

## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Before launching a book like this onto the marketplace, a few words are required, not as a warning on the packet along the lines of *Esoteric literature can be damaging to your mental health* but to establish a kind of guideline for people who have not yet had the chance of familiarizing themselves with the Sufi Tradition and thinking.

The knowledge the Sufi Tradition seeks to inspire is a way of feeling and doing rather than the western idea of a body of intellectual information. This means that the person who comes along with no previous formal knowledge of the subject need not feel inferior to people like myself who have been trying to do it for more than thirty years. The reason is simple: most people grow up in the context of a biological or surrogate family, and manage willy-nilly to develop some form of personal vision as they grow into adulthood. Everyone is hence already in possession of some form of learning equipment even though from the point of view of the Sufi Tradition, this can be either rusted or under-used.

The techniques of the Tradition, of which this book is but one amongst others, are thus designed to make use of and maximize on what a person already knows.

The basic idea of such techniques is that they are to be used in conjunction with one's own experience and the daily context of life. This means that you key them into your everyday life, as opposed to placing them on a metaphorical "altar" for purposes of worship.

Why it is considered necessary for a teacher to supervise such an activity is that people who start off in anything they have not done before will always be somewhat disoriented. After a while they may not be quite so lost but they can still pursue one possibility or avenue of research to the detriment of another, which leads to an unbalanced apprehension of real phenomena. It is the presence of a teacher, whose job is to monitor the learner's work, that enables less time to be wasted in a possibly fruitless quest.

To a certain extent, one can consider that this apprenticeship is similar in nature to that of a manual craft. My father was a teacher of *itaglio* printmaking, and he was sorry when, from the fifties onward, the black ink used on the plates began to be sold pre-mixed with linseed oil. In the old days, one had to grind the ink from dry cakes and mix it into the oil using a grinding-stone on a piece of plate glass. Getting a properly smooth texture of ink was not an easy thing to do, and most apprentices would have to grind the ink for a long time (a process known in French as "*broyer du noir*") before being allowed to even begin using it themselves on the copper or zinc plate.

When I asked him whether the ready-mixed ink was not as good as the other, he replied "Oh no, the ink itself is fine. It's the relationship with the ink that has changed for the worse."

I don't think it is stretching the imagination too far to say that this book should be considered as one might consider that dry cake of ink, a basic component to a great deal of work to come. There is no label on the side of the ink-cake telling you how to turn it into a beautiful image: the image must come from oneself. The burin won't make a line by itself, but the conscious hand can learn to use that burin. Or, as Omar Ali-Shah repeats over and over again, knowledge must be usable to exist.

There can therefore be no possibility of using this book as a sort of formulaic cookbook for esoteric wisdom. Nevertheless, the possibilities of use to which this book or that ink can be put are infinite, so that there is no point in becoming discouraged. One finds one's own way.

If one treats this book with the respect and attention it deserves, it can help almost anybody, so long as they key it into their overall life context without becoming obsessive over details, because that is when the consciousness becomes inflexible. One has to bring the whole of one's own life to bear on the concepts contained in the book, and it is only from this point on that the concepts themselves will acquire some meaning. If one tries to reduce this book to some kind of "how to" manual, this type of thinking will, of itself, render it useless.

A word on the framework of thought within which this is all taking place. To quote Omar Ali-Shah in his preface to *Sufism for Today*:

*The Sufi Tradition is not a religion, nor is it a cult. It is a philosophy of life, and its purpose is to offer to man a practical path to enable him to achieve a measure of higher consciousness, and through this elevated consciousness, to be able to understand his relationship with the Supreme Being...*

*This philosophy has been handed down throughout the ages. It has retained the ancient quality and has guarded its ancient secrets so that it may be available, unchanged and untarnished, to those who seek deeper wisdom through deeper consciousness.*

This is therefore the frame within which the present book must be considered. If you believe that such a thing is possible, read on, or take this book to the check-out counter and take it

home with you. If you don't believe that such a thing is possible, don't waste your time: put this book back on the shelf of the bookstore and go to the movies.

The *Rules or Secrets* are instruments to this general end, no more and no less. When used for lesser ends, they will at worst turn against oneself, or at best become totally useless. The intention with which one uses these techniques will very precisely define the level at which they can work—in other words it can be all or nothing. They are in no sense threatening, but one should just remember that one is handling powerful instruments. Those of us who have some experience of the Tradition know that the acquisition of inner weight makes our mistakes heavier as well.

The rules in this form were in fact laid out many years ago, in the sixteenth century. The first eight of these rules are said to have been drafted by Sheikh Kwaja Abd al-Khaliq Ghujawani who is buried in Ghujawan on the road between Bokhara and Samarkand, and the last three by Bahaudin Naqshband, founder of the Naqshbandi Order of Dervishes, whose recently restored shrine is also near Bokhara.

As Omar Ali-Shah explains in one of the chapters, the word "secret" in the Tradition implies less something which is confidential than something which is of an intimate nature. It is therefore more useful here to consider secret as being of the nature of intimate, something which addresses itself to the most secret part of the self. If one allows them in, this is the area where the rules can develop and flower, and it is in fact the only place where they can grow. If one tries to use them in any other way, say for impressing people with one's knowledge or for establishing domination over others, they will dissolve, or worse still, turn against one.

The various concepts expressed through these rules are

almost infinite in their possible and varied applications, which is why Omar Ali-Shah does not reduce this flexibility of application by giving many precise examples. As he says, if one prescribed a recipe-like usage, such as “use *alone in a crowd* when you’re in the subway during rush hour” one runs the risk of limiting its usage to the subway. The possible situations in which one might use this and other concepts are so varied that people trying to develop themselves by using this technique could conceivably have their horizons narrowed by too many suggested applications.

For this reason, if anybody feels that what is stated in this book appears to be vague, it is because Omar Ali-Shah is subtle enough to realize that there has to be enough room left over for the reader to be able apply his or her own options and experiences to these concepts. He is addressing himself to the feel of the rules’ use, rather than to the passing personal situations and events one uses them on.

Comparing notes or talking over how one applies them with someone else can be useful, but when this is done outside of a context where people have a similar intention, distortions usually develop. There is a certain narrow efficiency in dogmatism, and people can go off on this kind of tack, dragging others with them. This is one of the reasons why the supervision of a teacher is considered necessary in the Sufi Tradition, which tends to play down the importance of so-called “powerful personalities.”

One of the most important things a teacher does in the Sufi Tradition is to judge when something—if anything—is required. You don’t get stripes for length of service, but after a while you do get a bit more sense of how long things take, call it a feel for pattern. We are talking here of decades, not of hours and minutes. Yet some important things do happen quickly,

which makes it impossible to generalize.

A few words on the way Omar Ali-Shah works with his people may be in order here, since there is much fantasizing about gurus and teachers from the mysterious East, and anyone reading this book becomes *de facto* his pupil, insofar as these talks were all delivered to his students over the past fifteen years.

He does not invade his pupil's lives, create dependency or use systematically shocking tactics to achieve his (and their) ends, although he is capable of doing so. All family ties and relationships are to be respected and built on, recourse to all artificial stimulants discouraged. He uses the normal time-frame within which we live, which means that progress will often take longer than one would have hoped, and a shock or a provocation will be held in reserve for exceptional cases, for instance when a pupil is falling into a rut of some years' duration. A Sufi teacher doesn't walk into a room with his 'guns blazing' unless there is some teaching point to the operation, but he still has to keep it in reserve as an option if nothing less is adequate for the situation.

The notion of time and appropriateness to the situation is paramount, as well as the 'keying in' factor. One can say that, generally speaking, people have a tendency to be impatient, and western education feeds this tendency by promoting the illusion that you 'know' a subject when you have assimilated a certain amount of basic information about it. In the *Fihi ma Fihi*, Rumi likens a man who says "I understand" to a person who has just filled a skin bottle with sea water, and who then holds it up saying: "This is the sea."

This tendency also means that people won't consider they have learnt something unless it has taken a very heightened or

dramatic form. In other books Omar Ali-Shah has pointed out how people get drawn towards cathartic-type experiences where they are torn apart, the better, 'so the assumption goes, to be rebuilt again afterwards.' Certain therapists and many false teachers batten onto this kind of attraction by working in terms of conflict rather than towards harmony, and there is a certain pattern in the western world, where people have been naive about this kind of abuse, in which this kind of thing has been used as a technique.

My own short observation of Idries Shah and longer observation of Omar Ali-Shah as teachers, leads me to think that they do arrange things, but within a certain limitation. They are highly respectful of the pupil's own rhythm of assimilation over time. Omar Ali-Shah works through small groupings of people, but there is no trace of the high-pressure and money-grubbing tactics one associates with "cult" situations.

It should not be forgotten however, that the discipline required from a teacher who really does respect the capacity and rhythm of his pupil, and who carefully works with and around it, is of an exceptional nature. Working this way requires immense patience. This patience can be learnt from a teacher, but not quickly, insofar as this discipline within an overall flexibility takes a long time to assimilate.

If one can develop something analogous to this kind of patience towards oneself, it will help one to make powerful use of this book. The key to this book's use is familiarization: the closer one gets to these concepts, the more one can apply them to the various inner and outer circumstances in our lives.

The more one does this, and the more transparent one makes oneself to these concepts, the more these developmental modules can then work through us; almost—but not quite—in spite of ourselves.

In the earlier version of this book, the editing was “harder” in the sense that we tried to get as close as possible to proposing a single version of each rule. Time makes one more modest. In this expanded edition of the first book I have gone back to the original transcripts and have followed the original extracts more faithfully, which means that there is a certain amount of overlap.

Some may consider this repetitious: my feeling is that it is useful to watch Omar Ali-Shah considering and reconsidering a subject at different times, as one might look at the work of a painter returning to the same scene throughout his life, throwing a slightly different light on the subject each time, because he knows that the essence of his life’s work is in that place.

Augy Hayter  
1992 & 1998