

THE MASTERS OF WISDOM OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Between the tenth and the fifteenth centuries of the Christian Era, much of the inhabited world passed through a period of convulsions which shattered and scattered the ancient cultures and gave birth to the modern age. The chief visible cause was the irruption of hordes of Goths and Tartars, Turks and Mongols from Central Asia into the decaying empires of China, India, Baghdad, Byzantium and Rome. Near the epicentre of the convulsion, in the lands watered by the Amu Darya, the ancient Oxus, there appeared a society or brotherhood of wise men who played a vital though almost unrecognized part in bringing order into the confusion and distress caused by wholesale massacres and the destruction of so many cities and centres of culture. The members of this society were known as the Masters of Wisdom, in Persian, Khwajagan, and in Turkish: Hacegan Hanedani. They are commonly regarded as Sufis and they were certainly Muslims; but their doctrines and their methods differed radically from those of the Sufi schools of Arabia and Africa. Indeed, in most accounts of Sufism, no mention is made of the Khwajagan, notwithstanding the high esteem in which they were held by their contemporaries in the Arab countries. The Khwajagan were mostly Turks or Persians and their main centres were in Bokhara, Samarkand, Balkh, Herat and the regions of the Hindu Kush.

The Masters did not spring from nowhere. Before they appeared there was already a powerful stream of spirituality flowing in these regions. According to tradition, Selman the Persian, who was the first convert from the Magian religion to Islam and one of the close companions of the Prophet, belonged to the tradition which goes back at least as far as Zoroaster, who spent the latter part of his life at Balkh six hundred years before Christ. It is also certain that the arts and sciences were highly advanced. One of the greatest inventions of man is the so-called Arabic system of numerals with a sign for zero. The earliest reference to this comes from the same region in the writing of Elharzemi or Al Khwarizm (died A.D. 844). It is more than likely that the birth of our modern arithmetic occurred in this region. It is remarkable that the advances in algebra made by Harzemi were so radical that in many respects his methods continued to be used unchanged until the sixteenth century. Another great scientist, Abu Mashar of Balkh (died A.D. 866), influenced Western astronomy by translations of his works by scholars such as Adelard of Bath.

These few examples should make it clear that there was a well-established tradition of science and learning in the lands of the Amu Darya before the Masters appeared. It is very probable that the published works represent only a small part of their tradition.

The first great man to receive the title of Master was Khwaja Yusuf of Hamadan in North West Persia. He was born in A.D. 1048 in the village of Bozendjid near to Hamadan which was the capital of the first Seljuk Sultan Inghril Beg (died 1063). This was the beginning of the time of troubles though the Seljuk Turks were by no means devastating conquerors in the style of Jenghis Khan. Their greatest king, Malik Shah, had a wise vizier, Nizam-ul-Mulk, who kept order throughout the region that interests us until he was murdered by the notorious Assassins (Hashashin) of Mt. Elburz whose peaks are visible from the mountains north of Hamadan.

Yusuf of Hamadan ended his life at Bamyin at the age of 92, and is buried at Merv. He was the head of an inner circle of the Masters from which during the two following centuries came some of the most important Sufi orders such as the Yeseviyye and the Naqshibandis. He was referred to as the Kutb-ül Evliyya, or the Axis of the Saints, a title that suggests that he was the most exalted spiritual being of his time.

It is said that at the age of 16, Yusuf went to Baghdad where he studied the sacred law under Ebu Ishak Fakih, a follower of the famous Imam Ebu Hanifa. In spite of his youth, Ebu Ishak regarded him as the foremost of his pupils. He travelled to Ispahan, Bokhara, Horasan and Harzem where the school of mathematics and astronomy still flourished. After completing his education among the most learned men of his time, he decided to put away every kind of study and devote himself to prayer, asceticism and struggle with himself. He placed

himself under the spiritual direction of the Sheikh Ebu Ali Farmidi who was also the teacher of Al Gazali, and in the direct line of spiritual descent from Bayazid Bestami, Imam Riza and other great saints of early Sufism. By the time he was thirty years old, Yusuf was already known as a Master. We know from Muhyiddin ibn Arabi that he continued to be a Guide and Teacher for more than sixty years. He spent some time in Horasan and a much longer period in Bokhara and finally in Bamyin. He is described as tall, slender, with sandy hair, smiling eyes, very gentle and compassionate. He was pock-marked and always wore a patched woollen gown. He avoided the rich and powerful and consorted with the poor. He refused every kind of personal gift. Nevertheless, the great men of his time showed him respect and devotion. Sultan Sendjar, the Seljuk ruler, was his great admirer and in 1111 sent him 50,000 pieces of gold from Samarkand to enable a school to be built in Merv. This became so famous that it was called the 'Kaaba of Horasan', that is, the most sacred place of pilgrimage.

He himself had a few personal pupils to whom he devoted special attention and who became the founders of the Society of the Masters of Wisdom. Although well-versed in orthodox Sufism, he introduced new techniques, especially that of the group or *Halka* and the use of *conversations-Sohbet-for* the purpose not so much of teaching as of transmitting the spiritual force or *Baraka* that was one of the principal characteristics of the School of the Masters. He did not travel much outside the region in which his society was taking shape. One journey to Baghdad in A.D. 1121 is recorded. Baghdad, though in decline, was still a magnificent city. Thousands came to hear the old man - he was then 73 - discourse. It seems that the Sufis of Central Asia were suspected of leanings towards Nestorian Christianity and there are anecdotes of this visit which suggest that he wished to dissociate himself from this suggestion. There is no doubt that the Muslims of the region of the Amu Darya were in the majority converts from Christianity and retained viewpoints that would have been surprising to the Arabs. Further north, Shamanism was still the prevailing form of religion and Buddhism had already reached Tibet in the east and penetrated into what is now Afghanistan. Thus, two western and two eastern religions were involved in the culture of the region. In most cases the rulers, especially the Mongols, respected all religions and this may explain why this region lent itself to the preservation of a tradition that is open to men of all beliefs.

The first successor of Yusuf Hamadani was Khwaja Abdullah Berki, a native of Harzem. He was both a learned man and a great mystic with extraordinary spiritual powers (*keramat*). He died in Bokhara and was buried there in A.D. 1160. He was followed in the leadership of the Masters by Khwaja Hasan Endaki (born A.D. 1069, died in 1157). He was one of a small circle of eleven men whom Yusuf Hamadani collected round him in Samarkand. From various reports of his followers, it seems that Khwaja Yusuf initiated this group into the secrets of transmitting the Baraka or 'blessing power' and of communication without words. Khwaja Abdullah passed these on to his own followers. The story goes that when Khwaja Hasan entered the service of Khwaja Yusuf, he set himself to follow all his instructions with such perfect trust and devotion that before long such a state of bliss took possession of him that he forgot or failed to perform even the most necessary duties, so that his wives and children were obliged to keep reminding him. One day Khwaja Yusuf gave him advice, saying: "You are in a poor state and not fit to have a family. You must see to the necessities of life yourself. To burden others with them is neither good sense nor good morality." Khwaja Hasan answered: "My state is such that I have no strength for anything else." Delighted with these words, Khwaja Yusuf told him that God had appeared to him in a dream and said: "O Yusuf, we have given you the eye of wisdom, but to Hasan not only the eye of wisdom, but also the eye of the heart." After this dream, Yusuf Hamadani held Khwaja Hasan in great love and esteem and never called on him for any worldly affairs.

We now come to the founder of the Turkish branch of the Masters, the third successor of Yusuf Hamadani, Khwaja Ahmad Yesevi. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there were many famous Turkish Sheikhs in Central Asia, but he was regarded as the foremost. He was born in Eastern Turkestan, now the Sinkiang Province of China, at Yesi on the Havasu River. He is reputed to have been born in A.D. 1042 and is known to have died in A.D. 1166, which would give him the rare age of 124. Yesi was then a famous city of Turkestan. All Khwaja Yesevi's connections were there and his tomb remains. The local Turkestan folk still refer to him as Khwaja Father Yesevi.

He is said to have reached the highest rank of spirituality and to have possessed wonderful powers. He was also an alchemist, who was taught by the famous Baba Arslan who lived in the same city. When Baba Arslan was dying, he told him to make his way to Bokhara-a thousand miles to the west-and enter the service of Khwaja Yusuf Hamadani. He followed Hasan Endaki in the succession but, receiving a secret indication that he was to return to Turkestan, he

made over his charge to Abdul-halik Gujduvani and went back to Yesi. There he established an independent tradition of the Masters, which had a great influence upon subsequent events in China. We shall not pursue this line further, as it takes us out of Central Asia into the Far East. It is, however, known that a very advanced school remained for centuries in this part of the world. Ahmad wrote a treatise on spirituality, the *Divan-i-Hikmet*, in the Chagatai dialect, that is still widely read in Turkestan. The Yesiviyye Order of Dervishes founded by him played a great part in maintaining the spiritual life of Eastern Turkestan. His most famous successor was Zengi Ata of Tashkend, the son of Khwaja Tadj. The dervishes of this order usually live in open communities engaged in some enterprise for the benefit of the society in which they live. The example was set by Zengi Ata who had a large cattle farm near Shash, now called Tashkent, and taught many of the nomads to become settled farmers. He lived through the time of the conquest of Turkestan and China by Jenghis Khan. From the Counsels given to his successor by one of the later Sheiks of this order, it appears that they made use of *Sema* that is, ritual movements and dances accompanied by music. He says that these movements, rightly understood, enable the student to submit his mind to the Supreme Intelligence (Akli Kulli and to become master of his own body. This document, which contains precise descriptions of different stages of inner transformation and the means of attaining them, demonstrates the immense practical experience of the Sheiks of the Yeseviyye Order in the spiritual life. It is said that they have still a sanctuary near the Gobi Desert, where a group of Masters of wisdom continue to transmit the spiritual science of the Masters.

The high prestige of Yesevi in later centuries can be gauged from the story of Timur the Lame (Tamerlane), the greatest Mongol conqueror after Jenghis Khan. In his autobiography, the *Zafer-Namer* (translated into Turkish and perhaps apocryphal), he asserts that Khwaja Ahmad appeared to him in a dream and told him to go to the western lands. In any case, it is known that Timur had a splendid mausoleum built for Khwaja Ahmad and ascribed his great victory over Sultan Bayazid of Turkey at Ankara on the 20th of July 1402, to his having recited seventy times during the battle a verse from Khwaja Ahmed's Rubaiyat at the head of which he had written: "Whenever you are in a difficult situation, recite this quatrain ". There are innumerable `teaching stories' associated with the name of Ahmad Yesevi.

We must now return to Bokhara where Yusuf Hamadani's fourth successor, Khwaja Abdubalik Gudjduvani, was the leading master. According to the Chief Record of the Ranks of the Masters (*Serdefteri Tabakati Hazrati Hacegan*), he was the Grand Master of the Inner Circle of the Masters of his time.

Gudjduvan was more a large village than a town, six parasangs (18 miles) from Bokhara. His father was the Imam Abduldjamil and his grandfather, the famous Imam Malik. At that time Bokhara and the surrounding country was mainly inhabited by Turks of the Sart people and formed part of the kingdom of Harzem (usually spelled Khwarazm), soon to be destroyed by Jenghis Khan. For centuries, these regions had enjoyed relatively peaceful conditions. The population was settled agriculturally and had at an early date been converted to Islam. They lived in constant fear of irruptions by the nomads from the Gobi and the Altai mountains. Abdulhalik Gudjduvani succeeded to the leadership of the Khwajagan soon after the birth of Jenghis Khan in A.D. 1167. There is little doubt that he was a personal disciple of Yusuf Hamadani, but it is hard to reconcile with his age the assertion made in the *Reshahati Ayn'el Hayat* that he was one of the eleven who accompanied Yusuf from amadan to Samarkand. He did not succeed to the leadership until the death of Khwaja Ahmad Yesevi in A.D. 1166, and he must have presided over the Circle of the Masters for at least twenty years.

His influence was so far-reaching and his innovations so important that the belief grew up that he was initiated to the Mastery not by another Master, but by the Unknown Prophet Khidr himself. This is said to have occurred at Malatya in Anatolia, to the west of the Kurdish Highlands. His mother was a princess of the Seljuk Dynasty, who were at that time the principal supporters of Northern Sufism. It is also said that he took the name Abdulhalik (which means the servant of God charged with a creative mission) at the command of Khidr himself. According to another report, he himself told his disciples: "When I was twenty-two years old, the Most Holy Prophet Khidr, the Lord of all the Masters, recommended me to Yusuf Hamadani for him to undertake my training. As he was then in Transoxania (Maveraunnehir), I went and placed myself at his service."

Among the other disciples, all older than he was, Abdulhalik disguised his progress and kept hidden the high spiritual powers to which he attained. Yusuf Hamadani attested that he reached the rank of saint (Wall) at any early age. Among his chief innovations was the `prayer of the heart', (*Zikr-i-Qalbi*), not previously known to the Sufis and

said to have been imparted to him directly by the Prophet Khidr.¹ He also brought forward the doctrine of death and resurrection or *fena* and *baka* that is the foundation of the teaching of the Masters and most closely connects them with Christianity. They rejected openly the pantheistic doctrine associated with the great Spanish Sufi Muhyiddin ibn el Arabi *wahdet el wajud*, according to which there is only one substance (wudjud) which is God, of which man is the most perfect manifestation. This latter doctrine, which influenced Southern Sufism (including India), leads to the denial of true free-will in man and hence the belief in the uselessness of action. This is so opposed to both the doctrine and the practice of the Khwajagan that its rejection cannot surprise us. It must not be forgotten that Islam in Transoxania grew up in an environment of Apostolic Christianity (wrongly called 'Nestorian'), where the 'Good News' of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was still the central theme at the time of the Muslim conquest. This is not for a moment to suggest that the Khwajagan were professing Christians. On the contrary, they were all pious and some even strict Muslims in the sense of holding to the observances of the religious code. It may not be unfair to say that Southern Sufism grew out of Neo-Platonism whereas Northern Sufism-at least as represented by the Masters - was much closer to the simple gospel message of Christianity. Much of this can be seen in the *Essence of the Teaching of the Masters*, as formulated by Abdulhalik Gudjduvani in eight succinct rules, which we give with an attempt at interpretation.

1. *Hush der dem.* Be present at every breath. Do not let your attention wander for the duration of a single breath. Remember yourself always and in all situations.

2. *Nazar ber kadem.* Keep your intention before you at every step you take. You wish for freedom and you must never forget it.

3. *Safar der vatan.* Your journey is towards your homeland, Remember that you are traveling from the world of appearances to the World of Reality.

4. *Halvat der endjuman.* In all your outward activity remain inwardly free. Learn not to identify yourself with anything whatsoever.

5. *Yad gerd.* Remember your Friend, i.e. God. Let the prayer (*zikr*) of your tongue be the prayer of your heart (*q'alb*).

6. *Baz gasht.* Return to God. No aim but to attain Reality.

7. *Nigah dasht.* Struggle with all alien thoughts. Keep your mind on what you are doing whether outwardly or inwardly.

8. *Yad dasht.* Be constantly aware of the quality of the Divine Presence. Become used to recognizing the Presence of God in your heart.

We have also a remarkable document consisting of *Precepts for Living*, which he wrote for his second successor, Khwaja Evliya Kabir. Here are some extracts from the Precepts which have been read for centuries by followers of the path of the Khwajagan.

1. Keep a right balance between science, self-discipline and obedience. Study the works of your predecessors. Learn the law and the traditions and keep away from ignorant Sufis. Do your prayers with the people, but do not consent to lead them (imam) or make the call to prayer (muezzin).

2. Do not seek fame, for in fame there is calamity.

3. Do not meddle in public affairs. Do not make friends with kings and princes.

¹ But most probably derived from the mantras practised by the Buddhist monks of the Hindu Kush.

4. Do not make a place for yourself nor stay in someone else's place. Avoid an excess of sacred dance and music because excess of the sacred dance kills the heart. But you also should not reject the sacred dances, for many are devoted to them.

5. Speak little, eat little, sleep little. Avoid people and seek solitude. Do not converse with young people, women or the rich and noble. Be careful what you eat, avoid all suspect food. If you are able to contain yourself, do not marry, for it makes you wish for the things of this world and your religion runs the risk of corruption.

6. Do not laugh to excess, for excessive laughter kills the heart.

7. Be courteous to all and despise none. Do not adorn yourself outwardly, for outward adornment shows inner disorder. Never dispute with people and never ask for anything or be a burden upon anyone.

8. Do not trust the world and its people. Let your breast be filled with remorse and regret, your body be subdued, your eyes weep, your actions pure and your prayers humble. Wear old clothes and let your companions be poor also, let your house be a place of worship and let the Supreme Reality be your companion.

When Abdulhalik died in A.D. 1190, he was succeeded by Khwaja Ahmed Sadik of Bokhara. About this time, it seems that the Inner Circle of the Masters was transferred to Bokhara, where it remained for centuries. The storms were already gathering and the Mongols were uniting under Temurdjin [who. a](#) the great Kuriltay of 1206 took the name of Jenghis Khan and was proclaimed the Grand Khan of all the Mongols. His name already struck terror into the peoples of all the lands bordering on Mongolia. In the following year an unheralded but scarcely less significant event occurred in Balkh, just across the Amu Darya (Oxus), which Jenghis Khan was to cross 13 years later. This was the birth of Mevlana Djellaleddin Rumi, the greatest mystical poet of the Persian language and the founder of one of the great Sufi Orders: the Mevlevi.

Here we must pause to look at the total situation with which the appearance of the Masters was connected. Already in 1206, threatened disaster could be foreseen even by less discerning eyes than those of the Khwajagan. More than one stream of spiritual influences was flowing in the regions of what is now Iran, Afghanistan and Turkestan. One of these appears to have been centred in Balkh, the 'Mother of Cities', where Djellaleddin's father, Bahauddin Veled, was known as both theologian and mystic of the western school and a follower of Ibn el Arabi. Another stream was that of the Kubravi centred in N.W. Persia and consisting mainly of Shi'ites initiated into the ecstatic mysticism of the Alevis. They probably made use of hypnagogic drugs and other means of inducing mystical trance.

Before the Mongol threat three different lines of defence were prepared. Some emigrated. Some waited and deliberately allowed themselves to be assimilated into the new regime, even though it was flagrantly pagan. The third part remained and preserved their tradition intact by disguising its outward form. The most distinguished emigrant was Bahauddin Veled of Balkh, who moved west to Baghdad, then to Damascus, and finally to the Seljuk capital in Konya with his son Djellaleddin, who was to receive the soubriquet Al Rumi because he lived in what the inhabitants of Central Asia regarded as part of Rome, that is, the Anatolian peninsula. Another emigrant of the same school was Nijemeddin Daya, who also reached Konya, which was to become the centre of a powerful spiritual action that lasted until the twentieth century.

We are now concerned here with those who were assimilated to the Mongol conquerors. Some, such as Mahmud Yalavadj and his son Mas'oud Yalavadj, became the trusted advisers of Jenghis Khan and were largely responsible for setting up the remarkably successful-though largely improvised-administration by which he governed his Muslim conquests. Others undertook to organize the guilds and craftsmen which were soon to produce such surpassing works of art, buildings and agriculture.

Our present interest is with the third group, who maintained the traditional teachings secretly throughout all the convulsions of the period. Even before the Mongol invasion, all had not been peaceful in Transoxania. The Sultan of Harzim (Khwarezm), Muhammad Shah, conquered Eastern Afghanistan in 1220, Samarkand in 1212, and was not generally recognized as the paramount ruler of the region until 1217. Within three years his empire was in ruins. Bokhara was taken in February 1220, and in December, Muhammad, after fleeing across Asia to take refuge on an island in the Caspian Sea, died of grief and exhaustion.

Conflicting accounts of Jenghis Khan are given by the Arab and the Chinese historians. Yet another story appears in the *Secret History* compiled in A.D. 1240 under the direction of Jenghis' youngest son. He was certainly a ruthless conqueror, but he had also a very superstitious nature, combined with an uncanny knowledge of men. The common stories of complete destruction of cities and massacres of the entire population refer mainly to the acts of his generals, who, coming straight from the nomadic life of Siberia, regarded cities as unnatural and fit only to be destroyed. Even so, the pillage and the loss of life throughout Transoxania during the Mongol invasion were so frightful as to leave indelible marks. The administrative machinery collapsed and the Mongols, quite unprepared for the problems of an agricultural and urban population, could do nothing to restore order. The wisdom and foresight of Jenghis Khan showed themselves in his pacification of the region with the help of well-chosen Muslim advisers. At that time he ruled over the greatest empire the world had ever known, ranging from the Pacific Ocean to the boundaries of Europe. He was to live only seven years more, but his conquests were to be extended by his descendants from India and China to Prussia in the west. The old world and the mutual isolation of its major regions had gone forever, and a new order was to come. The descendants of Jenghis Khan-if we included Timurlenk among them-were to keep the world in suspense for two hundred years.

In the midst of these convulsions, the Khwajagan continued without interruption their task of teaching the way of accelerated spiritual transformation and of preparing an elite who were to transmit and carry their influence far and wide through Asia, Europe and North Africa. Their secrets are only known to us up to a point. They were, essentially, men of a balanced life, fully engaged in practical matters, often craftsmen, faithful in their religious duties but very little interested in philosophy or theology. The contrast with the Southern Sufis, such as Ibn Arabi and Al Gazali, is shown in many anecdotes in which they are represented as cutting short any attempts at leading them into philosophical or theological discussions. Nor were they at all favourable to ecstasies and mystical raptures. One of the sayings of Khwaja Azinami Ali illustrates this: "If at his time even one o€Hadjé Abdulhalik's disciples had been on the spot, Husein Mansur would not have got into trouble. He would have put Al Hallaj in his place and got rid of his nonsense." Al Hallaj (A.D. 865-930) was the most famous of the mystical Sufis who affirmed total identification of the purified man with God. He was rejected and martyred in his lifetime, but became later a symbol of the perfect lover of God.

The Masters, then, were certainly not savants, nor were they theologians or ecstatic mystics. What then was their teaching and method? This will become clearer as we follow them through the next two centuries. From the start they based their teaching upon the *Halka*, or group, upon conversation between master and disciple, *Sohbat*, upon spiritual exercises, *Zikr*, and upon constant vigilance and struggle with one's own weaknesses, *Mujahede*. They also used methods of awakening by means of shocks and surprises. Finally, and certainly not least in importance, was their engagement in practical enterprises. After the calamity of the Mongol invasion, they took the initiative in rebuilding mosques, schools and hospitals, working with their own hands and directing their Halkas, which sometimes numbered several hundred members.

This brings us back to Jenghis Khan and the sack of Bokhara in February, 1220. Jenghis Khan was a pagan in the full sense of the word. The Mongols were shamanists and they had a deep respect for the powers of their shamans. Jenghis Khan was no less convinced than his people that the shamans could bring success or failure and even life or death to their people. He was for many years influenced, even at some moments dominated, by the Shaman Kokchu, who accompanied him on his campaigns. We must take all this into account in our interpretation of the events of the years from 1220 to 1223, within which short time Jenghis Khan, from being a prodigiously successful leader of hordes of Mongolian nomads, became the no less successful ruler of the highly civilized agricultural. and urban people of Transoxania and Persia.

The Muslim historian Rachid-ed-din makes no attempt to explain this or conceal his hatred of Jenghis Khan; but the Chinese biographer Chang Chuen has preserved an interesting story of Jenghis Khan on reaching a village two days' march from Bokhara, which may have been Ringerve, where Hadje Arif passed most of his life, and saw a man of venerable appearance with an ox, irrigating the fields of a village by means of an ingenious apparatus the like of which he had never seen. He was so impressed by what he saw that he gave the old man a guarantee of immunity from all requisitions.

When Bokhara was taken a few days later, Jenghis Khan gave orders that all property could be pillaged, but only those who resisted were to be slaughtered. It may be true, as Djunayni the Persian historian wrote in 1260, that he had the Muslims of Bokhara brought together in the Great Mosque and assured them that he had a mission to establish a new world; but, in fact, the mosques were not destroyed. The legend of wholesale massacre, in Bokhara at least, seems to be without foundation. Only some fanatical Ulemas (commonly translated as `priests' but really men of authority in religious matters) who rallied groups of resistance were deliberately killed. Samarkand, taken a few weeks later, resisted stoutly and all who fought were ruthlessly slaughtered. But this time the religious authorities kept out of the battle and none of them was intentionally killed.

We have no means of reconciling the story of Jenghis Khan, as told in Persian, Chinese and Mongol biographies, with that of the Khwajagan, preserved in their own records, until these are generally available in translation. The rapid expansion of the circles affiliated to the Masters within a generation of the Mongol invasions suggests that they succeeded in convincing the new rulers not only of their loyalty, but also of their value to the new society. We may even guess that they were responsible for one of the important events in history: the conversion of the Mongols from their ancestral Shamanism to Islam and the consequent establishment of Muslim power throughout South West Asia, including India.

When, in A.D. 1273, Bokhara was again ravaged by the Mongols, this time their army came from the south, crossing the Amu Darya in the opposite direction from that taken by Jenghis Khan fifty years earlier. The link between China, Central Asia and South West Asia had been well and truly forged and the great trade route opened that was a real step towards the unification of the great society of peoples from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans that now comprises five-sixths of the human race. Thus, what appeared to be unmitigated disaster proved, in the greater perspective of world history, to have been a necessary element in the progress of humanity towards a single united society.

The point of these remarks is that, according to tradition there is and has been for thousands of years an `Inner Circle of Humanity', capable of thinking in terms of millenia and possessing knowledge and powers of a high order which enables its members to intervene from time to time in human affairs, not as leaders or even teachers of mankind, but by quietly and unobtrusively introducing ideas and techniques that work in such a way as to rectify deviations from the predestined course of human history. It is also said that this inner circle concentrates its activity in those areas and at those times when the situation is critical. This may be the reason why, during the period from A.D. 950-1450, the Masters became active in the zone of maximum tension between two totally different modes of existence; the spirit-worshipping nomad tribes of Siberia and Central Asia and the Muslims and Christians of Transoxania, Persia and South West Asia.

It would seem that one of the least known of the Grand Masters, Hadje Arif Rivgerevi, the fourth successor of Abdulhalik Gujduvani, guided the destiny of the Khwajagan through the period of the Mongol invasion. It may be that the central group withdrew into the mountain passes of the Syr Darya river where the great caves would enable them to maintain a spiritual community completely withdrawn from the world.

Arif Rivgerevi was followed by Khwaja Mahmud Fagnevi, who is known best through his famous second successor, Khwaja Azizan Ali of Ramiytin. By now the worst of the crisis was over. Jenghis Khan had died in February 1227. His successor Ogoday was a relatively mild man and capable administrator, whose chief concern was to organize the vast empire his father had won. Nevertheless, he extended the Mongol conquest across the Urals into Russia and at his death on December 11th, 1241, the Mongol Empire had reached its maximum expansion. He was followed by two alcoholic princes, who were nevertheless good soldiers, and then in A.D. 1264, after a struggle with his younger brothers, Qubilay-better known to us as Kubla Khan-became the Grand Khan, though his authority was virtually limited to Mongolia, China and Turkestan. His exploits are recounted with enthusiasm in the History of Marco Polo's travels. In the west, his cousin Hulagu, though nominally viceroy, was virtually independent. Hulagu's conquest of Mesopotamia and Syria and the famous sack of Baghdad on February 10th, 1258, ended the Abbasid Caliphate and left Egypt and Turkey as the sole independent areas in Western Islam.

By this time it was safe for the Masters to reappear in public. In their histories there are many anecdotes showing the shock of surprise caused to the orthodox Sufis by the spiritual techniques brought to light by Khwaja Azizan Ali. Their fame spread throughout the Islamic world. In far away Konya, Jelalludin Rumi, in one of his poems (gazels)

refers to Khwaja Azizan Ali under the name of Nessach Khwaja (Cf. Nefahat ul Uns). "If state (hal) were not preferred to speech (hal), would the notables of Bokhara have made themselves slaves to Nessach Khwaja" Khwaja Azizan Ali is credited with great spiritual powers. He could communicate with his fellow Masters and his disciples at a distance. He could read the thoughts of those who were with him. He was also known as a healer by means of hypnotism and the Mongols must have regarded him as a kind of super-shaman.

According to the Nefahat ul Uns, he lived to be 130 years of age, though this seems unlikely as his sons were under 70 when he died. He is buried in Harzem. It is specifically asserted in the history of the Khwajagan that he presided over a general assembly of all the Masters.

Shortly before his death in A.D. 1321 (according to another account 1315, which would make his age 124), he nominated his younger son Khwaja Ibrahim as his successor. Asked why he passed over his elder son Hurd Muhammed, whom everyone admired and loved, he replied, "Because he has not long to live and needs a little peace." In fact, he survived his father only by nineteen days, dying suddenly and unexpectedly.

His greatest disciple was Khwaja Muhammad Baba of Semas. He was born at Semas only nine miles outside Bokhara and lived there most of his life. He was still a young man when his teacher died. Shortly before his death, Khwaja Azizan called his principal disciples together and told them of the high promise of Muhammad of Semas and commanded them to give him every help to reach the Mastery and as soon as he was ready to accept him as their leader. His fourth successor was Khwaja Seyyid Emir Kulal Naq'shband, whose history we must unravel so far as the records allow, for he was the founder of the only Sufi Order that has grown and spread continually throughout the modern world until our own times.

Emir Kulal was a Seyyid, that is, a descendant of the Prophet, and also the son of an Emir, was not in the usual line of the Khwajagan. In his youth he was very fond of wrestling. Once he was taking part in a wrestling contest in Ramiytin, when Muhammad Baba Semasi, who was passing by, stopped to watch and said to his companions: "In this arena there is a champion from whose conversation many people should profit." Emir Kulal caught the Khawaja's eye and, when he went off, left the other wrestlers and followed him home. He became his disciple and served him for twenty years. He lived in Suhari, fifteen miles from Semas, but he used to make the journey twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays, to attend the Khwaja's Halka. He was the fourth and last successor of Khwaja Muhammad Semasi.

Khwaja Bahauddin surnamed Naq'shband, was also a Seyyid and born of a noble family. He was born in the village of Kasr-in-Hinduvan near to Bokhara in the month of Muharrem in the 718th year of the Hejira (A.D. 1316).

Before he was born, Muhammad Baba Semasi was one day passing through Kasr-i-Hindavan and, turning to his followers said: "I smell the smell of a hero in this soil." Some time later he went that way again and said: "The scent is stronger. No doubt he is born now." Bahauddin had come into the world three days earlier.

When he was named, according to the local custom, his grandfather placed a gift on his breast and, looking towards Baba Semasi, he said: " You have told us that this is to be your child. We accept that." The Khwaja turned to the group of disciples who had come with him to the cemetery and said: " This is the hero we scented. Before long this child is destined to be the Guide of the Age and the Overcomer of Obstacles for people on the path of Love." Turning to Emir Kulal: "I wish you to take my child Bahauddin under your care and see to his instruction. If you fail, I will not forgive you." The Emir rose to his feet and, placing both hands on his heart in token of obedience, said: " I am no man if I fail in this."

All accounts of his life agree that the marks of saintliness were on him from childhood. He was doubly blessed. He inherited the finest qualities and also was endowed in his own nature with a very exceptional disposition. He was also by common consent of the Masters of his time, made the heir of the abundant spiritual powers transmitted through Khwaja Abdulhalik Gujduvani.

When he was first admitted to a Halka at an exceptionally early age, he had a significant dream which he described as follows:

"Three candles were shown to me. Then I saw a lofty throne and a green curtain was drawn in front of it. Round about the throne people were gathered. Khwaja Muhammad Baba of Sema was among them. I knew that these people were dead Khwajagan.

Someone in the gathering told me that Abdulhalik Gudjduvani was seated on the throne and that the gathering was composed of his successors. There were Khwaja Ahmad Siddik, Khwaja Evliya, Khwaja Arif Rivgerevi, Khwaja Mahmud Fagnevi and Khwaja Azizan Ali Ramitini.

My guide, pointing to Baba Muhammad, said: " You will meet that man in life. He is your sheikh. You have been given a blessing whereby a misfortune that has overtaken him will be removed."

Then they all spoke to me and said: "Listen well. The Master will say something that is important for your path to Reality." I said: "If you please. If I see the Master, I will salute him." The curtain in front of me was raised and I saw a radiant Pir (Master). I saluted him. He accepted my salutation and proceeded to give me instructions regarding the beginning, the continuation and the end of the Path. With the three candles that I first saw he confirmed and praised my capacity and told me that with this capacity, I must arrive at learning the innermost secrets (*esrar*).

After giving me all these counsels, they advised me to go and serve with Seyyid Emir Kulal. He writes of this period: "The Emir showed me great consideration and set me to work upon the way of rejection and verification (*nefiyu'ispat*) with the help of a silent exercise (*zikr*)."

Emir Kulal's care and attention aroused complete trust in Bahauddin who, in consequence, made rapid progress. Some other members of the Halka complained that he did not take part in the chanting made in common, and found other faults in him. Some time after this, Emir Kulal was engaged with nearly five hundred of his disciples in building a mosque and meeting hall (*djamiat hare*) and, taking advantage of their being together, called them all round him and said: " You have not understood my son Bahauddin. God keeps a special eye on him and protects and guards his state. The creature's eye must be submissive to the Creator's eye: my attitude towards him is not of my own choosing, but God's." Later on, while the Khwaja was carting sun-dried bricks, he called them again. They all turned towards him and he said: " My son Bahauddin, I have completed the task that was given me from the blessed lips of Khwaja Muhammad Baba. He told me that I was to train his son Bahauddin as he had trained me, and that not a moment was to be lost in bringing him to the rank of Master. And that is what I have done." Then, pointing to his breast, he said: " On your account my breasts have run dry and the bird of your spirituality has been hatched. Now you must work for yourself. Let the intensity of your search be equal to your capacity."

After this event, Khwaja Nakshband placed himself under the discipline of Mevlana Arif of Dikkeran, and after the death of Emir Kulal joined the Mevlana's Halka.

When Emir Kulal was in his last sickness, he ordered his followers to obey Kwaja Bahauddin. They objected that he had been disobedient in the matter of the group-chanting that they were told to do in a loud voice. Once again, the Emir said: " All his doings emanate from The Real (that is, from God), and nothing comes from him of his own will."

Much later, Bahauddin explained what had happened. "When I began the repetition exercise (*Zikr*), I became aware that a very great secret was close at hand. I became a seeker after that Secret. During my thirty years with Mevlana Arif, we were not idle. We wandered hither and thither in search of the Guardians of the Truth (*Ahl-i-Hakk*). Twice we went on the *hajj* together. We did not shut ourselves up in cells or caves; whenever we heard of a man who might possess knowledge of the Truth, we sought him out. If I had found another Master like Mevlana Arif, or even if I had found someone who had even a drop of the Truth that Arif lacked, I would not have come to this side. Can you imagine a man who will sit by you, knee to knee, and reveal the loftiest heavenly mysteries and, what is more, convey to you their inner and outer significance?"

After the death of Mevlana Arif, on Sayyid Kulal's advice, Bahauddin went and spent three months with one of the Turkish Sheiks called Kasim, who belonged to the company of Khwaja Yusuf Hamadani. When he left, the Sheikh said: "I have nine sons. You are the tenth and are more acceptable to me than all the others." Thereafter, whenever Bahauddin went to Bokhara, he used to visit him and show him great respect.

After Kasim Sheikh, Bahauddin received a spiritual indication that he should go to the noblest of the Turkish Sheikhs: Halil Ata, in whose service he remained for twelve years. According to the Nefahat el Uns, Bahauddin, when he first entered the spiritual path, had seen himself in a dream being recommended to a dervish by name of Halil Ata. The face of the dervish had remained imprinted on his memory. He was also reminded that his grandmother, a very spiritual woman, to whom he told the dream, had said to him " It is true that you should find a Sheik from among the Turks."

Bahauddin was always on the look-out for this person when, one day, passing through the bazaar in Bokhara, he met him. " As soon as I saw him I recognized the dervish of my dream. I asked his name of a bystander: it was Halil. By that time he had passed by and I could not overtake him. I felt desperately sad and went home. When evening came, a messenger arrived: " That dervish Halil wants you." It was mid-summer. I took a couple of apples with me and went off to meet him. When I saw him, I asked permission to tell him my dream. He replied in Turki: " What is in your mind has happened here and now, no need for explanation." I saw that I stood before a genius and my desire to join him was stronger than ever. I entered his Halka and he showed me lofty states and strange and wonderful events.

Shortly after that time, the Sultanate of Transoxania was established. Halil Ata accepted an invitation to go as Counsellor to the Sultan and remained in his service six years. Bahauddin remained with him and, speaking of that time, said: " He showed me great affection. Sometimes gently, at other times brutally, he taught me the essential rules of service. The experience I gained was of very great value to me, when I came to undertake my own task. While Halil Ata was with the Sultan, he often used to say in our group: " Whoever, for the love of God, serves me, will become great among the people." He often repeated this, and I well understood whom it was aimed at. After six years the Sultanate came to grief and Bahauddin, whose heart had grown cold for such affairs, returned to Bokhara and settled at Rivten just outside Bokhara.

About this time, he joined a Halka under the direction of Mevlana Kishlaki, the step-father of Mevlana Arif Dikkerani, who became one of his close friends. When he first went to the village of Mubarekshah to meet Kishlaki, the Mevlana on seeing him said: " You are such a highflying bird that the only companion for you is Arif Dikkerani." " This aroused a strong wish in me to meet Arif at once," wrote Bahauddin. Becoming aware of my wish, the Mevlana went up on the roof and called out loudly: " Arif, Arif, Arif." At that time Arif Dikkerani was sowing cotton seed in his own village sixty miles (that is, two days' journey) away. He took the message and, starting off at midday, reached Kishiak in time for the evening meal and met Bahauddin for the first time.

Regarding the Halka of Mevlana Kishlaki, Khwaja Ubeydullah Ahrar, about a century later, used to say to his disciples: " There are souls who, by their sincerity, their devoted service, their power of prayer and by their renunciation and realization of nothingness have brought into being a great Realm, and it would be impossible to imagine a more lofty Realm than that one. If you cannot perform acts of service of that stature, at least you should know that such seekers of the truth do really exist."

We shall not describe Bahauddin's two pilgrimages to Mecca, the last with his second successor, Khwaja Muhammad Parsa. Many stories of his teaching are to be found in the records left by his followers. He is described as of medium height, with a round face, ruddy complexion, his eyebrows wide apart, his beard grey, in which " the white overcomes the black " his moustache straggling and his eyes dark brown.

He lived to seventy-one years of age. Various stories are extant about his death. A well-known Sheikh, not of the Master's tradition, named Nureddin Halveti, died in Bokhara and Khwaja Nakshband went to pay his respects. The household of the Sheikh were weeping and wailing. Some people found this unseemly and contrary to Muslim morality and made them end their wailing. All present expressed different opinions. The Khwaja said: " When my time comes, I will show how dervishes should die." Mevlana Miskin, who recounted the story, used to say: " These words always stuck in my mind until the time of our revered Khwaja's last illness. He had himself brought from his home to a room in the Caravanserai and remained there till his death. His principal followers used to go there and visit him every day. He used to talk to them with particular care and affection. At the end he raised his hands in prayer and remained in prayer for a long time and then, stroking his face with his hands, gave up his soul to God."

Alauddin Gujduvani's account tells how he went to see him on the day he died. " He was in death agony. As soon as he saw me, he said: ` Ala, pull the cloth in front of you and eat your fill.' (He always called me Ala). I, in obedience, eat two or three mouthfuls; I simply had not the power to eat my fill. Then I cleared the table and began to pray."

Some of those present were wondering if he would name his successor. He became aware of their thoughts and said: " Why, at this moment, do you disturb me. This is not in my hands. The decision is with the Supreme Truth. I wanted to make you joyful and you want me to give orders."

His son-in-law, Khwaja Ali Damad, recounted his own experience: " The venerated Khwaja ordered me to dig his grave. When I had performed this service, I returned to his presence. The thought passed through my mind as to who would be our Guide when he had gone. He at once raised his beloved head and said: 'My word is still the same as on the Pilgrimage to Mecca. Whoever wishes me well, must look to Khwaja Muhammad Parsa '. Three days later he returned to the bosom of his Maker."

When he died, his principal disciples gathered together, including Muhammad Parsa, whom he himself had so clearly indicated. All without hesitation agreed to accept Khwaja Alaeddin Attar-Bahauddin Nakshbandi's son-in-law-as their Guide. This is very significant for those who wish to understand the true manner in which the succession and the bestowal of the secret Wisdom should operate.

Some of Bahauddin 'Nakshbandi's talks to his Halka have been preserved. A few extracts will give the best idea of his teaching.

" Our way is that of group discussion. In solitude, there is renown and in renown there is peril. Welfare is to be found in a group. Those who follow this way find great benefit and blessing in group-meetings."

" It is not possible for man to attain the secret of Union (*tawhid*). To attain the secret of practical wisdom (*marifat*) is difficult but not impossible."

" We do not accept everyone, and if we do accept we do so with difficulty."

" The conditions of acceptance as they should duly be imposed are hard to fulfil. Either a pupil with capacity appears and a master fit to receive him is lacking, or a master is there and pupils with capacity are lacking." This was said on the occasion of the admission of Yakub Cherhi to the Halka.

" There are two sciences. One is the science of the heart which is useful knowledge. This was taught by the Prophets and Messengers of God. The other is the science of the tongue, which is God's Teaching to the sons of Adam."

" I learned utter devotion to the Search for Truth from a gambler. I watched a gambler lose everything he possessed, and when a comrade begged him to give it up, he answered: ' Ah my friend, if I had to give my head for this game, I could not do without it.' When I heard this, my heart was flooded with amazement and ever since I have pursued Truth with the same single-mindedness."

" When I was responsible for groups, my state was such that whenever I was aware of two or three in conversation, I lent an ear. If they were conversing of God I was blissful; if they were talking of anything else, I became sad and heavy of heart."

" When I was young, I begged of God that he would give me the strength to go through with all that there can be of effort and sacrifice. This prayer of mine was granted and now that I have to fill the role of teacher (Fir), I have been set free from effort and sacrifice."

" In my days of discipleship, according to the heritage of Kwaja Baba Semasi, I listened to many traditions and I talked with many learned men. But on my path, that which helped me the most was abasement and humiliation. I entered by that gate and whatever I may have found, that is how I found it."

" We are means for reaching the goal. It is necessary that seekers should cut themselves away from us and think only of the goal."

" One day, I was in the Mosque of Zivertun. I was sitting with my back to a pillar, looking towards the Q'ibla. Suddenly, I fell into a trance and my entire body melted away. This state annihilated my whole being. Then I heard a voice within me say: `Know that you have reached the Goal '."

" The capacity of all hearts is the same, but the practical wisdom within the heart is very different from one heart to another."

" If I were to look at the faults of my friends, I would be left without a friend. For there is no faultless friend. Everyone loves good people, The art is to learn how to love bad people."

" A famous learned man asked what was the purpose of the way we follow. Khwaja Bahauddin answered: `The clarification of practical wisdom.' `And what is that?' asked his interlocutor. `There are things to be believed that have been transmitted by reliable informants but only in a summary way. The clarification of practical wisdom consists in showing people how to discover them in their own personal experience '."

The place of Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshbandi in the tradition of the Masters is not, as often stated, that of the Founder of a new Dervish Order, but rather as one who enriched the tradition by bringing into it much practical (marifat) wisdom that had been preserved by individual teachers and groups over a very wide area. This is the significance of his many years of travel with Mevlana Arif Dikkerani. He was concerned to consolidate and transmit the marl fat he had brought together Within two generations, his successors were to teach kings and guide nations, exercising an immense visible influence; but he avoided any such undertakings. When he was invited by the King of Herat, he said: " We have no business with kings and sultans; but if we don't go to them, they will come to us and that will be a nuisance to our dervishes and a burden upon the population, so we shall have to go and make this visit." When he did go, he seems to have shown reserve and even indifference. He refused to eat even a mouthful at the great banquet arranged in his honour or to accept the present sent by the king; even a suit of clothes from his own wardrobe.

His relationships with his own pupils were totally different. His son-in-law and first successor, Khwaja Alaeddin Attar. used to tell the story how in the early days of his membership of the Halka, he was speaking to a `person of the Way' at Ramitin, about the heart. "I said that I did not know the true nature of the heart. This person said that in his opinion the heart was like the moon three days old. I told this to our beloved Khwaja Bahaddin. At that moment he was standing up. He placed his foot on mine. At that moment a great bliss came over me and I felt myself in contact with All Truth. When I recovered from this state, he said: `That is the heart; not what the dervish said.' How can you expect to know the true Heart (*q'alb*) unless you have direct experience of it?"

The history of the Masters divides into two periods at the time of Khwaja Bahauddin. Naq'shband. After him, there were very great teachers, but the brotherhood was merged into recognized 'Orders' and was either disbanded or went into retirement. The Naq'shbandi Order claim that they are the true successors of the Khwajagan and have inherited their secrets.

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