



ADAB – GOOD MANNERS

In the process of cleansing through the levels of *nafs* (egoistic or animalistic nature), the *murid* (Sufi student) achieves good *ahlak*, or beautiful character. These are the noble traits that adorned Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and helped bring him to closeness with Allah. Good *ahlak* will carry the *murid* through life's circumstances with grace and fortitude because it is the seedbed of righteous conduct.

We have placed all that is on the earth as a glittering show thereof, that We may test them: which of them is best in conduct. (Qur'an 18:7)



Putting good *ahlak* to use in action is known as the practice of *adab*. It is the outward manifestation of one's inner willingness to accept Allah's decree and to serve his Lord lovingly. Actions performed with *adab* reflect the realization that, even though Allah has given us the conscious will to make decisions, we do not exercise this privilege independently but only as executors of Allah's energy and attributes.

Many shaykhs have said that the whole of Sufism is *adab*. *Adab* is doing the right thing, at the right time, in the best way possible. It is the way of harmony, acting with deference to the scheme of the whole. The expression of *adab* is shown in courtesy, politeness, a pleasant social demeanor. It is a way of behaving graciously, which flows from the foundation of an inner attitude of surrender.

ADAB IN THE SUFI CIRCLE



When a *dervish* (Sufi practitioner) removes his shoes and walks through the entrance of the *dergah* or *tekke*, the Sufi center, he leaves the everyday world with its worries and problems outside. The *dergah* becomes a school in which to practice *adab*, or good manners, proper behavior and courtesy.

Our attitude in going to the *tekke* should be humble. We are there to observe, listen and learn. We should treat others as brothers, sisters and decent human beings, and assume that the other attendees are more spiritually developed than ourselves. The *tekke* is the place to practice a self-effacing attitude to the shaykh and the other *murids*. It is the place to learn service. One should speak softly, sit quietly, and follow the directions of the shaykh or leader at the time. The talk should focus on Allah, not our *nafs* (egos; selves). We do not go to the *tekke* to gossip or to backbite. We go there to talk about Allah so we can get rid of our negative habits. The aim is to control our *nafs*, which is our mechanical, egoistic nature. One reason to practice *adab* is because our *nafs* does not want to.

The key individual in the *adab* of a Sufi circle is, of course, the shaykh or shaykha. He or she is the one who sets the tone of the *halka* (circle). The shaykh decides what will be studied in the gathering, when the activity will begin and when it will end. Communications pass through him. He is the first person the *dervish* greets when he arrives at the *tekke*, and the first and last one of whom the *dervish* takes his leave.

We learn by listening and observing. If you want to say something while the shaykh is talking, or if you have a question, politely ask the shaykh for permission to talk after it seems that the shaykh may be finished speaking. The shaykh might have you wait because in a teaching circle what is coming through the shaykh's heart is a direct spiritual message that might be forgotten if he is interrupted.

We may show disagreement with the shaykh or other *murids* in a respectful way, although this does not mean we are right. If you hear something that you disagree with, put it in the "bag" behind you to be contemplated later. There might come a time when you understand what you had previously disagreed with.



All instructions given by the shaykh to *murids* should be treated as confidential, just as all personal issues discussed by the *murid* with the shaykh are confidential. The *dervish* does not ask a fellow student about her practice or compare his to the others'. Practices are given for the particular person's guidance and most likely will be quite different than the others'. Discussion of "visions" and other spiritual phenomena are discouraged between *murids* because of the confusions, as well as subtle competitiveness, that may arise, unless they are being used in teaching by the shaykh to help the brother or sister *murid*.

The most destructive and damaging problem in a spiritual group is backbiting. Backbiting occurs when one or more people criticize the character of another individual who is not present. This kind of destructive behavior can destroy a learning circle, and once the damage is done it is difficult to repair. The *tekke* is the place where the *nafs* is gradually brought into alignment with reality. It is therefore expected that conflicts will arise. Because of this, *adab* becomes a practice of extreme importance, not a mere formality.

*Daravish* (pl. of *dervish*) are free to join the *halka* of another *tariqa* and do their *zikr* if we have the permission of the shaykh of that *tariqa*. Our *adab* should be the same as with our own shaykh. If there are unique or different aspects to the *adab* of the other *tariqa*, we should honor these as well.

Good *adab* with one's shaykh does not stop outside of the Sufi circle. For example, it is a good practice for the *dervish* to ask his or her shaykh's permission before undertaking any major decision, such as moving, traveling, or other weighty matters. A good attitude to have is to talk with one's shaykh at least once a week if possible.

HZ. AHMED ER RIFAI: ON SHARIA AND NASIHA – COMPLY WITH ADAB

The path you intend to take openly and secretly has to be upon *sharia* (Islamic canonical law). Whoever acts like this will be among those desired by Allah. There are *ulama* (people of knowledge; scholars) and *fuqaha* (humble servants of Allah), people who are qualified to make judgment upon religious jurisprudence. You may advise people with judgment in *sharia*, but you have to be careful that you also act with what you preach; do not act as if you are sifting flour, only to give the fine flour to others and end up with the bran for yourself. When you are using your tongue, use it with respect, with wisdom. Let malice and envy not reside in your hearts. Otherwise you will fall into the judgment of “*ata muruunan naasa bilbirri wa tansawna anfusakum* (You advise others to do good, but you yourselves forget to do it.)” (2:44)

In your attitude and actions you should not have *qahr* (overpowering demeanor), cruelty, abuse or pride. You should not insinuate that you are better or higher than someone else. You need *adab* and kindness in the path of *nasiha* (advice) and giving sermons. The scent of the prime *sunna* (way or exemplary actions of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him) is here. When our Prophet, peace be upon him, wanted to admonish somebody for some shortcoming, he would address the issue in a general setting but would not mention the offending person's name. I swear that this kind of teaching gives salvation to hearts. What can we say to the person who claims superiority over people and wants to dominate them? O poor person! Turn away from this. Some people's so-called obedience is in the outer form only. Their hearts have not bowed down. When reality is distinguished from the *hal* (state of being; situation), the heart will turn away from you and you will be under its feet.

You people who want to be superior and to dominate others cannot avoid the danger of falling into *istidraj*, Allah's gradual lure into sin as a trial, because you want to follow your *nafs* (egoistic or animalistic nature). In truth, divine jealousy will not put up with this. – from *Guidance to Mysticism*, translated by Shaykh Taner Ansari in *Grand Masters of Sufism*

Practices Overview



Rabita



Adab



Surrender



Zikr



Sohbet



Contemplation



Service

