

# Why do we need a *Pīr*?

*This paper is a brief summary of a lecture delivered on Saturday 20th July 2019 in Doncaster, at the Zia al-Ummah Foundation Spiritual Camp 2019.*

## Who is a *Pīr*?

In its simplest form, a *Pīr* (sometimes called a *Shaykh* or *Murshid*) is a father. Allāh has blessed us with a biological father; a *Pīr* is like having a spiritual father. In fact, in many ways, the *Pīr* is more important than our biological father, because the *Pīr* takes us back to Sayyidunā Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). A father brings us immense benefit in this world, the *Pīr*'s assistance helps us in both worlds.

We can also view a *Pīr* like a teacher. Importantly, a *Pīr* is more concerned with the inner disciplines rather than the outer. He is more concerned with how we feel on the inside rather than how we look on the outer. Perhaps more than ever before, we need people of piety and wisdom (like *Pīrs*) that can help us rectify our inside in an age where we have become obsessed with the outer. We have nail bars, eyebrow parlours, beauty parlours and gyms, all concerned with the outer look. The *Pīr*'s concern is the most important part of the body, the heart.

## What happens when someone wants to become a *Murīd* (disciple) of a *Pīr*?

There are different Sufī orders such as Chishtī, Naqshbandī, Qādirī, Rafā'ī and many more. These are like different carriages of the same train. All of them go back to the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him), via the means of the Blessed Companions (may Allāh be pleased with them all).

A *Murīd* (disciple) will approach a *Pīr* of an established Sufī order and ask for *bay'at* (an allegiance). The *Pīr* will then welcome the disciple to the order, and will explain that this allegiance will now require him to show utmost obedience to Allāh and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).

In the same way this *Murīd* takes the hand of a *Pīr*, the *Pīr* prior to this took the hand of his *Pīr* who took the hand of his *Pīr*, till the chain (*silsila*) reaches the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). So this is a living tradition and link, going back to the best of times and the Best of all Creations, peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him.

## Why do need a *Pīr*?

There are countless benefits and needs for a *Pīr*, a few will be mentioned below:

### i. Everyone needs a guide

No matter how successful an individual is, there is always a need for a guide, mentor, manager, teacher or coach behind them. Every writer needs an editor, every boxer needs a coach and

every teacher needs a headmaster. The same applies to our religion; we need a guide to help us and that guide is a *Pīr*.

Someone may think that they are highly educated, so therefore they do not need a *Pīr*. This viewpoint is not correct. Books can give you the knowledge but nothing can ever replace experience, to be found at the hand of a *Pīr*. A graduate doctor is never allowed to operate unless under the guidance of a senior doctor. The latter provides advice and practical know-how that can never be found in books.

## **ii. To understand *Ihsān***

In the famous *Hadīth of Jibrīl*, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) identified Islām (the five pillars), *Imān* (the seven key beliefs) and *Ihsan* ('that you worship Allāh as if you are observing Him. And if you cannot do this, then Allāh is watching you'). So that we can understand Islam and *Imān*, everyone needs a teacher, guide, Shaykh, scholar or even parents to teach this. For *Ihsān*, we need someone who knows the inner dimensions of Islam, understands the subjective and spiritual aspects of our religion and can help us reach the lofty status of 'worshipping Allāh as if we are observing Him.' This is the remit of the *Pīr*.

## **iii. Good *Suhba* (Companionship)**

One of the most important benefits of having a *Pīr* is good, human companionship. Books are never enough for genuine guidance.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) compared good companionship to visiting a perfume seller. Even if a person does not purchase anything, he will leave with a nice fragrance on his body and clothes. Similarly, extended companionship with a good Shaykh is like visiting a perfume seller. Even if a person does not learn anything, at the very least, it stops him from numerous bad acts, which itself is rewarded by Allāh. Companionship determines everything. If a footballer plays for an excellent team, his standard will automatically increase. When we adopt the *suhba* of a practicing *Pīr*, our spiritual standards will automatically increase.

## **iv. To realise our shortcomings**

Sometimes we do not see the deficiencies we possess. We think we are perfect and faultless in our religion, when we are not. It is the *Pīr* who can correct this. Sayyidunā Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said, 'The believer for a believer is a mirror.' In other words, we should use the Muslims around us to point out our shortcomings. The *Pīr* is that shining, clean mirror that can point out our positive and negative traits.

However, this requires the disciples to accept and embrace criticism, especially when it comes from the seniors.

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