

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

ختم شریف

In honour of the venerable

شیخ نجم الدین الکبریٰ

**Shaykh Najm al-Din Kubra** رَحْمَةُ اللهِ

### INTRODUCTION

Ahmad b. Umar رَحْمَةُ اللهِ known as Shaykh Najm al-Din Kubra رَحْمَةُ اللهِ was born in Khwarazm (Khiva), present-day Uzbekistan in the year 540/1145. He was also known by the titles, 'Abu'l Jannab' and 'Tahmatul-Kubra'. The former he received while in Egypt when he dreamt of Rasul Allah ﷺ. In this dream, he requested a *Kunya* from Rasul Allah ﷺ, who replied, 'I give you the title, 'Abu'l Jannab,' 'the one who avoids the unlawful'. He was given the title, 'Tahmatul-Kubra' [the great affliction] by his peers as he was a fierce debater. After his demise, he became known as 'Wali Tarash' – the manufacturer of Saints. This was due to the overwhelming evidence of the lives of men, whom he had transformed from the ordinary to the **extraordinary**.

Shaykh Najm al-Din Kubra رَحْمَةُ اللهِ was an established scholar and saint and authored many books including works on Qur'anic Exegesis and Sufism. He founded the Kubrawi Sufi order which had a significant influence on many of the later Sufi orders and indeed upon the Mongol Dynasty. His spiritual chain traces back to Rasul Allah ﷺ through the great Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt.

## LIFE

From an early age, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله was a very gifted and able student. He excelled in all of his studies, but his passion inclined him towards the science of Hadith transmission. This passion eventually led him to travel to many countries to learn from the leading scholars of this field. He was not inclined towards the spiritual path, but on one of his travels abroad, namely to Khorasan, Iran, his outlook changed.

In one of his Hadith lessons, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله noticed a peculiar man sitting in the gathering and was immediately drawn to him. He was a *majdhub* Shaykh, Baba Faraj Tabrizi رحمته الله. When the lesson concluded, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله asked his teacher if he could go and visit this saintly man. The teacher duly obliged, and the entire class set off to the residence of the Baba Faraj رحمته الله. When they arrived, the *Khadim* asked, 'What brings all the students here today?' 'We have simply come to pay our respects' they replied. When the *Khadim* went into the private chambers to inform the Shaykh of the guests, he stated, 'if they come empty, then they are most welcome.' Not many of the students understood this statement, but Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله knew that the Shaykh was stating; that one must not come here with his knowledge and arrogance, rather he must empty himself of his knowledge before he can receive any guidance. After a short while, the group were permitted to leave except Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله. Once alone, Baba Faraj رحمته الله gazed at Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله with a powerful glance, and he instantly felt a current through his entire body. After this meeting, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله left his studies and began to pursue the spiritual path.

Baba Faraj رحمته الله encouraged Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله to go and study under the tutelage of Shaykh Ismail Qasiri رحمته الله. He spent time in his company and served him well. However, he had doubts. He thought that Shaykh Ismail رحمته الله was not a learned person, and he was more knowledgeable. Sensing these doubts, Shaykh Ismail رحمته الله then instructed Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله to visit Shaykh 'Ammar Yassar رحمته الله, who lived in Armenia. It was in fact, Shaykh 'Ammar رحمته الله who became the spiritual master of Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله. However, in his early interactions with his master, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله was still having doubts about the knowledge and ability of his master. Again, like Shaykh Ismail رحمته الله, Shaykh 'Ammar رحمته الله also sensed these doubts and instructed Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله to visit his contemporary, Shaykh Ruzbihan Baqli رحمته الله in Egypt.

When Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله arrived at the *Zawiyya* of Shaykh Ruzbihan, he observed the Shaykh performing ablution with a small amount of water. A thought came to his mind that the Shaykh was not learned as he was using little water for his ablution. When the Shaykh concluded his ablution, he turned to Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله and sprinkled some droplets of water on his face. Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله immediately fell unconscious. He relates, 'During

this state of unconsciousness, I observed that I was standing on the Day of Judgement and people were being dragged towards hell-fire. There was a man standing atop the mountain and anyone who claimed to know him were saved from punishment. Then the Angels took hold of me and advanced towards hell-fire. I too claimed to know the person atop the mountain and the Angels took me to this man. The man struck my face and said, "Do not have these thoughts about the Shaykhs again; show your manners!". When Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله regained consciousness, he saw Shaykh Ruzbihan رحمته الله performing his prayers. After prayer, Shaykh Ruzbihan رحمته الله struck Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله on the face and said, 'Do not have these thoughts about the Shaykhs again; show your manners!'

Shaykh Ruzbihan رحمته الله was responsible for nurturing and training Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله on the spiritual path. He became so impressed with Shaykh Najm al-Din's رحمته الله devotion and commitment that he later married his daughter to Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله. The training continued for a while longer until Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله was sent back to his master; Shaykh 'Ammar رحمته الله.

Shaykh 'Ammar رحمته الله then placed Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله in numerous seclusions and spiritual exercises. After this. He was sent back for a final time to Shaykh Ruzbihan رحمته الله until the Shaykh was satisfied that his spiritual training had been completed. When he finally arrived back to Shaykh 'Ammar رحمته الله, he received authorisation (*khirqā*) and was instructed to spread the teachings back in his homeland. Subsequently, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله returned to his homeland with his wife and children and began spreading the spiritual path.

## **SPIRITUAL PATH & TEACHINGS**

Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله wrote many works and treatises on Sufism. Many of his works revolved around 'spiritual wayfaring to God'. In these works, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله gives invaluable advice on how to fulfil our purpose; journeying to reach nearness to God. He states that the first step for any spiritual wayfarer is to observe and adhere to the *Sharia* (Islamic Law). Without this, one cannot progress. He also outlines the Kubrawi Path; stating its benefits and the ability to improve with such ease.

Alongside these works, he also authored 'al-Usul al'Ashara' – ten profound, practical and systematic principles for the spiritual wayfarer to adhere to;

**Principle One: Tawbah (*Repentance*)** – all spiritual stations begin with repentance. One cannot begin the spiritual path without atoning for his/her sins.

Imam al-Junayd رحمته الله was once walking through a forest when suddenly his gaze fell upon a tree and he fell unconscious. When he regained his consciousness, his students inquired as to why this occurred. He replied, 'When I was young, I committed a (*minor*) sin under this tree, and when I saw it, I was reminded of it and I became afraid of Allah's punishment'.

**Principle Two: Zuhd (*Renunciation*)** – Renouncing all greed of the world and its attachments.

A man once came to Rasul Allah ﷺ and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, tell me about a deed which will make Allah and people love me.' Rasul Allah ﷺ said, "Renounce the world and Allah will love you. Renounce what people possess and people will love you."

**Principle Three: Tawakkul (*Reliance upon Allah*)** – To have complete reliance on Allah and Allah alone; having a firm and unshakeable belief that He possesses full power and none can bring harm or benefit without His permission.

A Shaykh once fell into a well. From the opposite side, he saw a snake advancing towards him. At that moment, he focused on his heart to check if his reliance was completely on Allah. He was satisfied with what he saw and the snake didn't harm him.

**Principle Four: Qana'ah (*Contentment*)** with God's decree; whether He has ordained good or bad for you.

A lady once came to Qibla Hadrat Sahib رحمته الله as she had hurt her leg in an accident. She began complaining about her restricted mobility and her pain. In response, Hadrat Sahib recited a Punjabi couplet; 'My Lord is beautiful and everything He does is beautiful. I don't ask for buttered chapattis in case He takes the dry bread away from me'.

**Principle Five: 'Uzla (*Seclusion*)** – Detaching oneself from the people and to spend time alone to correct and rectify ones character. If a person is constantly surrounded with the company of people, he/ she will be unable to identify the faults and flaws of his/her own character.

**Principle Six: Mulazamat al-Dhikr (*Remembrance*)** – To be in a constant state of God's remembrance and not be neglectful for even one moment as this would be considered a wasted opportunity.

**Principle Seven: Tawajjuh Ila Allah (*Focusing on God*)** – To have complete focus on God and not to waver from His remembrance.

The wayfarer must not lose focus despite the calamities, adversities or bliss he/she may experience. Rasul Allah ﷺ would remember and focus on God in every situation and occasion.

Be it during calamity that had befallen the *Ummah* or be it in times of victory for the *Ummah*, God was always at the forefront of his ﷺ mind.

**Principle Eight: Sabr (Patience)** – Exercising patience in all states a person may endure. Indeed, a difficult trait to adopt.

Rasul Allah ﷺ was once passing by a grave when he ﷺ heard the wailing of a woman who had lost her son. Rasul Allah ﷺ told her to remain patient during her loss. Unaware the Prophet ﷺ had just advised her, she called out, 'He is not your son' (meaning only she knew what pain she was experiencing). Whilst Rasul Allah ﷺ continued on his ﷺ way, the companions informed the lady that the advice she just received was from Rasul Allah ﷺ and she was rude in the manner in which she addressed him ﷺ. The woman realised her mistake and went to apologise. Rasul Allah ﷺ said; 'True sabr (patience) is when you're in a time of difficulty'.

**Principle Nine: Muraqabah (Watchfulness)** – Meditation and practice of introspection. In Islam, *Muraqabah* is to empty oneself of thoughts other than God or thoughts that will distract one from marvelling at God's creation.

**Principle Ten: Al-Rida (Satisfaction)** – This is to be completely and utterly satisfied with the Divine outcome.

When Sayyiduna Ibrahim ؑ was thrown into the fire of Nimrod, he was approached by Arch Angel Gabriel, who offered his support. However, Sayyiduna Ibrahim ؑ was completely satisfied with the divine decree and as such, God made the fire cool for him. This type of *Rida* is considered the highest form of faith.

In addition to these principals, Shaykh Najm al-Din ؑ also acutely described four stages the spiritual wayfarer must pass in order to reach God:

- i) **The ego** – If it is not subdued, it will pollute all good acts and will lead to your ruin. This is by far, the largest veil between man and God.
- ii) **Obedience** – God says: 'Those who seek nearness to Me, do not succeed in attaining their goal except in proportion to their fulfilment of all that I have made obligatory upon them. My servant seeks nearness to me by the means of voluntary worship until he attains My love for him'. – One cannot achieve greatness without hard work and effort, namely through supererogatory worship.
- iii) **Good Etiquette** – this is vital in order to earn God's pleasure. However, this is not to be shown exclusively to those on the spiritual path. It is towards all of God's creation.

- iv) **Journey towards the Divine names** - Rasul Allah ﷺ said: 'Adorn yourselves with Allah's characteristics'- This means one should try to adopt the divine attributes by enacting the divine qualities; showing mercy, pardoning those who wrong you and concealing the faults of others to name a few.

### **ADVICE FOR THE SPIRITUAL WAYFARER**

From amongst his great works, Shaykh Najm al-Din ركن الدين also offers clear and comprehensive advice for the wayfarer. These advice are indeed a framework for all on the spiritual path; from the novice to the experienced. The advice are as follows:

**Detachment from the world:** A rich man once invited Sayyiduna Isa عليه السلام to his home. He bemoaned, 'Rabbi, I do all the rites of religion; I pray, I fast and I give charity, but I do not feel close to God.' Sayyiduna Isa عليه السلام replied, 'Leave your wealth and possessions and follow me and you will find God.' The rich man replied, 'I can't do that; I have worked hard for this wealth.' Sayyiduna Isa عليه السلام then explained, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a person with love of the world to enter heaven.'

**Detachment from the people:** this is vital as without this, one is constantly concerned with the thoughts and opinions of the people. The only view and opinion that truly matters is that of Gods.

A Darwish once said to Imam al-Junayd ركن الدين that he stopped praying his regular supererogatory worship because people were watching him. The Imam replied, 'You have forsaken the worship of your Lord for the sake of the people. Where is the logic in that?'

**Protecting the organs:** The wayfarer must protect his eyes from what they see, his ears from what they hear, his tongue from what it speaks, his mind from what it thinks, his limbs from what they do, his heart from what it feels and the stomach from the unlawfulness it receives. If the organs are not protected from corruptness then the wayfarer will be hindered on his progress.

**Complete Master:** The wayfarer must take a wise guide and submit to him wholly.

**Steadfast on prescribed litanies:** The wayfarer must remain diligent and steadfast upon the litanies he is prescribed. Just like the medicine that is prescribed for the sick to become better, likewise the litanies are a remedy for the sick heart.

**Physical fast:** The wayfarer must keep regular fasts to be able to subdue his desires and to progress spiritually.

**State of purity:** The wayfarer must always remain in a state ritual purity. This purity protects you from many unseen dangers.

**Night worship:** The wayfarer must establish the night prayer in an attempt to gain closeness to Allah. This is the hallmark of the pious people.

**Lawful livelihood:** The wayfarer must eat from a livelihood that has been earned through lawful means. Pir Jama'at Ali Shah رحمۃ اللہ علیہ further illustrates, 'Lawful livelihood is to look at what your money is spent on, not necessarily where it is earned'.

Following these advices is incumbent upon anyone who wishes to travel to Allah.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

Before we take a look at the calibre of people Shaykh Najm al-Din's رحمۃ اللہ علیہ produced, it is important to note the importance of transformation.

When we look into early Islam, we observe that many of the companions came from different backgrounds. Many of them had severe spiritual ailments such as barbaric thoughts and practices for example burying new-born girls alive. Others had noble and outstanding features but were misaligned. Then came Rasul Allah ﷺ and his ﷺ mere companionship transformed these people into the greatest human beings to ever grace the earth, after the Prophets (as). Such was the impact of Rasul Allah ﷺ.

Likewise, those who are spiritual inheritors of Rasul Allah ﷺ have also been given the ability to perform alchemy; taking the raw elements of man and turning them into gold (saints). But true transformation can only take place in another being if the one who is conducting it has been transformed himself. No doubt, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمۃ اللہ علیہ was transformed by the likes of Baba Faraj رحمۃ اللہ علیہ, Shaykh Isma'il Qasiri رحمۃ اللہ علیہ, Shaykh Ruzbihan رحمۃ اللہ علیہ and ultimately his master, Shaykh 'Ammar Yassar رحمۃ اللہ علیہ. The time he spent in their company is like the moulding of iron in the furnace. He was truly transformed into a an extra-ordinary being by virtue of his effort and sacrifice.

Reflecting upon this, we will come to realise the countless number of people we have tried to influence or assist in our lives but to no avail. The reason is simple; transformation must first begin within, only then can it impact others. Advice or counsel that hasn't been upheld by the speaker will not impact the heart of the listener. Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمۃ اللہ علیہ however, not only had the ability to transform through his words, but because he was a complete master, even his glance was able to impact those it fell upon.

## DEPUTIES

One of the titles bestowed upon Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله was 'Wali Tarash' – 'The manufacturer of Saints'. If we analyse his later life, it is clearly evident that he transformed the lives of many of the people whom came in contact with him. Many of his students and followers became great saints in their own right due to his nurture. We shall examine a few to gain an understanding of how much of a profound impact he had on them.

**Shaykh Majd al-Din Baghdadi** رحمته الله came as a young man to seek guidance from Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله and eventually became one of his favourite disciples. He was a slim and handsome man and had a delicate temperament. He later became the master of the renowned Persian poet and saint, Shaykh Farid al-Din Attar رحمته الله.

Shaykh Majd al-Din رحمته الله was sent by Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله to guide the King of his area. He would regularly advise the King on different matters. On one occasion however, in a state of spiritual intoxication, he exclaimed, 'I am an egg of a duck, and I sat under the hen until I was nurtured. Because I am a duck, I go into the water but the hen still stands watchfully'. – What he was alluding to, was the relationship between himself and his Master; Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله.

Though not present, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله became aware of this utterance, and said, 'This fool will drown in water'. Shaykh Majd al-Din رحمته الله soon realised the mistake he made and attempted to seek forgiveness through the intercession of his contemporary, When the mood was right, Shaykh Sa'd al-Din رحمته الله requested Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله to pardon him. Shaykh Majd al-Din رحمته الله quickly fell in the feet of Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله and begged for forgiveness. Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله stated, 'Your *Iman* is safe, but your head is gone. What has been said cannot be undone.'

It later transpired that rumours were spread about the mother of the king that she had secretly married Shaykh Majd al-Din رحمته الله. In his rage of anger, the king ordered for Shaykh Majd al-Din رحمته الله to be taken to the sea and drowned. Soon after, the king realised the rumours were false and felt remorse for his unruly actions. As a recourse for his actions, he came to Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله and presented a sword and a tray of gold. He requested that his life should be taken or that blood money was given to the poor in exchange for Shaykh Majd al-Din's رحمته الله murder. Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله answered, 'For his one head, thousands of heads will be taken; your head and mine is not enough. This cannot be reversed.'

These words came true when soon after this incident, the area was attacked by the Mongols and subsequently, the entire population was massacred save those who fled. Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله was also a casualty in this battle whilst trying to defend the Muslims.



Throughout his life, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله scouted for clean and sincere hearts and gave them the necessary spiritual training and or divine glance to create Men of God. In one such incident, a trader once visited the *zawiya* of Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله whilst on his travels. Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله gave him a powerful stare (*tawajjuh*) and the man was instantly transformed into a *Wali* (saint). The man was then instructed to return to his people and call them towards Allah.

**Shaykh Sayf al-Din رحمته الله** was a scholar and preacher but was initially against the Sufi thought. In his view, the Sufis were lazy people and did not contribute to society. One day Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله came to his mosque and listened to his sermon. As he was about to leave, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله glanced towards Shaykh Sayf al-Din رحمته الله.

As Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله was putting his sandals on, he remarked, 'Where is our Sufi?' Unsure what the Shaykh meant, the followers just looked around with confusion. Shaykh Sayf al-Din رحمته الله then came running and fell at the feet of Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله and asked to be initiated into the spiritual path. Thereafter, he undertook spiritual training under the supervision of his new-found master.

It was indeed Shaykh Sayf al-Din رحمته الله who was responsible for converting a great faction of the Mongol dynasty. After the atrocities that Hulagu Khan committed by mass murdering the Muslims, it was the follower of Shaykh Sayf al-Din رحمته الله, Berke Khan who avenged the Muslims by defeating Hulagu. The impact of Shaykh Sayf al-Din رحمته الله left a great imprint on those Mongols who accepted Islam.

### **THE BLESSED END**

During the end of his life, Shaykh spent much of time in his *zawiya*. By now, he had many followers spread all over the lands. During this time, the Mongols were spreading like a disease and destroying everything in their path. Realising the imminent danger, Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله instructed many of his followers to flee the area. However, despite the many requests of the followers for the Shaykh to migrate with them, he refused. He stated, 'I do not have permission to leave. Allah's Will is in motion and no one can avert the inevitable'. Thus, he remained behind with a handful of people. When the Mongols approached, he instructed his remaining followers to dress as warriors and they collectively fought the Mongols on the front line. It was during this, that an arrow struck the chest of Shaykh Najm al-Din رحمته الله causing his martyrdom. He passed away in the year 618/1221.

## LEGACY

Shaykh Najm al-Din's ﷺ followers and path spread across the entire globe; places such as Iraq, Iran, Uzbekistan, China, Malaysia etc. Many of the prominent and well-known Shuyukh have benefited directly from Shaykh Najm al-Din ﷺ or indirectly through his teachings and path. Present-day Kashmir also benefited from the Kubrawi Path through its proponent, Amir-e Kabir, Sayyid Ali Hamdani ﷺ. Even Mevlana Jalal al-Din's ﷺ path is linked to the Kubrawiyya through his father who was a follower of Shaykh Najm al-Din ﷺ.

Shaykh Najm al-Din ﷺ path and teachings still have a lasting impact on today's Sufi orders. We simply need to read and understand his works, and we can be certain to achieve enlightenment or at least, betterment.

We pray that we too can truly benefit from this wondrous personality by transforming our lives for the better through his works and teachings.

*Al- Faitha*

### **The Kubrawi Spiritual Order – *al-Shajrah al-Sharifah al-Kubrawiyya***

- ❖ Sayyiduna Rasul Allah صلى الله عليه و سلم
- ❖ Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib كرم الله وجهه
- ❖ Imam al-Husayn عليه السلام
- ❖ Imam Zayn al-'Abideen عليه السلام
- ❖ Imam Muhammad al-Baqir عليه السلام
- ❖ Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq عليه السلام
- ❖ Imam Musa al-Kadhim عليه السلام
- ❖ Imam Ali al-Rida عليه السلام
- ❖ Shaykh Ma'ruf al-Karkhi رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Sirri al-Saqati رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Junayd al-Baghdadi رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Abu 'Ali Ruzbari رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Abu 'Ali Katib رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Abu Uthman al-Maghribi رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Abu'l Qasim Ghurkani رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Abu Bakr Nasajj رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Ahmad al-Ghazali رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Abu Najib Suharwardi رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh 'Ammar Yasar رضى الله عنه
- ❖ Shaykh Ahmad b 'Umar [Najm al-Din al-Kubra] رضى الله عنه