

PEARLS OF WISDOM

Khawāja Gharīb Nawāz's, *Letter to his Beloved Disciple*



WHAT FOLLOWS IS A LETTER WRITTEN BY THE GREAT SUFI MASTER, Khawāja Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī Ajmerī (d. 1236 CE) to his cherished disciple, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī. It transcends its personal nature to offer timeless pearls of wisdom for all Muslims. While written nearly eight centuries ago, the advice within resonates with even greater urgency in the contemporary world. The reader will likely recognise that *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) offers potent solutions to the myriad dilemmas we face today. May Allah grant us the guidance to internalise and act upon these words of wisdom, *āmin*.

This excerpt originates from the forthcoming publication, Allah-willing: "The Sultan of India: The Life and Mission of Khawāja Mu'īn al-Dīn Chishtī," authored by Shaykh Mehdī Miyā Chishtī and edited by Dr Hafiz Ather Hussain al-Azhari.





ALLĀH'S NAME I BEGIN WITH—
THE MOST COMPASSIONATE, THE MOST MERCIFUL.

The flower of those who hold communion with Allāh, the lover of the Lord of the Universe, my brother, Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī! May Allah keep you content and protected in His shelter, *āmin*.

Once, when I was in the service of Khwāja ‘Uthmān Hārūnī. A man approached and lamented, “I have diligently acquired knowledge of various Islamic sciences and embraced asceticism (*zuhd*) to the best of my ability. However, I am yet to attain my true goal in life.”

‘Uthmān Hārūnī responded, “There is one key element you must embrace, and upon doing so, you will become both a true scholar (*‘ālim*) and a pious individual (*zāhid*). Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

‘Renunciation of the world (*tark al-dunyā*) is the essence of all worship, and love for the world is the root of all evil.’”

He continued, “If you act upon this hadīth, you will find no need for further knowledge acquisition. Gaining knowledge (*‘ilm*) is simple, but its practical application (*‘amal*) presents significant challenges. Accept that surrendering worldly desires is impossible without unwavering love and a profound connection with Allāh. And such divine love cannot be attained without His guidance (*hidāyah*). It is through His guidance alone that you can reach your ultimate objective. Allah states in the Qur’an:

Whomsoever Allah guides, he is
the [rightly] guided one” (7:178).

مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِي

Therefore, one should have the fear of Allāh. Instead of squandering precious time on fleeting worldly desires, one should cherish time as a valuable gift and embrace a life characterized by spiritual poverty (*faqr*) and contentment (*qanāʿah*). Cultivate humility and be so overcome with remorse for your shortcomings that you hesitate to even raise your head. Embrace humbleness and submissiveness, for these qualities hold immense value in the realm of worship and devotion.”

Later Khwāja ʿUthmān Hārūnī reported the following episode. Hātim was the devoted student and disciple (*murīd*) of Shaykh Shaqīq Balkhī. One day, Shaykh Shaqīq enquired of his student, “How many years have you spent in my company, benefiting from my teachings and guidance?” He answered: “Thirty years.” The Shaykh again enquired: “What have you acquired during this period?” He said: “I have obtained eight benefits.” The Shaykh pressed him, “Did you not possess these qualities before?” to which Hātim replied in the negative. He elaborated that he considered these eight qualities sufficient, for they encompassed the well-being of both this world and the next. The Shaykh, intrigued, asked him to enumerate these eight qualities, and so Hātim explained:

First Virtue “When I studied people, I observed a universal and fervent attachment to worldly possessions and pleasures. Of these beloveds things, some stay with him till the death bed, some till the hour of death, and others till he is laid to rest in the grave. However, none of these things accompany the person in the grave. None goes with him into his grave to sympathise with him there, to hold for him a torch of light, and help him travel safely through the stages of the Day of Judgement.

So based on this fact, I realised that one should have extraordinary love towards the thing that will also help in the grave and beyond. The only thing that meets that criteria is good deeds, for this goes to the grave with the person as a companion and guides him through the various stages on the Day of Judgement. Good deeds possess all these

characteristics, so I made them my beloved. The good deeds will be a friend in the grave to direct me during my travels in the afterlife.”

The Shaykh said: “Hātim, you have spoken wisely.” Hātim then proceeded to elaborate on the second virtue.

Second Virtue “Observing my fellow human beings, I noticed a pervasive tendency to be enslaved by their desires, blindly led by their whims. I then reflected upon the Qur’anic verse:

As for him who fears standing
before his Lord and has restrained
himself from impure evil desires
(*hawā*); verily, Paradise will be his
abode (79:40-1).

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ
عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ. فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ.

This verse solidified my belief in the veracity of the Holy Qur’an. To attain self-control, I actively resisted my base desires, finding no solace in fleeting worldly possessions. Instead, I discovered tranquility and fulfillment in submitting to Allah through sincere worship. “May Allah bless you,” remarked the Shaykh, “your words are imbued with wisdom.”

Third Virtue “Observing people, I witnessed their relentless pursuit of worldly gain, enduring immense hardship in its attainment. Some perceive obtaining favor from a worldly leader as a significant accomplishment. However, upon reflecting upon the verse:

Whatever is with you, will perish
and whatever is with Allāh [in the
form of good deeds] will remain
(16:96).

مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ. وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ.

I resolved to expend all my earnings in the path of Allāh, submitting wholly to His cause. I dedicated myself to Allāh, aspiring to attain my eternal goal in the hereafter.” The Shaykh replied: “May Allāh bestow blessings upon your life, you have spoken well.”

Fourth virtue “When I looked closely at people, I observed that they consider the riches and size of their family as a mark of respect and influence, and they boast about them. Later I concentrated on the verse:

Indeed the most noble of you are
the ones which have most *taqwā*
(49:13). إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ.

Hence I realised that this is true righteousness and whatever the people believe is incorrect. So I became God-fearing to be nearer to Him”. The Shaykh said: “Well done!”

Fifth virtue “When I reflected on the condition of people, I found that they speak ill of others, purely out of jealousy; and they are jealous of wealth, position and knowledge. Then I concentrated on the verse:

It is We Who portioned out
between them their livelihood in
this world, and We raised some of
them above others in ranks, so that
some may employ others in their
work (43:32). نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ
الدُّنْيَا. وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ
دَرَجَاتٍ لِيَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سُخْرِيًّا.

So [the verse indicates] that everyone has received their share according to divine decisions made an eternity ago, thus there is no benefit in being envious of others. So I surrendered envy and turned out to be peaceful with everybody.” The Shaykh said: “You have done well.”

Sixth virtue “When I observed the world, I saw that people have hostility with one another, and to satisfy a specific longing of theirs, they become each other’s enemies. Then I read the verse:

Verily to man, Shayṭān is the open
enemy. (12:5). إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ.

Then I understood that the Holy Qur’ān is true and indeed, Shaytān is our foe. From that point onwards, I considered Shaytān as my main enemy. I neither follow him nor comply with him, but submit to Allāh alone and offer my worship to Him only. This is the correct way, for Allāh Himself says:

Did I not command you, O children of Ādam, that you should not worship Shaytān. Verily he is a plain enemy to you. And that you should worship Me alone. That is the Straight Path (36:60-1).

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا
الشَّيْطَانَ. إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ. وَإِنِ
اعْبُدُونِي. هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ.

The Shaykh said: “Excellent”.

Seventh virtue “When I noticed people, I saw that each individual endeavours to secure their livelihood. Regrettably, some resort to impermissible, *ḥarām* means, leading to ignominy and degradation. This prompted my contemplation of the Qur’anic verse:

And no living creation is on earth
but its provisions are due from
Allah (11:6).

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ
رِزْقُهَا.

This led me to understand that His statement is absolute truth. As a creation of Allah myself, I resolved to dedicate myself to His worship, unwavering in my belief that He would provide for me, because He Himself has promised it.” The Shaykh remarked: “Excellent.”

Eighth virtue “I observed that every single person is reliant upon something. Some are enthusiastically inclined to gold and silver whilst some are inclined to property and abundance. Then I contemplated the verse:

And whosoever puts his trust in
Allāh, then He will suffice him
(65:3).

وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ.

Since then, I am reliant upon Him and He is enough for myself and He will save me.”

Shaykh Shaqīq Balkhī said: “O Hātim! May Allah grant you the steadfastness to embody these eight principles. I have studied the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms of David and the Holy Qur’ān, and within these divine scriptures, I have discovered these same eight truths. Therefore, whoever adheres to these principles aligns themselves with the essence of all revealed scriptures.”

From this episode, it is clear that there is more need for practice than knowledge.

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