Sufi Principles of Meditation

Lecture 12: Retreat and Seclusion

“Sufism is sitting for a few moments without cares and worries with God.” —Junayd
Retreat and Seclusion

*Khalwah*, retreat, belongs to the purified, while *uzlah*, withdrawal from the world, marks the people of union. The seeker needs to withdraw from his own kind in the beginning stages. Then, in the last stages, he needs to retreat in order to confirm himself in intimacy with God.

–Al-Qushayri,

*Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism*
If the servant chooses to withdraw, his intention must be to separate himself from people so that they will be safe from his evil—he must not be looking to protect himself from their evil. For the first of these attitudes come from thinking little of one’s own ego, while the second comes from making oneself out to be better than other people. A person who thinks little of himself is humble, while a person who sees himself as better than anybody else is arrogant.

—Al-Qushayri, *Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism*
One of the rules of withdrawal is that whoever goes into seclusion must acquire the knowledge that makes his commitment to unity (tawhid) firm, so that satan cannot seduce him through the imagination. Then he should acquire enough knowledge of the divine law that he is able to fulfill his religious duties so that his undertaking maybe built on definite and sure foundations.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Practical Foundations

Divine Law (*shari‘a*): ethical conduct
Silence (*ṣamt*): equanimity
Insight (*firasah*): clear perception
Unity (*tawhid*): witnessing the Truth
Withdrawing from the world does not mean going away from inhabited places. The essence of seclusion is to isolate blameworthy traits in order to substitute the divine names for them. Thus it was asked, “Who is the gnostic (arif)?” and they replied, “A creature distinguished,” that is, someone who appears to be together with people, but is inwardly separated from them.

—Al-Qushayri, Al-Risalah: Principles of Sufism
Inner Seclusion and Intimacy with God

It is related that [Al-Qarani] said, “Safety lies in solitude,” because the heart of the solitary is free from thought of “other,” and in no circumstances does he hope for anything from mankind. Let none imagine, however, that solitude (wahdat) merely consists in living alone. So long as the Devil associates with a man’s heart, and sensual passion holds sway in his breast, and any thought of this world or the next occurs to him in such a way as to make him conscious of mankind, he is not truly in solitude; since it is all one whether he takes pleasure in the thing itself or in the thought of it. Accordingly, the true solitary is not disturbed by society, but he who is preoccupied seeks in vain to acquire freedom from thought by secluding himself. In order to be cut off from mankind one must become intimate with God, and those who have become intimate with God are not hurt by intercourse with mankind.

—Al-Hujwiri, Revelation of the Mystery
Seclusion leads to silence for man, since one who withdraws from human company has no-one to talk to, and that naturally leads to silence of the tongue. There are two kinds of seclusion: firstly, the seclusion of the aspirants (murīdūn), which consists of not associating physically with others; and secondly, the seclusion of the verifiers (muhaqqiqūn), which consists of having no contact with created things in one’s heart: their hearts have no room for anything other than the knowledge of God, exalted is He, which is the witness of the Truth in the heart that results from contemplation (mushāhada).

–Ibn ‘Arabi,

*The Adornment of the Spiritually Transformed*
Three Motives for Seclusion

The people of seclusion have three motives: (1) the fear of the evil of other people affecting oneself; (2) the fear of one’s own evil affecting others—this is a higher perception than the first, as in the first case one thinks badly of others, while in the second one thinks badly of oneself, and thinking badly of oneself is better since you are more knowledgeable of yourself; (3) the preference for the company of the Master from the Sublime Assembly—the most elevated of men is one who parts from himself out of preference for the company of his Lord. One who prefers seclusion to the company of others prefers his Lord to that which is other than Him. And no-one can know what gifts and mysteries God showers upon the one who prefers his Lord. Seclusion never happens in the heart unless the heart feels an estrangement from that which one is separating from, and an intimacy with the One with whom one is secluding oneself, which is what drives one into seclusion.

—Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Adornment of the Spiritually Transformed*
Seclusion has no need of the extra condition of silence, as silence is necessarily included within it, insofar as it is silence of the tongue. As for silence of the heart, seclusion does not necessarily lead to it, since one could converse with oneself about other than God and with other than God, exalted is He. This is why we have considered silence to be one of the pillars (arkān) on the Way in its own right. –Ibn ‘Arabi, The Adornment of the Spiritually Transformed
Solitude and the Psychological Song

It is indispensable to observe oneself when alone in the same manner as when associated with people. Very different “I’s,” very different thoughts, negative emotions, etc., present themselves when one is alone. One is not always in good company when alone. It is just normal, very natural to be very badly accompanied when in complete solitude. The most negative and dangerous “I’s” present themselves when one is alone.

If we want to transform ourselves radically, we need to sacrifice our own sufferings.

Often we express our sufferings in articulated or inarticulated songs.

–Samael Aun Weor, Treatise of Revolutionary Psychology
The Witnessing of Unity

One who makes seclusion their practice grasps the mystery of the Divine Unity (wahdāniyya). In terms of knowledges and mysteries, this brings to him the secrets of the Uniqueness (ahadiyya) insofar as it is a quality. The true spiritual state of seclusion, whether it be that of the seeker or the verifier, is to be transcendent of all attributes. The highest state of seclusion is retreat (khalwa), for it is a seclusion within seclusion, and its fruit is stronger than that of ordinary seclusion. One who makes seclusion his practice must have certainty regarding God, exalted is He, until he has no thought that will distract him and take him beyond the confines of his seclusion. If he lacks certainty, then let him prepare himself to be strong enough for seclusion, in order that his certainty may be strengthened by what is revealed to him in his seclusion. There is no other way. This is one of the firm preconditions governing seclusion. Seclusion bequeaths knowledge of this world (dunyā)

—Ibn ‘Arabi, The Adornment of the Spiritually Transformed
Retreat Schedule

Morning
• 5:00 - 7:00 a.m. Meditation / Pranayama
• 7:00 - 8:00 a.m. Runes / Seven Vowels
• 8:00 - 9:00 a.m. Breakfast
• 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. Meditation

Noon
• 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Sacred Rites for Rejuvenation
• 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch
• 1:00 - 3:00 p.m. Free Time
• 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. Lecture / Scripture Study

Evening
• 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. Dinner
• 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Meditation
• 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. Dream Yoga / Jinn Exercises