Chapter 4: Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s Presentation of Ṣūfī Practices

We are only just beginning to understand the integration of Islamic mystical movements (Sufism) into all levels of Central Asian society during and immediately after the Timurids. Part of understanding these movements is appreciating the practices and world views they held to be important, in that the practices were one of the ways the groups and the individuals who led them differentiated themselves from one another, other religious figures and the population at large. As our knowledge advances concerning the development of the Naqshbandiyya and the Khwājaqān in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, we are finding more diversity among late medieval thought and practice than has often been acknowledged. The debate within the Khwājaqān over the permitted ritual elements may have played a part in the acquisition of “social capital”1 – often meaning here the acquisition of students and gifts – by enabling group members access to the fruits of these religious exercises. As seen in the previous chapter and Chapter 1, the competition among the various individuals and groups can be understood as being played out through the promotion of particular practices. It would be inappropriate to view the practices of the Khwājaqān in this period as fixed; many issues still seem to have been in flux. Religious figures like Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam drew from what was by then a smorgasbord of ideas and methodologies. Whom he draws upon gives us clues about elements that resonated not only among the people of his time, but also among the hundreds of people who read and copied his works over the five centuries since they were written.

This chapter will examine the practices involved in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s written

works describe as being part of his understanding of Sufism. Scholars have begun to understand the complexities of the ritual elements. As the work of Devin DeWese and Jürgen Paul have begun to sketch out, the Khwājagān – the group from which the Naqshbandiyya developed – contained various threads in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These groups used, among other things, various practices as markers: the use or not of khānaqahs, a selection of a particular type of źikr, a ritual practice focussing on remembering God. Or they may have synthesized many disparate ideas under a “whatever works” umbrella. We know relatively little about the ideas circulating in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s milieu specifically; few primary sources pertaining to the development of ideas have been systematically published from Central Asia even relating major figures like Khwāja Aḥrār.

This chapter will first delineate the various practices that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam noted as being important for the Khwājagān, and the multiple permutations and contexts within which he was drawn to particularize this. I will then discuss the practice that the text indicates Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam felt to be most important, suḥbat (conversation, intercourse). Lastly, I will discuss in detail the three practices that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam thought important enough to devote a treatise to: samāʿ (audition), zīkr (remembrance of God), and bukāʾ (lamentations).

1. **Introduction: Sources and Context**

   **A. The Modern Secondary Sources**

   One of the ways we want to understand change and/or continuity over time is through concrete understandings of what these religious figures suggested their followers do. Both Soviet era / Cold War and post-independence works, to say nothing of
“Naqshbandi” focussed presentations, make assumptions about both the continuity or lack thereof for particular practices, but the truth is that little effort has been devoted to studying it.

It is tempting to take discussions of modern practices within the Naqshbandiyya and use them to reflect on medieval practices. Works that offer instruction in contemporary Sufism often do just that, and who could blame them? It is attractive to be able to say “this practice has been done successfully for the past 600 years”. They may even have sources attributed to foundational shaykh indicating that this is so. But unfortunately, those who work steadily with individual works, with individual transmission histories and codicological problems to say nothing of motivations of medieval and early modern authors, know the contradictions and peculiarities of individual manuscripts and works. What we may know with certainty from our sources is far less than we would like. It is for this reason that many places this chapter will of necessity speculate and discuss future research possibilities.

B. Survey of Ritual Practices of the Naqshbandiyya / Khwājahān in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

Muhammad Parsā, who can be considered a major systematizer of the thought of

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Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband within the Khwājagān, typically emphasized the breadth of possible practices, while Khwāja Aḥrār, active more than 50 years later, seems to have had particular ritual practices for his many students. Jürgen Paul’s presentation, a preliminary effort to delimit the Khwājagān / Naqshbandiyya, contrasts Pārsā to Kwaja Aḥrār. Given this, we can see that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam seems to be hewing more closely to the ideas of Muḥammad Pārsā than to those of Khwāja Aḥrār, particularly since Aḥrār rejected vocal āṯikr, which Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam clearly accepted. Paul indicates that Pārsā viewed “various approaches … all equally valid and therefore they have all been integrated into Khwājagāni practice.” He also notes that Pārsā had “no theory of ṭabīṭa”, a practice that, while Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam knows of it, he places no emphasis on it, quite different from Aḥrār. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also had other Ṣūfī groups – and their practices – in Central Asia. Unfortunately we can only say that these groups are probably still more poorly understood than the Khwājagān, and practices that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam seems to be suggesting as acceptable may indicate an effort to draw

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3 This is because most of what we know about Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband has come down through Muḥammad Pārsā, with works like Muḥammad Pārsā, Risāla-i Qudsiyya, ed. Malik Muḥammad Iqball (Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Iran Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies, 1975). One might contrast this with, for instance, Ian Richard Netton, Ṣūfī Ritual: The Parallel Universe, ed. Ian Richard Netton, Curzon Sufi Series (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 62. Netton here suggests that the only important figure of the “Naqshbandiya” after Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband and before Sirhindi was Khwāja Aḥrār.


5 Ibid., 29.

6 In most mentions of āṯikr jahr (vocal āṯikr) in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam, he presents both the vocal and silent variety as equal choices. See, for instance, in ms. 1443, treatise II, folio 35a, IV/64b, 93b; XX/282s; XXV/341b, 348a-b, 353b-354a. In the Kattakhanov ms., see II/30b, IV/55b, 77a; XX/228a; XXV/293a, 299a-300a, 303a-b.

7 Paul, 46.

8 Ibid., 35-38.
upon practices from some of these other lineages.

In an effort to look at the practices Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam is suggesting, let us first look at the practices that the works of Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam put forward as being acceptable to his group.


In several of Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s treatises lists of practices are presented as being among the possible paths for attaining fanā, the “goal” of Sufism. Treatise IV, Ādāb al-sālikīn, suggests that all these paths are from Muḥammad; the rest of the treatises do not make this suggestion, not even the more polemical Ahwāl ʿulamā wa umarā. The presentations in these treatises attributed to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam largely seem to suggest at least some level of mutual exclusion among the practices, with “some [people] do x, some do y” lists, yet in the more complete discussions, this sense of exclusiveness is blunted by a certain amount of intermixture. For instance, jaẓba is usually presented with an Arabic hikmat or hadith; this Arabic phrase can also be found in other contexts. This phrase indicated that this passion or craving (jaẓba) is from God. This could mean that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam uses the Arabic phrase like a litany for particular contents, as seen with many phrases in Islam. To that extent, one might believe that all of these practices were among those Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam saw as part of the Khwājagān. With this in mind, the discussion below will look at these all as pieces of a whole rather than as

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9 Ms. 1443, IV/55b.

10 Ms. 1443, IV/65a-66b; XVIII/264b-267a; XXV/341b-341a; Kattakhanov ms., IV55b-56b; XVIII/212b-216a; XXV/293a-294a.

wholes in themselves.

Of the six treatises that present lists of practices, only two number them, which might imply a hierarchy but for the fact that the lists have almost no practices in the same position. Thus if either one represents a hierarchy, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s thinking about what that hierarchy was changed, based either on time or context.\textsuperscript{12} The lists as they are given are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Nafahāt al-sālikīn}
  \begin{enumerate}
    \item jažba
    \item zi̇kr (no further specification)
    \item tawajjūh
    \item murāqaba
    \item râbiṭa
    \item suḥbat
    \item samā\textsuperscript{c}
  \end{enumerate}
  \item \textit{Aḥwāl ʿulamā wa umarā}
  \begin{enumerate}
    \item zi̇kr (khafiyya and jahīr)
    \item tawajjūh
    \item murāqaba
    \item râbiṭa
    \item suḥbat
    \item jažba
    \item samā\textsuperscript{c}
  \end{enumerate}
\end{itemize}

These lists give the practices with either no explanation or a brief, one-sentence explanation.\textsuperscript{13} Râbiṭa is rather an exception, here and elsewhere, as it always is given with at least a short explanation whenever it is used in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s works. For instance, “And the fifth path (ṭariq) is râbiṭa. Râbiṭa is when one holds the face or image of the master (pīr) always in one’s own sight (naẓar).”\textsuperscript{14} In no context (more on this below), does the author and/or the scribe believe that this term can stand alone. Although samā\textsuperscript{c} completes each list, it is not given any particular weight.

\textsuperscript{12} As mentioned in Chapter 2, we unfortunately do not know the order in which Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s treatises were written. Ādāb al-sālikīn was one of the earlier ones, as it is mentioned in treatise XIII.

\textsuperscript{13} Nafahāt: Ms. 1443, XII/187b-188a; Kattakhanov, XII/162a-b. Aḥwāl: Ms. 1443, XX/282a-b; Kattakhanov, XX/228a-b.

\textsuperscript{14} Ms. 1443, XII/187b, Kattakhanov ms., XII/162a.
The treatises in which these lists appear are quite different; *Nafaḥāt al-sālikīn* is apparently an introduction to Makhdūm-i Aʿżam’s form of Sufism with a high level of metaphor drawing heavily on allusions from Ghazālī.¹⁵ It includes a richly elaborated discussion of ṣuhbat, as we shall see below. Although the presentation here of Ḿīkr is quite brief, mentioning neither the spoken nor silent Ḿīkr specifically, later in the treatise a fuller discussion that also appears in several other treatises provides instructions about how Ḿīkr is performed.¹⁶ *Āhwāl ‘ulamā wa umarā* is more of an explanation of Şūfi ideas in contradistinction to the ways the ‘ulamā – the exoteric practitioners of religion – present themselves.¹⁷

The unnumbered lists include six to eight elements: Ḿīkr (both vocal and silent), tawajjuh, murāqaba, rābiṭa, ṣuhbat, and jaẓba are always in these lists. *Khizmat* and *samāʾ* (sometimes given as “listening to the words of God” or “listening to beautiful voices” or both rather than the term *samāʾ*) are elements that are not always given. All of these are in treatises presenting the practice of Sufism as if for those who do not know it well; this includes the presentation in *Bāburiyya*, which has a much more complex probable development than other treatises.¹⁸ *Samāʾiyya* like *Āhwāl ‘ulamā wa umarā* (mentioned above) gives its list in the context of refuting criticism of the group, although their lists are not the same and this is among the briefest of the lists of practices that Makhdūm-i Aʿżam’s works’ provide.¹⁹ *Ādāb al-sālikīn*’s list is perhaps where we would expect to find it, with a discussion of practices in general of Sufism, although even this allows for more complications within the group than we typically see represented in the

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¹⁵ For more on this treatise, see Chapter 2.
¹⁶ See below.
¹⁷ See Chapter 2.
¹⁸ See Chapter 2.
¹⁹ Ms. 1443, II/35a, Kattakhanov ms. II/30b.
One last point needs to be made here: what is missing? Given the weight Makhdūm-i Aʿzam gives to the “practice” of lamentations (bukāʾ), writing a treatise about it and frequently mentioning it in his works, it is worth noting here that he never includes it among these lists of practices. One may assume from this that he did not consider it as an activity that advanced one in propinquity with God, as all these other practices are presented as doing. This will be discussed in more detail at the close of this chapter.

In sum, these lists do not provide us with a great deal of information in themselves, other than to point out the lack of any single “correct” view presented even within one manuscript attributed to a single author. Because of the richness of these variations, we will look at some of these practices in more detail below.

3. ʿṢuḥbat: The Pinnacle of Practices

ʿṢuḥbat is the practice that Makhdūm-i Aʿzam most commonly suggests is “the best of all acts”, yet the current academic literature on Sufism has little to say about what ʿṣuḥbat was understood to be.²⁰ Virtually none of the literature on the Naqshbandiyya or the Khwājagan mention it,²¹ yet only six of Makhdūm-i Aʿzam’s treatises in Ms. 1443²²

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²¹ One exception is Netton, 85-86.

²² Those six are Ganj-nāma, Savād al-wajh fī al-dārāyn, Chahār kalima, Murshid al-sālikin, Fanāʾiyya, and Shaybiyya.
fail to mention it, only three in the Kattakhanov ms.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ṣuḥbat} means “intercourse”, with the English term’s duality, both sexual and verbal, although the verbal, conversational meaning is more common and for this reason it is sometimes translated as “conversation” or “companionship”. Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam uses both meanings; in \textit{Asrār al-nikāḥ suḥbat} is used with its sexual meaning. For instance:

...for example, [when] a person takes the hand of his own wife in order to play (\textit{bāzī kardan}).\textsuperscript{24} they say this is such a quality of good works (\textit{šawāb}) or it gives the direction of prayer (\textit{qibla}) thusly, and from the face of good works is like kissing the pillar of the house of the Kaʿba; when \textit{suḥbat} occurs, both are forgiven when they wash. The number of each drop of water [is] the good works written in the record book (\textit{diwān}) of their good acts (\textit{ʿamalshān}).\textsuperscript{25}

This structure and phrasing are repeated on the next folio in an anecdote involving someone from “the people of ʿUmar” who is similarly forgiven (although the piece does not say that he was involved with his wife). In other places which meaning is intended may be left intentionally ambiguous. For instance, \textit{jins} can mean either “gender, sex” or “kind”; one of the rules of \textit{zīkr} is to avoid \textit{suḥbat} with “the other \textit{jins}”.\textsuperscript{26} Since this seems to be immediately before a \textit{zīkr} session, it could mean avoiding sexual activity or it could mean avoiding conversation with either women or “those who are not like us”. One other interpretation, that heterosexual sex is not allowed but perhaps homosexual activity is,\textsuperscript{27} is extremely unlikely, given that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam is quite clear in \textit{Asrār al-nikāḥ} that sexual activity should occur only within a married or concubinage relationship, that is, within the law.\textsuperscript{28} This is certainly not to say that homosexual activity was unknown in

\textsuperscript{23} Those three are \textit{Ganj-nāma}, \textit{Savād al-wajh fī al-dārayn}, \textit{Chahār kalima}.

\textsuperscript{24} A euphemism for having sex.

\textsuperscript{25} Ms. 1443, I/9a, Kattakhanov ms., I/7b.

\textsuperscript{26} See for example, ms. 1443, XIII/199b, Kattakhanov ms., XIII/172b.

\textsuperscript{27} In modern Persian, for instance, “homosexual” is \textit{hamjinsbāz}, one who “plays” with the same kind/sex.

\textsuperscript{28} Ms. 1443, I/14a-b, Kattakhanov ms., I/12a.
this time and place, or within the Khwājagān / Naqshbandiyya. Other works by authors commonly ascribed to the Naqshbandiyya like ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī openly portray these activities. However, there is no evidence for reading this into Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam. The washing here is explained not as trying to wash away “dirt” of sex, but rather “when one’s being (wujūd), which is a great dirt, is submerged in the river of annihilation [that is, attains fanā (annihilation) through ʿsuḥbat] … washing is a token for making one’s exterior like the interior.” When Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam wants to be clear, he is; for instance on folio 13b, he combines ʿsuḥbat with takallum, conversation. Thus we have to assume the ambiguity, where present, is intentional.

Unlike some of the other practices, such as rābiṭa, ʿsuḥbat is rarely explained in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s works. Ādāb al-sālikīn gives an extensive list and discussion of the proper behavior in ʿsuḥbat, but while we might glean some understanding from this list, the author of these works does not seem to have believed that it or other terms, like murāqaba, needed any explanation. Fortunately, however, one treatise, Nafāḥāt al-

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31 Ms. 1443, II/10a.
sālikīn does provide a discussion of šuhbat that places it in a context well beyond any of the discussions in the other treatises. Because this discussion is so unusual, it is worth quoting at length:

Know that šuhbat has two forms: one [is] speaking (takallum) and one is silence (sukūt). Each one should be explained so that the states are not destroyed.

Know that the speaking form of this group in šuhbat is that they burn their being and existence (wujūd u hastī) in the fire of love (muhabbat) of the True, be He exalted, so that nothing from the name and sign of being and existence remains in them. And the speaker in them during this state is the True, be He exalted, with every appearance. … Since the breaths (nafāha-hā-yi) of the Divine are joined to the disciple (sālik) of the path through the road’s veils, and speaking is that breath from the Divine breaths that come out of their burned existence during this time as a fiery quality; through listening (samāʾ) the disciples attain and burn those veils that are in their hearts, which are obstructing the Divine breaths. And after burning the veils is the place of silence and rest and presence and notice [of God], and concealing this is essential to the disciple. And the speaking and manifestation of the pīr is for the welfare of the disciples, since were the pīr silent, the disciple would not be able to gather much profit. …

Know, oh darwīsh, that many people who are not informed of the true work [of this group] have heard that the path of these people is concealment and silence. They don’t know whose lineage [follows] concealment and silence and for what. They have made a great blunder and they have excluded themselves from the happiness of noble šuhbat.33

This is the only instance in which Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam suggests that there is more than one way of practicing šuhbat. It is remarkable that this so closely parallels silent and vocal žikr. The misunderstanding of the group that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam presents might also surprise some scholars of the Naqshbandiyya in this period, since clearly Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam is emphasizing that his group is not silent. In fact, it would appear from this presentation that ecstatic, Ḥallāj-like phrases would be condoned during šuhbat. It also seems clear that some kind of samāʾ was included in what Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam meant by

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32 That is, God.

33 Ms. 1443, XII/188a-b.
the term šuhbat. As we shall see in the discussion on samā' below, most of Makhdūm-i Aʿzam’s discussions of samā’ do not center around samā’ as a group activity, yet the listening the disciples are expected to do here, such that it is drawing their being to ecstasy, can only be what he is describing there.

One idea of what “silent” šuhbat might be is one centered on the meditative practices that Makhdūm-i Aʿzam lists among the practices of the Khwājagan, like murāqaba and rābiṭa. These involve concentrating, typically on one’s shaykh. Rābiṭa can be done without the shaykh’s physical presence; as noted in Makhdūm-i Aʿzam, one concentrates on the space between the shaykh’s eyebrows.34 Murāqābā, although not discussed extensively in the secondary literature, seems to have been a focussed meditation on a physically present shaykh.35 This description would fit well with an idea of “silent šuhbat” and in fact, in some of the lists of practices Makhdūm-i Aʿzam suggests that it was a competing method, a suggestion he does not make about zīkr.

In Ādāb al-sālikīn Makhdūm-i Aʿzam gives extensive rules for šuhbat, so extensive that he directs readers of Zikriyya to this tract to read them rather than repeat them.36 There are, by my count, twenty-six rules.37 The rules cover practical aspects of what to do and not do while in the gathering, relationships with the pīr and with other members of the group, and directions about shaping one’s interior. Some of these rules are quite direct to the point of being obvious – don’t sleep, sit still – but the descriptions are at times delightful. For instance, in the description of sitting still, Makhdūm-i Aʿzam

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34 Ms. 1443, IV/70b, although this is also one of the rules for šuhbat.
35 Dina Le Gall, A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman World, 1450-1700, ed. Jere Bacharach, SUNY series in Medieval Middle East History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Netton; Waley.
36 Ms. 1443, XIII/198b.
37 Ms. 1443, IV/72a-85a.
writes that the disciple should sit as if a wild bird (murgh) were sitting on his head, so that if he moved even one hair, it would fly away. Another, in a rule about not asking anything of the pîr, says that “ṣuhbat is alchemy that turns the copper of your difficulties into gold”; asking questions is “perfect rudeness” (kamâl bi-adabî). Even when asked a question, one is not to answer in a loud voice, with a Qur’anic verse, XLIX:2 as support. There are two rules which suggest that one should avoid displaying any blessings accrued from ṣuhbat or extra acts of devotions, specifically to avoid jealousy.

Participants are admonished to make space for everyone in the majlis, sitting shoulder to shoulder and knee to knee, as one would in a mosque during salat.

The more esoteric of the suggestions tend to blend into the “etiquette of the ṭarîqat” that follow the rules for ṣuhbat. These involve humbling oneself by serving without distinguishing oneself, by being “an emissary of loyalty”. Some of these final “rules” are close to what is frequently suggested for students in general, that if you strive to make ṣuhbat continual, a point will come (assuming all goes well) that one will not be able to stop even if one wishes.

The last of the rules suggests that ṣuhbat lays a foundation, and this seems to be part of yet another meaning for this word. Ṣuhbat is the term used for the relationship between Ghijduwani and his khalîfas; from this point on in this treatises it is this meaning of the term that is paramount, describing the submission to Aḥmad Yasawî, and training
between Amir Kulāl and Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband. This idea of ʿsuḥbat as a form of association is also seen in ʿIlmiyya, but only once the presentation moves into what its author might have considered the central part of the Khwājagān sīlsila, with Shaykh Burhān al-Dīn Qalaj participating in ʿsuḥbat with Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim Gurgānī, who then participates with Hamadānī in “ẓikr-i dil” (remembrance of the heart).

In many places it seems that what is supposed to be gained from ʿsuḥbat is acquired through baraka, a term that is difficult to translate succinctly. Baraka is rather like a blessing, but it is usually understood that proximity can cause it to flow or rub off on others. For instance:

> [God] ennobles people through ʿsuḥbat with his friends until the baraka of ʿsuḥbat or through the turning of his [the disciple’s] mind or his sight, he is brought near [to God]. With the baraka of ʿsuḥbat the rust on the mirror of the heart is polished and this [resulting] happiness comes to him necessarily from the baraka of ʿsuḥbat of the pīr.46

So it is effusions produced through the pīr, apparently, that elevate those who attend ʿsuḥbat. Note here that even Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam does not feel comfortable excluding the baraka come from other meditative practices. Although he does not use the technical terms here, this probably refers to tawajjuh and murāqaba. One can also make too much of ʿsuḥbat’s polishing the rust from the mirror of the heart, since in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s works, many acts are suggested to perform this function. In another treatise, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam portrays a failure to attain “traces” (aṣar) from ʿsuḥbat on the part of Ghulām Khalil; later in the same treatise ʿsuḥbat is linked to “makān” (places) as where traces from ʿsuḥbat remain. The terms Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam is using here are interesting, for

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45 See the discussion in Chapter 2. This work may not be by Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam, but by one of his followers, although it has been commonly attributed to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam.
46 Ms. 1443, III/40b-41a.
47 Ms. 1443, X/169a.
48 Ms. 1443, X/172b.
they are usually found in discussions of samāʾ, derived from Aḥmad Ghazālī.⁴⁹

The most important specification, however, is that suḥbat be with a perfected master, kāmil wa mukammil, perfect and perfecting. Although Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam never refers to himself in this way – to do so would be a gross failure of humbleness – the repeated emphasis on only a perfected master being an appropriate partner in this religious pursuit suggests that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam was himself such a master. Part of his problem with the ʿulamāʾ, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, was that they were not such masters. Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam never refers to anyone else, not even earlier prominent figures in the silsila as perfected masters either, suggesting an inhibition in labeling others in this way.

This perfected master in some treatises is also linked to a master who has experienced and passed through jaʿba. Jaʿba – attraction, inclination – is another of the poorly described practices of the Khwājagān.

One example of the prominence suḥbat held in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s system of practices can be portrayed from Žikriyya, an extended discussion of Žikr in the understanding of the Khwājagān. He says:

Know, no Žikr or thought or good act is better for disciples of the group than suḥbat of a perfected master. That which one obtains in one moment (yik zamān) during his noble suḥbat are not obtained [even] through prolonged years of Žikr and thought.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ Ms. 1443, XIII/198a.
4. Practice in Context: Treatises Named with Practices and Their Discussions

A. Samāʾ as Understood in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s Treatise Samāʾiyya

1. The Context of samāʾ

Samāʾ – “audition” – in general has referred to listening to singing, to playing and listening to musical instruments, to poetic recitation (sung or recited, erotic or not), and to various types of Qurʾānic recitation. Various authorities have banned some of these activities, others have permitted them. The chronology of the development of the debate has been given as follows: after its development and initial condemnations in the ninth century CE, in the tenth century support for samāʾ was based on “hadiths and on statements ascribed to early mystics (e.g., Žū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī [d. 861 CE]).”51 In the eleventh century apologies were written by such important theoreticians of Sufism as Abū ‘l-Qāsim Qushayrī (d. 1074) and Ghazālī; in the fourteenth century “rational” support of samāʾ was based on its “social and devotional aspects.”52 By the sixteenth century, what seems to have mattered most for the religious authorities was the intention of the listener: those who were listening for some kind of sensory pleasure were roundly criticized, while those who were able to listen with their nafs – their base, physical self – under control were most often permitted. It was in this context that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam wrote his treatise.

Samāʾ for Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam was understood as one of the many paths to finding fanā (annihilation [in God]). The place of samāʾ among the other methods is given little notice in this treatise, limited to a bare listing of “some” do one practice and “some”

52 Ibid., 325.
others. As mentioned above, not all the treatises that list the practices mention the term *samāʾ*. *Samāʾ*, in the lists in which it is presented, is part of the arsenal of practices which can be used; most of them could be construed as “meditation techniques”. Some of the techniques incorporate sound, as *samāʾ* does, others include visualization techniques, focussing on the teacher or something else. Others are more like activities; these include “service” (*khīżmat* in Tajik and Uzbek/Chaghatay, *khidmat* in Arabic) and *ṣuḥbat*, which both involve interaction with and guidance by the master in physical proximity.

2. The Treatise

The treatise which shall be our focus is found in a variety of codices, each with its own transmission history, thus mention must be made of the copies upon which this discussion is based. The four examples of *Samāʾiyya* used here are all physically located in Uzbekistan. Three of them are held at Sharqshunoslik instituti, Tashkent: ms. 1443/II, 9706/II, and 10626/II. For this treatise, none of these three are exact duplicates of the others; mss. 1443 and 10626 are similar; 10626 omits a large section at the end of the treatise compared to ms. 1443. Ms. 9706, which is older than the other two, seems to follow a different exemplar, with major sections added to the text and changes of emphasis in some places. This codex’s treatise corresponds very closely to the fourth

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53 Ms. 1443, II/35a, Kattakhanov, II/30a-b.
55 The *Sobranie Vostochnykh Rukopisei*, the published catalogue for Sharqshunoslik instituti (also known by its Russian title, Institut vostokovedenie, or [Near] Eastern Studies Institute), lists six manuscripts containing treatises of Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam; ms. 9706 is not included in this list. For a discussion of manuscript issues, see Chapter 2.
example, in a codex held privately in Samarqand, which was maintained throughout the
Soviet era by descendants of Makhdūm-i Aʿzām in Dahbid, the “Kattakhanov”
manuscript. Thus we have two basic manuscript “branches” that are corroborated by
two different codices each. Either version could reflect a revision of an “original” text; I
have made no effort to determine a “correct” text among these, but consider each to be a
reflection of a contemporary understanding of the text. Before we look at the meat of the
text, however, let us first look at the context of the ritual practice of samāʾ.

Samāʾiyya, written in mixed poetry and prose in classical Tajik with some
Arabic, consists of several basic parts. In the introduction, Makhdūm-i Aʿzām presents
his reasons for writing the treatise, to address criticism the group has received about this
practice, situating both his audience and himself in the world. The treatise then goes
through several reasons why samāʾ is useful, making it plain that it is chosen by only
some shaykhs. Typical for some of Makhdūm-i Aʿzām’s work is to set a topic within
Qurʾānic and hadith permissions; this treatise does this as well and additionally sets it
within a cosmologic setting. Makhdūm-i Aʿzām is not using most of the standard hadith
that are typically cited in support of samāʾ. What he does do, however, is situate Ṣūfī
shaykhs in his cosmology, hoping perhaps to marginalize those who disagree. He then
describes how the outer states of samāʾ correlate to inner experience. Sufism generally
contrasts exterior, exoteric states to interior, esoteric ones; in this it is not significantly
different from other mystical approaches to religion. After this, Makhdūm-i Aʿzām

56 See Appendix VII.
57 What to call this language involves political constructions; I am choosing to call it Tajik in
general because some spellings and usages are distinct from classical Persian, and geographically common
to the Turkic literary language, Chaghatai. Linguistic labels are, however, quite problematic in this time
and place, and Makhdūm-i Aʿzam himself seems to suggest that language in which he was writing was
“Farsi”, that is, Persian.
launches into a discussion of how samāʾ came to be rejected, and more fully develops his response, closing with quotes from Junayd and Žu al-Nūn al-Miṣrî. Then Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam moves the discussion from samāʾ to wajd (ecstasy), using excerpts from Kimiyya-i Saʿādat by Ghazâlî, selecting only part of Ghazâlî's argument for allowing samāʾ. Following this, he brings in a discussion of answers to questions asked of Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî, which focus more on wajd and various Sûfî states than discussing samāʾ. The closing of the treatise varies across all the manuscripts, sometimes encompassing large selections of poetry. At no point does he attempt to delimit samāʾ by excluding anything; there are no excluded acts, instruments or verse. Given this rudimentary background of the structure of the treatise, let us now turn to the ideas contained therein.

3. What Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam understood samāʾ to be

Understandings of what samāʾ included were central to what was permitted or disallowed about samāʾ. Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam does not link samāʾ to other practices, like


59 Ms. 10626 edits the selection down still further, removing part of the first selection and all of the last selection. The Kattakhanov manuscript uses largely the same selection as ms. 1443.
dancing (*raqṣ*) and gazing at boys, that were more frequently disallowed although what “dance” might mean is yet another ambiguity, for it seems clear that movement was a possible side effect of *samāʾ* (see below). Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam is not presenting his ideas as “unique” or “original” in our current sense of those words, but fits them into a stream of ideas, so he draws his definitions from outside sources as well. For instance, he provides his audience with Žū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī’s definition for *samāʾ*, “the divine revelations (*ward*) that prod the heart toward the Real. He who listens to it truly achieves true realization and he who listens to it through his soul (*nafs*, base self) apostatizes.”

This quote also appears in Qushayrī’s chapter on *samāʾ*, where it is also an answer to the question “what is *samāʾ*”. Other authors, notably Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 1230), have used translations into Persian of the same passage as an answer of Žū al-Nūn’s to “what is *wajd* (ecstasy)”. An early contemporary of Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam, Jāmī’s entry on Žū al-Nūn in the *Nafahāt*, another compendium of biographies, discusses neither *samāʾ* nor *wajd* other than to mention that Žū al-Nūn left an “impression” on *samāʾ*. *Wajd* may have been the problematic part of *samāʾ* for the “sober” Naqshbandiyya; it is not clear that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam necessarily saw *wajd* as “intoxicating”, in contrast to “sober”

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61 Ms. 1443, II/24a, 31a; Kattakhanov, II/20a, 26b. Translation from Arabic by Alexander Knysh.
62 Qushayrī, 467.
64 ʿAbd al-Raḥman Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns min ḥadārat al-quds*, ed. Mahdī Tawḥīdīpūr (Tehran: ʿIlmī, 1375 (1996 or 97)), 32. Jāmī (d. 1492) was one of the great literary figures of late fifteenth-century Central Asia, and was a member of the Khwājagān/Naqshbandiyya in Herat (now in Afghanistan). For a discussion of the *Nafahāt* in its genre, see J. A. (Jawid Ahmad) Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Tabaqat Genre from al-Sulami to Jami* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).
activities, but this could be argued as an implication. The intoxicating aspects of samāᶜ were clear to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam, as we shall see below, and it was likely this aspect of samāᶜ that he felt most needed defense. As noted above, this places Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam squarely in the mainstream of discussion concerning samāᶜ for his time; it is only in the context of our current understanding of the Khwājagān / Naqshbandiyya that his defense of samāᶜ might seem unusual.

About five folios into the text in ms. 1443, or after about 20% of the treatise, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam provides his own explicit definition:

Samāᶜ is listening to good, harmonious voices; what beautiful voices has the benevolence of the True⁶⁵ [in His] discourse? Since the True, be He exalted, [placed a particle] into the heart of [His] servants during the time when the True, be He exalted, created the souls and said to the souls Am I not your Lord?,⁶⁶ that is, Am I not your Creator? The souls said, yes, that is, You are our Creator, [thus] the delight and goodness of those voices stayed in the ear of the souls [since that time].⁶⁷

The Kattakhanov manuscript gives a slightly different version, and six folios or after about 15% of the treatise:

Samāᶜ, that is, listening to good voices, is great; what good voices has the benevolence of the True [as Its] discourse? From the Exalted True, [a particle is placed] into the heart of His own servants, [it] is the discourse of that which, during the time that the True, be He exalted, created the souls (arwah) of people, [and] said to the souls “Am I not your Lord?” The souls said “Yes, you are our Lord.” And all of the souls, in the words of the Exalted [said], “Our Lord! Surely we have heard a preacher calling [us] to the faith, saying: Believe in your Lord, so we did believe.”⁶⁸ The delight and goodness of those voices stayed in the ear of the

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⁶⁵ This is a translation of one of the names of God, al-Haqq. I have chosen to translate it this way, instead of simply as “God”, in order to maintain some of the richness (and complexity) of the original text.

⁶⁶ Qurʾān VII:172. The answer is a Tajik paraphrase of the answer in Arabic in this verse. Qurʾānic translations are from The Qurʾan, trans. M.H. Shakir (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾan Inc, 1999).

⁶⁷ Ms. 1443, II/20b. Italics indicate Arabic embedded in the Tajik.

⁶⁸ Qurʾān III:193.
souls.\textsuperscript{69}

So what, exactly, does Makhdūm-i Aʿzam have in mind with “harmonious voices”? Before these passages, in his first discussion after the introduction, Makhdūm-i Aʿzam mentions more explicitly what Ṣūfī shaykhs – presumably including himself – do in order to avoid the material world overwhelming them: listen to “sweet sounds and harmonious chants and desire-filled, stimulating poems that are allowed by law.”\textsuperscript{70} He gives a short list of what these sounds might include, but a more complete idea can be gleaned from looking at the examples he uses in his defense of listening to these voices, which will be discussed more completely below. These are: singing (that is, a human voice providing a musical sound, whether with words or not), playing instruments, chanting – as in reciting the Qurʾān – and listening to poetry, spoken presumably although the different between “singing a song” and “reciting poetry” may not have been so divergent as presently understood. We shall look at each of these in turn.

\textbf{a. Sweet Sounds}

As a general category this is perhaps the broadest since many things have been subsumed under it in most discussions of \textit{samāʿ}. But as Makhdūm-i Aʿzam uses it, it does not have an all-encompassing meaning, and we can break this term down into subgroups in order to delineate more clearly what Makhdūm-i Aʿzam intended his readers to understand about what \textit{samāʿ} could mean.

\textit{i. Singing}

Makhdūm-i Aʿzam rarely mentions singing as an act by human beings; most of the common terms used for singing in Arabic and Persian do not appear in this treatise or anywhere else in the 1443 codex. Yet singers do appear. In both ms. 1443 and the

\textsuperscript{69} Kattakhanov, II/16b. This section occurs closer to the beginning of the treatise in this ms.

\textsuperscript{70} Ms. 1443, II/19b.
Kattakhanov ms., Junayd, who was often the archetype for “sober” Sufism, is presented by Makhdūm-i Aʿzam as engaging in *samāʾ*. Anecdotes, often used in Ṣūfī literature to provide examples, include one when Junayd comes to the Ferghana valley. It reads: It is related from his excellency Shaykh Junayd that he heard that one of this group had passed away in Farghāna and his singing girl remained. He went there and paid handsomely for that girl and entered into covenant [with her] and brought [her] to Baghdād.

In both versions, this anecdote immediately follows a presentation of why Junayd had decided *samāʾ* was necessary, because he needed it as a tool in his *majlis* (a gathering for teaching or exchanging ideas) together with *ṣuhbat* (“intercourse”, with both its verbal and physical connotations) in order to raise the “states” (the mystical level) of his students. This anecdote does not appear in hagiographies of Junayd that I have examined. It would seem unlikely that Junayd would have come to the far east of the Islamic world as it was defined at his time from his home in Baghdad; it is also interesting that the anecdote has little apparent connection to the stated reason for permitting *samāʾ*. One might read this series as presenting the reason for permitting *samāʾ* as espoused by a sober Ṣūfī, and then how one might go about obtaining the proper human instrument. The terms that the two manuscript branches use for the construction of the relationship between Junayd and the girl are different, although related. The Kattakhanov manuscript uses *ʿaqd*, which makes the point that she becomes his responsibility; this could also imply marriage. Ms. 1443 uses *qayd*, which can also be

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71 The Farghana valley is where Makhdūm-i Aʿzam was born; it now straddles four countries: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China. Even in modern-day Uzbekistan, it is noted for the high quality of its singers.

72 Kattakhanov, II/20a. Ms. 1443 does not name Junayd, and calls Farghana a region (*wilayat*).

73 Ms. 1443, II/24a; Kattakhanov, II/20a.

used for marriage, but is more commonly related to bondage and imprisonment. For both texts, the anecdote seems to show Junayd being actively involved in both Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam’s homeland and perhaps in providing singing girls for his students. Kattakhanov’s possible elevation of the girl’s status may be to make clear that she was not a prostitute, one of the occupations for which professional singers in the Islamic world were also known. It is also possible to understand this more in terms of Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam’s initial reason for wanting samaʿ: for the individual benefit of the shaykh himself.

ii. **Instruments**

While some modern commentators give symbolism for various instruments used in the Islamic world\(^{75}\) this treatise of Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam makes no effort to explain the use or permissibility of any particular instruments, other to mention their use in permitted contexts. As we will see below, Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam elected not to reproduce sections of Ghazālī’s text that delimit which instruments are allowed. Although it would be difficult to prove that Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam knew that some instruments were prohibited and others permitted, it seems logical to expect that Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam had access to the full text of Ghazālī’s work on samaʿ in Persian, since he quotes several pages verbatim. Thus, although Ghazālī did not prohibit all musical instruments, most of the musical instruments that Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam mentions in the treatise – a sāz and a nāṭī (flute) – are among the prohibited instruments in Ghazālī’s longer work and we shall assume that Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam knew of this status.\(^{76}\) Not everyone condemns the flute,\(^{77}\) which Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam mentions, but it is interesting that Makhdūm-i Āʿẓam has omitted any mention of the tambourine (daf in Arabic and Persian, or in Uzbek, doira), which is often

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mentioned in works discussing samāʿ and is perhaps one of the few instruments that is most frequently permitted. Since Makhdūm-i Aʿzam states that the treatise’s purpose is to counter criticism, and ʿulamāʾ are the most likely source of criticism for this, we might have expected Makhdūm-i Aʿzam to use the least controversial instruments in his promotion of samāʿ to the ʿulamāʾ, this omission is all the more interesting. The qanūn, a stringed instrument, is also mentioned by Makhdūm-i Aʿzam; all the instruments are passively defended by having prominent Šūfīs who Makhdūm-i Aʿzam constructs as being earlier links in the intellectual chain (silsila) reaching back to Muḥammad – either Junayd or Khwāja Aḥrār – listening to the instruments.\textsuperscript{78} The shaykhs are not mentioned playing the instruments themselves; this aspect of listening to music is not mentioned by most commentators on samāʿ, so one is left to understand that those who were interested in the spiritual aspects of their lives probably did not learn to play an instrument themselves.\textsuperscript{79} This explicit distancing of the listener from the production of the music to the “consumption” of the music is a common element in treatises on samāʿ.\textsuperscript{80} The


\textsuperscript{78} Ms. 1443, II/24a, 29a, 29b; Kattakhanov, II/20b, 24a-b.

\textsuperscript{79} This does not mean that those who did play the instruments were themselves unaffected; “professional” musicians, because of their frequent contact with Šūfī rituals, were often acutely aware of what was involved. Although it is difficult to go back and fill the holes in our historical understanding, there is significant work being done on this in anthropology and musicology for the present day.

\textsuperscript{80} It is not necessarily true however; we see, for instance, images of those who become Šūfīs being producers of music in some hagiographies. See, for instance, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya (Memorial of the Saints), trans. A. J. Arberry (London, New York: Arkana / Penguin, 1990), 27.
clapping of hands – one instance where participants create the music – that one finds discussed based on Rūmī’s works is not repeated here. Specific examples include Khwāja Ahrār listening to both a qanūn and a flute, where the musician is specifically mentioned in the text as if to set Khwāja Ahrār apart from him. The only other place in the treatise that instruments are mentioned is in connection with Junayd, where Ms. 1443 just says he permitted musical instruments in his majlis, while Kattakhanov says he permitted the sāz. The two manuscripts use the same root in two different forms here. While Ms. 1443 says “baʿdī sāz-hā ki mubāḥ-ast” (some instruments that are lawful), the Kattakhanov manuscript has “sāz-hā-yi ki mubah-ast” (instruments (or multiple sāz) that are lawful). A sāz can either be musical instruments in general or a particular kind of stringed instrument; the -y of the Kattakhanov version could be either a doubled plural (-hā is also a plural) or an indication of generalness.

b. Chants

There is little disagreement that listening to the Qurʾān being recited is permitted; even extremely sober, shariʿa-minded critics like Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Jawzi viewed this as lawful. Many verses of the Qurʾān can be cited as support for listening to its recitation. Yet Makhdūm-i Aʿẓām does not cite any of the ones commonly suggested as supporting Qurʾān ic recitation; in fact, all of the support he gives for listening to the Qurʾān are through anecdotes with Khwāja Ahrār. One might, then, say this is because of the presumption of legality, except that the Qurʾān reciter who speaks in the anecdote is questioning why its legality would be questioned, clearly indicating that it was.

81 Ms. 1443, II/29a, 29b; Kattakhanov, II/24a-b, 24b.
82 Ms. 1443, II/24a, Kattakhanov ms., II/20.
84 Ms. 1443, II/28b-29a; Kattakhanov, II/24b.
Chanting here seems to have more of a connotation connecting it to God, for when Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam introduces the “discourse of the Beloved” which “strikes the stone” of the hearer’s heart, he is specifically mentioning the “Alast” verse (Q. VII.172). Thus “harmonious chants” seems to be recitation of the Qurʾān. Yet the task of the Qurʾān reciters does not seem to have been limited merely to reciting the Qurʾān, for the one anecdote that includes them seems to indicate they also recited poetry “and the work of Amīr Qāsim” before Khwāja Aḥrār’s majlis.\(^85\) The three anecdotes in this treatise that involve Khwāja Ahrār stay together in both manuscripts, while those of other figures, like Žū al-Nūn Miṣrī, Junayd and Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband move around in the context of the treatise.

There are many other forms of chanting known in the Islamic world, but Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam does not mention any others. Even a vocal ḥikr is not presented. We are left to assume that other forms would not have been questioned by the ʿulamāʾ for whom the treatise was intended.

c. Poetry

Poetic recitation seems to be included in what Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam meant to permit, but the discussions including poetry, other than those mentioned above, are indirect at best. Whether this was because Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s practice did not include it in any substantial way or because as he understood it, the ʿulamāʾ might be more likely to reject it, cannot be determined at this time.

One of the few mentions of poetry – notably in Arabic – includes a slave girl reciting it to Imām Shāfīʿī (9th century).\(^86\) He experiences an altered state from the mere recitation, and then asks her if she, too, experiences it. When she says she doesn’t, he

\(^{85}\) Ms. 1443, II/29a-b; Kattakhanov, II/24b.

\(^{86}\) Ms. 1443, II/24b; Kattakhanov, II/20b.
seems disappointed that it has “come to nothing in your heart”. Another anecdote involving poetry is one widely found among treatises on samāʾ, for it has Muhammad, upon hearing a verse (and the amount of poetry varies, even across our manuscripts here), being so transported by ecstasy that he tears his cloak. Perhaps what Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam is seeking to have permitted is not so much the act of listening to music or poetry itself, but a condoning of the states which are gained through it.

4. The Purposes for practicing samāʾ

Although by the weight of the argument, Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam considers the goal of samāʾ to be assisting in the attainment of increasing degrees of propinquity with God, it is not the only goal he considers useful. Union with God – the end goal of all Ṣūfī experience – is an understated purpose here. Wajd, ecstasy, is the visible result of that union that must be allowed a space within the material world; samāʾ, as Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam proposes, is an efficient means to that end. Yet he does give some intermediate reasons for practicing samāʾ as well.

a. Mental Health

The first reason for choosing samāʾ according to Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam is that “due to the abundance of the material world, complaints and sadness occurs in the hearts and souls” of “the leaders of hardships and the lords of struggle.” “Thus modern shaykhs … in order to avert and overcome that event” listen to samāʾ. This psychological benefit is similar to ideas prevalent in Ṣūfī circles, where, for instance, as Lewisohn writes, Ṭūsî refers to the “spiritual nourishment which strengthens the heart and inner nature.” Not

87 Ms. 1443, II/29b-30a; Kattakhanov, II/25a.
88 Ms. 1443. II/19b; Kattakhanov, II/16a.
89 Lewisohn: 25.
surprisingly, given Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s dependence on Ghazālī, his presentation is closer to what we find in Ghazālī:

And another said, ‘He who sorrows let him listen to melodies, for when sorrow enters the soul the light of the soul dies down, but whenever the soul rejoices its light flames up, and its joy appears, and yearning appears in proportion to the possible receiving of him who receives it, and that is in proportion to his purity and cleanliness from guile and filthiness.’

In an introduction to Sufism, Ruzbihan Baqli’s ideas about samāʿ are quoted, saying it “refreshed all thoughts from the heaviness of mortal humanity.” Particularly in the context of Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s work, this rationale, the elimination of sorrow, is interesting because he was also a proponent of bukā, lamenting for religious purposes. Both the treatise on bukā and that on samāʿ use some of the same material near the end, quoting from Rūmī on drunkenness.

**b. Propinquity with God**

The second reason one might choose samāʿ is to “purify the domination of the base self (nafs)” since samāʿ assists one in more speedily moving along the path (to God). Samāʿ does this by getting past the “cotton of the whispers of Satan” that had “filled the ears of their soul”.

Introductions to Sufism contextualize samāʿ by noting that Ibn ʿArabī, who did not encourage samāʿ, explained the practice by saying that it was “simply the

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92 One of Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s other treatises is a defense of this practice, *Bukāʾiyya*.
93 Ms. 1443, VII/138b-139a; II/35b-36a; Kattakhanov, VII/118b, II/30b-31a.
94 Ms. 1443, II/19b-20a; Kattakhanov, II/16a.
95 Ms. 1443, II/23a-b; Kattakhanov, II/19b.
remembrance of the primordial ‘be’ that brought the world into being.”⁹⁶ Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam, however, says that samāʾ stirs a remembrance of God, but in a covenantal mode, asking all beings, “Am I not your Lord?”⁹⁷ Chittick attributes this aspect regarding samāʾ to “some Sufis”⁹⁸, which can specifically be found in Āṭṭār’s biography of Junayd.⁹⁹ Chittick notes “the music of Alast” – which means “Am I not” – is a frequent theme in Rūmī’s poetry.¹⁰⁰ Rāzī also mentions it,¹⁰¹ but perhaps what is most noticeable here is the centrality of this to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s argument, since it is the awakening of these words of God in a person’s soul, and its assistance in throwing off Satan’s misleading guidance – a subtext seen elsewhere in Rāzī as well¹⁰² – that give force to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s presentation. This is somewhat closer to Qushayri’s presentation, which focuses on the sweetness of remembering brought on by hearing music.¹⁰³

**c. Side effects: Crying and movement**

“The foremost point of etiquette upon which all the Sufis are agreed, is that silence and stillness must reign throughout samāʾ, notwithstanding the participant becoming affected by ecstasy and rapture (wajd).”¹⁰⁴ Yet Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam rationalizes what was clearly a result of samāʾ in his milieu: shouting and clamoring and the movement of limbs. Although Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam does not mention žikr as a part of

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⁹⁶ Chittick, 78. God is said in the Qur’an only to need to say “be” for anything to come into existence.
⁹⁷ Qurʾān VII: 172; Ms. 1443, II/20b, 21a; Kattakhanov, II/16b, 17a.
⁹⁸ Chittick, 80.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 80, fn 18.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 80.
¹⁰¹ Rāzī, ed., 365.
¹⁰² Ibid., 363.
¹⁰³ Qushayri, 466.
¹⁰⁴ Lewisohn: 8.
samāʾ, the movements which he seemed to consider a result of the ecstatic connection were also observed in later Naqshbandi groups in Eastern Turkistan, where it was connected to a different “method of reading”.

These side effects are wrapped up, in parts of Ṣūfī literature, with wajd (ecstasy), with which samāʾ is often linked. In ʿAṭṭār, for instance, when Zū al-Nūn Miṣrī is quoted on samāʾ, wajd is the focus of the quote, and samāʾ is the means to that end. Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam links ecstasy with prominent members of the Islamic community, with Muhammad falling into wajd, and Imām Shafiʿī attaining an ecstatic state when hearing a poem. Like Rāzī, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam explains the movement as the soul trying to free itself from the bonds of its corporal self. Although other authors, like Rāzī, move from discussions of samāʾ and its initiation of movement to dancing, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam does not take this step, and makes no mention of dancing. This could either mean that he and his followers believed it to be too outlandish to make it defensible to the ʿulamāʾ, or it could be that he did not take samāʾ to that extreme. In the Kattakhanov manuscript, we find dancing, raqs, mentioned once, in a quotation of Simnanī which says that listening to a “good voice” makes “him” (meaning either Simnanī or Khizr, the text is unclear) dance. Notably, this section of the text is omitted from both Mss. 1443 and 10626, although all three include the poetry that follows this

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106 ʿAṭṭār, Taẓkirat al-awliyāʾ, 153.

107 1443, II/29b-30a; Kattakhanov, II/25a.

108 1443, II/24b; Kattakhanov, II/20b.


110 Kattakhanov, II/25a-b; ms. 1443, II/30a; ms. 10626, II/30a.
section in the Kattakhanov manuscript, which mentions dancing very briefly.\textsuperscript{111}

What we need to draw from this is that these were elements which needed to be explained – and made palatable – to the ‘ulamā’. Logically, we can assume that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam would not have been trying to defend activities and actions which were not occurring – what would have been the point? – so both the movement and the weeping must have been occurring in samāʾ that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam condoned. This brings them far closer to the modern image of samāʾ than the anecdotes, particularly those of Khwāja Aḥrār, where the listening seems almost accidental, would lead us to imagine.

5. The Defense of samāʾ

Given that the entire treatise is a defense of samāʾ, in this section we shall examine how Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam constructs the defense. One assumes that he would gather the evidence that he would consider most effective for convincing his audience, perhaps the ‘ulamā’; interestingly, while his anecdotes include Khwāja Aḥrār and Bahāʾ al-Din, his references to earlier proponents rely largely on Junayd, Ṣū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, and Ghazālī. While he uses several hadith, as well as citations from the Qurʾān, he does not use those that are considered “standard” in the defense of samāʾ. Whether he does not use them because he has not thought of them or because he believes them so accepted as to be unworthy of discussion cannot be known. One of the few he does use, verse XXXIX:18, “Those who listen to the word, then follow the best of it”, is often used in discussing samāʾ.\textsuperscript{112} Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam uses it while presenting ideas about samāʾ from

\textsuperscript{111} Kattakhanov, II/25a, 25b.
\textsuperscript{112} See, for instance, Chittick, 90; Rāzī, ed., 364
Shaykh Ṭahūr, using it more as an explanation for the usefulness of samāʿ. He is specifically not arguing in a format one might expect of a “religious scholar” (a category in which Makhdūm-i Aʿżam has often been assumed to be in). By both direct language and style, the author has set himself outside that system.

Paul has suggested that Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband was “explicit in excluding … music and dancing from his method”, using as his source Anīs al-ṭālibīn, when Bahāʾ al-Dīn was being interviewed by the ruler of Herat. Yet a pre-Bahāʾ al-Dīn Khwājagānī source, Maslak al-ʿārifīn, while condemning vocal ḥikr, seems to permit music and dancing, but only so as not to be heard by outsiders. Paul appears to be employing a narrow definition of samāʿ which does not include Qurʿānic recitation, as he relates a story about Bahāʾ al-Dīn’s followers reciting the Qurʿān to him on his deathbed. Togan quotes the Rashahāṭ, on the other hand, where Bahāʾ al-Dīn neither forbids nor encourages samāʿ, towards which his followers had “a strong inclination.” As we have seen above, readings of the Qurʿān appear to be included in what Makhdūm-i Aʿżam had in mind when defending samāʿ.

The basic structure of the treatise has been given above, but in order to look a little more closely at the argument, we shall need to look into the logic as Makhdūm-i

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113 Ms. 1443, II/25b-26a; Kattakhanov, II/21b.
114 For more detail on how Makhdūm-i Aʿżam constructs both his own group and the ʿulamāʾ, see Chapter 3.
115 Paul, 21.
116 Ibid., 30, 75 for a more complete discussion of the text; Togan, 28-29 where she gives a direct quote from the text.
117 Paul, 25.
118 Ibid., 28.
Aʿẓam has presented it. His method lies primarily in constructing those who are on his side in such a way that no good Muslim would want to disagree, and then finding a means for the undesirable side effects of samāʾ to be accepted as well.

B. Ẓikr’s Construction in Žikriyya and Elsewhere

Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam present discussions of ẓikr in a variety of settings across his oeuvre. When discussing the “ẓikr of the Khwājagān” – the first half of the Shahada (There is no god but God) – he most often presented it as composed of three “experiences” (wuqūf) and three movements. This may have been in an effort to augment or distinguish it from the Kubrawiyya’s use of the same ẓikr.120 Although the exact discussions vary across the treatises, the movements emphasize control over breathing, although controlling one’s genitals is typically mentioned first.121 The head begins upright, then leans right (one treatise seems to imply the whole body moved right, but this seems to be the only variant), and then left, saying “ṭāq-ṭāq” (phrase apparently without meaning, only to approximate a sound) with one’s tongue against one’s palate. The movements must have been rather subtle, as the discussion seems to indicate focussing on the right side of the chest and then the left, at the location of the physical heart, which Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam refers to with a phrase of Ghazāli’s, qalb-i ṣanawburī al-shakl, the pineal heart, without mentioning the source.

Given that one’s tongue is pressed against one’s palate, and one is holding one’s breath while counting ṭāqṣ and saying the formula, it seems most likely that this is a

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121 Ms. 1443, IV/67a-68a, XII/190a-191a, XIII/198b-199a, XX/284a-b, XXV/350a-b.
description of a silent Ḿikr, although the treatises do not say so. The only indication that this is not taking place alone is that one treatise indicates that one’s ecstasy should be so well contained that the person to the right doesn’t know of it.

The three experiences connected with Ḿikr also appear in other settings, where without knowing the linkage there is little to tie them to Ḿikr. These experiences are concrete ties to one’s own interior, rather than a more esoteric understanding of Ḿikr. There are: numbered experience, experience of time, and experience of heart(s). Three-fold constructions of Ḿikr are common, but not necessarily the same as Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s here. As Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam indicates, the numbered experience is that one seeks to say ṭɑq-ṭɑq 21 times per breath, after starting at three. The experience of time consists of “controlling and passing [exhaling] the nafs” – which here can readily mean both “breath” and “base soul”, the term’s two most common meanings – “and the interval between the breaths should be focussed only in the heart.” The experience of the heart(s) (qalbī) is that one’s heart should be present with God. The presentation of Ḿikr in this way is often indicated to be “beginner’s Ḿikr”, and is almost always followed by the rules for Ḿikr. Unfortunately, the works that have come down to us do not include the intermediate or advanced forms.

There is little substantive variation between the 501/Kattakhanov and 1443 branches for these discussions, while there are variations between individual pairs of treatises. The variations are within the range of variations seen across the individual treatise, so they are all describing the same fundamental phenomenon.

The treatises that contain these presentations are not necessarily the ones in which one would expect to find them. Ādāb al-sālikīn, the general presentation of the ideas and

123 Ms. 1443, IV/67a.
activities of the group, gives a relatively clear-cut presentation in the context of *ṣuhbat*, as discussed above, and *Ẓikriyya* gives a longer one. The longest, however, is in *Ahwāl ʿulamā wa umarā*, a more polemical work, not one in which one would expect basic teaching about the group. Treatise XII, *Nafaḥāt al-sālikīn* gives a clear presentation; the shortest is in *Bāburiyya*, which barely covers the major points. *Chahār kalima* notes only one “experience” in passing, but doesn’t link them to *zikr*; in that presentation *wuqūf-i zamān* (experience of time) are linked to “*hūsh dar dam*” (goodness in breathing), which indicates the goodness results from holding one’s breath.124

1. The Treatise(s)

The actual practice of *zikr* is described several times in *Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s* work. This description in *Ẓikriyya* is representative:

   Know that the path of saying this *zikr* is this: that with necessity of the permission (*ijāzat*) of the completely perfected [master], who says movements [are] three and experience three. First, his *nafs* must be controlled in his genitals, and his tongue caused to adhere to [his] palette, and he [should] believe that this breath are his last breaths.

   The three movements are that while saying “*lā*” his head must go up (*bālā*) and while saying “*āla*”, move to the right. Every connection (*taʿalaqi*) that he has is brought to the sight of the sword “*lā*” as amputated from [his] heart (*dil*) and while saying “*ilā Allah*”, he holds his breath within himself, which means the true heart (*dil-i haqiqī*). He turns towards the pine-cone shaped heart which is in the left side, with the power of all that is more complete he goes down until the marks of ardor/heat arrive on his toenails/ tips of his toes.

   [On] to the three experiences, that is, the numbered experience, the experience of time (*zamān*) and the experience of a heart (*qalbī*). The numbered experience is that *zikr* is numbered, saying “*ṭāq ṭāq*” from three to 21 which is the place of profit (*mahal-i nāṭīja*). The experience of time is that which during the controlling of and passing the *nafs* and the interval between the breath should be the presence such that the mind is nowhere except in the heart (*dil*). The experience of the heart is that which while saying the *zikr “ila Allah*” his own heart is made present with the

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124 Ms. 1443, XVI/245a.
True, be He exalted, in the same way continually saying “ṭāq ṭāq” until with one breath one attains 21 [repetitions]. This is the place of profit. The intention of success here is the annihilation of the existence of humanness. And the meaning of the existence of humanness [are] those connections that he has with things. If the connection of love (muḥabbat) of one of these is banished from his heart, his Ḹikr will be successful and if not his reason/proof (dalīl) is for his unsuccessful [good] work, that is, the weakness in his [good] work, is their coming to pass (wāqaʿ shuda ast).125

One may compare this to the description found in seventeenth-century works, to which it is quite similar.126 That description has the participant using the second half of the Shahada, Muhammad rasūl Allāh, as part of the Ḹikr, a practice found nowhere in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s works.

2. Ḹikr and the representation of choice

In virtually every presentation of Ḹikr, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam expresses the idea that the paths to God are many, although as discussed above, he seems to have been fairly confident of the idea that the best means of attaining fanā was through suḥbat. Although silsila presentations related to Ḹikr show a clear preference for silent over vocal Ḹikr,127 the abundance of the examples of choice need to be examined more closely.

Ḹikr is included in lists of practices in addition to those noted above; these lists seem to represent normal pious activities – perhaps remembering God in the simple sense rather than as a ritual practice. For instance, Asrūr al-nikāḥ says that “good practices” (zarāʾat) include prayers (namāz), fasting, Ḹikr, and using beads (taspīh); Wujūdiyya changes this list slightly by adding “reading the Qurʾān.”128 Most of the time this phrase is used as “Ḥikr u Ḳāʾr”, remembrance and thought, and here the author must

125 Ms. 1443, XIII/198b-199a.
126 Netton, 80.
127 Ms. 1443, IV/90b-95b, XXV/348a-350a; XXIX/393b-400a.
128 Ms. 1443, I/11b, III/51b.
intend the simple calling to mind of God’s ultimate place in the scheme of things. Not everyone might agree, however; some scholars believe that “fikr” here should stand for a group of practices including *murâqaba*.

C. **Lamentations as a Ritual Practice?**

Given these presentations throughout Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam’s work of practices, and lists of proper practices, one can only puzzle over an entire treatise on the subject of weeping when this is apparently never understood as a “practice” in the same sense of *zikr*, *samāʿ*, and *ṣuḥbat*. At the same time, it is certainly an activity that Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam was advocating, and it is worth discussion in this context.

As mentioned above, one might infer that *bukāʾ* was not understood to promote the attainment of fanā in itself. Yet weeping was on some level linked to the “pain of seeking” (*dard-i ṭalab*), an essential part of the path of Sufism in Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam’s understanding. In Sufism generally, weeping was something one could bring on oneself and was understood as a proper behavior while reading the Qurʾān. For Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam, weeping was fundamentally linked to repentance: the first metaphor he constructs is Adam’s lamentations for the sin of disobeying God that caused he and Hawwa/Eve to be cast from the Garden. Repentance is also the first step along the path, along with separation from the everyday connections with the world.

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129 Ms. 1443, IV/63b, 86b, V/102b, VI/119a, XIV/229b, XVIII/262a, XIX/271a, 271b, XXI/298b, XXII/321a, XXIII/329b, XXIV/336a, 336b, XXV/356a, XXVI/360b, 362a.


131 Ibid., 509 quoting Ghazâlî.

132 Ms. 1443, VIII/122a-124a. The lamenting after the fall is not included in every presentation of this story in Makhdûm-i Aʿẓam’s work.
treatise suggests that weeping over one’s sins helps to make one receptive to prayer;\textsuperscript{133} this can readily be understood as an overwhelming focus on the connections with the world, since one cannot weep over one’s errors without thinking about them in earnest. In fact, the anecdote Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam relates immediately after noting that being too involved in the world “of women and children” brings the wrath of God\textsuperscript{134} is one in which Yaʿqūb/Jacob, because of an error with a servant, made God angry, and therefore God took Yusūf/Joseph away for seven years.\textsuperscript{135} It was the separation, as well as a desire to please God, that made Yaʿqūb/Jacob lament, according to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam. Thus the weeping is understood both as sadness because of the loss of a child, to whom one ought not be overly attached in the first place, and as a God-pleasing penance.

As noted in Chapter 3, Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam did not typically suggest ascetic practices, of which weeping is generally considered a part. Some ascetic practices, like weeping here, did apparently enter into Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s religious practice – the way Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam related religiously to himself in the world. Many times one finds weeping as side effects, caused by samāʿ and separation from God after union.

Why then do we see a treatise on bukāʾ and not one on suḥbat or murāqaba or some other element well attested in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s work? One might understand it as an ecstatic element that needed significant interpretation to make it other than what perhaps the ʿulamāʾ were doing. He also emphatically links weeping with all of the major prophets of Islam – the most notable exception being Jesus – in addition to the family of the prophet Muḥammad. This may be a clue to Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s thinking on the

\textsuperscript{133} Ms. 1443, VIII/125a-b.
\textsuperscript{134} Ms. 1443, VIII/126a.
\textsuperscript{135} Ms. 1443, VIII/126a-b. See more on this in Brannon M. Wheeler, \textit{Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis} (London / New York: Continuum, 2002).
matter however, for Ibn ʿArabi, in his discussion of weeping, also discusses the prophets, and Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam may be attempting to clarify that discussion without referencing it.\textsuperscript{136} Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam does not construct the role of the prophets in weeping as Ibn ʿArabi does, however; Ibn ʿArabi’s discussion centers on the dichotomy between the prophets’ exalted status and, at the same time, their understanding of their servanthood to God.\textsuperscript{137} Fātima in this treatise plays a prominent role in helping to “bring down” a verse of the Qurʾān through her lamentations; this is one of the few places in Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s works where a woman is presented as having significant agency.\textsuperscript{138}

The treatise however, also notes that union with God is a place without pain.\textsuperscript{139} This may be to suggest that all other times have just cause for weeping. It is probably this distinction that drops bukāʾ from the list of practices that Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam gives, for it is a marker of not being in a state of union with God, if we follow this logic. Thus duality, the positive instruction to weep for one’s failures in obedience to God, while at the same time knowing that weeping is a mark of one’s lack on connection to God, must have been an important teaching for Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam, or perhaps he saw it as missing from the available works of his time.

6. Conclusion

As we can see, there is much more research needed before we can begin to form conclusions about the practices of the Khwājakān / Naqshbandiyya in the late fifteenth

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ms. 1443, VIII/134b-135b.
\textsuperscript{139} Ms. 1443, VIII/137b-138a.
and early sixteenth centuries. Ties into fundamental rationalizations about identity for the group and lineage, these practices seem to be related even to how an individual shaykh understands his place in the world, as we see with Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s emphasis on weeping. Makhdūm-i Aʿẓam’s calls to an emotionally fulfilling life, with the emphasis on the entire range from humbleness to ecstatic participation in samāʾ, remind us that even the parts of Sufism not related to wealth and politics have an important place in our understanding of the function these men played in society.
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