

Fana-fi-Sheikh

An Original Sangatheka

by

Murshid Samuel L. Lewis

(Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

This paper was classified as a Sangatheka by Murshid SAM.

The papers on this level from Hazrat Inayat Khan were withheld

from him by the Sufi Movement et. al., so he wrote his own.

“An Original Sangatheka” has been added to the title—Ed.

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Sangatheka Number 1

There is a common mistake about the idea of surrender which confuses ordinary surrender and spiritual surrender. Ordinary surrender is based upon the idea—untrue in cosmic reality—that “you are different and I am different.” Spiritual surrender is based upon the principle that God is the only Being, that therefore that **you** and **I** are one.

Every wish we have is in some way an impulse. If there was no wish or impulse there would be no life. Life makes its way in and through our being in the form of these impulses and when these impulses enter the heart-sphere they become impressions. These impressions should be viewed metaphysically first rather than morally. If we view them morally we begin to doubt the goodness of our acts, whereas it maybe that our acts have no special place in the moral field at all, only we place them there. By viewing them metaphysically we learn to determine what things are impressions and what are not.

It is because we fail to understand impressions and intuitions that we need some other alternatives until we can develop the heart. One way of attunement is through the use of Darood. This is very fine but there are some conditions where one cannot be prayerful or perhaps one is not really devotional by nature. Then one can practice fana-fi-Sheikh.

If you look at a magnet there are two poles, yet it is one magnet. We may call these poles north and south, or positive and negative. In electricity we do have positive and negative poles in a certain sense, and these poles do complement each other, but you cannot have one without the other. Thus polarity is really born of unity and the same is true in the study of hierarchy.

Now strictly speaking Sheikh is not a detective or a bookkeeper constantly keeping after the mureed to mark down all his actions in the book of life and label them good or bad. He is not a recording angel who, because of superior development, somehow watches over the mureeds, really to get after them for every shortcoming or nod approval for every act of goodness. It is only that the Sheikh has a certain superior development either in divine attunement or in receptivity to impressions or otherwise, and by fana-fi-Sheikh one can take the full advantage of the Sheikh's attunement.

For instance if a mureed wants to have a party and is troubled about something, let her not be troubled. Let her invite the Sheikh. The Sheikh may come physically, which is not so important; let the Sheikh be invited spiritually. Speak to the Sheikh in his absence, ask him his advice, and either he will give it to you or God will begin to speak to you that way.

There is a certain feeling that if one practices fana-fi-Sheikh and plans a party, that one must

surrender to the Sheikh and not have the party, but do what the Sheikh says. Nothing could be further from the truth. Sheikh is not personality; Sheikh is the spirit of God in another personality, which enables that one to help the disciples. We live to fulfill a purpose and there is nothing in that purpose which says that the spiritual student must go in an opposite way from happiness or contrary to the custom of society, even including its pleasures. While we say pleasures and pain are not needed, if we consciously try to avoid them, we are worse than those who indulge in pleasures or are slaves of pain.

Now we want to have a party, and in fana-fi-Sheikh we simply go ahead and have the party and invite the Sheikh in spirit. We don't send him a postal card or telephone. We say Darood and then act as if the Sheikh were there as a sort of guardian spirit. If everything goes right, well and good. If not, we ask the Sheikh and in that way we feel his presence and the affair may go on much better.

It will not often happen that in this form of surrender we are going to feel that the Sheikh is going to say no. On the contrary, the purpose of Sheikh is to help us develop our impressions and intuitions, not to oppose our wishes. Every wish being based upon life, has an element of truth, no matter how selfish it seems. But is pleasure necessarily selfish? We might get the greatest elation out of giving joy to another in all manners of activity. Sufism does not stand out preventing or forbidding.

In fana-fi-Sheikh one doesn't write and ask the Sheikh his opinion as to what hat we should buy or what friend we should call on. We don't have to consult the Sheikh at all except when in doubt or when in need. It is for the mureed's protection, guidance and happiness that this is done. Only we have to be careful about mixing our thoughts of God with the Divine Reality. As Christ said: "How can we love God whom we haven't seen when we do not love our brother whom we have seen?" All the Orthodox use the word "God" without having the Divine Reality.

Sufis have a better method by seeking the divine reality in manifestation. And this guidance become as a protection, a guardian angel, not a celestial censor standing in our path every time we have an idea. So it is very important to get very clear. Become one with the Sheikh. Having a wish, feel that the Sheikh has a similar wish; having an inspiration, feel that this is also the inspiration of the Sheikh. Practice unity with the Sheikh, this is fana-fi-Sheikh; don't practice opposition, don't suppose or believe Sheikh is going to stand against us, join your enemies, forbid your wishes and pleasures. Nothing is farther from the Truth. Fana-fi-Sheikh can bless every one to get the most out of his material pursuits.

Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

Sangatheka Number 2

The difference between the less advanced and more advanced Buddhism can be explained in a few words. For the earlier Buddhism stressed the non-reality of ego and ego-soul, and the later Buddhism was based upon this reality. It is one thing to have a belief, and it is something else to have knowledge. Therefore in the introductory literature of modern Sufism there is a study made of different stages in the growth of belief, so that one can pass from belief to knowledge, knowledge which can be confirmed by inner and outer experience.

Now this is very important for in the words of the Sufi Invocation, we read “the Only Being,” and after reading them we go on and suppose that “I exist,” meaning ego-existence, which is the very thing denied by “the Only Being.” But instead of trying to prove that one is wrong in assuming self-existence, whether one philosophically denies or affirms ego-soul, in fana-fi-Sheikh one learns the truth of his own nature.

Every impulse, no matter how self-centered, must have a bit a truth in it, for it has a bit of life in it. The selfish desire becomes destructive of vital life forces and the unselfish desire become constructive and adds to our inner and outer strength. Suppose, for instance, one wants to have a party and while preparing for it one thinks of one's own pleasure—that is one course. And suppose that everything else is exactly the same and one thinks about pleasure others will have, that is another course. And while pleasure is not happiness, the pleasure which leads away from self and which may bring joy to others cannot be called unholy, unspiritual.

The first attitude is naturally egoistic. We come into the world and in the ammara stage we think about the body. The body is new to us and we give it much thought. After a while, however, the satisfaction of the purely bodily needs may become automatic and then we enter the lauwama stage and we seek pleasure. But it is a mistake to suppose that everything in the ammara stage is wrong or everything in the lauwama stage is evil. If all that belonged to nufs ammara and nufs lauwama were wrong, then God would be the Creator of evil for causing us to pass through these stages.

We were born upon earth to have certain experiences, and we have to build up a proper physical body and proper psychic constitution. There is a sort of education needed for this which culminates in right experience. Mostly people are prone, especially in the lauwama stage, to become very selfish and seek pleasure, and when they do not they run over to the opposite extreme and attack every form of amusement. The result is that we have the libertine and the puritan and it is doubtful whether one is actually higher than the other.

Now instead of trying to balance one against the other, or even trying a middle path, one may remember that every impulse is born of life and if there were not a purpose in it it could not be entertained. The conscience is the cream of the past experience, but soul cannot be limited to past, and if we want to live in the eternal present we not only have to learn from ego-self, we have to learn from which we have considered as separate from our own ego.

The Sheikh is essentially a dispenser of life to disciples—that they may have more life and thus succeed in what they are doing. As life throws more light upon their plans, they may naturally change their plans. It is not to call anything right or wrong. So it is not part of the training of Sufism to make people conscious stricken about everything or to doubt as they go along whether their experiences and plans, selfish or unselfish, are pleasing to God. For God is life, the life even in the selfish impulse, and an impulse, no matter how selfish, may contain more of life than the resistance to all impulse.

Resistance to impulse is always advisable if it leads to life. For we have many opportunities before us. If we wish to be wealthy, we ought to resist all impulses which will deprive us of wealth. If we long for poetical expression we should learn to discipline ourselves along that path. It is when we have many impulses and contradictory impulses—and when we have several impulses, they are sure to be conflicting—then we should learn to choose from them, and cultivate one or a few and build them up and build around them. In that way even what started out as a selfish motive, perhaps, may become the center of a divine accomplishment.

Of course there is a great deal of difference between the one who resists everything, who does nothing, and the person who, having a certain plan, or a few plans, resists everything else. The first person does not operate “Toward the One” for his personality is empty, there is nothing there. The person who has a motive—and it is not necessary to qualify the motive at first—can work toward a motive and around a motive. If it turns out to be contrary to the Universal Will it will bring pain, and if it is in harmony with the Universal Will it may bring bliss, although not necessarily so. But in either case it will bring strength and aid in one’s evolution.

Therefore Sufism and all spiritual development is not necessarily metaphysical; we can work in and with everyday life and in and with the most commonplace things. It is only to draw strength to ourselves that some disciplines are urged, not compelled.

The Sheikh is the transformer by which spiritual magnetism may be converted into strength of will for the success of disciples in all undertakings. Contrariwise, the disciple is the Sheikh experiencing the particulars of life, and when this attitude is followed, the union between teacher and pupil becomes stronger even without transcendental experience. It is this union which constitutes Yoga. So the unity becomes more important than anything else.

Sufism is not a system of restrictions or prohibitions. The term “discipline” is used in order to make the talibs get the most out of everything, no matter what the course of speech, thought or action be. There is not only in this a real freedom of will, there is in this every opportunity to become successful and there need be no contradiction between inner development and the satisfaction in experiencing even the most ordinary things of life.