and acting accordingly, his arrival at all these things will be delayed. That is why the Sufi masters say: "When the gnostic speaks [profusely] about [his] gnosis, consider him to be ignorant!" For this is

842 As a sign of gratitude and payment.

nothing but talking about mystical stations without [direct] knowledge [of them]. He whose knowledge is greater than his station is a possessor of [abstract] knowledge, not a traveler on the [Sufi] path.

Section

One of the requirements of proper manners is that aspirants should not seek prominence (*tasaddur*), nor have disciples and novices. For the aspirant (*murid*) who has become one to whom others aspire (*murad*) before ridding himself of his human nature and his failings is veiled from the True Reality. Therefore his instructions and teachings will benefit no one.

Section

When an aspirant renders services to [advanced] Sufis [he should know] that their inner thoughts⁸⁴³ are their messengers to him. Therefore, the aspirant must not resist sincere striving in their service and the total dedication of his efforts [for their well-being] that his innermost soul commands him.

Section

If it is the aspirant's duty to render services to Sufis, he should bear it patiently if they are harsh to him. Even if he believes that he spares no effort in their service, while they never praise him [for that], he should apologize to them for his shortcomings and assert that it is he himself who is at fault, thereby soothing their hearts. [He should do this] even though he may know that he has nothing to be blamed for. Even though they may persist in being harsh toward him, he should exert himself in their service and in his solicitude [toward them]. I heard imam Abu Bakr b. Furak say: "As an adage has it: 'If you cannot be patient under the hammer, why then become an anvil?'" With this in mind the Sufis recite:

I would occasionally come to him to submit my apologies to him
For my sins even before I have done any wrong.//489

Section

The foundation and the essence of this matter⁸⁴⁴ is the observance of the rules of the Divine Law, the guarding of one's hand from stretching to anything that is forbidden or ambiguous [under it], protecting one's senses from prohibited things, and avoiding forgetfulness of God Most High even for [the duration of] a single breath. If, in the time of need, one is not allowed to consider lawful as much as a sesame seed because of doubt about [its provenance], how [do you think] one should behave at a time of ease and free choice?

843 That is, "their wishes and desires", according to a commentator.

844 That is, Sufism.

It is the aspirant's duty to constantly exert himself in an effort to give up passionate desires (*shahawat*). For whoever follows his passion, forfeits his purity. One of the ugliest features in the aspirant is that he reverts to the passion which he previously gave up for the sake of God Most High.

Section

It is the aspirant's duty to keep his pact with God Most High. Breaking the pact while on the path of aspiration is [for the aspirant] like apostasy (*ridda*) for the people of outward [faith]. The aspirant should not, as far as possible, promise to God Most High anything of his own free choice, for the requirements of the Divine Law contain enough to satisfy anyone's ability [to worship God]. God said regarding certain folk: "[Monasticism]⁸⁴⁵ they invented – we did not prescribe it to them – only seeking the good pleasure of God; but they observed it not as it should be observed."⁸⁴⁶

Section

It is the aspirant's duty not to entertain high hopes [for the future], for the poor one⁸⁴⁷ is the son of his [mystical] moment.⁸⁴⁸ Nothing will come out of the aspirant who makes plans for the future, looks beyond his [condition] in the present moment and anticipates what might happen to him.

Section

It is the aspirant's duty that he has no [secure] sustenance, no matter how small, especially when he is in the company of Sufis. For the darkness of [secure] sustenance stifles the light of the [mystical] moment.

Section

It is the aspirant's duty – which applies to all those who travel along this [Sufi] path – not to accept any favors from women, not to mention actively seeking them. // 490 This is the way of the masters of the Sufi community and what they have advised others to do.

845 This word appears only in some versions of the text; others omit it.

846 Q. 57:27; 57:29, according to Arberry's translation. This verse is a matter of controversy among Muslim exegetes, since it allows two diametrically opposed interpretations: one is favorable toward the Christian monks (in which case, one reads "We did not prescribe it for them except that [it arose] out of desire for the satisfaction of God"); the other is critical of their "innovation", as in the translation suggested by Arberry.

847 That is, the Sufi.

848 That is, he lives by the "here and now".

Section

It is the aspirant's duty to keep away from worldly people, for keeping company with them is a time-tested poison. They will benefit from him, while they will detract from his [spiritual] stature. God Most High said: "Obey not him whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance."⁸⁴⁹ Those who renounce the world (*zuhhad*) take money out of their purses in order to draw closer to God, whereas the pure ones⁸⁵⁰ take the creatures [of this world] and [mundane] knowledge out of their hearts in order to attain to God's True Reality.

The master and imam Abu 'l-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri – may God be pleased with him – said: "This is our advice to the aspirants. We ask that God the Generous grant them success and that He not hold it against us [in the Hereafter]. We have completed dictating this *Epistle* at the beginning of the year four hundred and thirty-eight.⁸⁵¹ We ask God the Generous not to make it an argument against us and not to punish us on account of it [in the Hereafter]. On the contrary, [we ask] that it serve for us as a means [to salvation] and a benefit. Verily, His grace is His wont and forgiveness is [always] ascribed to Him."

Praise be to God as is His due. May His graces, blessings and mercy be on His messenger, our master the virgin (*ummi*)⁸⁵² Prophet as well as upon his pure family and his elect and noble Companions! May God greet them all abundantly!

849 Q. 18:28; 18:27, according to Arberry's translation.

850 *Ahl al-safa'* – that is, the Sufis.

851 That is, 1046 C.E.

852 That is, one whose mission and teachings were original and unprecedented.