

Never ceasing to transcend the ego's limits

SERVING GOD, SERVING MEN

By Marie-Hélène Dassa

He who is a guide for others on the path leading to spiritual realization has recognized that he is also a disciple and a servant. It is only under these conditions that he can receive from his own master the education leading to the purification of the heart.

“ The most elevated of all men is also at their service” (Words attributed to the Prophet Muhammed)

It is only when the heart is totally purified that the spiritual secret is given to the person who is chosen to be the recipient of God's grace: “ When people see a swarm of bees, they bring a box in which they put sweet and perfumed things. When the bees smell this perfume, they enter the hive. If the bees like this environment and feel comfortable there, they make it their home. Otherwise, the bees might stay for a day or two in this hive, and then move on to search for a better place. It is the same thing with the divine Secret: if the Sirr (Secret) finds the heart to be sweet and perfumed, It will stay and grow within this heart. As for the bees, when they settle, they reproduce and make honey, a honey that will provide nourishment through eternity.” (1)

This purification of the heart is an absolute condition for all those who wish to follow the path of return towards their interior truth.

The state of the disciple

One of the primordial qualities of the seeker on the way is humility. It is this quality that enables him to be in a state of receptivity, as Ibn 'Ata Llah suggested: “charity is for those who are in need.” (2)

“ Real knowledge can only be obtained through humility. The path leading to it can be compared to a person who wants to drink water from a brook. In order to drink, this person must bend down to be at the level of the water. Water is always situated at the lowest level, near the ground. We must aspire to be like water.” (3)

The spiritual path is one of inner relinquishment. The Sufi is free from possession and is not possessed by anything. According to the Sufis, he who desires a thing is a slave to that thing. This detachment from the world is consequential to the soul being purified by the practice of invocation as prescribed by the guide as well as the aspirant's faith in the guide.

Each human being is victim of a very specific sickness, his ego. By traveling the spiritual path, man returns to his true nature. He ceases to be the slave of his own ego and becomes God's servant. “ If you believe yourself to be more important than an ant or a worm, know that your journey's end is still far way; and if you believe your self to be more important than most people, then concentrate your efforts on trying to deliver your soul from this sickness.” (4)

The main thing is to learn to renounce the ego's illusory wealth and to recognize that the ego's vanity produces a state of spiritual poverty. It is for this reason that the primordial condition of the spiritual guide is to be poor in God. He does not become someone else, does not hide behind the mask of the wise, but comes into contact with his true self, and is in touch with his original state at the center of his being.

Choosing to be a disciple is to engage combat against the passions tearing the soul apart with the aim of uniting the different tendencies governing it, of simplifying the being by concentrating it by pulling everything back to the center. The Sufis say: "One must forget one's soul in order to remember God".

The ego has an outer shell that prevents Light from entering. Ordinary man only sees this obscurity. When this shell is removed, the light contained in the heart can merge with God's Light, and the divine Light becomes omnipresent. "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God," states the Koran.

Liberation from the ego's domination

The path is centered on one thing: to stop being a slave of the ego to become God's servant.

" What is Sufism?

- * Free yourself from the prison of your thoughts**
- * Give generously for you have been given generously**
- * Be responsible for your life and your actions"**

It is the disciple's condition to be of service. By serving others, the seeker on the path learns to leave self-centeredness and liberate his self from what has so often been a master to him, his ego.

Man has been created for the purpose of serving, of adoring, of freely choosing to love God, but it is in his nature to be forgetful. Under the illusion of the reality of his ego, he spends all his time pursuing his desires. He serves his passions and is not at God's service. Not really awake, he walks through life like a sleepwalker chasing after the fantasies of a constantly changing dream.

The spiritual guide is an awakened being. His whole existence is focused on God and he sees only God's light. He is a servant of God's will and has become an instrument in God's hands. Beyond the appearances and paradoxes, he knows that this is where real freedom lies. The person who truly wishes for this kind of freedom, the kind of freedom that liberates him from the opinion of others and from the ego's narrow mindedness, knows that this freedom can only be obtained through submission to God's will.

" It is precisely when man realizes his true condition as God's servant that he stops being a slave of beings and circumstances, ceases to be a slave of his temporal condition, of his own caprices and illusions, of the temptations of idols, whether these idols be glory, wealth or even ideals that are chained to time. Unless his servitude is solely to God, the human being is fatally a slave of others and of his own self" (5)

It is God's will that Man is the only creature on this earth that has been given free will. He therefore can negate divine love and choose to devote himself to the world, to his ego and to bind himself to what is, in its nature, destined to end. In such a case, he negates himself because "the soul's destiny is to give herself to God" (6). For this reason, being a disciple is an absolute condition on this path, for it liberates the seeker from any traces of power. This abandonment of power is what makes the spiritual guide a complete Man, free from any ties and inclinations.

A real guide has no desire for power, not even a desire for wisdom or science. God is his sole preoccupation and aim, and only this kind of love can transcend all of creation. There is only the face of God.

The possessor of the secret

Being a disciple prepares the person who will be entrusted with the secret to be an instrument of the universal Reality. He must give up all his illusions about this world in order to be a receptacle of the spiritual Lights. Only then will he act according to what the moment truly requires, becoming an agent of order and harmony in the world. His soul dissolves in the divine ocean. As Jesus said: "Man infinitely surpasses man."

The guide doesn't have ownership over the spiritual secret; he is the possessor of it. The Sirr (secret) belongs solely to God. In order to transmit it, the guide must find the person whom God has designated as being a proper recipient because of his state of abandonment and readiness to receive this heritage. The guide is a 'abd Allah', God's servant, after having been a disciple to his master.

His freedom is tied to the mystery of divine love. It is a way of being whereby man ceases to see things and events with the physical eyes, but sees everything with the eye of the heart, thus returning to his original state. This is the most sublime action in Islam: to willingly accept to bind oneself to God as an act of pure love. Love removes the veil that separates us from the divine Reality. Everything in life becomes meaningful, as the heart perceives the beauty in all things. It is a state of profound joy. Whoever is given a taste of this state is drowned in an ocean of love, forever contemplative, in union.

It is probably for this reason that many saints consider the task of being a guide a weight on their shoulders. For these men who have relinquished all desire for personal power, accepting such a responsibility means to retrace their steps in order to lend a hand to those who are seeking truth.

- 1) Words from Sidi Hamza
- 2) A 'Hikam' from Ibn ata Allah
- 3) Words from Sidi Hamza
- 4) Faouzi Skali from 'Traces de Lumière'
- 5) Najm oud-dine Bammate from 'La liberté en Islam'
- 6) Najm oud-dine Bammate from 'La liberté en Islam'