

The Khankah Further Considered

While there are no requisites or restrictions as to the number of rooms in a khankah, there should be at least one dedicated to the service of God. Also, if possible one other room for the initiate-members, where they may meet for social purposes without having to invite guests to their private quarters, and if possible, at least a room for the creative activities which arise out of inspiration, such as a studio or work-shop. In general, however, the associate-dwellers will know how to carry on.

Each room should have its corner dedicated to God. Sometimes there may be an altar or a shrine in that corner, built in or decorations or art-objects. Each person should, so far as possible, select the furnishings for his own room that his atmosphere may be built up easily and harmoniously.

Many members, coming together for the first time, may supply their own things. The principles of love, harmony and beauty should be followed.

It is the simple beginning which will lead ultimately to the new and beautiful and thus establish a trend which may be followed without any slavish imitation. Formality should never dominate spiritual expression. Likewise all questions relating to roof, walls, gardens, decorations and general detail may be decided by the group together. While it is well to have at least one Sufi Symbol around in the khankah, symbolism does not have to be carried to the point of being an encumbrance, nor must it dominate beauty. Fixed norms which can easily degenerate into superstitions, formal customs and idolatry should be avoided.

Of course there is nothing to hinder the establishment of different rooms for worship, teaching and meditation, or for brotherhood and social meetings if there is suitable accommodation. There may be places for healing and concentration groups, according to the size of the khankah, number of persons interested, amount of funds and available space. There may even be annexes where Mureeds live and in which probationers may also stay who cannot remain in the khankah for various reasons. There is nothing to hinder spiritual students and other people from dwelling together; they already occupy space in the same apartment houses and hotels, but every Sufi house is not, nor need it become a khankah.

After the house is properly dedicated the rooms should be used as often as possible for the purposes for which they were originally intended even though individuals come and go; this policy will strengthen the atmosphere. Besides that, every khankah should have its extra room for the visiting Sufi, which may be occupied at any time by a teacher or disciple in seclusion. Many people who cannot otherwise practice seclusion will be able to report to a khankah and be properly protected and otherwise helped.

In rural districts, or where there are a group of buildings forming a compound, it may be possible to have a general seclusion from time to time. Then one person should be left free to protect the others and act as mediator before the world. It is important to bear this in mind when planning.

It may even be that a khankah is partially or largely vacant at times and there can be such a place preserved mostly for those who would use it for seclusion and sacred purposes generally.

The question of friends, relatives and children residing in the khankah is not a subject to be discussed in architecture. However, the various rooms should be sound-proof to some extent so that those in seclusion or devotion may have suitable privacy. As has been said the khankah is not a convent or monastery, except during times of seclusion. It is even possible that such an establishment may become the norm for others.

Khankahs may be built or acquired separately, or they may be part of a group of buildings used or occupied by spiritual students, or they may be connected with a temple. In the latter case the occupants would still have their independence unless the khankah was actually part of the templebuilding, which matter requires extreme caution. Except for a guardian or *wali* it may be unwise for anybody to dwell in an actual temple.

The life in the khankah is not to be too restricted, and this should be taken into consideration from the very first planning. It may even be that the khankah will offer something to the generality, in spreading the arts and customs of all the people in the world. Thus may the spirit of brotherhood be spread, even without the use of lectures. Many spiritual teachings may be offered to the world through beauty and right example.

There may be gardens connected with any khankah and full sway is permitted here. One may have bird sanctuaries and pergolas and nooks and arbors for those who wish to meditate outside or to go outdoors and be protected even while in seclusion. There may be gymnasiums and swimming pools or roof gardens, where there is the means therefore. These gardens and other accessories will offer ample opportunities for artistic expression, and will stimulate such arts as flower arrangement, even bring new ideas to gardening and landscaping. The ideal therefore has been called "The Garden of Inayat" which purports to synthesize several arts, crafts and social ideals even as Spiritual Architecture is, in another sense, a synthesis. But here too, imitation, at least in form, is not required.

Different climates suggest different methods and varying modes of living. It is the spirit alone which need be universal.

Again, it would be right to grow in one place the flowers that the teacher dwelling there enjoyed. One should always consider the living personalities more than those who have departed except in the matter of sacred retreat, which follows traditional patterns and holy records. Each one may worship in his own fashion, and love of beauty should also be regarded as one form of worship. Nor does every khankah have to have or become a Garden of Inayat.

A large khankah may contain workshops, studios, even offices, business rooms and other conveniences and accessories. There can be a craft-room where the principles learned in esoteric classes may be applied for the khankah, for the brethren generally or even for professional purposes. Disciples may actually have their studios and shops in or adjacent to such a place. But these workshops are not for visitors except those on business and should be as sound-proof as possible to build their own atmospheres, each after its kind. But after all the purpose of the khankah is to house humanity, not to force humanity to accept rules or norms which are too binding and restrictive.

We should bear in mind that anything built by man is essentially human, and only that which is created by God is properly speaking divine. There has been the mistake of the past that a certain church or convent is the house of God, and people even had to inconvenience themselves to go there to worship. Man himself is the noblest work of God. But man may erect edifices and endow them with Baraka, and thus through his own creation of a sacred atmosphere bring blessing to the world.