



Rabita: the Spiritual Nexus

The expression “*Rabita*”, “the link” is of Koranic origin. Sufi masters have developed its practice in the Sufi way for a long time but the Naqshbandi masters in particular have instituted it as a regular and fundamental practice. **These are 4 different ways of relating (*rabita*), either through consciousness in practice *rabitat-a-t-l- mawt*, meditation on the tomb, or *rabitat as-sheikh*, visualization of the Sheikh heart to heart. After these two are added *rabitat-a-t-r Rassûl* then *rabitat al fath*.**

The Quranic verse says : « *ya ayyuha l- ladhîna âmanû sbirû wa sabirû wa rabitû wa taqû l- llah la'allakum tuflihûn* » « O! You who believe! Be patient ! Encourage yourself to be patient ! (*rabbitu*) connect with each other (to be stronger)! Maybe you will be blissful! » Coran III, 200.

This *ayat* (verse) can be compared to this one which develops its meaning : « *Ya ayyuha l – ladhîna amanû t-taqû l- llah wa kûnû ma'a sâddiqîn* » Coran 9 -119). « O you who believe fear God and be with the sincere ». It is clearly a question here of achieving companionship with sincere people, the *'ibad ar Rahman* (The servants of the All-Merciful) who inspire peace of which the Sheikh is the eminent representative.

The hadith reinforces the Koranic data as it should also be said : « *khayrukum al ladhîna idharu'u dhukira llahu la ru'yatihim* » : « The best of you are those who cannot be looked at without at the same time remembering God ». Hence a foundation both in the Koran as well as in the hadiths for this practice of *Rabita* that we are going to explain.

But let us note again this famous hadith where the Prophet said : « All the divine light that God sent down into my heart, I transmitted it into the heart of Abu Bakr ». It is interesting to remember that this initiatory transmission for Abu Bakr took place at a particularly privileged moment while he was in the cave (that of the spider of which the Koran speaks) alone with the Prophet (on him the unifying and pacifying graces), this gives a subtle hint as to the excellence of this practice and transmission in the *khalwa*.



The attachment of the heart of the disciple to the heart of his Sheikh is obviously the great key to all other forms of *rabita*.

One of the masters of our elevated naqshbandi way, the magnificent khwaja Azizan Ali Ramitani often reminded that God always looks at the heart of his beloved (the *awliya*) and therefore if a disciple manages to enter the heart of his sheikh God will also look at him... What a beautiful secret of love !

The disciple is in fact like the child who asks for milk from his mother; his request produces milk in the mother. In the same way, the disciple who calls upon the heart of his Sheikh by his concentration will receive from the latter his *tawajjuh*: the orientation of his *himma* (his effluence of sainthood) towards him.

In this practice "creative imagination" is allowed, *khayyal* which has its traditional basis in the hadith on *al ihsân* : « *an ta'budu l-llah ka annaka tarah* », « Worship God as if you could see Him ».

The "as if" here implies the use of the imagination in the practice of worship. But it is obvious that one cannot imagine the "formless" and that on the other hand it is possible to imagine "the one who makes us remember God" according to the previous hadith.

According to Sheikh muhhyi-d-dîn Ibn arabi, imagination is more powerful than reason because it is the luminous nature of the soul and its receptive nature can make it (if it is well used) the receptacle of theophanies.

Let us now see the different stages of the practice of *rabita*.

***Tafakkûr- al-mawt* : meditation on death**

It is recommended, especially since it is a sunna and a prophetic advice, to meditate on death. This can be done every day for a short time, around five minutes or shorter. It is customary to do this before *fajr* because the prayer is a symbol of resurrection after death. Nevertheless, this practice is not necessarily only there, as it can be done just before the practice of *rabitat as-sheikh* and in any case before the *dhikr* (which is really very beneficial). The purpose of this practice is to make one aware of the evanescence of things and the fact that death can put an end to what we are building at any moment. The aspirant makes his ablutions, sits in the *Qibla* (Southeast) or lies down on his right side looking at the qibla and imagines that he is dead and his relatives wash him and put him in a shroud and then in his grave. The relatives throw earth



on his body, then bury him, he is alone now, all gone, it is time to be accountable and then come the two angels who will question him in his grave this will help the aspirant to realize the importance of managing his life by not wasting his time in trivialities. Just before the *dhikr* it allows one to close the doors to the desires of this world and to be fully oriented towards God.

Rabitat as-sheikh : "spiritual nexus" with the Master

It is to sit with your eyes closed and imagine yourself facing your Sheikh with the consciousness that he is the representative and heir of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It is important to imagine the whole Sheikh, not just his face. The divine graces and lights descend in the Sheikh's chest to his (her) own heart which is predisposed as a receptacle. It is possible that he (she) also practices the invocation by hearing his (her) Sheikh practicing it with him (her) in an ineffable communion. The Sheikh is his mirror according to the hadith "*al mu'min mirâth al mu'min*", he awakens in him (her) the divine secret, the presence of his (her) *Rabb*, this Lord who only asks to educate him (her) in an intimate and unique way so that he (she) knows him (her) by knowing his (her) soul and becomes *rabbani*. He is the channel for him (her) of the effluences of *Nûr Mohammad (Saw)*. Do not lose this precious gift. This practice will open for you the eye of your heart.

Rabitat Ar-Rassûl : "spiritual nexus" with the Prophet

The Sheikh quite naturally leads you into the Sacred Presence of the Beloved *Sayyidina* Mohammad (on him the graces of Unity and Peace), he puts you in his presence, presents you to him, intercedes for you in this holy Presence. This is through the eye of the heart that has been opened in your relationship with the Sheikh. You then continuously perceive that God and His angels manifest, in all things in heaven and on earth, those unifying and pacifying graces, *as-salât 'ala nabî'*, fragrance and light enveloping all things. You then become aware of the *haqîqa mohammadiyya* of this Mohammadian light which is the essence of the world.



***Rabitat al-Fath* : "spiritual bound" with the Illumination**

The *Hadrat* of *Rassûl Allah* (on him the blessings of Unity and Peace) leads you to realize the oneness of existence where you realize "wherever you turn, there is the face of God". You perceive the extraordinary unity in the creation that sings the divine praises. You then realize with your heart the light of the verse : " *a lam tara anna l -llaha yussabihu lahu man fi s-samawati wal ard wa tâi-rru saffatin kullun 'alima salatahu wa tassbihahu, wa l- llah 'alîmu-n bima taf'alun.*" "Do you not see that what is in the heavens and on earth and the birds that spread their wings celebrate the praises of God? Each one knows his prayer and his praise and God knows perfectly what they do. " (Qur'an 24-41) Then you become *Rabbani*.

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