

# Classics and Modern Theories: Abu Said Abul Khair and Human Resources Paradigm Shift

Nisar Ahmad<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him, henceforth pbuh) is quoted in *Sahih Bukhari* (Vol.8, Book 73, No.40) and *Muslim* (Book 32, No. 6258 & 6260) as having said, “True believers are expected to have compassion, kindness and sympathy for each other, like a body which suffers as a whole, when any one organ experiences pain, becoming sleepless and hot.” This *hadith*<sup>2</sup> of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), when seen in the context of human relations, appear to summarize teachings of various sufi saints who followed him and preached the message of universal brotherhood. During the lifetime of the Prophet, there had emerged a group among his companions, who was not only well versed in *shariat*<sup>3</sup> and learning but was also immersed in prayers and supplication to achieve qualities of negation and purification of heart and soul.<sup>4</sup> The distinguished descendents of the men of *shariat* and *tariqat*<sup>5</sup> laid the foundations of what was later to be known as Sufism. Sufism or *tariqat* is the embodiment of *shariat* and *sunnat*<sup>6</sup>. Its aim is to build inner and outer qualities of man, to cleanse him of all sins, and develop a strong character according to the doctrine of religion. While its origin lies in religion, the practice of Sufism places emphasis on human values. Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, a famous Sufi saint who has his shrine in Ajmer, India, was once asked about the highest form of devotion. He said it was nothing but feeding the hungry and helping those in distress. Sheikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya (a very well known Sufi saint of his time who lived in Delhi, India) often cited in his assemblies a remark of Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair that though there were myriads of routes and roads leading to God, none was quicker and more effective than bringing happiness to the hearts of men.<sup>7</sup> Social responsibility, born out of the love of God, is one of the most important sides of early Sufism.<sup>8</sup> Compilations of various Sufic thoughts, anecdotes, and poetry are available in various classics like Abu Said (Ibn-e-Munawwar)’s *Asrar-ul-Tawheed*, Rumi’s *Mathnavi*, Hujwiri’s *Kashf al-Mahjub*, and Farid-ud-din Attar’s *Tazkarat ul-Aulia*, etc.

Old classics have their origins in wisdom that was acquired through thorough experience of life. Abu Said’s first teacher Sheikh Abul Fazl at Sarakhs is reported to have told Abu Said,

---

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Nisar Ahmad, a researcher, is former Dean, College of Management, University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. Currently he works as a visiting professor at various management institutes in India.

<sup>2</sup> The word Hadith literally means communication or written narration. In the Islamic context it denotes the record of what the Prophet (pbuh) said, did, or tacitly approved. Both Sahih Bukhari and Muslim are two compilations of Hadith which are considered an authentic account.

<sup>3</sup> Shariat means the entire Islamic way of life, specially the law of Islam.

<sup>4</sup> Mohammed Usman Arif, “Sufism: Definition, History and Relevance in the Contemporary World”, Syeda Saiyidain Hameed (ed), *Contemporary Relevance of Sufism* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1999) p253

<sup>5</sup> Tariqat means way, path, or method. In sufic terminology it means a system of spiritual practices and guidance that takes the follower close to God.

<sup>6</sup> Sunnat is a practice of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). It is evident from some *hadith*. Muslims consider it a very pious practice to follow a *sunnat*.

<sup>7</sup> K.A.Nizami, “The Contribution of Indian Sufis to Peace and Amity”, Baidyanath Saraswati (ed), *Culture of Peace* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 1999)

<sup>8</sup> A. Schimmel, “Ibn Khafif: An Early Representative of Sufis”, *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society, Vol VI pt.3* (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1958) p173

“*Mastak shudai hami, nadani pas u pish*” ( مستك شده اي همي نداني پس و پيش ) – “Though art drunk, poor youth! Thou know’st not head from tail.”<sup>9</sup> It holds true for us often. We are drunk with our existing knowledge which restricts us while understanding new knowledge or comes in our way while reinterpreting the existing knowledge. New vistas of knowledge are thrown open before us through reinterpretation of old classics. These classics have wider meanings, which go beyond the obvious. The following story will highlight this point.

Mulla Nasruddin<sup>10</sup> was taking a load of salt to the market. There was a stream on the way. His donkey wade through the stream, and salt got dissolved in water. On reaching the other bank, the donkey was frisky because his load was lightened, but Nasruddin was angry. On the next weekly market day he loaded the donkey with wool. While crossing the stream the donkey almost drowned of weight. Mulla said, “This should teach you a lesson: that you gain something everytime you go through water.”

This simple story acquires a new perspective once the simple terms like salt and wool are interpreted in a deeper sense. In Sufic literature, salt is the symbol for goodness, and wool (*suff* in Arabic) for Sufi / Sufic knowledge. By shedding its burden of goodness the man (donkey) feels lighter. But it also results in him getting no food, because Nasruddin could not sell the salt to buy fodder. So even lessening your burden comes at a price – a price which you may not even be aware of. When you lessen your burden it adds to someone else’s – in this case the water in the stream takes the salt along. What happens to the water? Does it change its qualities? On the second occasion the donkey had an increase in his burden and had to trudge to the market with greater weight. But end result is better because Mulla Nasruddin sells the damp wool, now heavier than before, for a higher price than dry wool. This story also teaches that if man, like the donkey, remains attached to his fixed ideas (that his burden will be lighter every time he passes through water) he will meet with failure. To quote Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair,

“Detach from fixed ideas and preconceptions. And face what is to be your lot.”<sup>11</sup>

Further:

“The first step in this affair (Sufism) is the breaking of ink-pots and the tearing-up of books and the forgetting of all kinds of (intellectual) knowledge”.<sup>12</sup>

Through this paper, a beginning is made to commission a detailed research on the poetry and teachings of Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair. An attempt will be made to study his works with a view to developing theories of man management. This paper presents the first article in this series.

Most of Abul Khair’s wisdom was passed on orally. The first compilation of his works came through *Halat o Sukhnan-e-Sheikh Abu Said ibn Abul Khair*, composed by one of his descendents Abu Ruh Lutfullah about a century after Abu Said’s death. Later Abu Said’s great-great-grandson Muhammed Ibn-e-Munawwar compiled a much larger biography of

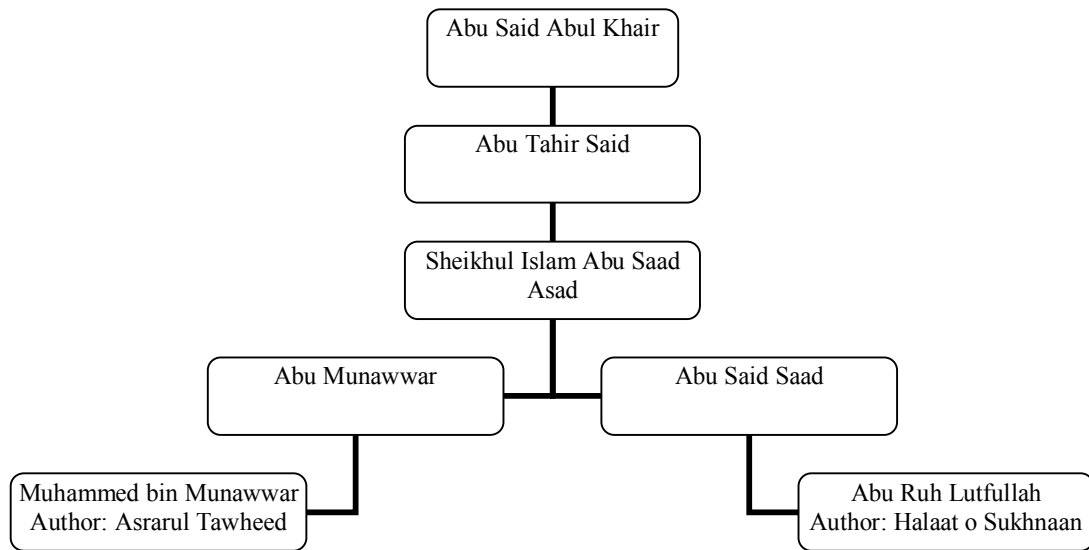
<sup>9</sup> R A Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (New Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat- i – Delli, 1988) p8

<sup>10</sup> Mulla Nasruddin, is a fictional character evolved by Sufis. His stories were / are used to describe various concepts of Sufism

<sup>11</sup> Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Anchor Books – Doubleday, 1990) p205

<sup>12</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, p21

his ancestor which he entitled *Asrar-ul-Tawheed*. Dr. Mohammed Raza Shafiei Kudkani<sup>13</sup> has described the family tree as under.



The sayings of Abu Said include several definitions of Sufism, which are given below.<sup>14</sup>

1. To lay aside what thou hast in thy head, to give what thou hast in thy hand, and not to recoil from whatsoever befalls thee.
2. Sufism is two things: to look in one direction and to live in one way.
3. Sufism is a name attached to its object; when it reaches its ultimate perfection, it is God (i.e. the end of Sufism is that, for the Sufi, nothing should exist except God).
4. It is glory in wretchedness and riches in poverty and lordship in servitude and satiety in hunger and clothedness in nakedness and freedom in slavery and life in death and sweetness in bitterness.
5. The Sufi is he who is pleased with all that God does, in order that God may be pleased with all that he does.
6. Sufism is patience under God's commanding and forbidding, and acquiescence and resignation in the events determined by divine providence.
7. To be a Sufi is to cease from taking trouble (*takalluf*); and there is no greater trouble for thee than thine own self (*tu'i-yi tu*), for when thou art occupied with thyself, thou remainest away from God.

These definitions, when read in an organizational context, convey the concepts of (1) genuine compliance where one has given in completely to the command – giving what one has in head and hand; (2) lateral thinking by looking away from ones current reality; (3) leading life towards a goal; (4) reinterpreting the current condition and ability to see an asset as a liability and a liability as an asset; (5) letting ones aspirations be submerged by organizational goals and happily reconciling with it; (6) patience and discipline; and (7) annihilation of self.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Mohammed Raza Shafiei Kudkani, (ed) *Halat o Sukhnan Abu Sayed Abul Khair* by Jamaluddin Aburuh Lutfullah (Iran: Muassa Intasharat Aagah, 1976) p14 (Persian)

<sup>14</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, pp 49-50

Simab said, "I shall sell the Book of Wisdom for a hundred gold pieces, and some people will say that it is cheap". Yunus Marmar said to him, "And I shall give away the key to understanding it, and almost none shall take it, even free of charge".<sup>15</sup>

We will now study anecdotes from Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair's life and his quatrains (*rubaiyat*) and develop a key to understand them to arrive at some concepts in Human Resource Management.

### 1. Concept of Self and Ultimate Goal – "Nobody, the son of Nobody"

Sheikh Abu Said has repeatedly advised that indulging with our own self often comes in the way of our long term and ultimate goals. (Refer to Sufism definition no. 7 given above)

On Unity's Way:  
no infidelity  
no faith.  
Take one step  
away from yourself and –  
behold! -- the Path!  
You, soul of the world,  
must choose the road  
of Divine Submission  
then sit with anyone you like  
even a black snake --  
but not your self!

(English version by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Nasrollah Pourjavady)<sup>16</sup>

In this poem, Sheikh advises one to tread the chosen path without infidelity and without faith. This calls for suspension of one's beliefs. A stage where you neither believe, nor disbelieve, you reach the stage of 'zero' by taking a step away from yourself – like a child born into this world to experience whatever comes your way. But there is a rider. And the rider is to choose the correct path beforehand. Because once your purpose (path) is clear nothing will take you away from it, you will keep moving forward irrespective of the company you keep unless you go back to your own self.

He was asked, "What is evil and what is the worst evil?" Sheikh Abu Said replied, "Evil is 'thou' ; and the worst evil is 'thou', when thou knowest it not." Abu Said's belief that he had escaped from the prison of individuality was constantly asserting itself. Once he attended a party of mourners (*taazia*), where the visitors, as they arrived, were announced by a servant (*muarrif*) who with a loud voice enumerated their titles of honour (*alqab*). When Abu Said appeared, the *muarrif* enquired how he should announce him. "Go," said he, "and tell them to make way for Nobody, the son of Nobody."

---

<sup>15</sup> Idries Shah, *Thinkers of the East* (London: Arkana Penguin Books, 1991) p.23

<sup>16</sup> Peter Lamborn Wilson & Nasrollah Pourjavady, *The Drunken Universe - An Anthology of Persian Sufi Poetry* (New York: Omega Publications, 1999)

In speaking of himself, he never used the pronouns “I” or “we”, but invariably referred to himself as “they” (*ishan*). This was a practical demonstration of having moved away from self and considering self as a part of others. Probably for the same reason, Abu Said discarded the imperative, using the impersonal form instead. He always said, “It is necessary to do so-and-so” (*chunin bayad kard*), not “Do so-and-so” (*chunin bikun*).<sup>17</sup> This is a more effective way of communicating in an organization. While “do so and so” sounds like a command to the listener, “it is necessary to do so and so” feels like a suggestion. The latter will have wider acceptability in organizations.

Some of his other sayings from *Asrar-ul-Tawheed* are :

The veil between man and God is not the world, is not the throne of God, it is the illusion of "I", pass beyond yourself and you are there.

Anywhere the illusion of “I” exists is hell, anywhere “I” is absent is heaven.

If you are not going to sacrifice your self do not spend your time with Sufi nonsense.

Self comes in conflict with organizational goals quite often. Abu Said tells us that not only it is evil, but also it is worst when we are not even aware of its existence. This concept of sub-conscious over-powering self is new to the theory of human resource management. This presents before us a bigger challenge of overcoming a shortcoming, which we ourselves are not even aware of. What can organizations do in this regard? What processes can be introduced to reduce the occurrence of similar impediments so that the organization remains unidirectional?

The following passage illustrating another side of Abu Said's asceticism provides some answers to these questions. He said:

One day I said to myself, “Knowledge, works, meditation - I have them all; now I want to become absent from them (*ghaybati az in*).” On consideration I saw that the only way to attain this was by acting as a servant to the dervishes, for when God wishes to benefit a man, He shows to him the path of self-abasement. Accordingly I made it my business to wait upon them, and I used to clean their cells and privies and lavatories. I persevered in this work for a long time, until it became a habit. Then I resolved to beg for the dervishes, which seemed to me the hardest thing I could lay upon myself. At first, when people saw me begging, they would give me a piece of gold, but soon it was only copper, and by degrees it came down to a single raisin or nut. In the end even this was refused. One day I was with a number of dervishes, and there was nothing to be got for them. For their sake I parted with the turban I had on my head, then I sold one after the other my slippers, the lining of my *jubba*<sup>18</sup>, the cloth of which it was made, and the cotton quilting.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, p53

<sup>18</sup> Jubba is a coat worn by people in Arabia, Central Asia, and Indian subcontinent. It is commonly used by Islamic scholars and sufis.

<sup>19</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, p14

This incident from the life of Sheikh Abu Said teaches many concepts to us. First it teaches that how knowledge, works, meditation, etc. could not be an end in themselves. They were at best, stages in a life-long journey of discovering the self and taking one to the level of *Insaan ul Kamil* (the perfect man). In the journey of self-discovery, one should be prepared to lower one's self, submerge one's ego, and serve as a servant as displayed by Abu Said through his own example. He resolved to beg for others, which even in his own words was the hardest thing he could lay upon himself. Same concept is illustrated through another of Sheikh's saying.

To abstain from religious acts is infidelity, and to perform such acts self-consciously is dualism. If "thou" exists and "He" exists, "two" exists; and that is dualism. You must put your "self" away altogether.<sup>20</sup>

This incident also narrates, how others' favours will continue to decrease if we make ourselves dependent on them for too long. See how the alms starting with gold get reduced to a single raisin or nut, and finally to naught! And in the course of journey of self discovery, he was even ready to part with his turban!<sup>21</sup>

The challenge before us is how do we achieve this annihilation of self (*nafs*). Sheikh himself has provided a hint in one of his quatrain (*rubayee*).

Love came and emptied me of self,  
every vein and every pore,  
made into a container to be filled by the Beloved.  
Of me, only a name is left,  
the rest is You my Friend, my Beloved.  
(English version by Vraje Abramian in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*)<sup>22</sup>

Love is defined as a key to empty one of oneself. This is the concept of complete absorption of one's aims and goals so that all other realities cease to exist. It is a stage of complete enrollment into the purpose. In an organization this enrollment can be achieved when individuals pass through the first stage of getting answer to the question : *What is in it for me*, to reaching a stage of *Fihi Ma Fihi* (It is what it is).<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Postulate of Sign and Reality

Here is yet another quatrain (*rubayee*) by Abu Said.

The personality absolute, manifest in all creation fine,  
If thou desire to know of His pervading the universe, the reality and sign;  
Go! And on the surface of wine observe the bubble, see how,  
The wine is within the bubble and the bubble is within the wine.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p16

<sup>21</sup> In Eastern society a head cover in the form of a turban or cap is seen as a sign of one's honour and dignity.

<sup>22</sup> Vraje Abramian, *Nobody Son of Nobody - by Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair* (New York:Hohm Press,2001)

<sup>23</sup> *Fihi Ma Fihi* is title of a book authored by Jallauddin Rumi and contains his discourses. Here the title is used to convey an aspired reality of accepting what is there as one's desire – it is what it is.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Zahurul Hasan Sharib, *Abu Said Abul Khair and His Rubaiyat* (London:Sharib Press,1992)

Let us study the relationship between reality and sign. Signs are an indicator of reality, which exists, yet remains unseen. Sometimes, signs can be confused with reality. For example when some one notices a moving flag, it may be taken by the person as a reality before her/his eyes. Yet when looked at as a sign, it indicates that air is moving. The air exists, though unseen. Signs in themselves are real, yet they are indicators of something else.

Once a young man asked a learned man three questions. His three questions were :

- a) Does God exist? If so, show me His shape.
- b) What is *taqdir* (fate)?
- c) If *shaitan* (Satan) was created from the fire, why on Judgment day will he be thrown in hell that is also created from fire. It certainly will not hurt him at all, since *shaitan* (Satan) and the hell were both created from fire. Did God not think of it this far?

Suddenly, the learned man slapped the young man's face very hard. The young man felt pain and said, " Why do you get angry at me?" The learned man replied very patiently, "I am not angry. The slap is my answer to your three questions." He asked the young man whether he felt the pain. On getting a reply in affirmative, he reconfirmed from him that he believed in the existence of pain. The learned man simply asked him to show the shape of pain. That was the first answer. Everything that exists need not have a shape.

Then the learned man asked him whether he had dreamt of getting a slap from him. Or, whether he thought of it earlier before the meeting. On getting a negative answer, he told him that was *taqdeer* (fate).

And lastly, he asked the young man whether his hand as well as the young man's cheeks were both made of flesh. If a hand made of flesh can inflict pain on a cheek made of flesh, so can fire prove painful for creatures made of fire. That was his third answer.

In this story, which is sometimes ascribed to Imam Abu Hanifa<sup>25</sup>, a simple thing like slapping is used as a metaphor to convey serious thoughts. This is an example of the usage of sign to convey a reality.

We shall now study the particular sign from the *rubayee* quoted at the beginning of this section: the bubble on the surface of the wine.

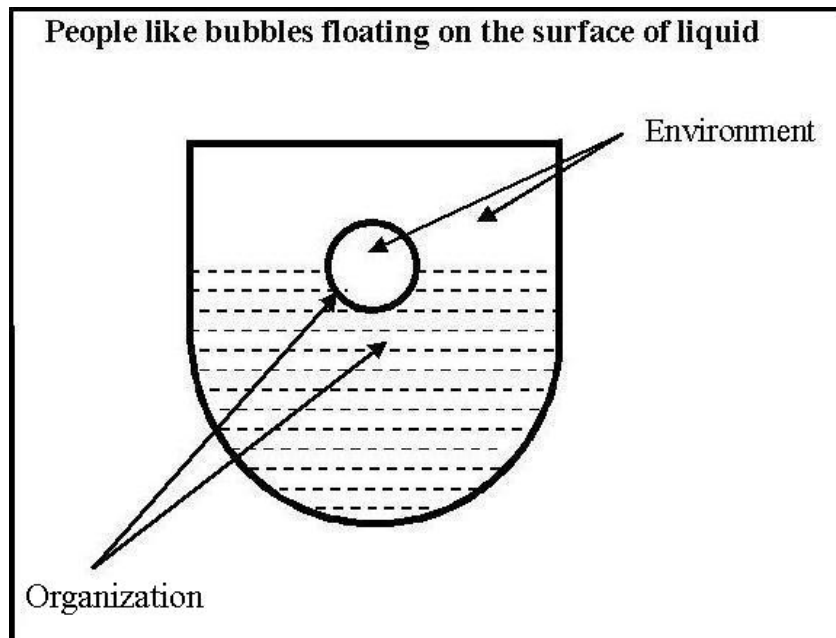
A bubble is a pocket of air trapped inside a sphere formed of a very thin film of liquid – in this case wine. So presence of a liquid and presence of air are two prerequisites for a bubble to exist. If there were no wine there would be no bubble, only air. When the bubble is burst, the air returns to air and the wine to wine. On the other hand it is the air outside the bubble, which supports the thin film of liquid (wine) enabling it to retain its spherical shape. So, if there were no air surrounding the bubble made of wine, the bubble of wine will cease to exist.

---

<sup>25</sup> It could not be confirmed whether the learned man being described in the story is actually Imam Abu Hanifa, the noted Islamic scholar. However, for our purpose only the basic content of the story is relevant.

If the wine in the glass were to be replaced with water, the bubble will also have water inside. Scientifically the film forming the outer surface of the bubble has to be of the same liquid upon which it floats. A bubble of wine cannot float on the surface of water. Thus the liquid outside the bubble is the same as the liquid inside the bubble. Also, the air in the bubble is exactly the same in nature as the air outside. However, the bubble has a particular quality: it has a form; in this case a spherical shape. Thus, whilst we can ascribe qualities to the air, we cannot, in the analogy, see or define the air, but we can see and define the air as a bubble by virtue of the wine. We can say that the wine gives form to the air, just as the air gives form to wine. However, the reality of air is different from the bubble. The bubble is not air. Air is inside it and surrounds it. It only becomes evident, or manifests itself through a bubble in this case. Air is reality, the bubble is merely a sign. Also for this sign to take its present shape wine is another reality. If there were no liquid there would be no bubble. Reality manifests itself through many signs. Signs on the other hand infer the reality. It is actually a two-way relationship where reality is much larger aspect of the signs, yet if we remove all the signs it will be difficult to see the reality. That's why people may often confuse the sign with reality itself. Typical example is of people who consider fever an ailment. Fever is confused with the reality. It is only a symptom of a disease, a sign of some unknown reality inside the body.

In human resource management the reality of the organization (a group of people) manifests itself through signs in the form of the individuals.



As can be seen from the earlier analysis, people are like bubbles floating on the surface – the surface that is an interface of environment and the organization. It is the organization, which has given shape (thin film) to the bubble, and the inside of the bubble also carries the environment.

Looking at the bubble reveals more secrets. The spot where the bubble floats shows a small depression on the surface of the liquid. Considering there is wine inside the bubble, this depression is caused on the surface of wine by its own weight! In organizations it is



peoples' own aspirations, which cause depressions in the organizational surface. But peoples' own aspirations are a function of their inner self and the outside environment which is continuously affecting their inner self. Thus environment affects organizations in two ways – directly, as well as indirectly through people. In order to assess the reality of the environment, organizations can look closely and cumulatively to its people. However, only a part of larger reality can be inferred from this activity.

Sheikh asks us to see the bubble 'on the surface of the wine'. Of course there are bubbles that may be submerged - despite their tendency to rise. These bubbles are surrounded by the denseness of wine. It is only on arrival at the surface that they become visible and leave their impact on the liquid itself. If we assume that bubbles have a vision, for the sake of exploring this analogy, then the air within would be able to see the air outside. Albeit through a thin film – which may distort this vision a little. In organizations people are often submerged in the organizational climate. To realize their full potential, organizations should facilitate people to come to the surface so that their inner self can see their outer reality. Challenge is to remove the thin film so that vision is not distorted.

A thin film of wine separates the inside from the outside. This thin film is like a veil which separates reality from a sign. In order to move towards larger reality it becomes necessary to lift the veil – break the bubble. Organizations need to create a climate with proper reward mechanism which can encourage people to let their outer form go. Like the wine going to the wine and air going to air, this will result in the organization becoming more homogeneous and unidirectional. When there are many bubbles, they appear to be 'fighting' with each other on the surface of the wine. As if each bubble is struggling to retain its shape. In the process weaker ones break faster. Such multiple bubbles also make the surface of wine turbulent. This needs to be avoided in organizations because it results in a lot of individual energy being wasted. When individuals let the outer form (in the organizations perspective only) go, there is no infighting. Obviously, unidirectional organizations will move faster and better than those with infighting.

It is a person's individuality (thin film) that surrounds his personality (the inner self). Everybody is aware of having a personality within yet he cannot exactly say what it is, but he knows it is something. He can point to its manifestations in his behaviour and thoughts, and moods and feelings, but this does not completely define his personality. This is a typical reality and sign relationship. Our sense of individuality is a bar to oneness with the divine; it retards the development of our personality. So the faster we uplift the veil the better it is.

Another *rubayee* quoted from Vraje Abramian's *Nobody, Son of Nobody* further highlights these thoughts.

Detached You are, even from your being,  
and this being is nothing but You.  
Unmanifest, yet the manifest is naught  
but Your shadow.

Moons, galaxies and worlds drunk from this cup.  
And the cupbearer is nowhere to be seen!

Ivan M Granger<sup>26</sup>, in his commentary on this poem has highlighted the use of various signs used therein to convey the realities of the eternal world:

“This poem is a beautiful, brief meditation on God as both eternal essence and as the manifestation of material creation.”

“The so-called 'real world' can be said to be unreal because, through direct perception, the mystic sees physical manifestation as only a ghost-like reflection of a deeper, more subtle Reality. The world of tangible things and solid objects is found to be inherently empty and intangible. This is how ‘the manifest is naught / but Your shadow.’ Manifestation only suggests something of the underlying Essence; it is merely a darkened reflection of the ‘Unmanifest’.”

“The fundamental nature of all Being is ecstatic or ‘drunk’ bliss, even though not always perceived. All of creation is built upon this bliss and continually fed by this bliss: ‘Moons, galaxies and worlds drunk from this cup’.”

“And the irony of this divine game of hide-and-seek: ‘The cupbearer is nowhere to be seen!’ The bestower of bliss, the ‘cupbearer’, being ‘unmanifest,’ inhabits no space, ‘is nowhere’ and unable to be ‘seen’ in the mundane sense. We are teased and taunted by the endlessly spinning variety of manifestation until we stop looking for some object we can name ‘God’.”

At the material level, when we reinterpret the poem, we find that due to external factors human beings are detached from their being. They do not know who are they: what is their purpose in life. At organizational level this means absence of clarity about one’s roles and responsibilities. The organizational goals, on the other hand, remain unseen. Though all the moons, galaxies, and the worlds (read departments) of the organization are supposed to serve this purpose (drink from the cup), yet it remains not only unseen but often gets overridden by their own goals. Sometimes these goals can be at cross-purpose with one another. While these cross-purposes are not manifest, yet what gets manifest in the form of organizational results is sub-optimal (read naught in the poem).

### 3. Knowledge v/s Experiential Learning

I have not met a person who claims to have learnt cycling in a classroom! There are a few skills which are acquired only through experience. In the organizational context, it is the interplay of knowledge and a practical skill, which transforms that knowledge to tangible benefit of the mankind. We now study a *rubayee* of Sheikh Abu Said.

Beg for Love.  
Consider this burning, and those who  
burn, as gifts from the Friend.  
Nothing to learn.  
Too much has already been said.  
When you read a single page from  
the silent book of your heart,  
you will laugh at all this chattering,

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/G/GrangerIvanM/index.htm>

all this pretentious learning.  
(English version by Vraje Abramian in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*)

Sheikh advises us to develop the love for the ultimate friend (God). And in this process the learning acquired by the heart will be deeper and more meaningful than the 'pretentious learning' acquired earlier.

Abu Said is reported to have met Ibn-e-Sina (Avicenna).<sup>27</sup> After this meeting when students of Ibn-e-sina asked him how he found the Shaikh. He is reported to have told that everything that he knew, the Sheikh saw. And when Shaikh Abu Said's followers asked him about his meeting with Ibn-e-Sina he said , "Everything I see, he knows".<sup>28</sup>

The main point of the legend is to emphasize that Ibn-e-Sina knew what Abu Said saw and that what the latter saw the former already knew. This was development of the idea and an attempt to bridge the gap between knowledge through rational enquiry (*Ilm*) and seeing through a supra-rational experience (*Maarifah*) or direct experiential knowledge. In a way Sheikh Abu Said was the first person who talked about experiential learning. This is a technique that is useful in the organizational context because continuous changes in the environment call for constant updation of both organizational as well as individual knowledge. This can best be achieved through experiential learning.

Once a butcher served food to Sheikh Abu Said and his friends. "After we had done," said Abu Said, "he asked whether any of us could answer a question. My friends pointed to me. He then said, 'What is the duty of a slave and what is the duty of a labourer for hire?' I replied in terms of the religious law. He asked, 'Is there nothing else?' I remained silent. With a stern look he exclaimed, 'Do not live with one whom thou hast divorced !' meaning that since I had discarded exoteric knowledge (*ilm-e zahir*), I must not have any further dealings with it. Then he added, 'Until thou art free, thou wilt never be a slave, and until thou art an honest and sincere labourer, thou wilt never receive the wages of everlasting bliss.'"<sup>29</sup>

This passage translated from *Asrar-ul-Tawheed* emphasizes the concept of freeing oneself of one's knowledge. The concept of unlearning to learn. And to be honest and sincere in what one does to get the rewards in the form of 'bliss' – satisfying one's inner self with a feeling of having done one's best to achieve the goal.

If you keep seeking the jewel of understanding,  
then you are a mine of understanding in the making.  
If you live to reach the Essence one day,  
then your life itself is an expression of the Essence.  
Know that in the final analysis you are that  
which you search for.  
(English version by Vraje Abramian in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*)

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Munawar, *Secrets of God's Mystical Oneness, or Asrarul-Tawhid* translated with notes and an introduction by John O'Kane (New York: Mazda Publishers in association with Bibliotheca Persica, 1992), pp300-301.

<sup>28</sup> Etin Anwar, *Ibn-e-Sina and Mysticism – A thesis* (Montreal: The Institute of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research McGill University, 1998) pp50-52

<sup>29</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, p20

Sheikh Abu Said, in this *rubayee*, has provided a key to experiential learning. You are that which you search for. He has clearly indicated that once we go beyond the understanding and seek the “essence”, our life will be an expression of that essence. It is reported in *Asrar-ul-Tawheed* that Sheikh was very particular about following the *sunnat* of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). He practiced the *sunnat* so much that at a later stage in his life, he continued using a toothpick though he had only one tooth left! (A detailed description of this incident will be given later under Discipline and Systems).

#### 4. Discipline and Systems

Sheikh Abu Said Abul Khair has presented before us, a great example, of discipline. He has taught how certain practices, even though they may appear to be mundane and irrelevant, should still be done for the sake of not only maintaining a discipline but also to display a higher level of compliance. This is a much-desired quality among people in organizations which is a prerequisite to bring various tasks to satisfactory completion. Following anecdote proves this point.

Pir Abu Salih Dandani was the Sheikh's barber who regularly trimmed his moustache. This Abu Salih related that the Sheikh, towards the end of his life, had only one tooth left. “Every night, after supper, I used to give him a toothpick, with which he cleaned his mouth; and when he washed his hands, he would pour water on the toothpick and lay it down.” One evening I thought to myself, “He has no teeth and does not require a toothpick: why should he take it from me every night?” The Sheikh raised his head and looked at me and said, “Because I wish to observe the *sunnat* and because I hope to win divine mercy. The Prophet (pbuh) has said, “May God have mercy upon those of my people who use the toothpick in their ablutions and at their meals”.<sup>30</sup>

See how Sheikh continued to use his toothpick inspite of having lost all but one of his teeth. For him the purpose of using the toothpick was not merely cleaning of teeth, it was much higher. It was the achievement of a larger goal of emulating the Prophet (pbuh).

Sheikh Abu Said devised certain rules which were displayed, in writing, at his convent so that these could be observed punctually by all. In the original, after every rule there followed some words of the Holy Koran on which it was based.

- 4.1. Let them keep their garments clean and themselves always pure.
- 4.2. Let them not sit in the mosque or in any holy place for the sake of gossiping.
- 4.3. In the first instance let them perform their prayers in common.
- 4.4. Let them pray much at night.
- 4.5. At dawn let them ask forgiveness of God and call unto Him.
- 4.6. In the morning let them read as much of the Koran as they can, and let them not talk until the sun has risen.
- 4.7. Between evening prayers (*Maghrib*) and bedtime prayers (*Ishaa*) let them occupy themselves with repeating some litany (*wird & zikr*).
- 4.8. Let them welcome the poor, and needy and all who join their company, and let them bear patiently the trouble of (waiting upon) them.
- 4.9. Let them not eat anything save in participation with one another.
- 4.10. Let them not absent themselves without receiving permission from one another.

---

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p47

Furthermore, let them spend their hours of leisure in one of three things: either in the study of theology or in some devotional exercise (*wird*) or in bringing comfort to some one. Whosoever loves this community and helps them as much as he can is a sharer in their merit and future recompense.

These rules present a very good example of setting some systems and setting a process in motion to follow that system. Some of the highlights are :

- 4.a. Rules are displayed in writing to clear any ambiguities and to achieve a common understanding.
- 4.b. Though as incharge of the convent Sheikh Abu Said had full authority to frame rules as he wished, yet in the written communication he chose to quote relevant passages from the holy Koran to provide a higher level sanctity to these rules. This is a good example of a ‘boss’ explaining his actions voluntarily. This voluntary disclosure is an example of a transparent, good governance model set 1000 years ago!

Some of these rules (like 4.2, 4.8, and 4.10) have a direct relationship with organizational working. Others are key to promoting good teamwork, as practice of those rules would develop camaraderie among people.

## 5. Duty and its Outcome

When Sheikh lived with his disciples in Nishapur, some differences arose with Qazi Said, the city’s official preacher, and it appeared that soon their *khanqah* (seminary) will be closed, and Sheikh Abu Said alongwith other Sufis would undergo a trial for severe punishment. Sheikh Abu Said dealt with this threatening situation using all his powers and the matter was settled. At that time Sheikh is reported to have told his disciples : “Since yesterday ye have been trembling for fear that the scaffold would be soaked with your blood. Nay, that is the lot of such as Husayn-i Mansur Hallaj, the most eminent mystic of his time in East and West. Scaffolds drip with the blood of heroes, not of cowards.” Then he asked the *qawwal*<sup>31</sup> to sing these lines:

“With shield and quiver meet thine enemy !  
Vaunt not thyself but make thy vaunt of Me.  
Let Fate be cool as water, hot as fire,  
Do thou live happy, whichsoe'er it be !”<sup>32</sup>

This is an example of using the technique of stirring a person’s conscience. Making the disciples aware of their fears, and then telling them that what they feared was actually an accomplishment. A role model was set in Mansur Hallaj describing him as a hero, a hero of east and west. His disciples were exhorted to be bold; to face their enemy with all their might, yet live happily in the present, leaving the outcome to fate. This is a work philosophy, which tells a person to do his bit in the right manner with full integrity, and leaving the results to God (read external forces which cannot be influenced). In the

---

<sup>31</sup> Qawwal is a singer who sings qawwali – a particular form sung in high octave – which often has lyrics with sufic messages.

<sup>32</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, p32

organizational context this means doing your duties as laid down and working for the overall benefit of the organization, taking both success and failure in your stride.

This concept of doing one's duty without bothering about the outcome is beautifully expressed in another of his *rubayee*.

Life here is a gamble in which when you win, you lose!  
Be content, that's how you beat the game here.  
This world is like a pair of dice,  
the only reason you pick them up  
is to throw them down!  
(English version by Vraje Abramian in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*)

Seen in a larger perspective one will not know whether what appears to be a loss is actually a gain in the long term. For centuries, the deserts in the Arabian Peninsula got insufficient rains giving rise to difficult living conditions. But the resulting climate could convert old fossils into crude oil which brought substantial gains to its people. Sheikh Abu Said advises that being content is the key to taking victory and defeat both in one's stride. A person's job is to fulfill his duty, like in a game where dice are picked up only to be thrown again. The outcome of the dice (result of our action in the organization) does not affect the game unless the objective of the game changes.

## 6. Creativity and Innovation

If you do not give up the crowds  
you won't find your way to Oneness.  
If you do not drop your self  
you won't find your true worth.  
If you do not offer all you  
have to the Beloved,  
you will live this life free of that  
pain which makes it worth living.  
(English version by Vraje Abramian in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*)

Sheikh Abu Said advises us to keep away from crowds. To refrain from doing what everyone is doing. It is one's own creativity and exclusive pursuit that will lead one towards achievement of 'oneness'. This is the proper attitude that leads to mystical union. In order to "find your way to Oneness," you can't follow the path of the mass of people or hope to fit in. You will have to be different. Is anyone around you attaining that? If not, don't follow their example! But if there are people who have successfully displayed the example of achieving organizational goals, replicate their example. If you do not give your complete self (complete effort) to the purpose, you will not be able to get the pain which makes life worth living. He has actually said that one should strive to set ones own examples for others to follow. Once Sheikh asked one of his disciples what he had been doing. On being told that he was busy writing anecdotes of his master he was told, " O Abdul Karim, do not be a writer of anecdotes: be such a man that anecdotes be told of thee".<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p67

The final line of this poem might seem confusing. Why wouldn't you want to be free from pain? The Sufis love to turn imagery on its head, such as using wine - a worldly drink that is forbidden in Islam - as a reference to divine bliss. In the language of some of the Sufi poets, the all-consuming love for God is described as sweet pain, a deeply aching yearning that turns the entire awareness towards God. It gives orientation to the soul and meaning to life. It is that pain that leads to true joy. In organizational context it transforms to achievement of higher organizational goals and a satisfaction of having contributed to the overall success of the organization. The individual gets the 'pain' of remaining useful and contributing to the overall success of the organization, which makes his living in the organization more meaningful to him.

At the time of Abu Said's stay in Nishapur, Sheikh Bu Abdullah Baku (Baku is a village in the district of Shirwan) was in the convent of Sheikh Abu Abd-al-Rahman al-Sulami, of which he became the director after the death of Abu Abd-al-Rahman.. This Bu Abdullah Baku used to frequently talk with Sheikh Abu Said in a controversial spirit and ask him questions about the Sufi path. One day he came to him and said, "O Sheikh ! we see you doing some things that our elders never did." "What are these things?" Abu Said inquired. "One of them," said he, "is this, that you let the young men sit beside the old and put the juniors on a level with their seniors in all affairs and make no difference between them; secondly, you permit the young men to sing; and thirdly, when a dervish throws off his gaberdine (in ecstasy), you sometimes direct that it should be given back to him, saying that the dervish has the best right to his own gaberdine. This has never been the practice of our elders." "Is there anything else?" said Abu Said. "No," he replied. Abu Said said, "As regards the juniors and seniors, none of them is a junior in my opinion. When a man has once entered the Path of Sufism, although he may be young, his seniors ought to consider that possibly he will receive in a single day what they have not received in seventy years. None who holds this belief will look upon any person as a junior. Then, as to the young men's dancing in the *sama*<sup>34</sup>, the souls of young men are not yet purged of lust: indeed it may be the prevailing element; and lust takes possession of all the limbs. Now, if a young dervish claps his hands, the lust of his hands will be dissipated, and if he tosses his feet, the lust of his feet will be lessened. When by this means the lust fails in their limbs, they can preserve themselves from great sins, but when all lusts are united, they will sin mortally. It is better that the fire of their lust should be dissipated in the *sama* than in something else. As regards the gaberdine which a dervish throws off, its disposal rests with the whole company of dervishes and engages their attention. If they have no other garment at hand, they clothe him again in his own gaberdine, and thereby relieve their minds from the burden of thinking about it. That dervish has not taken back his own gaberdine, but the company of dervishes has given him their gaberdine and, has thus freed their minds from thought of him. Therefore he is protected by the spiritual concentration (*himma*) of the whole company. This gaberdine is not the same one which he threw away."<sup>35</sup>

This interesting passage represents Abu Said as having departed in certain respects from the ancient Sufic tradition. His innovations, by destroying the influence and authority of the more experienced dervishes, would naturally, tend to relax discipline. But then this will open vistas of new knowledge and doing things differently. The introduction of new blood in an organization and letting them interact freely with the seniors brings an opportunity to introduce fresh ideas.

---

<sup>34</sup> Sama is a meditational dance performed by Sufis

<sup>35</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, pp57-58

A great learning can be derived from the answer of the returning of gaberdine to a Sufi. Considering the gaberdine being returned by the company of dervishes as different from the one thrown by the Sufi requires a lateral thinking where ownership of a material is considered to have been transferred the moment it is offered to the crowd.

Few anecdotes giving a good example of seeing things differently are:

- 6.1. When his followers wished to chastise a bigot who had cursed him, he restrained them, saying, "God forbid! He is not cursing me, but he thinks that my belief is false and that his own belief is true: therefore he is cursing that false belief for God's sake".<sup>36</sup>
- 6.2. Being told that a disciple of his was lying drunk on a road, Abu Said said, "Thank God he has fallen on the way, not off the way".<sup>37</sup>
- 6.3. Someone asked him, "Are the men of God in the mosque?" "They are in the tavern too," he replied.<sup>38</sup>

## 7. Trust and Team Building

Pir Hubbi was the Sheikh's tailor. One day he came in with a garment belonging to the Sheikh which he had mended. At that moment the Sheikh was taking his siesta and reclining on a couch, while Khwaja Abdul Karim, his valet, sat beside his pillow and fanned him. Khwaja Abdul Karim exclaimed, "What are you doing here?" Pir Hubbi retorted, "Wherever there is room for you, there is room for me". The valet laid down the fan and struck him again and again. After seven blows the Sheikh said, "That is enough". Pir Hubbi went off and complained to Khwaja Najjar, who said to the Sheikh, when he came out for afternoon prayers, "The young men lift their hands against the elders: what says the, Sheikh?" The Sheikh replied, "Khwaja Abdul Karim's hand is my hand," and nothing more was said about it.<sup>39</sup>

By completely owning-up the actions of his subordinate, the Sheikh, has successfully conveyed to the people that if they committed a mistake, or something wrong, it should be seen as having done by the Sheikh himself. Such actions build a greater level of trust between people. A subordinate knows that he has someone to bank upon. This mutual trust helps in building strong teams. Trust among team members helps them perform better.

Another important ingredient in formation of teams is trust in own actions. Though one may have trust in others but if one's own faith in the purpose or in one's actions is not strong, desired team results will not be there. Consider the following *rubayee*:

*Ta sher budam, shikar-i man bud palang,  
Salaar budam ba har-chi kardam ahang.  
Ta ishq-i tura ba-bar dar awardam tang,  
Az bisha burun kard ma-ra rubah-i lang.*<sup>40</sup>

تا شیر بدم شکار من بود پلنگ  
سالار بدم به هر چه کردم آهنگ  
تا عشق ترا به بر در آوردم تنگ  
از بیشه برون کرد مرا روبه لنگ

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, pp49-50

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, pp63-64

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p64

<sup>39</sup> Ibn al-Munawar, *op cit*, p271

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Mohammed Raza Shafiei Kudkani, *op cit*, p153



On the surface, in this *rubayee* Sheikh appears to be complaining to God that till I was a lion, I could hunt the leopards, I was a winner everywhere; but since I fell in love with You, lame foxes drive me out! What happened in the deeper sense comes from Sheikh's own description that when this *rubayee* crossed his mind he opened the Holy Koran and his eyes fell on the verse, "...*We shall make a trial of you with evil and with good, to try you; and to Us you will be returned.*" (Holy Koran 21.35). So Sheikh saw the difficult times as a time of trial, and he moved ahead with his trust in God.

This is how trust has to be built internally as well. One has to trust one's actions in the organization and be sure that even if the outcome is not favourable sometimes, yet the methods being adopted are correct and trustworthy.

## 8. Process of Overcoming Self

It is interesting to note that even though Sheikh Abu Said has laid so much of emphasis on annihilation of self, yet he has repeatedly said that it is actually God sent and does not happen by acquisition of man. The point can be understood with reference to three excerpts from *Asrarul Tawheed* cited by R.A.Nicholson. These excerpts, though very lengthy, are quoted below in view of their topical relevance.

Sheikh Abu Said defines *sirr* (inner soul of a person) as a substance of God's grace (*latifa*)- for Allah is very gracious (*latif*) and kind to His servants (Holy Koran 42.19) - and it is produced by the bounty and mercy of God, not by the acquisition and action of man. At first, He produces a need and longing and sorrow in man's heart; then He contemplates that need and sorrow, and in His bounty and mercy deposits in that heart a spiritual substance (*latifa*) which is hidden from the knowledge of angel and prophet. That substance is called *Sirr Allah*, and that is *ikhlas*. That pure *sirr* is the Beloved of Unitarians. It is immortal and does not become naught, since it subsists in God's contemplation of it. It belongs to the Creator: the creatures have no part therein, and in the body it is a loan. Whoever possesses it is "living" (*hayy*), and whoever lacks it is "animal" (*haywan*). There is a great difference between the "living" and the "animal".<sup>41</sup>

He was asked, "When shall a man be freed from his wants?"

"When God shall free him," he replied; "this is not affected by a man's exertion, but by the grace and help of God. First of all, He brings forth in him the desire to attain this goal. Then He opens to him the gate of repentance (*tawba*). Then He throws him into self-mortification (*mujahada*), so that he continues to strive and, for a while, to pride himself upon his efforts, thinking that he is advancing or achieving something; but afterwards he falls into despair and feels no joy. Then he knows that his work is not pure, but tainted, he repents the acts of devotion which he had thought to be his own, and perceives that they were done by God's grace and help, and that he was guilty of polytheism (*shirk*) in attributing them to his own exertion. When this becomes manifest, a feeling of joy enters his heart. Then God opens to him the gate of certainty (*yaqin*), so that for a time he takes anything from any one and accepts contumely and endures abasement, and knows for certain by Whom it is

---

<sup>41</sup> R A Nicholson, *op cit*, p51

brought to pass, and doubt concerning this is removed from his heart. Then God opens to him the gate of love (*mohabbat*), and here too egoism shows itself for a time and he is exposed to blame (*malamat*), which means that in his love of God he meets fearlessly whatever may befall him and reeks not of reproach; but still he thinks “I love” and finds no rest until he perceives that it is God who loves him and keeps him in the state of loving, and that this is the result of divine love and grace, not of his own endeavour. Then God opens to him the gate of unity (*tawhid*) and causes him to know that all action depends on God Almighty. Hereupon he perceives that all is He, and all is by Him, and all is His; that He has laid this self-conceit upon His creatures in order to prove them, and that He in His omnipotence ordains that they shall hold this false belief, because omnipotence is His attribute, so that when they regard His attributes they shall know that He is the Lord. What formerly was hearsay now becomes known to him intuitively as he contemplates the works of God. Then he entirely recognises that he has not the right to say “I” or “mine”. At this stage he beholds his helplessness; desires fall away from him and he becomes free and calm. He wishes that which God wishes: his own wishes are gone, he is emancipated from his wants, and has gained peace and joy in both worlds.....First, action is necessary, then knowledge, in order that thou mayst know that thou knowest naught and art no one. This is not easy to know. It is a thing that cannot be rightly learned by instruction, nor sewn on with needle nor tied on with thread. It is the gift of God..... The heart's vision is what matters, not the tongue's speech”.<sup>42</sup>

The “inward striving” after selflessness is identical with the state which Abu Said calls "want" (*niyaz*). There is no way nearer to God than this. It is described as a living and, luminous fire placed by God in the breasts of His servants in order that their “self” (*nafs*) may be burned; and when it has been burned, the fire of "want" becomes the fire of "longing" (*shawq*) which never dies, neither in this world nor in the next, and is only increased by vision.<sup>43</sup>

However, when seen in conjunction with the rules described under section 4 (Discipline and Systems) it becomes clear that the individual's own efforts are also important. Sheikh's own words are, “The heart's vision is what matters, not the tongue's speech”. This can be reaffirmed from the following *rubayee* where closeness to God (described as ‘Beloved’ in the poem) is described as achievable through love of mankind. An example is quoted of the sun, which provides warmth and light to everyone without any differentiation.

If you are seeking closeness to the Beloved,  
 love everyone.  
 Whether in their presence or absence,  
 see only their good.  
 If you want to be as clear and refreshing as  
 the breath of the morning breeze,  
 like the sun, have nothing but warmth and light  
 for everyone.  
 (English version by Vraje Abramian in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*)

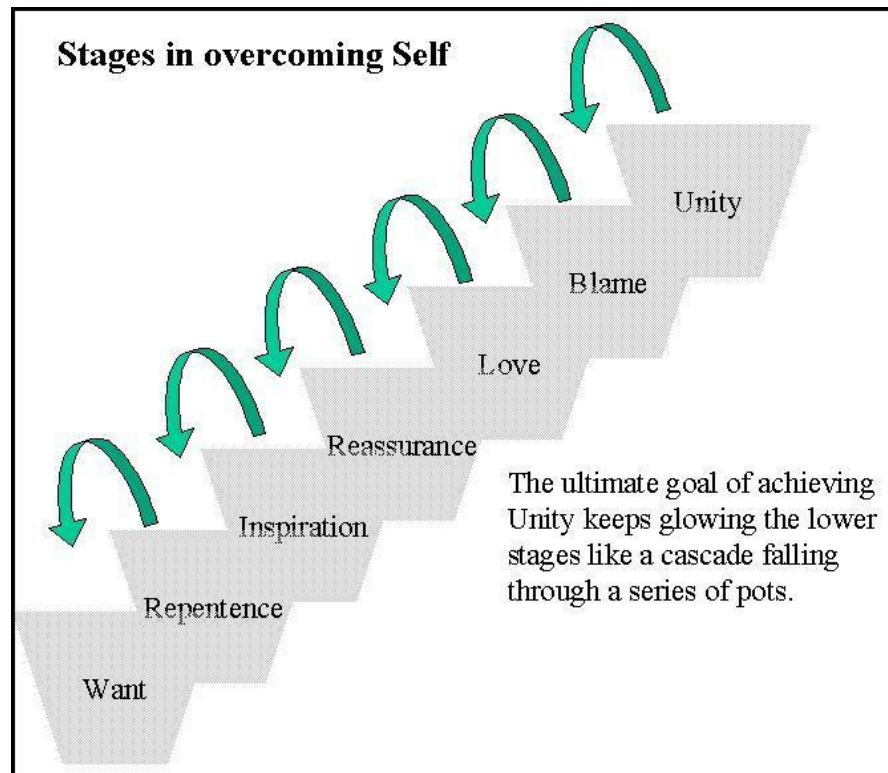
---

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, pp51-52

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, p55

In Sheikh's opinion it is the ultimate spiritual yearning of the soul (*Sirr Allah*) that separates the "living" from merely the "existing". He uses the words *hayy* (being) and *haywan* (animal) to describe this difference. In organizations, it is a motivated work aimed at the organization's larger good which can be referred to as "living" as against just doing one's duty in a perfunctory manner ("existing"). Key to move from the lower stage of perfunctory work to sincere contribution is the ability to mirror one's own aspirations in the organizations overall goal. This requires submerging ones desires into organizational goals. In Sheikh's language it amounts to overcoming the *nafs*. The process of overcoming the *nafs* is described as an evolving, sequential process comprising of seven stages as under.

First stage is that of an "inward striving" to achieve closeness with God. Sheikh Abu Said calls this state 'want' (*niyaz*). Next stage is called repentance (*tawba*) where man begins repenting his earlier actions. The third stage is that of inspiration and self-mortification (*mujahada*) where man continues to strive and, for a while, takes pride looking at his advance or achievement so far. Under this stage man gets inspiration to continue his efforts. The fourth stage of reassurance (*yaqin*) is where man develops certainty about, and trust in, his chosen path and is sure of himself. This is followed by the stage of love (*mohabbat*) where he falls in love with God. Next is the stage of blame (*malamat*) because of the egoism which resurfaced during the previous stage when he thought "I love" and finds no rest until he perceives that it is God who loves him. The seventh, and last is the stage where the gate of unity (*tawhid*) is opened to him.



In organizations this model can be put to use through creating a pull towards ultimate goal (unity). This pull will generate 'want' at the individual level which will trigger the process of moving through the seven stages.

## 9. Conclusion

Organizations are made-up of people. Any organization is actually a group of people working for a common goal. However, each individual does not see this common goal in the same, or similar manner. This creates unalignment resulting into conflicts in organizations thereby affecting productivity adversely. Organizations, being a sum total of people working for it, are as good as its people. If people are not motivated, the organization will not be dynamic. If people are not knowledgeable, organizations will also lack the cutting edge. Human resource development, therefore, has to be in focus if organizations have to develop.

Sheikh Abul Khair's theories and postulates (developed for Sufism) discussed above can be applied in organizations. Most of the theories and postulates aim at individuals. These can be used to ignite an ember in people and then to convert it into a raging fire which can take them to a lifelong course of self development.

This paper is an example of how much has been said by a Sufi poet in such few words. These words which are more than 1000 years old have wisdom which is relevant in today's world. To summarize the work of great Sufi poet Abul Khair one can say,

*“Na wah wah karo, chup raho, zaraa samjho,  
Ke beech lafzon ke, maani bhi maine dale hain”*

Don't applaud, keep quiet, begin introspecting too,  
As, in between the words, I have put meaning too.

Abu Said lived for 1000 months (83 years + 4 months). He died at Mayhana on the 4th of Shabaan, A.H. 440 (12th of January, A.D. 1049), and was buried in the mosque opposite his house. His tomb bore the following lines in Arabic, which he himself had chosen for an epitaph:

I beg, nay, charge thee: Write on my gravestone,  
"This was love's bondsman," that when I am gone,  
Some wretch well versed in passion's ways may sigh  
And give me greeting, as he passes by<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p45