

The Khankah or Brotherhood Dwelling

In the Orient sometimes the Sufis live together in a common house on a cooperative or hierarchical brotherhood basis. Sometimes a Sheikh or teacher lives alone and the students come to his place for their lessons, also for their periods of Purdah or Khilvat (seclusion). Sometimes the House of the Sheikh is surrounded by the dwellings of the brethren. In these and in other instances the place may be called a Khankah. But for our purposes a Khankah may be any building in which one or more Sufis dwell, with or without their families, on an individual, cooperative or other basis. The rules and precedents must be set down by the teachers and by practicality. It is only that the principles of architecture involved may follow certain bases, so that spirituality may be increased on earth.

Rented and leased houses are not properly khankahs except when their owners are Sufis, and when there is a certain agreement that will take into consideration the objectives of the Sufi Movement and Sufi Order. In order to purchase a house for a Khankah there should be unanimous feeling that it is serviceable. If there is any objection to it, it should not be used. There must be harmony from the very beginning. If there is a keynote that is inharmonious, if there is even the slightest discord in the beginning; that means that thereafter the discord will increase. That would be a most unfortunate sign. And no one is compelled to live in a khankah and he should not unless his heart is gladdened thereby.

Everyone invited to such an undertaking should speak rather than surrender in spirit to that with which he does not agree. There is no doubt a great virtue in self-surrender but it is also true that many times a person has intuition, even an inspiration, and it goes contrary to the thoughts of others. The others speak and the inspired one keeps silent. Then the will of God is not made known and there is no planting of Baraka. Man must be true to himself and also to the divine spirit within.

If a sheikh alone takes a house or a sheikh with one or more mureeds rents a place, or three or more mureeds with the permission of the sheikh occupy a building or apartment that place may be used as a khankah. And in the khankah there should be one vacant room which is reserved for travelers. Even if the place be a house filled with Sufis if there is not this vacant room the place is not properly a khankah. That may be regarded as the Lord's room or the room for Maitreya Buddha or the Messiah, or it may have no designation. Yet it is for the travelers and visitors.

So whoever is to live in such a house should see that there is one extra room serviceable as a bedroom. That room should be used only by travelers, visitors. Or under certain conditions it may be used for meditation, concentration, prayer, healing, but not as a bedroom. It must be used only for holy and sacred purposes. Or there may be two such rooms, the extra room and the sacred room, which is preferable whenever practical.

When there is harmony between the original occupants and the owner, and an agreement can be made that is satisfactory to all, that place may be used as a khankah. Then there should be some symbol set up, preferably but not necessarily the Sufi Symbol. That symbol would indicate a place of Baraka. Then there should be a ceremony of purification or dedication or both, following the rites of the Universal Worship. The whole place should be properly dedicated knowing it is going to be the center for Baraka. This makes the establishment spiritual and holy.

The next consideration comes when there may be an old house which can be modified to become a khankah. This is not usually desirable and should not be undertaken when it can be avoided.

The chief exception will be houses adjacent to buildings already in use for sacred purposes, when it would be advantageous to rent or acquire them. In this case it would probably be best to have a ceremony of purification immediately and then if there are modifications and additions to have a ceremony of dedication afterwards. Thus evil influences would be removed before any alterations were attempted, and the old atmosphere would not exert any malefic affect. It is best to get rid of the old atmosphere, even to leave the windows and doors open for a while.

Modifications may be along two lines. The first kind would include the setting up of symbols and the proper provision for special rooms for meditation and for guests. Along with this the material and practical purposes should not be overlooked. Nor should anybody be required to make needless sacrifices for a "traveler" who exists in some distant place and who may not come there for a long time. The holiness is lost when human consideration is forgotten. Besides, when there are a group of buildings in a khankah, it is not necessary that everyone have a guest room; even one guest room for a group may suffice or there may be many such guest rooms. This can only be decided by the occupants.

A house of God should be a house of joy and of life. The khankah is not a convent in the old sense even though it be used in some instances for those in seclusion. In that case the rules for Khilvat (seclusion) apply. Yet any house may be embellished or altered because it proves to be desirable and in the remodeling there is also the opportunity to apply the principles of spiritual art.

From the point of view of architecture the khankah is a step beyond the shrine, being a more complex structure. Yet the general principles of it may be adopted by any family interested in spiritual matters, or even by any family at all. The method of building up a holy atmosphere and engendering psychic power is the same. The khankah, within limits, may be the example for all the world.

When it is desirable to build a structure, the first step may be the selection of the land. It is good even to have a concentration in that respect, for one or two or more to dwell upon the subject.

The more that can unite in holy concentration the better, but persons who will not live in the khankah should not be concerned with such concentrations. For there are persons, more willing than far-sighted, who will want to make suggestions for others, and receive impressions for others. They will even go out of their way to see that other persons follow the right path. But this of itself is a departure from spiritual teachings and is not to be sanctioned.

The site for the khankah or the khankah itself may be selected by the sheikh alone, but properly speaking he is not a sheikh who considers himself apart from his disciples. And it may be that when a sheikh concentrates his faithful disciples will be inspired or impressed or even have dreams or visions that prove to be valuable.

An "I-I" is a group formed by the integrative endeavor of several individuals who thus form a group which acts as a unit, or as one personality. This was the original idea of church, of sangha, of brotherhood, at least in the spiritual sense. When brethren act in unity, says the psalmist, then blessings come to earth. But people have not always acted in brotherhood, which has remained mostly an ideal. The Healing Service of the Sufis shows how a group may act together as if a single personality of a higher order.

When several people concentrate as a group they should hold hands and repeat an invocation or sacred phrase at the beginning of their undertaking and should pray afterwards, invoking the Presence and the blessing of God.

Nakib is a title given to guardians of shrines and managers of khankahs who maintain the concentration started by a group and who continue it for the good of the places under their direction.

They thus preserve the holiness. A *Nakib* sometimes presides over a khankah, usually being the senior disciple staying there. Sometimes he is a teacher, but he has the privilege of conducting business and making contacts with the world of a different nature.

In concentration a thought-pattern is set up and should be regarded even as parents regard the soul coming toward earth to occupy an infant's body. Properly conducted it gives rise to living thought and as the khankah is also to be regarded as living, this vitalizes the building. But the same method may be used with respect to any home. Many people hang up a placard, "God bless our home." They do not always realise that they themselves can cooperate in increasing the blessing. When this attitude is taken as if toward a living thing, an accommodation is made for growth.

It is the light and life of man that sustains all things in this world though he knows it not. The physical body is the temple of God and the home is the temple of man, for God created the former and man the latter. And if man establishes and maintains the atmosphere of holiness, the whole of physical existence may change.

Every room in a house can have its suitable concentration: the bedroom, the meditation hall, the kitchen, sewing room and all parts of the house. A common concentration or a group meditation of the several people who live in a sacred dwelling, two or three or more, and even with others joining them, will create a marvellous atmosphere. Besides this, it will preserve harmony. And although concentration may be regarded as an exercise, more or less esoteric, it can have most practical implications.

After a while there may come that contagious inspiration which makes one feel that life is worthwhile. The question arises, "Who exists, God or man?" It is one thing to say that God alone is, and it is another thing to live and act as if this were true. It is one thing to think that God is the only Being and it is quite another to obtain impressions clearly, to strengthen one's faculty of intuition, to heed that Voice which comes constantly from within. Only one who respects dreams, visions, intuitions and inspirations of himself or another is resigned to the Divine Will. Otherwise, no matter how willing he may seem to be, he has not attained.

Therefore to be sure that there is a manifestation of the Will of God, there may be an impression which comes first to the heart and consciousness of the teacher and then the pupils until the pupils learn to recognize their own intuitions. And in the selection of a Khankah site and all things concerned with it, this heart response is most necessary. For if a sheikh tried to force his personal will upon the mureeds because of a beautiful house or for some other consideration, it would not establish the seed of blessing which is needed more than anything else. Therefore the true teacher will always encourage his disciples to follow their impressions and express their feelings. And in that way he receives corroboration to his own inspirations.

If one wishes to partake in the enterprise of the selection of khankah site, khankah, of temple site, of temple, he should be willing to cooperate in harmony, to expect that at least one person will be responsive and to accept in reverence the

responsiveness and the actual response. Any personal will, no matter how seemingly justifiable, throws a shadow across the light which illuminates the inner and outer worlds. God is the Only Teacher, we all learn from Him. Therefore what is done should be done in the full spirit of love, of harmony, of beauty. Then, after there is agreement as to site, building may commence. The ground may be dedicated by a ceremony or by a simple blessing, and there may be a blessing at the laying of a cornerstone.

Excepting for the cornerstone it is not necessary that any part of the building or building materials be personally magnetized. Yet, when it is possible, if the teacher or one or more disciples meditate on the site before or even during the construction, it will help bring the blessings. And if the workers themselves are spiritual students or initiates, that is still a greater blessing, for there will be holiness in all they do.

It has been suggested that materials of living substances be used for the khankah. This is often best but it is also to be remembered that there is a certain amount of life in everything. So if a khankah is to be established near a quarry one may draw from the stones therein. If it is on clay or adobe ground, it may safely be built of adobe or brick or tile. If it be on rocky land near the seashore, stones and shells may be used. For the materials there are from and in their own element and they preserve an atmosphere which is in harmony with their surroundings and which will be better able to withstand the exigencies of the weather and of time. One might say then that the very materials have been "initiated." Some knowledge of psychic law does not mean that there is any compulsion about it. Beauty, serviceability and human choice must also be given consideration.

When it comes to the question of light, unless it is in a warm country and the light brings too much heat, there should be as much of it as possible, even that each room obtain direct light from the outside, facing the sun in some way. Bedrooms and individual quarters should receive preference in this, while a meditation hall does not need the direct rays of the sun, and should be neither too hot nor too cold.

In these days there are many systems for heating and cooling and for controlling air currents. It is to be remembered that just as a living person breathes, in his peculiar way, so a living dwelling should breathe in its own way. One should not be afraid of drafts. This very fear helps to produce disease. Far more colds result from the fear-impressions concerning drafts than from wind and air currents. Of course one does not expose his home to windstorm and dust; a house, after all, is a dwelling place for people.

There is no reason why students of mysticism may not be thoroughly practical. They may avail themselves of modern improvements, especially those that add to health and general comfort. The khankah does not have to be too different from other buildings but it should, at least, be abreast of the times, and its construction should follow the principles of Spiritual Architecture so far as permissible.