

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# Khatam Sharif

IN HONOUR OF THE VENERABLE

Shaykh Shukri al-Ruhafi رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ

KH-DA-MA

خ - د - م

VERB

*Noun:* the action of helping or doing work for someone:

“A selfless act rendered without pursuit of reward”

*synonyms:* act of assistance · good turn · compassion · kindness ·

*Active participant:* Khadim (the doer of service)

## Introduction

There was a once a lady who had the prestigious honour to work for the Royal Family. Her duty was to wash and iron the clothes of the princess. The princess' clothes were made of very expensive and delicate materials and utmost care was taken when dealing with them. It just so happened, that one day, this lady's son had seen one of the princess' dresses and became overawed by its rarity. He enquired “Mother, to whom does this belong to?”

“My son, I have kept this secret hidden from you as I fear it becoming open. Today I will disclose this to you but you must promise not to reveal this to anyone. I work for the Royal Family, and I have been assigned with the duty of looking after the princess' clothes” replied the mother.

Upon hearing this, the son became keen to participate in this service to the Royal Family and so pleaded with his mother if she would allow him to iron the princess' clothes. At first, the mother was hesitant, but due to his persistence she allowed her son to iron and fold the clothes with her guidance.

When the clothes were returned to the princess, she began to notice a difference in the ironing and folding of her clothes. She summoned the lady and informed her "You have been in our service for many years, and I have become more impressed with you. The clothes you had returned were immaculately ironed and were folded impeccably. Continue to keep such high standards".

The lady returned home in relief and subsequently she continued to allow her son to iron and fold the clothes of the princess. The son now began to fall in love with the intricacies and beauty of the princess' dresses and desired to see her. However, his mother refused as she felt this could endanger their lives.

It just so transpired that the son became fatally ill and passed away. Soon after, the mother resumed the duty of ironing the princess' clothes. Again, the princess noticed a difference in the standard of ironing and folding and again summoned the lady. This time however, she was less than impressed and enquired as to why the sudden difference in the ironing and folding. The lady refused to be honest with her but the princess persisted and finally she had to tell the truth. She told the princess of the whole ordeal and also informed her that her son had sadly passed away. Upon hearing this, the princess fell in love with the boy's sincerity and devotion in this simple act of his.

The Sufi masters use this story to illustrate that human beings are like this young man, who is unable to see the object of his desires; God. However, through servitude, mankind can come to know of God, through serving His creation.

## **Service**

From the dustbin man to the lady in the job centre filling in your forms, every human being, and in fact every living organism, is participating in some form of service.

Some may be skilled more than others but everyone at the foundational level is doing service. If you're not, then you're considered *out of service*.

The concept of service has been propagated and encouraged in every faith and in all walks of life. Even those who choose not to believe in a God, still believe in benefitting others. If we were to observe the corporate world, we will notice that companies spend billions of pounds a year to train their employees on how to provide the *right* service. They promote the notion that one satisfied customer can bring in more potential customers. However, this example is the service of dunya. Whether it is the sales rep on the phone giving a discount to a loyal customer or an old lady setting up a monthly direct debit with Oxfam, this is all the service of dunya.

As Muslims we believe in a Lord that has created us for a purpose. As in the Holy Qur'an, Allah Almighty says:

“Those who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], **“Our Lord, You did not create this *aimlessly*; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire.”** – (3:191)

It is therefore our belief that God has ordained for all things a purpose. Some of which He has made manifest to us and others which He has hidden from us. However, Allah made explicitly known the purpose of Man and Jinn alike in the Holy Qur'an;

**“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”** – (51:56)

The term worship is very encompassing and there are many different forms of it. One of the many forms of worship, that we often do not appreciate to the extent that we should, is being in servitude to Allah's creation. Despite the worldly rank one may hold, all human beings are servants of God and His creation.

Some charge for their service and others go unpaid. Amongst those who do not take payment are the mothers. It was commonly known that Mawlana Shaykh Nazim

ﷺ would state; “If I was the ruler or president of my time, I would pay the women double the wage of the man [due to their work in the household]”.

It is this selfless service that the mothers do on an unceasing basis that goes unnoticed. Yet they continue to work tirelessly to feed, clothe and provide for their families without any desire for reward. The mother is therefore considered the primary and foremost *service station* and it is firstly from your mother that you learn how to serve.

We have now established that there are two types of service: i) One for some worldly gain or ii) Service done for the pleasure of Allah. Any type of service that one does can be fit in to the two above mentioned categories. Even that which is a chore or task. As an example, if one earns a livelihood by halal means and does so with the intention of seeking Allah’s pleasure, this can be considered service and will be rewarded accordingly.

## **Servant Makers**

*Service done without the pursuit of reward can win the hearts of men.*

If a child does *service* to his parents then they will bless and pray for him. If a student does something for the teacher, or if a disciple does something for his master then they will also bless him likewise.

When we show signs of potentiality and sincerity, then Allah sends us guides and teachers. Their task is to transform us from weak servants to strong servants. It is through bettering ourselves and from following the guidance of our teachers, that Allah bestows more opportunities upon us to serve His creation.

But why is serving God’s creation so important? The great poet of Pakistan, Allama Iqbal explains, ‘There are many people that want to be servants of God, but I am looking for the servants of God to serve them.’ This is fundamentally how you reach God, by serving His creation.

Like all else in our deen, this concept starts with RasulAllah ﷺ. To serve the needy and downtrodden is indeed a prophetic quality. Our beloved Prophet ﷺ taught us to

be considerate and gentle with all creatures. His ﷺ concern was to serve humanity and it would sadden him if anyone was in distress, even if it was an animal. The Prophet ﷺ once entered the garden of a man from the Ansar, and upon seeing him, a camel froze and its eyes watered. He ﷺ came to it and rubbed its ears until it calmed down. He ﷺ inquired about the owner and warned him to fear Allah for the camel had complained to him that he starves it and tires it by overworking it and using it beyond its capacity. There are numerous examples of the Prophet's ﷺ love, care and affection for God's creatures. Even in his home, he ﷺ was known to do the household chores, like milking the goats, sewing his own clothes and kneading the flour. He never saw any activity as derogatory or beneath him. As he ﷺ taught the ummah that any action done with good intention, becomes *service*.

Through the blessed example of RasulAllah ﷺ, his beloved companions also learnt to perform sincere acts of service through emulating him ﷺ. And when the Prophet ﷺ would see this development in his companions, he would entrust them with different responsibilities.

For example Sayyiduna Bilal رضي الله عنه was given the duties of giving the call to prayer, collecting donations from the people for special occasions and was given special permission to enter the household of RasulAllah ﷺ without prior announcement, as he was considered a trustworthy and noble person. However not all companions were given this exclusive right. Each was given according to their capacity and ability.

We should now be aware that service is a large part of spirituality. A student serves a master and once his service has been accepted, he himself becomes a master. Traditionally, a teacher would have students who would serve him, not because they were made slaves for him, rather their love and admiration for him urged them to please the heart of their teacher by performing service to him or his family.

It is well documented that the great Imam, Abu Hanifa رضي الله عنه would visit his teacher's house on a daily basis and ask his family if there were any errands he could do for them. He understood that his teacher, Shaykh Hamaad رضي الله عنه was busy teaching the

deen and he did not have the time to do the household chores; therefore he took it upon himself to carry these tasks out. This of course meant that his teacher, need not to concern himself about these trivial matters and he could focus on teaching people the religion. It is through the teachings and guidance of the master, that sincere students realise that service is all action. They do not wait and over analyse any situation, rather they hear a command and they immediately try to execute. And when a master sees a pupil making an effort, he will choose him to be part of those who are able to provide the greater service.

### **Ahl al Khidma**

The khudama (helpers) are those elite groups of people who are performing service day and night. They place the needs of others before their own. From these are those who reach sainthood, like the Patron of the Poor, Khwaja Gharib Nawaz رحمۃ اللہ علیہ. It is related about him that he would carry a stove on head so he could provide warm milk for his Shaykh to break his fast with while on his travels. He was so discreet about it, that his Shaykh never noticed this act of his. Until one day, when Khwaja Gharib Nawaz was making wudu, his Shaykh noticed that his hair was wearing out despite his young age. After making enquiries, the Shaykh had come to realise what Gharib Nawaz had been doing. His dedication was such, that he did not take notice of his own appearance. It is through this sincere service that Khwaja Gharib Nawaz رحمۃ اللہ علیہ later became one of the most renowned Shaykhs of India.

Shaykh Sa'di رحمۃ اللہ علیہ, the 14th century Persian Mystic buried in Shiraz, brilliantly explains, 'The spiritual path of Sufism, is not having a prayer mat, a rosary or a nice cloak; this does not make you a Sufi. What makes you a Sufi, is service to the people.'

Once an individual has been through the necessary training with his master, he will achieve true servanthood. As he increases in his service, he will advance through the spiritual stages, to reach nearness to God. This nearness will enable the khadim to taste the benefits of servitude. Following this, God will then bestow abundant opportunities upon him to provide service His creation. But what does all this require?

First and foremost, the khadim must always understand that opportunities to serve are divine favours from God. He must ensure that he is present in every action and avoid any feelings of pride. He must understand that the service he provides here is the rent for his room in Paradise. When **sincerity** is concurrent with every action of his, then the khadim will dismiss the search for any reward.

Secondly, the khadim must be consistent in every action of service. He cannot 'choose' to do service when it suits him. Rather, he is constantly on the lookout for those in need of help and service. **Steadfastness** is closely tied to sincerity as without it you cannot be consistent in any of your actions.

Moreover, the khadim must look through the lens of mercy when dealing with the people. He must be **compassionate** in his approach or else he will risk being harsh or abrupt with those in delicate situations.

The khadim must also possess a **skill** or talent. The more skills or talents that one acquires, the more he can be of benefit to another. For instance, if a person possesses some form of mechanical skills then he can be of use to a person whose car has broken down. In contrast, if a person is approached for help and he is not able to offer anything, then this can be embarrassing for both parties.

Another key component to true service is to do every act with **love**. Without this, the khadim may treat it as a chore or menial task. It is only through love, that he will place the other's needs before his own. This love will make it impossible for him to tire from doing service. He will receive divine energies that will enable him to endure great difficulties; as is illustrated in the following narrative.

While his Shaykh was touring the neighbouring lands, Mira Bhikh رضي الله عنه took it upon himself to provide food and support for his Shaykh's family. He would tend to his Shaykh's needs during the day and then in the evening, he would travel a great distance back to his Shaykh's home to provide food for the Shaykh's family.

In addition to the above, the khadim must constantly remain in a state of **awareness** as this will enable him to see the opportunities and times that require service. If he fails to do so, then the opportunity to serve will pass him by and he may later rue his complacency.

The seventh key element to true service is the one which is done **selflessly** and is not forced upon. When a person carries out service that is solely for Allah's sake, then this is deemed selfless. This is essential for your acts to be accepted in the eyes of God. To illustrate this point, there is a narration about the Sultan, Shah Ismail from Tashkent. He would come out of his palace during the extreme winter and would listen to the plight and requests of the people. His courtiers would advise him to this work during the summer, so he would not need to stand in such harsh weather. However, he would refuse and state, "this is the most crucial time of the year. This is when people are facing the most hardships and this is when they need me the most". And so he would stand all day and fulfil the requests and needs of the people. Upon finishing this, he would pray 2 cycles of prayer of thankfulness and reflect before God. He would state, "O Allah, you made this day so blessed for me. You gave me the opportunity to serve your people, and for this I am eternally grateful".

Above all, the key to performing sincere service is that the khadim must always remain **humble**. Without this, his ego will prevent him from aiding or assisting anyone. The true servant will not see any service as demeaning or belittling, rather he will see this as an unmissable opportunity from God.

## **The Blessed Life**

All of the aforementioned qualities were embodied in one individual who lived in our time; Shaykh Shukri al-Luhafi رحمته الله.

### **Lineage**

Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله was born in Damascus in 1920. His full name is Shaykh Shukri ibn Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Ahmad al-Luhafi al-Hanafi. His father would perform one of the simplest and humbling types of service a person can do; be a shoemaker. He was a very kind and tolerant man and also a very generous person. His blessed mother originated from Algeria and was also a very pious lady.

As a young boy Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله went to school and at the age of nine, he had started memorising the Holy *Qur'an*. In this way, as is traditional, he was learning the



knowledge of *dunya* for the here and now and also the knowledge of the *deen* for the *akhirah*.

### **Education and teaching**

After completing his junior studies in 1944 he continued his Islamic studies at the Faculty of Sharia in the Damascus University established by Shaykh Taj al-Din al-Hassani رحمته الله, who was the son of the great Shaykh Badr al-Hassani رحمته الله, one of the most renowned scholars of Hadith in *Sham Sharif*.

It is said Shaykh Badr al-Hassani رحمته الله was of such calibre that he would often be sat conversing with someone in his room. When the people would go into the room, there would be no one there. They would ask the Shaykh, “Who were you speaking to?” and he would reply “RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم came to see me. They were enquiring about my coming dars for today”.

Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله taught in various schools in Aleppo, Dara and Damascus and later became a principle in the Ashrafiyya School in Damascus. His life was spent in the service of education.

However, despite working as a teacher he was continually educating and bettering himself. He learnt other languages like French and Persian so well that he was competent enough to teach them.

He also learned one of the noblest arts in Islam which is that of calligraphy. This skill is so revered that Sayyiduna Ali رضي الله عنه once said, ‘if you learn calligraphy, you will never starve.’

Later Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله was married to a noble lady from the family of RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم, from the lineage of Sayyiduna Imam Hassan رضي الله عنه □ They were blessed with four children.

The Holy Qur’an can be recited in ten different ways or Qir’ats. Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله learnt all ten different ways. Each one is a precise knowledge and a science in itself. Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله was able to take this knowledge from Shaykh Yusuf Abu

Dayl رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ and received the ijaza from Shaykh Abu al-Hasan al-Kurdi رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ . So despite being a husband and later a father and teacher, he was still benefitting from the people of knowledge around him.

### **Spiritual connection**

Shaykh Shukri's رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ spiritual connection was that he was a *Shadhili* and his Shaykh was Shaykh Abdur Rahman Shaghuri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ who passed away in 2006.

Shaykh Shaghuri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ was linked to a great Shadhili bazurg called Shaykh Ahmad Bin Mustafa from Algeria. Shaykh Ahmad رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ would come to Damascus on his way to Hajj. He had many followers in Damascus and one of his followers was Shaykh Ali al-Hashimi رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ who was authorised by him as his deputy. Shaykh al-Hashimi رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ then had students, one of which is Shaykh Abdur Rahman Shaghuri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ who then had his own *Khalifas*.

However Shaykh Shukri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ also had direct *bay'a* with Shaykh Mohammed al-Hashimi رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ who passed away in 1961. Shaykh al-Hashimi رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ was a very prominent wali in Damascus and many people benefited from him. The people who had met and seen the Shaykh al-Hashimi رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ would mention that Shaykh Shukri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ reminded them of his Shaykh in his mannerism and characteristics. For example just like his Shaykh, Shaykh Shukri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ would go to the *bazaar* outside the mosque and pick up any food which people had thrown away, like bread, fruit etc. His Shaykh was also renowned for arranging the shoes of people in the mosque which was another service which Shaykh Shukri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ emulated from his master and practised.

However, Shaykh Shukri's رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ greatest service was to be seen serving water to the people who attended the Shadhili Hadra gathering in the mosque. This has been his duty since the time of Shaykh Shaghuri رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ in the 60s till this day. So even when he was over 90 years he would still do this duty.

## Characteristics

Physically Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله was very small and he would constantly look down in humility. He did this all his life and as a result of this his neck bone became crooked in that position. People would say that he reminded them of the Companions of the Prophet صلوات الله وسلامه عليه as he seemed like he was from another age. He had no interest in wealth or position. The people that saw him regularly never saw him wearing anything apart from the same 2-3 different types of clothing. His focus was just Allah and he spent all his energies in service of Allah's creation. Whether they were students, or if they were the general public that had just come to the mosque; in any gathering he was constantly active in serving them.

Many people have spent time with him, one of whom has said about Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله "He is very poor yet so content with his life. Due to his age he had difficulties trying to stand up or even walk but for us he went all the way to the shops to buy us food."

## Conclusion

As we have seen, Khidmat is not just mere service. As exemplified by the life of Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله. Despite being an expert in calligraphy, in Persian and French languages, the ten different *Qur'an* recitations, poetry, jurisprudence and a Sufi Master, he opted to choose the path of service. He was offered high spiritual ranks and the chance to leave the service and to move on to a place where he would be the one served as a Master like those before him. Yet, he refused it all, so he could remain a Khadim. Because he truly understood that, to be a khadim is the greatest honour for any human being.

In amidst of an age, where we desire to be of those who are being served, we witnessed an individual who in his advanced age would serve water to those who attended his mosque. And it was known to those who *knew*, that this individual was not only an Abdaal, nay he was the leader of them.

To truly understand the repute that Shaykh Shukri رحمته الله had towards service, we need to understand the following account.

As a young man, the disciple of Qibla Alam, Baba Faqir Muhammad ﷺ was involved in an accident, and he broke his leg. He was brought to Mirpur hospital where he was treated. It was here that he came to know of Qibla Alam ﷺ. Once he had met Qibla Alam ﷺ he decided to dedicate rest of his life to their service. Even after his Shaykh had passed away and he still stayed in the service of Qibla Alam's family.

Hadrat Sahib ﷺ gave an account of how this loyal and true servant passed away.

They would state, "I visited him in his last moments and I asked him, "You have served your Shaykh and his family all your life. What have you gained from all your service?"

Baba Faqir Muhammad ﷺ replied, "I do not regret anything in my life, for indeed my Shaykh is standing in front of me and is welcoming me into the next life, therefore I am content". Soon after saying this, Hadrat Sahib ﷺ stated that he passed away with a smile on his face.

*'A life worth living and a life worth dying for, is the life of a true servant'.*

**Al-Fatiha.**