

ISLAMIC MYSTICISM &  
THE BEKTASHI PATH



# ISLAMIC MYSTICISM AND THE BEKTASHI PATH

Baba Rexheb

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Translation: Huseyin Abiva

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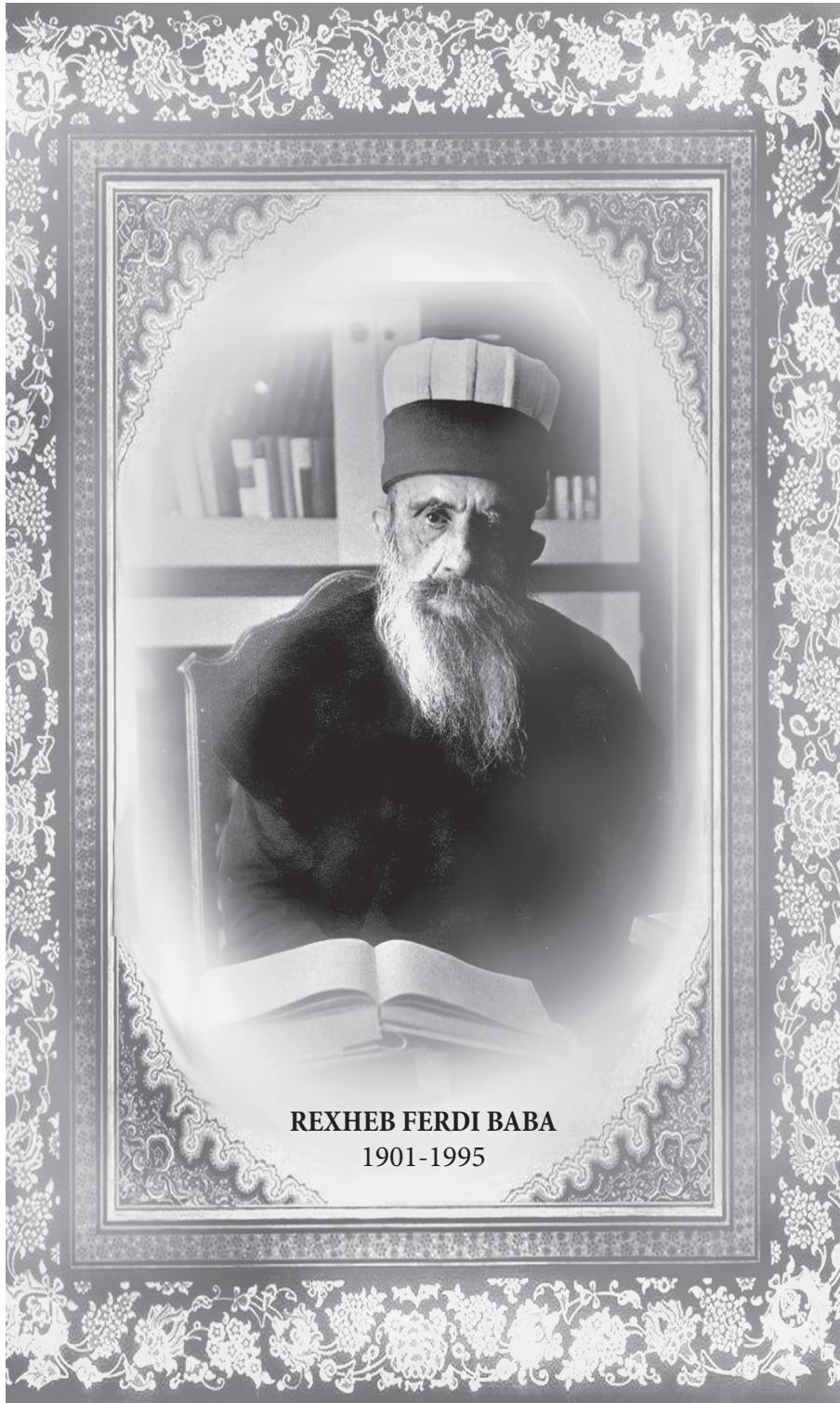
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## THE AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

*Given their refusal to forsake their religious and national principles, it is with deep reverence that the author hereby dedicates this work to those members of Albania's clergy - of all faiths - who sacrificed everything for freedom and liberty, as well as to those individuals who were tortured and murdered during the communist reign of terror.*





**REXHEB FERDI BABA**

1901-1995



# CONTENTS

<i>Foreword to the English Translation</i> .....	i
<i>Baba Rexheb: America's Albanian Saint</i> .....	iii
<i>Translator's Introduction</i> .....	vi
<i>Baba Rexheb's Foreword</i> .....	xvii

## PART ONE: A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

Chapter 1: The Foundations of Islamic Mysticism .....	1
<i>The Kur'ān</i> .....	2
<i>The Hadīth Kudsī</i> .....	5
<i>The Hadīth</i> .....	6
<i>The Noble Prophet Muhammad</i> .....	8
Chapter 2: Islamic Mysticism in the 1st & 2nd Hijrī Centuries .....	13
<i>Rābi'a al-‘Adawiyah</i> .....	16
Chapter 3: Islamic Mysticism in the 3rd & 4th Hijrī Centuries .....	20
Chapter 4: The Mystics of the 3rd & 4th Hijrī Centuries .....	30
Chapter 5: The Establishment of the Sufi Orders .....	40
<i>The Conflict between the Fukahā' &amp; the Sufis</i> .....	41
<i>Al-Hallāj</i> .....	43
Chapter 6: Islamic Mysticism in the 5th Hijrī Century .....	51
<i>Theology, Philosophy, Sufism &amp; Al-Ghazālī</i> .....	52
<i>Al-Ghazālī on the Classification of Knowledge</i> .....	54
<i>Ma'rifat according to Al-Ghazālī</i> .....	57
<i>True Bliss according to Al-Ghazālī</i> .....	59
Chapter 7: The Mystics of the 6th & 7th Hijrī Centuries and their Views ...	62
<i>Suhrawardī &amp; the Science of Illumination</i> .....	65
<i>Ibn 'Arabī &amp; the Theory of Wahdat ul-wujūd</i> .....	71
<i>Ibn ul-Fāriḍ &amp; Divine Love</i> .....	79
<i>Ibn Sabīn &amp; the Theory of Wahdat ul-Muṭlak</i> .....	81
<i>Mevlānā Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī</i> .....	82
Chapter 8: The Mystic Orders Take Shape .....	89
<i>The Kādirī Order</i> .....	90
<i>The Rīfā'ī Order</i> .....	92
<i>The Badawī Order</i> .....	93
<i>The Yasawī Order</i> .....	95
<i>The Nakshbandī Order</i> .....	97
<i>The Khalwatī Order</i> .....	98
<i>Ibrāhīm Gūlshenī</i> .....	99
<i>Niyāz-i Misrī</i> .....	100

<i>The Sa‘di Order</i> .....	102
<i>The Shādhilī Order</i> .....	103
<i>Other Orders</i> .....	104

## PART TWO: THE BEKTASHI PATH

Chapter 9: The Founding of the Bektashi Order .....	107
<i>Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī</i> .....	109
<i>Bālīm Sultān: The “Second Pīr”</i> .....	112
Chapter 10: The Fundamentals & Principles upon which Bektashism Rests .....	114
<i>Care in selecting Spiritual Associates</i> .....	116
<i>Spiritual Wayfaring on the Bektashi Path</i> .....	119
<i>Spiritual Training in Bektashism</i> .....	122
<i>Preparing the Wayfarer</i> .....	126
<i>The Sources of the Bektashi Mystic Path</i> .....	128
<i>Qualities the Wayfarer must possess</i> .....	130
<i>Bektashi views on Steadfastness</i> .....	131
<i>Bektashi views on Etiquette</i> .....	133
<i>Bektashi views on Egotism</i> .....	134
<i>Bektashi views on Spiritual love</i> .....	137
<i>Who can be considered a Lover?</i> .....	139
<i>Bektashi views on the Beloved</i> .....	141
<i>Lover and the Beloved Together</i> .....	144
<i>Bektashi views on Wahdat ul-Wujūd</i> .....	147
Chapter 11: Advice from Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī .....	151

## PART THREE: BEKTASHI POETRY

Chapter 12: Bektashi Poets & their Works .....	179
<i>Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī</i> .....	181
<i>Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān</i> .....	186
<i>Abdal Mūsā Sultān</i> .....	189
<i>Balūm Sultān</i> .....	193
<i>Kaygusuz Sultān al-Maghāwirī</i> .....	200
<i>Virānī Baba</i> .....	220
<i>Abdul Mu’min Dede &amp; Fużūlī</i> .....	225
<i>Şādiķ Abdal Baba</i> .....	232
<i>Sersem ʻAlī Dede</i> .....	234
<i>ʻArshī Baba</i> .....	239
<i>Mithālī</i> .....	240
<i>Imād ud-Dīn Nasīmī</i> .....	242
<i>Pīr Sultān Abdal</i> .....	257
<i>Kalandar Shah</i> .....	275
<i>Kazak Abdal</i> .....	277

<i>Kamāl ud-Dīn Shamīmī Baba</i> .....	281
<i>Üsküdarlı Hāshim Baba</i> .....	287
<i>‘Alī Turābī Dede</i> .....	289
<i>Bōsnevī Baba</i> .....	298
<i>Ibrāhīm Dertlī</i> .....	302
<i>Nasībī Tāhir Baba</i> .....	307
<i>Muharram Maḥzūnī Baba</i> .....	308
<i>Hajjī Mehmet Perīshān Dede</i> .....	316
<i>Aḥmad Seyrānī</i> .....	319
<i>Baba ‘Abdullah Melçani</i> .....	323
<i>Girītlī ‘Alī Rasmī Baba</i> .....	326
<i>Asad Baba</i> .....	330
<i>Sayyid Muḥammad ḋĀsim Baba &amp; His Tekke</i> .....	332
<i>Hajjī ‘Alī Khākī Baba</i> .....	336
<i>Selīm Rūhī Baba</i> .....	349
<i>Mehmet ‘Alī Hilmī Dede</i> .....	357
<i>Mehmet Yasārī Baba</i> .....	364
<i>Shamsī Baba</i> .....	367
<i>Baba Zayn ul-‘Abidīn Leskoviku</i> .....	369
<i>Edib Harābī Baba</i> .....	373
<i>Filozof Rıza Tevfik</i> .....	380
<i>Adam Wajhī Baba</i> .....	394
<i>Tālib Frashēri</i> .....	398
<i>Hajjī Ad’ham Bey, “Shahīdī”</i> .....	400
<i>Baba Melek Shēmbērdhenji</i> .....	403
<i>Şālih Niyāzī Dede</i> .....	416
<i>Baba Aḥmad Turānī</i> .....	419
<i>A poem from Ahmad Sirrī Baba</i> .....	421
<i>Baba Ibrāhīm &amp; The Hajjī Baba Tekke of Qesarakē</i> .....	422
<i>Baṣrī Baba</i> .....	425
<i>Salmān Jamālī Baba</i> .....	429
<i>Baba ‘Alī Tomori</i> .....	431
<i>Kulthūm Bājī</i> .....	440
<i>Zahrā Bājī</i> .....	441
<i>Sakīna Bājī</i> .....	442
<i>Āminah Beyza Bājī</i> .....	444
<i>‘Arīfah Bājī</i> .....	445
<i>Ikbāl Bājī</i> .....	446
<i>Munīrah Bājī</i> .....	447
<i>Baba Şālih Matohasanaj</i> .....	449
 A Few Words to Conclude With .....	452
 <i>Glossary</i> .....	457
<i>Notes</i> .....	467



*Indeed, We have given to you a clear victory*

﴿Sūrat ul-Fath 48:1﴾



## FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

*Bismi Shab Allah Allah!*

The Bektashi Way is profoundly simple yet perplexingly complex, striking in its boldness yet gracious in its subtlety; consequently, while shining forth brightly it still is seemingly cloaked in obscurity. There have been attempts to gather its history, characteristic ideas, and observable aspects together and to elucidate its inner wisdom in prose, but few of these attempts have been made by knowledgeable insiders, and even fewer of these have been made in English. This full translation of Baba Rexheb's *Islamic Mysticism and the Bektashi Path* from its original Albanian is thus a unique addition to the literature on Bektashism in English, and a boon to those who seek to know more about this clearly enigmatic way.

Baba Rexheb's book approaches its topic by first laying out the Islamic and Sufi context in which it is to be understood. Bektashi beliefs, practices and ethics are shown to be firmly rooted in the fundamental elements of Islam, and we can thus gain a sense of how Bektashis read the Qur'an and other foundational texts. By seeing Bektashism set within the ideological and organizational history of Islamic mysticism in its different streams, we are likewise better prepared to fathom the significances it gives to figures like Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and its interpretations of such concepts as *wahdat ul-wujūd*.

The book's treatment of Bektashism itself is unique in its emphasis on etiquette and morals, especially in relation to the proper behavior toward the spiritual guide, the *murshid*, but also in focusing on such virtues as steadfastness. Baba Rexheb presents the Bektashi Way as a way – a path to be followed – and often brings the reader back to awareness of this through repeatedly referring to the “wayfarer” and detailing the requirements of one who would undertake this journey. Much of this is overlooked in other descriptions of the Bektashi path, though its importance is undeniable. It is in keeping with this emphasis that Baba Rexheb provides a translation (in Albanian, and here for the first time in English) of the collection of spiritual counsels of Haji Bektash, a book known as the *Fawa'id*. Addressed to the wayfarer or dervish, these counsels offer a practical ethical road map. May

those who would fare this way find the insight, fortitude and steadfastness to follow this advice!

As perhaps the fruit of the wayfarer's labor on the way, we find another theme that runs through Baba Rexheb's description of Bektashism: love – especially its power to transform the lover by dissolving his or her ego, leaving nothing behind but oneness with the Beloved.

With a solid foundation in Islamic mysticism, and after a thorough account of the way of the wayfarer according to the Bektashi idiom, the reader is now prepared to appreciate another of the book's major contributions: its sizable collection of Bektashi *nefes* poems, most of them translated by Baba Rexheb from Turkish to Albanian, with some of them composed originally in Albanian, and all here rendered in English. Nefes poems have always been the primary literary vehicle for the expression of Bektashi ideas about the cosmos, the nature of God and the process of creation, the search for the Real, and the power of love, wrapped in that particularly Bektashi symbolism and mythology. Since the poetic corpus is also the realm where the enigmatic quality of Bektashi expression reaches its full potential, Baba Rexheb does us the favor of providing detailed commentary explaining some of the nuances of meaning in the individual poems, illuminating references which might otherwise remain opaque. We are also fortunate to be offered priceless anecdotes on the lives and careers of the poets whose poems are being presented. Most of the poems themselves are here given in English for the first time.

Coming from the pen of Baba Rexheb, this book includes insights that only a well-attained and cultivated Bektashi baba could bestow – one knowledgeable about not only the Bektashi path, but the principles of Islamic mysticism in general as well. The book has also been painstakingly and superbly rendered into English by the translator. This monumental undertaking involved, for one, translating dozens of complex poems from Baba Rexheb's Albanian translation, while diligently cross-checking them with the Turkish originals. This likewise required broad knowledge and a deep heart. The book in hand is the fruit of a labor of love. May all who read it with an open mind and a longing heart find what it has to offer!

May love be...

*Fakir Vafi Baba*

# BABA REXHEB: AMERICA'S ALBANIAN SAINT

by Mërgim Korça

I am deeply honored to have been asked to write the foreword to the magnum opus of one of Albania's most distinguished clergymen and intellectuals, His Holiness Baba Rexheb. I owe this honor to Mr. Huseyin Abiva, whom I first met in the early 1990s during his many visits to Taylor's tekke, where he absorbed the rudiments of Bektashi spirituality at the feet of Baba Rexheb. Now he has asked me to write this foreword, having been a close friend of this great spiritual master and as one familiar with Baba's lofty moral principles and way of life.

I recall one day asking Baba Rexheb, "O Baba! Why is it that people always seem to enjoy debating religious matters?" Baba immediately began laughing. He then quoted this saying of the great Muhammad: "Everything in creation knows something, but the ignorant know nothing." He then added, "Unfortunately my son the world is filled with ignorant folk – some even with grand diplomas. They attempt to interpret facts, frame generalizations and reach conclusions about religion without having tasted God. These intellectually-handicapped individuals achieve nothing except sinking ever deeper into the morass of confusion! The ground they walk upon in their ignorance is quicksand and as they start sinking ... well, may God grant them His mercy!"

Baba Rexheb acknowledged that traditionally Muslim students learned theology in the seminary (*madrasah*), where it was taught with all of the other subjects. Yet there is a deep trench that separates mysticism from theology. Mysticism can be acquired only by following the unique path that leads to it. If we consider how the majority of Muslims (and Christians for that matter!) explain their doctrines and dogmas, we notice that they do so from exoteric perspectives. However, mysticism, spirituality, and esoterism embrace a more profound understanding of religion; it is – in reality – the essence of religion!

I once asked Baba Rexheb whether he truly possessed the miraculous powers so often displayed by God's saintly mystics. He smiled and replied: "Oh no my son! I worship God like everyone else. The only difference perhaps is that I'm able to pray all day long. Now whether God listens to my prayers is up to Him. Moreover, whenever God has listened to my prayers He has done so on behalf of the people I've prayed for. Forget talk of my so-called miracles; I possess no power other than my ability to pray. It's God who performs the miracles!"

I can say with conviction that whenever Baba Rexheb touched on the most profound problems that have vexed the human mind from the very beginning – like the question of God's existence – you were carried away to levels beyond the bounds of space and time by his sweet way of speaking and his rigorous logic, often without realizing it. "Millions of human beings exist on earth," Baba would

say, “but how many of them are spiritually alive?” Immediately after offering this rhetorical question he would add that it is our egos that prevent us from becoming spiritually alive and uniting with God. The ego, and nothing but the ego, separates us from God. This is why Baba Rexheb saw egotism as the gravest moral affliction to even torment humanity. He told us that the ego sits like a high mountain rising before our very eyes, preventing us from seeing beyond. Yet if we can scale this mountain through discipline and self-restraint we will be able to see God in all of His majesty. Overpowering egocentricity will allow us to see God right in front of us. Therefore the great lesson that Baba Rexheb still teaches us today – even though his physical form left us on August 10, 1995 – is that if we strive for goodness, we must fully expect that righteousness and morality to one day triumph, encouraging us to view the future with faith and optimism!

“Nobleness of character is to repay an evil deed with goodness,” Baba Rexheb would often say, paraphrasing a Qur’anic verse. “But keep in mind,” he would add, “that doing good to obtain some heavenly reward is nothing but bartering. For us, there is no trading with God!”

I wish to conclude this foreword by presenting to the reader two incidents involving Baba Rexheb that I witnessed. I was once reading to Baba Rexheb (who had by then lost much of his eyesight due to his advanced age) a so-called “self-criticism” (i.e. “political confession”) made by Bedri Spahiu that was two newspaper pages long. Spahiu had been for a time one of the most prominent members of the Albanian Communist Party, and he managed to survive imprisonment after running afoul of Enver Hoxha. During WWII, Spahiu was the secretary of the Communist Party in the Gjirokastër District, and he did his utmost to capture and execute Baba Rexheb, who was a distinguished nationalist, an intellectual of note, and, of course, an irreproachable clergyman. This was also one reason why Baba Rexheb fled Albania for the West late in 1944. While I was reading Spahiu’s “self-criticism,” Baba listened with utmost attention. In the end – focused as he was – he spoke aloud, but as if to himself. “It’s funny,” he said, “how as people grow old they tend to move away from atheism and as they start believing in God, they also start telling the truth. Yet Bedri – as old as he is – continues to lie so boldly!” After some silence, he continued: “I have prayed much for his soul over the years; that God might have mercy on him and forgive his trespasses. However, now it seems that I have to pray much more on his behalf!”

The following is an example of the genuineness with which Baba Rexheb prayed to God without asking for any recompense, applying in his life the prayer of the mystic ‘Alī ibn Muwaffak (whom the reader will find quoted in this work): “O God! If I pray for the sake of securing paradise or escaping hell, give me not paradise; but rather plunge me into hell. I pray only out of love. Therefore merge me into Your countenance shorn of needing any effort!”

One day my family had heard from Baba Rexheb's sister, Mrs. Zejneb Çuçi, that Baba's ninetieth birthday would be occurring the following week and that she wished to celebrate this milestone event by holding a gathering. My wife and I told her that we would prepare a luncheon and that she should go ahead and invite Baba's closest devotees. My wife and daughter baked a big cake in the shape of the headgear (or *tāj*) of a Bektashi clergyman. On the day of the celebration, we stealthily gathered at the tekke, but without first meeting Baba to avoid compromising the intended surprise. The birthday lunch was then prepared in the tekke's kitchen. Exactly at noon, Baba Rexheb – as was his habit – proceeded to invite any visitors sitting with him in the reception hall to join him for lunch. Surprisingly, over thirty visitors started walking toward the staircase leading down to the dining hall. Even though a gathering of such a large number of people was unusual, Baba exhibited no suspicion as he led the way.

The staircase turns twice as it descends to the dining hall in the basement and when Baba reached the second turn, he saw the table set for a festive occasion. He stopped for a moment, looked back to the top of the stairs and called out to his sister. "Zejneb," he said, "what's going on today?" She merrily replied that this luncheon was for his birthday and that Mimoza, Bibika, and Mërgim had organized it in his honor. He stroked the length of his beard, as was his custom when he was thinking. He came down the last three or four stairs and walked to his chair at the table.

The birthday luncheon commenced, and it was filled with happiness and conversation. It was Baba Rexheb's custom to bless each of the three daily meals at the tekke not at their beginning but their end. Thus, when the birthday meal finished he thanked God for the bounty spread before us and at the end of the customary supplication he added these words in a rather self-effacing way: "My heartfelt thanks goes out to the Korça family for arranging this meal in my honor, as well as to all those who took part in it. But you need to know that I may be the first and only Bektashi baba to celebrate his birthday, given that Bektashi clergymen are forbidden to partake in such self-focused festivities!"

Is there a better example of a mystic of Baba Rexheb's caliber, a mystic who puts into practice the teachings of Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Veli, that to respect a person's good intentions and to avoid offending, he prefers to violate the regulations of his clerical office?

And with that I wish to once again thank Mr. Abiva for asking me to write this humble foreword to the enormous task that he has undertaken in translating the work of His Holiness Baba Rexheb, so that English-speaking readers interested in Islamic mysticism in general and in Bektashism in particular, can freely form their conclusions in regards to the spiritual and intellectual depth of this celebrated Albanian-American saint.

## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is with great happiness that we are able to present for the first time the full translation of Baba Rexheb's monumental work *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme*. Nearly half a century has passed since the first publication of this book, and it has been out of reach for the English-speaking world for far too long. It is our sincerest hope that this translation will equip readers with a better understanding of this well-known, yet often misunderstood, spiritual stream of Islam.

Since a full biography of Baba Rexheb can be read in Frances Trix's moving work *The Sufi Journey of Baba Rexheb* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press 2009) we need only present here a brief sketch of the saint's life, with emphasis placed on his writings. Baba Rexheb was born on August 18, 1901, in the southern Albanian town of Gjirokastër into the arms of a well-respected Muslim family. In his childhood, he received the formal education befitting a young Muslim male. At the age of seventeen, he was initiated into the Bektashi Order at the hand of his uncle, Selim Rühî Baba, and at the age of twenty-one, he was advanced to the rank of dervish. At the age of twenty-four, he took a further vow, that of celibacy, sealing his lifelong commitment to Bektashism. At this point, he took up residence in Gjirokastër's famed Bektashi monastery, the Teqe e Zallit.

Over the next two decades, Baba Rexheb served both his tekke and his spiritual master, Selim Rühî Baba, with great competence and care. He represented Baba Selim at the various congresses held by Albania's Bektashi community, allowing his reputation as a resolute mystic and gifted scholar to spread far and wide. During the Second World War, when Albania faced both foreign and domestic enemies, Baba Rexheb gave his open support to the Balli Kombëtar (National Front), an anti-communist republican organization. As a result, he was forced to flee Albania late in 1944 when the communists seized control of the country. He would never step foot in his homeland again.

Over the next four years, Baba Rexheb lived with hundreds of other Albanians in a displaced persons camp in southern Italy. In 1948 he moved to Cairo, where he served as a dervish in the Kaygusuz Tekke, which was then under the direction of Ahmed Sirri Dede (1895-1965). When the revolutionary government of Egypt closed the tekke in 1952, Baba Rexheb left for America, where he arrived on December 10, 1952, launching an entirely new chapter in his life.

With the generous assistance of the Albanian émigré community, The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery was opened in Taylor, Michigan on May 15, 1954. Since every tekke needs a spiritual master, Baba Rexheb was concurrently ordained a baba by Ahmed Sirri Dede. It was not long thereafter that Baba Rexheb began to organize the publication of a semiannual journal entitled *Zëri i Bektashizmës* (The Voice of Bektashism). In the lead article of the first issue, Baba Rexheb (as chief editor) presented the motivation for bringing out this periodical:

Bektashism is celebrated worldwide, particularly in our Albania, where it left a notable mark. This is why at the time of the foundation of the first Bektashi tekke in the United States of America, a great curiosity arose about it in many circles. Everyone now wants to know about Bektashism, its metaphysical foundation, its role in world history and in particular, Albanian history. To justly satisfy these desires we made the decision to publish – with our small budget – our journal *Zëri i Bektashizmës*, which will endeavor to bring knowledge to all those interested, in all that they want to know about Bektashism, its religious principles, and its history.

Baba Rexheb initially intended to keep the journal going into the future, suggesting that the frequency of publication could be expanded to quarterly given the interest (and the funding). He also solicited writings from those in the community who possessed a talent for writing, stating that the pages of *Zëri i Bektashizmës* were open to all articles “dealing with moral, social, and economic issues that promote the general good.”

It seems, however, that this appeal for community participation was unsuccessful in moving individuals to participate, even financially. Only four issues of the journal were ever published (1954-1955). Yet in spite of its brief existence, *Zëri i Bektashizmës* proved to be a treasure of information on Bektashi history, doctrine and practice. Each of the four issues is thirty-two pages in length, and all but one contains articles in English. The reason for this may have been a reflection of Baba Rexheb’s desire to make Bektashism accessible not only to English-speaking Albanian-Americans but to the general American public. All of the articles in the four issues are of a spiritual nature, dealing with points of basic Islamic knowledge (“Why is the Qur'an respected?”, “Islamic Pilgrimage”, “The Ka'bah: The Sacred Place of Islam” etc.), universal concepts of various mystical traditions (Vedic, Buddhist, Greek and Egyptian philosophies) and, naturally, Bektashism. Articles

discussing Bektashism include “What the Great Writers say about ‘Ali,” “How Bektashism was Organized” (which examines the lives of Hacı Bektaş Veli and Balım Sultan), “The Ritual Garb of Bektashism,” as well as articles on the Ashura, the Matem and the celebration of Sultan Nevruz.

In 1970, some fifteen years after the last issue of *Zëri i Bektashizmës* appeared, Baba Rexheb published *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme*, a book that bears witness to his extensive knowledge Islam, Sufism and the Bektashi tradition. What makes this work all the more noteworthy is that it was written with limited academic resources, a point frequently made clear throughout the text. It is likely that Baba Rexheb would have significantly expanded the book had he had a suitable collection of manuscripts at his disposal.

*Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* was clearly written for the general public, as the work’s style makes it an ideal textbook of sorts for readers unacquainted with the Bektashi tradition. Composed entirely in the Albanian language, the original printing consisted of 389 pages divided into two parts: the first presenting a broad outline of Sufi history and doctrine; and the second giving a focused presentation of Bektashi thought and mystic poetry. This organization offers the reader sufficient familiarization with the Sufi milieu from which Bektashism emerged before transporting him or her to the specifics of its path, reflecting in a way the gradual unveiling of spiritual truths that the wayfarer experiences in his or her journey along the spiritual path.

Baba Rexheb’s discussion of Sufism covers a number of fundamental themes. He begins by demonstrating the validity of mysticism within the Islamic tradition by using evidence found in the Qur’ān, ḥadīth ķudsī as well as the prophetic ḥadīth. After presenting these basic facts, he delivers an extensive overview of the advance of Islamic mysticism from the first to the fifth centuries Hijrah, which including accounts of the lives and teachings of such famous personalities as Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyyah, Bāyazīd Bistāmī, and Al-Hallāj. Baba Rexheb then gives an explanation of the mystical philosophy of Al-Ghazālī, the great thinker of the 11th century CE, and the impact it made on Islamic mysticism. He then moves the reader into the classical age of Sufism, presenting the lives and teachings of such distinguished mystic saints as Ibn ‘Arabī, Rūmī, and Ibn Fārid. This portion of the book ends with a discussion of the major Sufi orders (*tariķats*) that came into existence in the late Middle Ages: the Қādirī, Rifā‘ī, Badawī, Yesevī, Nakshibāndī, Khalwatī, etc. In this

examination of Bektashism's Sufi roots, informed readers might notice that Baba Rexheb includes no discussion of the heterodox roots so often ascribed to it by a significant number of academics and observers.

Having presented the contextual foundation of Bektashism, the second half of *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* discusses the major components of Bektashi spirituality, such as *adab* (etiquette), admission into the order, the centrality of mystical love, as well as the master-disciple relationship. This is followed by a solid 244 pages devoted to the lives and poetic verse of a long line of Bektashi personalities, beginning with Hajjī Bektāsh Velī and ending with the prominent babas of pre-WWII Albania, including Baba Rexheb's own spiritual master, Selim Rūhī Baba. These biographies are quite extensive in some places, and nearly all of the poems are provided with a brief explanation of their content and vocabulary.

In 1984, an abridged English translation of *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* appeared under the title *The Mysticism of Islam and Bektashism*. This translation was prepared by Bardhyl Pogoni and was 173 pages in length. Although the effort is certainly to be commended, the work, overall, is lacking in many respects. Much of the religious terminology was imprecisely rendered into English, and critical passages from the original work were not translated at all, disrupting the flow of reading and giving a blurry and rather imprecise picture of Bektashism. Despite claims that persist to this day, *The Mysticism of Islam and Bektashism* can in no way be considered a complete translation. It only covers the first half of Baba Rexheb's book (i.e. the portion discussing Sufism) and a minute part of the second. It is clear that there were plans to finish the translation of the remainder of the work, for the cover of *The Mysticism of Islam and Bektashism* is marked as "Volume I." Sadly, these plans were never realized as Bardhyl Pogoni passed away a year after this work was published.

Given that Baba Rexheb devoted a considerable portion of his *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* to poetry, it would be reasonable to devote a few words to this topic. One of the ways in which Bektashi spirituality has traditionally been conveyed is through the countless mystical poems (*nefes*) composed over the centuries by both wayfarers and saints. However, a reader unfamiliar with the principles of Bektashism is bound to find these poems difficult to understand. In addition to employing ambiguous phrases, symbols and terms intended to safeguard Bektashi teachings from the eyes of the uninitiated and hostile religious

orthodoxy, these poems seek to communicate spiritual experiences that are impossible or near-impossible to express with words. Thus they are veiled, cryptic and mystifying.

The majority of the *nefes* poems presented in this book were originally composed in Turkish. These were then translated by Baba Rexheb into Albanian. However, these translations were not direct renderings, as Baba creatively reworked the originals to convey their expressive beauty through rhymed and metered Albanian. This gave the book's readers delightful renditions of classic Bektashi poetry, albeit in a decidedly paraphrased form. For a poet the caliber of Baba Rexheb – who was not only fluent in Turkish and Albanian and but a master of the subject matter as well – rendering these verses accurately and rhythmically proved to be no difficulty.

Yet for this translator, the most challenging aspect of this book was how to render the vast assembly of *nefes* poems into English. Early on I decided to translate directly from the Turkish originals so as not to lose accuracy in conveying their meaning. Had I translated Baba Rexheb's renditions word for word, I would have had the same problem faced in translating the Turkish, although my renditions would then have been two translations away from the original, thus increasing the risk of losing what the poet sought to convey. I do not believe Baba Rexheb would have objected to this, for he himself chose the path of poetic style over verbatim translation. Thus, the English renditions of the *nefes* poems presented here are entirely the handiwork of this poor one, and any flaws and failings they may contain must in no way deflect the brilliance of Baba Rexheb's Albanian translations.

Two routes were available in translating directly from the original *nefes*: I could simply render the poems in an academic (and somewhat bland) manner word for word, preserving accuracy at the expense of flowing expression, or I could employ artistic license in reinterpreting the lines to convey a more poetic rendering. Baba Rexheb chose the latter course, and I felt it fitting to do the same. Therefore, the reader will find the English translations not only rhythmic but emulating (whenever possible) the rhyme schemes traditionally employed by Turkish and Albanian Bektashi poets.

Readers conversant in Albanian and Turkish and familiar with the subject matter will no doubt find gaffes in my translation of this lengthy and challenging book, particularly in the renderings of the poems. For

these, the translator apologizes and takes full responsibility. However, since this book presents information about Bektashism from the pen of a Bektashi master it would seem a shame to leave it untranslated and hence inaccessible to a large part of the world's population. Needless to say, this undertaking required an immense amount of perseverance over a number of years, and there is no way that I could have carried it out alone. Given my own inadequacies and limitations, I could not have accurately translated the subtle points of the many Turkish *nefes* poems presented in this book without the assistance of my own *murshid*, Vafi Baba. His guiding hand and expertise continually removed the obstacles I often faced rendering these poems into English. I cannot imagine ever being able to repay his help in this project adequately. I am also incredibly grateful for the assistance, great and small, I received from Emin Lelić, Sead Puškar, Azim Looker, Bahar Aykaç, Bektaş Ahlatoğlu, Kashan and Salman Malik and Cüneyt Dalgakıran in translating, editing, and review. For their help with the Albanian poems (often filled with archaisms not found in modern dictionaries), I wish to thank Fatos Kopliku, Shkëlqim Tosuni, and Olsi Jazexhi. May God bless each one of them! I would also like to thank both Mr. Mërgim Korça for sharing his memories of Baba Rexheb and the Albanian-American Bektashi community for all of the support and encouragement they have given me throughout the years that I worked on this project. I also would like to express my profound appreciation for the support and inspiration given to me by Haxhi Dede Baba Edmond Brahimaj, head of the World Bektashi Community (*Kryegjyshata Botërore bektashiane*) who has not only been a fountain of spiritual guidance for me over the years but a friend as well.

Notwithstanding the countless hours spent working on the translation of *Misticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme*, it was a task that brought great delight. In each sentence I found a newly-uncovered jewel infused with Baba Rexheb's spiritual grace and power. Knowing that these were his words was, at times, overwhelming, and throughout this work I often found myself returned to his presence, imagining him speaking these spiritual teachings directly to me.

To describe the depth of Baba Rexheb's character would require volumes. My own memories of him are held cherished in my heart. It might be easiest simply to say that Baba Rexheb fully embodied Bektashism in all of its high principles and unfathomable spirituality. Bektashism has often been called (understandably) a "liberal sect" within Islam. Having watched Baba Rexheb in the few years that I knew him, I feel it more

appropriate to describe Bektashism as an interpretation of Islam that orders us to perfect and purify ourselves before encouraging others to do so. I feel that this is the whole point of this book. The reader will not find in these pages lengthy descriptions of unfathomable secrets or mind-boggling mystic philosophies. What you will find is Baba Rexheb stressing the need to curb the ego, build character and polish the heart. If this can be done, we will not only advance through the veils separating us from the Real (*Hakk*) but we will come to see the great beauty of God's creation, the miracle that is humankind and we eventually find love and peace emitting from our hearts outward to the universe.

Baba Rexheb radiated such love and peace. To this day the tenderness, guidance, and service he gave to all who sat in his shadow are warmly remembered. This book expresses the essence of what Baba Rexheb taught and what he believed. It is a printed image of who he was. He lived every single day of his life by the teachings of morality and human perfection expounded upon throughout this book. This book, his book, *Islamic Mysticism and the Bektashi Path*, is an explanation of the world-view that created his goodness. Those blessed to have had the chance to meet him in this life will undoubtedly attest to this. For those who were unable to, this book is a way to know him.

Years ago, I went to visit Baba Rexheb seeking relief from some long-forgotten problem. "Don't worry, my son," he said. "Wherever you go, and in whatever you do, I am with you." My hope is that he is with me in presenting his book to the world.



## A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

Throughout this book, I have followed the Library of Congress' guidelines (with slight modification) in the spelling of names and concepts that are Arabic in origin. I have used the letter 'ќ' to represent the Arabic letter ڇ, rather than the standard "q" in order to avoid confusion with the Albanian letter 'q', which represents a different sound. My hope in taking this somewhat "academic" approach to translation and transcription is (hopefully) to aid in rectifying the widespread and habitual mispronunciation of names, concepts, and terms. For those individuals who lived part (if not all) of their lives in post-Ottoman Albania, I have used the relevant modern spellings. Dates prior to the 16th century AD are generally given according to the Islamic (*Hijrī*) and Christian calendars.

### *Arabic Pronunciation*

Those unfamiliar with Arabic transcription can ignore the diacritical marks and pronounce the letters as they appear in English; except note that the ā, ī, and ū are long vowels and commonly mark where the syllable is stressed - for instance, *kitāb* would be properly pronounced *kitaab*, *hadīth* as *hadeeth*, and *wujūd* as *wujoood*

### *Albanian Pronunciation*

c	'ts', as in 'bits'
ç	'ch', as in 'chair'
dh	'th', as in 'this'
ë	'uh', as the 'u' in 'radium'; silent at the end of words
gj	'dj', as in 'adjourn'
j	'y', as in 'yarn'
q	'ch', but with more of a 'k' sound
x	'dz', as in 'adze'
xh	'j', as in 'jump'
y	a tightly round 'u', similar to the Turkish 'ü'

### *Turkish Pronunciation*

c	'j', as in 'jump'
ç	'ch', as in 'chair'
ı	'uh', as the 'u' in 'radium'
ğ	silent, but it lengthens the preceding vowel sound
ö	a tightly rounded 'o'
ş	'sh', as in 'short'
ü	a tightly round 'u', similar to the Albanian 'y'



ISLAMIC MYSTICISM &  
THE BEKTASHI PATH





The cover of the first printing  
of *Misticizma Islame është Bektaşizma* in 1970.





## Baba Rexheb's Introduction

The Bektashi Order is known throughout the world, its presence being felt in those Muslim lands where it left lasting traces. Throughout the long centuries of its existence it has met both successes and setbacks. Consequently, people developed an interest in Bektashism, so much so that a significant number of books – both positive and negative – have been written about it. As a result, the Bektashi Order became well-known and noteworthy.

Enormous interest in Bektashism took hold in Albania, especially since our independence. It seemed that everyone was keen on learning something about it. Despite this eagerness very few comprehensive studies were written in the Albanian language about the Bektashis; and the people's desire to learn about this spiritual path and its philosophy remained unfulfilled.

We have always intended to write about this topic, hoping to give Albanians a more comprehensive understanding of the Bektashi Path. However this plan was repeatedly postponed owing to the unfavorable conditions of the time.

With the opening of a Bektashi tekke in the United States of America in 1954, we attempted (in cooperation with our tekke's administrators) to publish a periodical that would bring our intention to realization. This periodical was entitled *Zëri i Bektashizmës* (The Voice of Bektashism), and four issues of it were distributed to the public. However, the limited budget of the tekke prevented us from moving further with this project.

Then in 1964 a book was written by the beloved spiritual son of Hajjī Bektash, Mr. Xhevat Kallajxhi. This book was published by our tekke on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its establishment. Xhevat's work stirred a considerable amount of interest in our tekke and our mystic path, and it sparked in people a renewed yearning for a more extensive presentation of Bektashism. Therefore, having been invigorated by the desires of many enthusiasts, we sat down to write this book with the goal of realizing our long-held intention.

For this work to be a comprehensive study of the topic, we felt it necessary to explain the historical context of Bektashism by presenting its foundational background, which is Islamic mysticism. It is for this reason that we have entitled our book *Islamic Mysticism and the Bektashi Path*.

It should go without saying that writing this book was a challenging endeavor. Our isolation from Albania made it even more so, since we were cut off from the literary and academic resources available there.

Fortunately, we recently received two books on the subject matter. The first is *Tasavvuf Tarihi* (The History of Sufism) by Professor Mehmet Ali Ayni of the University of Istanbul, and the other is *İslâmiyetin Geliştirdiği Tasavvuf* (Sufism as Developed by Islam) by Ömer Rıza Doğrul. We profited greatly from these books and found them to be quite delightful. We made frequent reference to both of these works, especially in the first half of our book. We likewise referenced other books on our topic. Among these are the *Marifetnâme* (The Book of Knowledge) of İbrahim Hakkı Erzurumi, *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* (Early Mystics in Turkish Literature) by Fuat Köprülü, *Şeyhi Ekberi Niçin Severim* (Why I adore the Great Shaykh), also by Professor Mehmet Ali Ayni, and a number of other works on the topic of Islamic mysticism.

For the second part of our book, we consulted Dr. Bedri Noyan's *Aşk Risalesi* (Treatise of Love), *Mi'rât ul-Makâsid fî daf' ul-Mafâsid* (The Reflection of the Purposes for the Eradication of Intrigues) by Ahmed Rifat, and Sadettin Nuzhet Ergun's *Bektaşı Şairleri* (Bektashi Poets). We also consulted Hajjî Bektash Veli's *Fawâ'id ul-Fukarâ'* (Advice to the Poor), the book *Bektaşı Nefesleri* (Bektashi Lyric Poems) of Ziya Şakir, *Pîr Sultan Abdal* by Professor Gölpinarlı, and various collections of the poetry of such luminaries as Nasîmî, Kaygusuz, Fuzûlî, and so on.

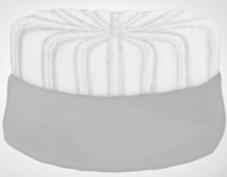
We make no claim to having produced a great work. We only trust that we have provided a broad explanation, more or less, for those individuals interested in this subject. Moreover, we believe that this is the first time that such a comprehensive book has been written in the Albanian language introducing both Islamic mysticism and Bektashism. We hope that our writing of this opens the way for others to compose works on this subject in the future, thereby enriching our mother tongue with such books that are found in all of the languages of the civilized world.

It must be said that mystical philosophy is by nature extremely intricate. Hence, this book must be read slowly and with care. To better understand the essence of the poems presented in the second half of the book, the reader should refer to the explanations that we give beneath each, since many poems might otherwise be incomprehensible.

It is our hope that future circumstances will allow us to write other beneficial books related to this topic. We close this introduction by asking for your continued support and we ask God Almighty to bring us success in all of our endeavors. Amin!

-The Author  
Detroit, Michigan  
July 29, 1967

# A History of Islamic Mysticism



آهْ تَسْلِمْ مِيَتْ

*Ah, Submission!*





# The Foundations of Islamic Mysticism 1

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**M**ysticism – or *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), as it is more commonly known throughout the Islamic world – is a wellspring of life for the human soul, for when the spirituality it stirs establishes its throne in the heart with the aid of heavenly directives, all selfishness and materialism fades away; and when this occurs its gifts will come to fruition.

Mysticism stimulates a state of awareness that guides those who practice it along the road to perfection. It provides these spiritual wayfarers with an all-embracing ethical outlook that purifies the individual of the crass vulgarities manifest in the material world. This cleansing prepares wayfarers for the ultimate goal of uniting with the Beloved, who is none other than God Almighty.

Mysticism is essentially a mirror that reflects our spiritual condition. As we strive along the spiritual path, this mirror enables us to cleanse our hearts through introspection – for introspection allows the shrouds of worldly passion that encircle the heart to unravel. By constantly curbing and combating lustful desires we will find the strength to abandon gradually all the diseases that afflict our character. When these desires begin to weaken, the transcendent element that is hidden deep within all of us will take bloom in our hearts, its seeds having been planted by introspection, contemplation, and self-accountability.

The adherents of Islam's mystical path corroborate the statements presented above by way of this *hadīth kudsī* (sacred saying), wherein God declares:

*My heavens and My earth cannot contain Me,  
but I can be contained within the heart of My faithful  
servant.*

Hence God's infinite light is to be found in the hearts of those who sincerely devote themselves to this spiritual path. In fact, the light produced by those journeying towards the Beloved has the power to purge every imperfection and lust from the heart, much like a diamond once extracted from the muck and mire is washed to present its true nature. We can likewise behold our true and splendid nature through such "washing", thereby uncovering countless secret treasures before the throne of God after having eradicated the self [or ego]. Doing so will bring us into the state called *fanā'* *fillah* by the mystics of Islam, a phrase meaning "extinction in God."

## THE KUR'ĀN

Mysticism has been present among human beings long before the advent of historical Islam, for it is a phenomenon that emerges out of the mists of antiquity. The Islamic mystics, however, stress that their particular approach to spirituality flows out of the foundations of Islam, which are the Kur'ān, the *hadīth kudsī* and the *Sunnah* (sayings and conduct) of the Prophet Muḥammad as recorded in the *hadīth*.

Those Kur'ānic verses conveying mystical insight are abundant, among which is this one, where God addresses the Prophet Muḥammad:

*And you (O Muḥammad) threw not when you threw,  
but rather it was God who threw...*

﴿Sūrat al-Anfāl 8:17﴾

It is important for us to explain the context of this verse to allow our readers to gain a greater understanding of its profound meaning. In the second year after the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Madinah (an event known as the Hijrah), the polytheists of Mecca assembled a huge army that was to launch a surprise attack on the Muslim community. To counter this move, the Muslims went forth from Madinah and met the Meccans at the Wells of Badr on the seventeenth day of the month of Ramadan. This battle was made all the more perilous by the fact that it was carried out at a time when the Muslim community was in a vulnerable condition.

As the battle raged, God commanded the Prophet Muḥammad to grab a handful of sand and throw it towards the enemy ranks. The sand immediately materialized in front of the Meccan army as a powerful dust storm, causing

blindness among their ranks. Consequently, their assault ground to a halt. Seeing their foes waver, the Muslim warriors counterattacked and eventually overcame the idolaters. The victory at Badr presented an opening for the Prophet's teachings to spread far and wide. The foundations of Islam were thus laid – foundations that no adversary has been able to shatter ever since.

Our mystics have extracted many meanings from this particular Kur'ānic verse, taking it as scriptural proof of God's absolute command over everything. Every act or movement that we make ultimately originates with God and ultimately goes back to God. To describe this principle with a simple allegory, the Islamic mystics have said that human beings are to God like pens in the hand of a scribe. The pen may write, but it is moved and directed by the scribe.

In addition to the aforementioned divine words, we have this sacred Kur'ānic verse, which states:

*God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.*

《Sūrat an-Nūr 24:35》

We also have verse 115 of Sūrat al-Baqarah, wherein God declares:

*Wheresoever you turn,  
there is the Face of God...*

《Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:115》

The Islamic mystics see this particular verse as proof of the mystical theories of *wahdat ul-wujūd* (the unity of existence) and *wahdat ush-shuhūd* (unity of appearance), both of which will be discussed later on in our book. In this verse God declares that He can be seen reflected in all of creation. We should next examine this verse, in which God declares:

*O you who believe! If any from among you abscond your Faith, soon will God produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him, gentle with the believers, strong against the immoral, struggling in the way of God, and never afraid of the accusations of the fault-finders....*

《Sūrat al-Mā'idah 5:54》

The Islamic mystics find confirmation in this verse for the emphasis they place on divine love. According to their perspective, this form of love expresses itself in two ways: Firstly, there is the love God has towards

spiritually-perfected human beings and secondly, there is the love that such individuals have for God. Both of these “loves” are included in this Qur’ānic verse. In light of this we read God saying in the Qur’ān:

*Have not those who disbelieve known  
that the heavens and the earth were of one piece,  
and We separated them...*

﴿Sūrat al-Anbiyā’ 21:30﴾

As with all of the Qur’ānic passages cited so far, our Islamic mystics extract many profound insights from this particular verse, the foremost being that it proves the concept of the primordial *Hakīkat-i muhammadīyyah*, the “Muhammadan Reality,” which is the underlying and all-encompassing foundation of creation. According to this theory, the essence of all created things was pre-eternally condensed within the *Hakīkat-i muhammadīyyah*. Then at God’s command, everything in existence emerged (and continues to emerge) out of this single reality, manifesting in the multitudinous forms they have been destined to possess. This concept is a bit complex to grasp fully, and it has been the subject of extensive discussion and debate between mystics and non-mystic thinkers over the centuries. The great thirteenth century mystic Ibn ‘Arabī wrote extensively on this theory, particularly in his work *Fusūs ul-Hikām* (The Bezels of Wisdom), a work that we hope to translate for our readers if the opportunity arises in the future.

Our mystics have likewise based their understandings of such topics as repentance, forgiveness, patience, reliance on God, prayer, remembrance, forsaking the world, and so forth, on the following Qur’ānic verses:

*And seek forgiveness of God. Indeed, God is ever Forgiving and Merciful.*

﴿Sūrat an-Nisā’ 4:106﴾

*Be mindful of your duty to God, and seek the way of approach unto Him...*

﴿Sūrat al-Mā’idah 5:35﴾

*O you who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy...*

﴿Sūrah Āl-i ‘Imrān 3:200﴾

*O you who believe! Turn to God with sincere repentance...*

﴿Sūrat at-Tahrīm, 66:8﴾

*And turn not away those who invoke their Lord,  
morning and afternoon seeking His Face.*

﴿Sūrat al-’An’ām 6:52﴾

*And worship your Lord until the certitude comes up to you.*

﴿Sūrat al-Hijr 15:99﴾

*Know that this world's life is only sport and play and gaiety and boasting among yourselves, and a vying in the multiplication of wealth and children, like the rain, whose causing the vegetation to grow, pleases the husbandmen, then it withers away so that you will see it become yellow, then it becomes dried up and broken down; and in the hereafter is a severe chastisement and (also) forgiveness from God and (His) pleasure; and this world's life is naught but means of deception.*

﴿Sūrat al-Hijr 15:99﴾

*And rely on the Ever-living Who dies not,  
and celebrate His praise...*

﴿Sūrat al-Furkān 25:58﴾

*Verily, the promise of God is true: let not, then, this present life deceive you, nor let the chief deceiver [Satan] deceive you about God.*

﴿Sūrah Luqmān 31:33﴾

## THE ḤADĪTH KUDSĪ

In addition to the Ḳur’ān, the Islamic mystics adorn their mystical perspective with the radiant light of the *ḥadīth kudsī*, the extra-Ḳur’ānic words that God revealed to the blessed Prophet Muhammad. One of the most well-known of these sayings is:

*I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known.  
Therefore I created Creation that I might be known.*

The Islamic mystics stress that these words reveal God's primordial love for His creation and that the entire cosmos was brought into existence solely to recognize and reciprocate this love. They assert that in pre- eternity God was as He always has been and that nothing else existed save His eternal divinity. God then desired to behold something other than Himself, and so He brought the universe into existence. However, since no reality truly exists apart from God, creation is nothing other than a glorious mirror of the divine. This fact is alluded to in another *ḥadīth kudsī*, wherein God declares:

*And the most beloved things with which My slave comes nearer to Me is what I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps coming closer to Me through performing extra-obligatory worship until I love him, so I become his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks...*

These words explain how those who submerge themselves in love of God will be united with the divine presence, much like the lover is united with the Beloved, or as the soul is entwined with the body. This particular ḥadīth ķudsī gives a clear explanation of the mystical concept of *ittihād*, the state where the spiritual wayfarer – being annihilated in the never-ending divine – merges into God and becomes the *Insān-i kāmil*, the “Perfected Human”. In the state of *ittihād*, the lover’s self is reduced to ashes, and he is dissolved into the ultimate beloved: God Almighty, who endures forever without equal. The mystic wayfarer thus becomes one in character and spirit with his beloved. In this transcendent state, the *Insān-i kāmil* finds that every act carried out and every word spoken arises not from the self, but from God. This concept is in accordance with this Kur’ānic verse where God describes the Prophet’s lofty spiritual rank:

*Nor does he speak out of his own desire...*

﴿Sūrat an-Najm 53:3﴾

This hallowed verse reveals that the blessed Muḥammad did not act or speak according to his will. Every word and every act emerged from him by the command of God. Any notion of self that the blessed Muḥammad may have possessed was extinguished in the divine. What appeared after that was nothing other than his true essence.

## THE ḤADĪTHS

In addition to the ḥadīth ķudsī there exist many other mystical sayings, or *ḥadīths*, uttered by sacred mouth of the Prophet Muḥammad. Among the more famous of these *ḥadīths* is this:

*He who knows himself knows his Lord.*

Commenting on this particular *ḥadīth*, the mystics of Islam maintain that as we aspire to journey along the spiritual path we must first come to realize that we are nothing; and having reached this point we must be prepared to truly understand that the only genuine existence is the existence of God. Moreover we have this blessed ḥadīth from the Prophet, where he says:

*Your greatest foe is the desire that emanates from between your two sides [i.e. the physical body].*

In accordance with this ḥadīth our mystics have continually battled to restrain any anger, lust or desire that may arise from within; for we will only be able to adorn our character with exemplary conduct when we have purified ourselves of vice and imperfection.

In addition to the two ḥadīths above the Islamic mystics have demarcated – using the unassailable words of the Prophet to prove their point – the various grades that the spiritually perfected possess in the mystical realm in relation to the martyrs, saints, and prophets. Here is a ḥadīth regarding this issue:

*Among God's servants are some who are neither prophets, nor martyrs, but their rank with their Lord on the Day of Judgment will be so high that the prophets and martyrs will envy them.*

After the exalted Prophet Muhammad spoke these words one of his companions asked: “Who are these people, O Messenger of God? Tell us about their qualities so that we may know them and perhaps come to love them.” The noble Prophet answered this question by saying:

*They are those who are lovers of God. They have forsaken worldly ties and the charm of this life. Their faces are filled with divine light [nūr] and they remain focused on that radiance. When others fear, they are not afraid, and when others are angry and worried, there is neither worry nor anger nor other concern among them.*

When these blessed words came to an end, the Prophet recited this Kur’ānic revelation:

*Verily, the Friends of God [awliyā’ullah], there is no worry upon them, nor do they grieve...  
﴿Sūrah Yūnus 10:62﴾*

Accordingly, these ḥadīths, these prophetic maxims, are part of the foundation upon which our mystics rest their spiritual endeavors. We should not forget to say that these wayfarers have as an exemplar the Prophet Muḥammad, both in life and in conduct, to whom we shall devote the following section.

## THE NOBLE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

In keeping with the advice of the Islamic mystics, we shall now cast a brief glance at the life and personality of the exalted Prophet Muḥammad; for it is in the example, or *Sunnah*, laid out by his life that we can clearly see all of the essentials of Islamic mysticism manifest.

Before the revelation of the *Kur’ān* and his ordination as God’s messenger, the noble Muḥammad would often retire to a solitary cave atop Jabal an-Nūr, a rugged mountain that rises above the city of Mecca. There he would seclude himself day and night, sometimes for months at a time. By focusing on the Creator, he would extinguish every worldly thought from his mind and ceaselessly polish his heart. It is not surprising that a man of such lofty caliber would thrust aside the whole world in this way, absorbed in the divine as he sat in seclusion. By carrying out these spiritual exercises he ultimately converged with *Hakk*, the Real (i.e. God) and melted in Him.

The noble Muḥammad would sit serenely in the absolute stillness of his cave, with his mind far away from the affairs of the material world and his heart stripped of any feeling for it. While his physical eyes could see nothing within the dark cave, the intuitive vision of his heart became intoxicated as he contemplated the flawless and masterly creator of the universe. Muḥammad beheld both the splendor of existence and, moreover, that of its all-powerful designer.

Whenever the sacred month of Ramadan came around the noble Muḥammad would drop everything and depart to his cave atop Jabal an-Nūr, giving full attention to his devotions. In his sanctuary, he completely set aside thoughts of family, home, and community, and this detachment from the world allowed him to inhale the spiritual delights of which Islamic mystics would later speak. This intense focus on spirituality, furthermore, caused the blessed Muḥammad’s innermost self to be unveiled, his intellect to sharpen, and his heart to be purified. Everything now came to be seen through the lens of Reality. With the passage of time the door to Truth

opened; and when he reached the age of forty, the honorable Muḥammad had become suitably prepared with worthiness and spiritual capability to embark upon his exalted mission as God's last messenger to the world.

One night, as Muḥammad's enchantment with the splendor of his beloved deepened, the Archangel Gabriel appeared. Drawing near to Muḥammad, the angel declared

*Read! In the name of your Lord Who created!  
He created man from a clot. Read!  
And your Lord is Most Honorable, Who taught with the pen.  
Taught man that which he knew not...*

﴿Sūrat al-‘Alaq 96:1-5﴾

Gabriel then conveyed verses of the Qur’ān to the exalted Muḥammad for the very first time with this command to “read”. Utterly bewildered by this supernatural experience, Muḥammad told the angel that he could not read, to which the angel repeated the command to “read” twice more. When Gabriel voiced the command a third time, the noble Muḥammad began reciting the divine revelation with perfect lucidity and at that moment he was charged with the burden of prophethood, as well as the enormous responsibility of conveying God's word to the world.

We should not imagine that the blessed Muḥammad only undertook such demanding spiritual exercises in the days before his prophetic mission. Not in the least! Even after revelation commenced and he was appointed God's messenger his transcendent state continuously and exponentially expanded. In fact, he never ceased to demonstrate a worthy and righteous lifestyle, a lifestyle very well-known to Muslims. The Prophet was completely submerged in divine love, and he thrust aside all worldly concerns for the sake of divine love, and thus his life became a venerated model of virtue for his spiritual heirs.

The Prophet Muḥammad's matchless moral status can be observed throughout the countless scenes displayed by his biography. The clearest and most noteworthy proof of his unsurpassed spiritual rank is the extraordinary event called the ‘Isrā’ wa ’l-Mi‘rāj. This event is mentioned in the Qur’ān, and it has been given extensive commentary in numerous important Islamic religious works – works that continue to be studied.

For those who may not be familiar with this event, the ‘Isrā’ wa ’l-Mi‘rāj is the night when the Prophet Muḥammad was miraculously led by Gabriel

from Mecca to the Al-Aksa sanctuary located in modern-day Jerusalem. From the Al-Aksa sanctuary he was then transported through the heavens. Unfathomable mysteries were revealed to the Prophet during this supernatural journey, and these mysteries allowed him to arrive at the highest of all conceivable spiritual ranks.

In the course of the ‘Isrā’ wa’l-Mi‘rāj a sacred ritual was held during which the blessed Prophet was bequeathed the mystic prototypes of the *tāj*, *khirkah* and *kemer* (among other things). These sacred vestments were later inherited by our Bektashi dervishes, who have used them to this day.

A further display of the Prophet’s otherworldly character can be observed in his daily habits. He continuously observed *perhīz* (abstinence) – eating little, or sometimes not at all. He dressed simply at all times, for he disliked ostentation. He also viewed excessive material wealth unfavorably. Our dear Prophet led the modest life that would later be emulated by our mystics. Much of the time the Prophet was found night and day engaged in prayer in the corner of his sanctuary. His eyes and his mind were incessantly focused on his love for God, the Lord of Reality. Indeed, the Prophet seemed forever occupied with worship, so much so that his feet often grew swollen from all of his standing in devotions. He likewise remained in prostration for hours.

“O Messenger of God!” a companion of his asked one day, “So many verses of the Qur’ān have been revealed to you. Why do you undergo all of these hardships despite the fact that God has already forgiven you of any previous or potential shortcomings?” “Should I not then be a grateful servant of my Lord?” the exalted Prophet responded. Furthermore, another one of his companions recalled that the Prophet once said: “I swear by God that I seek His pardon and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day.”

The guidance and teachings that the Prophet gave to his followers emphasized the worship of One God, the abandonment of sinful deeds, and the seeking of divine forgiveness. Also, he taught his followers to shun desire for this transitory world and to strive continually to purify the heart.

Let us now turn to some of the sayings of the exalted Prophet Muhammad, a man who at all times was true to his word and who forever made known what is right and good. Whenever any of his followers faced difficulties he advised them to be patient, to thank God and to seek forgiveness. He said:

*If God wishes good for one of His slaves, He seeks for him to deepen his pious efforts. God then makes him leave the worries of this world and shows all of his shortcomings needed to be improved upon.*

He also gave this counsel in regards to spiritual matters:

*If you see a man graced with renunciation of the world, and who is drained of rhetorical skills, come close to that man and stick to his side, for indeed he is inspired with wisdom (hikmah).*

And the Prophet relayed this ḥadīth қudsī from God Himself:

*None of My servants can approach Me, except those who meet Me having performed what I have commanded. Then My servant does not cease to approach Me through voluntary worship until I will love him. When I love him, I will become the ears with which he hears, the eyes with which he sees the hand with which he acts and the tongue with which he speaks.*

On another occasion, the Prophet said:

*Cleanliness is half of faith, while “Praise be to God” fills the other half, and “Glory be to God” and “God is Greater” fills up what is between the heavens and the earth. Prayer is illumination, while charity is a verification of one’s faith; patience is brightness and the Qurān is evidence (burhān) either on your behalf or against you. All people go out early in the morning and sell themselves, either setting themselves free or being ruined.*

The Prophet also said:

*God is nearer to you than you are to your own soul. Mention God when you are in a good position, and do not forget that He will give His support in time of misfortune. Wisdom is to know that what is to be has been preordained by God and that it will come in time; and what does not occur was not written to be. But know that the patient will triumph. Joy and sorrow are but sister and brother. Know that along with every difficulty there is certain relief.*

Again he said out of his sublime humbleness:

*O people! Seek forgiveness from God. Seek His mercy; for I myself ask God for pardon a hundred times a day.*

We can additionally see examples of the Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual state in the supplications that he made to his Lord:

*O Lord! I turn only to You! It is in You that I place my faith! Only upon You do I rely! For You I have struggled and for You is my remembrance! O my Lord! Before You I plead, for whom can I implore other than You? Do not place upon me sufferings I cannot bear! You are the Living and Everlasting! All else comes and goes, yet You remain eternal!*



*O Lord! Compel me to pray and make me steadfast! Diminish my stature in my own eyes and magnify me in the eyes of people!*



*O Lord! Help me to know! Make me satisfied with mercifulness! Honor me with Your protection and bestow upon me wellbeing!*



*O Lord! Please give me what is good, and protect me! Endow me with a virtuous character and increase my obedience to You, so that I may carry out Your commands!*

Such blessed words of the Prophet Muḥammad have repeatedly been rehearsed by the mystics of Islam. These prayers clearly reveal the immeasurable spiritual vision that was present in the life and character of the illustrious Prophet Muḥammad.





# Islamic Mysticism in the 1st & 2nd Hijrī Centuries

# 2

Islamic mysticism did not immediately manifest itself as a noticeable trend at the outset. Rather, it steadily evolved over a lengthy period, often with tremendous sacrifice, until it became widespread and firmly established throughout the Muslim world. During the first century of the Islamic era, mysticism was a well-guarded matter, and its observance was primarily restricted to the descendants of the exalted Imām ʻAlī and their intimate circle of devotees.

In the early decades of Islam, Muslims were well aware of their basic duties to worship God wholeheartedly, to properly perform the obligatory sacred rituals, and to implement divine commands, for doing so would grant heavenly blessings. According to the instructions of Islam, those believers who went above and beyond these obligations by busily engaging themselves with *nāfila* (super-obligatory) worship could obtain additional divine rewards. Many Muslims considered these *nāfila* devotions to be of great value, and those who did prayed without stop. Such pious individuals fervently begged God to bestow upon them whatever rewards could be gained through their efforts. However, carrying out such super-obligatory devotions was no easy task. *Nāfila* worship could be quite arduous, and consequently, it was not observed by the majority of Muslims.

Nonetheless, there were those who possessed the will and determination to forgo material comfort and give themselves totally over to the worship. Such people were called *ʻabīd*, or pietists, to distinguish them from ordinary Muslims.

In addition to the *ʻabīd*, there were others for whom these demanding forms of worship alone did not suffice. Such individuals performed austerities in addition to *nāfila* worship by completely eschewing the trappings of the material world, living plainly and standing aloof from the allure of ordinary life. These people came to be called *zuhhād* (sing. *zāhid*), or renunciants, to

differentiate them from both the common folk and the *‘abīd*.

The spread of Islam beyond the primitive tribes of the Arabian Peninsula sparked a renewed advance in human civilization and progress. During the early centuries of the Arab Empire two major educational institutions were established: one in Kufah (a town to the south of Baghdad) and the other in the city of Basra in southern Iraq.

In addition to teaching *mantik* (rational logic), the schools of Kufah and Basra focused on Arabic grammar and stylistics. Both of these institutions clearly maintained a religious character, as their goals were to delve into the layered meanings of the *Kur’ān*, the *ḥadīth*, and other texts relating to the Islamic faith through the study of linguistics. This is why, in addition to many accomplished grammarians, the schools of Kufah and Basra produced *huffāz* (memorizers) and melodious reciters of the *Kur’ān*, as well as commentators of sacred scripture.

In addition to *Kur’ānic* exegetes, there emerged individuals who mastered the study of *ḥadīth* and religious jurisprudence. The later was implemented in courts of law by the *kādis*. These men analyzed the exoteric rules and regulations of Islam and pondered on how best to apply these to society as a whole. The ultimate objective of the *kādis* was to ensure that the community of the faithful remained upright through the proper application of religious law. In doing so both the masses and the *kādis* would win the eternal delights of Paradise and escape the fires of Hell.

It is important to note that during the first century of Islam, the individuals mentioned at the start of this chapter who engaged in super-obligatory worship (the *‘abīd*) and those who renounced the adornments of the world (the *zuhhād*) had yet to form themselves into an organized body or order. Each acted in accordance with his or her individual spiritual perception and disposition. The religious lives of such resolute people focused on rigorous acts of worship and abstaining from physical pleasure. Their devotion was often accompanied by weeping and wailing caused by reflection on possible consignment to Hell. In fact, the *huzn*, or distress, of these ascetics reached such a level that their constant wailing served as an outward affirmation of their inner anguish.

Both the *‘abīd* and the *zuhhād* struggled to constrain and resist the desires of the ego all the while striving to purify their souls through *tafakkur*, or reflection on the life to come. The material world was of no significance to these folk and they eagerly sought to surmount the many perils and hurdles on the path to gaining God’s approval and grace.

This spiritual outlook came to be epitomized by the “Basra School” of mysticism, which argued that only intense contemplation could bring one to genuine faith. Moreover, the Basra School held the view that self-purification was the only act capable of gaining God’s pleasure, which would be needed to allow one to enter Paradise. Self-purification could only be stirred by the distress, anxiety, and regret felt over one’s pitiful and imperfect spiritual state. One of the great mystics of this period, the famed Ȣasan al-Baṣrī, spoke about this stance:

This world is like a fertile field. If you plant it with all that it hungers after you will be answerable, for you will only be saved if you do not fill it with desire. If you are taken up with it in friendship, it will cast you into a pit from which not even the most skilled can escape. Intense contemplation leads one to good works and repentance from immoral acts. However beneficial it seems to be, this world is temporary and thus has no lasting value. It cannot be compared to a world that is everlasting. Move away then from this illusory and deceitful world, for its craftiness is sugary and unrestrained. Deluded is the one who embraces it completely!

Regarding distress, anxiety, and regret Ȣasan al-Baṣrī said:

He who has genuine faith rises in the morning with fear and goes to sleep at night with fear. We cannot do otherwise; we are simply stuck between these two fears. The first fear is this: Since we commit so many sins we are not even aware of, there is the fear of how God will be awaiting us on the Day of Judgment. The second fear is the uneasiness of how we will spend our day, never knowing what will result, and of doing something that will not be approved and accepted by God!

On the matter of anxiety over possible consignment to the fires of Hell, Ȣasan al-Baṣrī added:

A godly man knows he will eventually die. He believes that he will rise on the Day of Judgment and appear before his Lord with all of the deeds performed during his lifetime. Consequently, he will always fear what his end will be; and for this he becomes terribly careworn, ever so often weeping. If we live life filled with such worry of Hellfire we will be encouraged by this worry to do good, and in this way, we will earn the ultimate reward.

Finally, Ȣasan al-Baṣrī gave the following counsel about worldly desires:

O Humanity! Save yourself from cravings. Guard yourself against these, for your soul is in your hands. If it is to be saved, it will be you who will save it! If it is lost, you will be lost with it. What do you want of things other than your own? They will have no value one day. However, if you win Paradise, everything will be yours!

To sum up this section, the Islamic mystics of this time saw focused contemplation on the afterlife as the sole method by which a person could find true faith, since fear and worry of divine chastisement would compel the individual to purify the heart and carry out deeds pleasing to God. In doing this, the reward of Paradise would be secured.

However, by the second Hijrī century the aforementioned outlook was fused to a new idea: the concept of love for God. In addition to contemplating the afterlife and weeping for fear of divine chastisement (elements of which persisted), many pious persons came to realize that an element of *‘ashk ilāhī* (divine love) had to be present in the struggle for spiritual awareness. This insight did much to advance the spiritual growth of humanity; and the initiator of this fresh inspiration was a woman from Basra named Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyyah, to whom we exclusively devote the next section.

## RĀBI‘A AL-‘ADAWIYYAH

The saintly mystic Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyyah was born in the city of Basra towards the end of the First Hijrī century. She completed her higher education in her hometown, and she eventually progressed so far in the realm of mysticism that she gained the title “The Crown of Men.” She passed from this world in 185/ 801 and lies buried on the Mount of Olives in Palestine, where her illuminated grave continues to be visited by pilgrims.

Rābi‘a married only once, and when her husband passed away, she was left with very little money. Her poverty compelled her to focus her whole heart on the spiritual path and like the other Islamic mystics of her day, Rābi‘a pursued this path with tears of sorrow and worry. But she introduced a new element into the ascetic outlook of her contemporaries: that of *‘ashk ilāhī*. This element of divine love would play a tremendous role in opening of a new chapter in the story of Islamic mysticism.

In her spiritual pursuits, Rābi‘a not only exhibited the distress, trepidation and weeping that the *zuhhād* of her day experienced, she also enjoyed something far loftier than a desire for Paradise or fear of Hell. For



The tomb of Rābi'a al-Adawiyyah on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem.

her, the wayfarer needed to give less importance to fear of divine wrath and aspiration for a heavenly reward to attain spiritual fulfillment. Instead, God needed to be loved, and the wayfarer's driving impetus must be seeking out the beauty of God's visage. Love of God, above all else, should be the primary goal of all true mystics.

Rābi'a maintained that it is only this spirit of love that can bring the wayfarer to the ultimate reality. In stressing this point – especially at a time when Islamic mysticism was still unrefined and had yet to achieve full maturity – Rābi'a fashioned a new take on the transcendent path to God. On hearing a *zāhid* once exclaim, “Oh the sorrows!” Rābi'a quickly retorted, “You should rather say ‘Oh the lack of sorrows!’ For if you were truly filled with sorrow you would not have the gall even to breathe!”

It would be no overestimation to describe Rābi'a as the first nightingale of her time, a nightingale who sang of the beauty, grandeur, and adoration of her beloved, God. Rābi'a was the most advanced mystic of her day, the brightest and most exuberant of all. She utterly detached herself from the adornments of the world and ultimately surrendered heart and soul to her Lord. Rābi'a was submerged in the love of God, and her ego was completely extinguished by the intensity of that love, so much so that her biography has been celebrated ever since.

Nevertheless, Rābi'a did on occasion express apprehension about God's judgment in the afterlife, but her worry was interwoven with the loving adoration for her maker that she felt deep within her soul. In other words, any despondency that she might have felt was nothing other than the boiling cauldron of love which, in poetic expression, bubbled and seethed in her heart. Her merging of love and dread left clear marks on her spiritual teachings. These marks can be considered the first stage of an undercurrent that was to be absorbed and expanded by later Islamic mystics.

In her recorded words, Rābi'a conveyed love's passion with such profound sincerity that she came to be respected and praised by many subsequent mystic luminaries, like Suhrawardī and Al-Ghazālī. She truthfully touched on no other theme except divine love. Everything for her began and ended with this, and she wholeheartedly endeavored to communicate this ideal in the loftiest way. This can be seen in this poem wherein she describes her spiritual state:

*It is with two loves that I adore you;  
One love from myself, the other from you.  
In the love from myself I endlessly call to you;  
You reveal your face in the love that comes from you.  
No praise in these loves towards me at all us due,  
Praise alone for both utterly belongs to you.*

The great Islamic scholar and mystic Al-Ghazālī (whom we shall meet later on) paid tribute to Rābi'a's words in his masterwork *Iḥyā 'ulūm al-Dīn*, saying:

What Rābi'a means by a “love from myself” is the love of God stimulated by His approval and grace. This love brings momentary delight. The love that “comes from you” is the love revealed to her through God's visage. This is the loftier of the two loves. The pleasure arising from the glory of God's visage is relayed by the exalted Prophet Muhammad in this ḥadīth kudsī, where God says: “I have prepared for my faithful servants what eye hath not seen nor ear heard and what has not entered into the heart of man.” Some of these delights are awarded in this world to those who have wholly purified their hearts.

Rābi'a herself said in one place:

Within my heart here is only one voice that speaks, and it is yours!

Others speak around me and remain within eyesight. However, in my heart, at the center of my soul, there is only one and that is you!

On another occasion she exclaimed:

O my love! Whenever I express love, you turn to me. What is this wonder? For what reason? Aren't you a lover as you say? Anything otherwise would be dreadful, for the Beloved not to respond to the lover!

Contrary to the outlook of the zuhhād – who only sought to gain Paradise and save themselves from Hell – Rābi'a struggled to fully submit to God and draw near to Him, so near in fact to be dissolved in His grandeur. For her, true love neither dreaded punishment nor desired reward. Rābi'a only wanted to behold the splendor of God's visage and merge with it. This was a unique and exalted notion, one that is clearly seen in this most famous supplication of hers:

O God! If I worship you for fear of Hell, incinerate me in it. If I worship you out of longing for Paradise, keep it from me. But if I worship you for yourself alone, do not deny me your everlasting splendor!

When a friend once asked her how she understood faith, Rābi'a replied without delay:

I do not worship my Lord to obtain Paradise, or to avoid Hellfire – such a thing would make me look like a common servant who works only to receive compensation. I submit to my Lord solely to love Him with all my being. Where one to weep and wail for God without being united with Him, it would be a useless artificiality.

Rābi'a gained the admiration of all of her contemporaries on account of these transcendent principles. She was the first person to inject the notion of divine love into Islamic mysticism, a concept that we have detailed above.





# 3

## Islamic Mysticism in the 3rd & 4th Hijrī Centuries

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As the domains of Islam expanded during the third and fourth Hijrī centuries, the Arab people came into intimate contact with more sophisticated civilizations and the resulting interaction yielded significant advancement in many areas of life. Thus the Muslims were able to bequeath numerous contributions to humanity, and it was during this era that a vizier of the Seljuk Empire founded a university in Baghdad known as the Madrasah an- Niżāmiyyah

In those days Baghdad took on the appearance of a world capital as it turned into a focal point for countless cultural and scientific activities. Hundreds of translators of ancient Greek, Sanskrit, Syriac (an old Semitic language) and Middle Persian rushed to the patronage of the caliph's court. These individuals translated into Arabic important works in the fields of physics, chemistry, mathematics, medicine, science, as well as other areas of study. As a result of these translations, the Muslim Arabs produced many distinguished doctors, eminent scientists, expert mathematicians, and gifted chemists.

During this period of history the cultural advance of Muslim civilization received fresh momentum with the emergence of Persian literature, a field that would contribute over the centuries hundreds of poets, authors, and prose writers who would bestow upon their language worldwide recognition.

During these centuries of educational and cultural expansion, the Muslim world advanced with such great strides that it made an identifiable impact on many other civilizations around the world. In fact, it significantly influenced the development of Western civilization. It is well-known that many words of Arabic origin – such as algebra, alchemy, magazine, etc. – can still be found in European languages. This alone bears witness to the important role that medieval Arab culture played in the formation of modern Western civilization.

During this period we also find broadminded Muslim thinkers challenging the inflexible mindset of religious conservatives. The technological, educational and material advances in daily life began to challenge people's views, especially their views on faith and spiritual awareness. As they grew infatuated with the material gains that progress conveyed they began to forget the ways of the *‘abīd* and *zuhhād* of earlier times. However, a handful of individuals firmly resisted this state of affairs, and they held fast to the quest for the transcendent.

As the words *‘abd* and *zāhid* gradually fell into disuse the term *taṣawwuf*, or proper mysticism, started to be used to describe the quest, the practitioners of which came to be known as “Sufis.” The Arabic word *suf* means “wool,” and these individuals were in all probability called “Sufis” because of the coarse woolen robes they wore as their habit. The definition of a Sufi bears similarity to *‘abīd* and *zāhid*, but it diverged significantly from these two as a result of the attitudes of later mystics, to the point that very little remained of any initial likeness. The mystic Abū Hafs al-Suhrawardī (d. 641/1243) wrote in his *‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif* (Knowledge of the Learned) that Sufism possesses some qualities and merits lacking in the ways of the earlier *‘abīd* and *zuhhād*. Sufism is a means by which one could gain an elevated state through forsaking negative behavior. Consequently, Sufism stands apart from the two earlier spiritual approaches, which laid emphasis on distress, apprehension, and sorrow. Thus the Sufis branched out from the *‘abīd* and *zuhhād*, as well as the *‘ulamā’* (scholars of exoteric Islam), and, as we had mentioned above, one of the peculiar practices of the Sufis was the donning of woolen cloaks as an outward sign of their indifference towards worldly wealth.

Before presenting details regarding the progress of Islamic mysticism in the third and fourth Hijrī centuries, it would be best to draw attention to the definitions given during this time to the words “Sufi” and “Sufism”. Throughout their evolution, these terms have been used to describe adherents of the spiritual path in relation to the qualities its followers possessed. Despite the fact that these terms have been defined in a variety of ways, the substance and goal of these explanations is one – as can be observed in these quotes:

- According to Bishr al-Hāfi (d. 255/840), a Sufi is “a person who is spiritually pure and whose heart is entirely illuminated.”
- Bandar ibn Husayn (d. 353/964) said, “God has chosen the Sufi for

Himself and cleansed him from his ego's cravings. Such a person has pleasure and satisfaction with God. He has severed all links to worldly desire and is thoroughly devoid of it.”

- Abū ‘Alī al-Rūdhbārī (d. 321/933) described a Sufi as a person, “who wears a coarse woolen cloak out of love for God. He is never angry and he is thoroughly stripped of the world. He is busy with both his hands in the way of the Prophet, a way which he holds to with great vigor.”
- Salh al-Tustarī (d. 284/898) said, “A Sufi is one who is stripped of all moral impurities. He remains pure, detached from any connection to the material world. He keeps his thoughts focused on God and is withdrawn from human affairs. Gold and coal are one and the same to him.”<sup>1</sup>

As we can see, this array of definitions points to a single goal in that they all agree that the soul must be purified and desire overcome. The ego must be fought if we seek to draw near to God. The enchantments of this world must be resisted, and the self entirely surrendered to the divine, all while maintaining deep contemplation. These acts are in full accord with the teachings of the Prophet. These additional definitions of Sufism should help us gain further understanding of its goals:

- Ma'rūf al-Kharkhī said: “Sufism is the complete immersion of your being in spiritual matters. It is forsaking anything that should fall into your hand and, moreover, holding no hope in the material world.”
- Abū Muḥammad al-Jarīrī said: “Sufism is the integration of lofty characteristics and the forsaking of moral deficiencies.”
- Ruwaym al-Baghdādī said: “Sufism is based on four things: privation, which means detaching from both what you have and that which you don't have; reliance on God and leaving your needs to Him alone; sacrifice in the way of God; and seeing the needs of others as being above your own. Sufism is giving up asking anyone for anything and demanding your rights from others. Sufism is abandoning anger and freeing the self from lustful desires, annihilating them altogether.”

- Junayd al-Baghdādī said: “Sufism is being with God and having no worldly attachments. It is extinguishing desire and ego. It is uniting with God and submitting to Him in accordance with the words of the Prophet Muḥammad: ‘Die before you die.’”<sup>2</sup>

Junayd likewise said: “Gather yourself together and consistently bring God to mind.” This means that if we are to make spiritual progress, we must remember God with heart and soul and trust in Him completely. Furthermore, Junayd stated: “Being vigilant, enter into the state of *wajd* (ecstasy) and be absolute in your submission.” This means that we must follow our pious predecessors not just in word, but in deed. All of these definitions require us to adorn our spiritual lives with admirable character, for doing so aids in conquering the ego and in gaining nearness to God.<sup>2</sup>

We should note here that the Arabic term *fakr* (poverty) as it is used by Islamic mystics means to be in a state of need to the greatest extent that the wayfarer can bear, relying solely on God for the fulfillment of his needs. Also, the wayfarer must not imagine that he has any real will, for everything must be entrusted to God’s will. He must strive to cleanse himself of all moral impurities, as commanded by the Qur’ān and the example of the Prophet. This striving will certainly hasten the obliteration of the ego before the majesty of God.

If we were to condense these various descriptions of Sufism into a single definition it would become clear that if we choose to dedicate ourselves to the spiritual path we must not be deceived by the tumult of the world; rather we must completely involve ourselves in polishing the heart, living by lofty principles, removing egoism, and outfitting ourselves with the qualities of holiness. We must also carry out deeds that are beneficial to humanity, thereby remaining faithful to the practice of the blessed Muḥammad.

As we can see, the definitions (or rather explanations) of Sufism presented above – which were given in the last half of the second Hijrī century – possess several shades of meaning. Nevertheless, they can be summarized in the words of Ma’rūf al-Kharkhī, who stated: “Sufism embraces *ḥaṭīkat*, or reality, and it rejects anything that is in circulation among the masses.”

Now that we have briefly presented the descriptions used by the early spiritual masters to define mysticism and Sufism, it would be beneficial to examine how these concepts were viewed during this early period of Islamic history. Was it or was it not seen as a field of knowledge? Moreover,

if it was, what category of knowledge did it belong to? To answer these questions we shall present a careful examination of the issue here.

The *sharī'at*, or Islamic sacred law, not only taught Muslims how to conduct ritual worship in the proper way, it also instructed them on how social and civic obligations had to be discharged. When we investigate this period of history, we find that the rules of the *sharī'at* were seldom catalogued, systematized, or put down in writing. Instead, they were committed to memory and transmitted orally to the next generation.

Over time, however, the doctors of the *sharī'at* – as well as others fixated on exoteric religious knowledge – properly systematized and arranged the particular points, principles and matters dealing with sacred law. With this codification of the *sharī'at*, there arose a class of scholars known as the *fukahā'*. These scholars studied, analyzed and explored the *sharī'at* in such great detail that they were able to write countless books, both great and small, regarding its regulation. Sometimes these works comprised numerous volumes. Of course all of these compositions claimed to be anchored in the commands of the *Kur'ān* and the Prophet Muhammad.

The Sufis were, by and large, indifferent with such works. They did not feel the need to preoccupy themselves with exoteric manifestations of Islam; rather they sought to delve into its inner depths. Like the *fukahā'* the Sufis began to write and arrange works according to their particular outlook. These works discussed topics like self-discipline, the purification of the heart, moving away from immoral desires, and leading a life based on transcendent values.

Consequently, Islamic leaning advanced along two divergent paths. The first dealt solely with ritual prayer (*ṣalāh/namāz*) and other external religious rites and regulations, and it came to be known as the path of *'ilm-i zāhir*, or exoteric knowledge. *'Ilm-i zāhir* supplied *fatwās* (practical rulings) based on the yardstick laid down by the *sharī'at* as interpreted by the *fukahā'*, who along with the *ḳāḍīs* and *muftis*, were the law's foremost authorities.

The second path explored matters such as self-discipline, struggling against the ego, and expanding of one's spiritual state. This path became known as the path of *'ilm-i bātin*, or esoteric knowledge – which is the path of mysticism.

The *fukahā'* wrote books filled with *fatwās* based on the precepts of the *Kur'ān* and the *ḥadīths*, while the mystics wrote of spiritual intoxication and annihilation in the splendor of God, along with the experiences that

transpired while traveling through these states. Unsurprisingly writings of these two streams of thought evolved in different directions, with the *fukahā'* focusing on exterior worship and social conduct and the mystics focusing on the purification of the heart, the development of virtue and spiritual insight. As we have stated above, the interpretation of the *sharī'at* (for that matter, Islam as a whole) separated into two contrasting branches: the exoteric and esoteric; and it has remained like this ever since.

While the *fukahā'* were busy with the exoteric, the early mystics of Islam began framing concepts that would be expanded upon by later mystics. For instance, these individuals asserted that genuine spiritual awareness could not be attained by means of *zāhiri* (external) knowledge, but only through *bātini* (esoteric or inner) knowledge. This awareness was not seen as a category of knowledge per se, but as *hikmah*, or wisdom. It could not be truly be categorized as a science since it was a heavenly knowledge (*ilm-i laduni*). This awareness was not based on words and books; it was a state of consciousness. İbrahim Hakkı Erzurumi (d. 1780) clearly explains this point in his *Ma'rifatnāmah*:

Bātini knowledge is heavenly knowledge, the awareness of reality, the awareness of the saints, the awareness of *irfān* (mystic gnosis) and divine love. It is a perception in the heart that opens eyes, covers transgressions, forgives shortcomings and adorns the nameless. It is knowledge about which God speaks of in the Qur'ān: "Who comes to this knowledge brings about great good."

He then continues:

*Zāhiri* knowledge is acquired through study, whereas *bātini* knowledge is attained by way of renunciation. *Zāhiri* knowledge bounces from one tongue to another, whereas *bātini* knowledge descends from the insight of the heart and it trickles into the core of the soul. *Zāhiri* knowledge is a feat of the tongue, whereas *bātini* knowledge emerges from the angelic realm and is connected to matters of the heart. *Zāhiri* knowledge is recognized far and wide and is written down in books, whereas *bātini* knowledge is enclosed in the breasts of those near to God, and all others are forbidden to convey it. *Zāhiri* knowledge is discovered by thinking, whereas *bātini* knowledge is obtained through the continual remembrance of God.

Another Islamic mystic, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 385/996), once said this about bāṭīni knowledge:

The individual absorbed in mystical awareness of God enjoys three sorts of knowledge. The first is ẓāhiri knowledge, which is open to all. The second is bāṭīni knowledge, which is only bestowed upon the capable. Then there is a third type of knowledge, which is neither ẓāhiri nor bāṭīni; this knowledge forever remains concealed and is a secret between God and the *Insān-i kāmil*.

On the subject of *hikmat ilāhī* (divine wisdom), İbrahim Hakkı adds these words:

Hikmah is spiritual wisdom. It is an inspiration from God that takes one to the heights of understanding, reasoning and insight. It is an illumination that descends from the divine throne to the accepting heart, by which everything is fully untangled and by which *Hakk*, or Reality, is revealed. The one who obtains this blessing converses with God and abides in Him. This person speaks and acts in order to rectify and make all well. The signs of this kind of knowledge entering are: the letting go of worldly desires, the intent to be continuously in the *ḥuzūr* (presence) of the Lord, eating, drinking, and speaking less, being in a state of constant goodwill and speaking appropriately, and finally, remaining entirely focused on God. The signs of hikmah in an *‘ārif* (gnostic) are that he is sustained by his Lord having surrendered completely to his Lord's will and that he is gentle and humble before people, socializing with them in a pleasant way. He respects his elders, gives consideration to the young and shows kindness to both friend and foe. He who has these qualities stands as wise in the eyes of God. Such a person conveys this wisdom to those who are capable of carrying it and withholds it from the ignorant.

Concerning bāṭīni knowledge, Jāmī (d. 897/1492), a mystic of Persia, states in his book *Nafahāt al-‘Uṣūl* (Breaths of Fellowship):

<sup>‘</sup>Ilm ul-bāṭin is the complete knowledge the Prophet Muḥammad received in his heart from the divine throne by way of inspiration and without the intermediation of the Archangel Gabriel. This inner awareness encompasses many forms of knowledge, such as knowledge of faith, of Islam, of sincerity, of one's self, and of

purifying the self. Moreover, *‘ilm ul-bāṭin* encompasses a total understanding of the word of God, the lifting of the veils of His countenance, His unity, His manifestation and the approach to Him. It has a rank and place in respect to the relevant divine qualities. It also presents a full understanding of the spiritual states of nearness, distance, annihilation, abiding, intoxication, and vigilance.

All of the spiritual states cited by Jāmī can be very difficult to understand and can only be grasped and tasted by those who have been inspired to reach them. Nevertheless, we highlighted them here so that our readers may become acquainted with them.

Before we close this subject we should consider the opinion of the Egyptian scholar and mystic *‘Abd ul-Wahhāb ash-Shārānī* (d. 973/1565), who states the following in his book *At-Tabakāt al-kubrā*:

As stylistics is to the core of applied linguistics, Sufism is to all of the works that spring from God’s commands and the dictates of His noble messenger. Mysticism is an unimpeded knowledge, recognizable in the words of both the *Qur’ān* and the Prophet. The great Sufi, Ibn ‘Arabī, said in his remarkable work *Al-Futūhāt al-makkiyya*: “Walking the Sufi Path requires resilient faith and steadfastness.”

*May God confer such light upon us! Amin!*



Looking through the books of centuries past we see that the Sufism of the third and fourth Hijrī centuries integrated the basic principles of mysticism, morality, metaphysics and, above all, personal integrity. The renowned late-Ottoman scholar Mustafa Abdürrezak Pasha wrote that mysticism conveys the essence of exoteric Islamic worship. This view is further reinforced by Abū Bakr al-Kattānī (d. 322/934), another mystic sage, who states:

Sufism advocates integrity of character, because this bolsters godliness and expands internal purification. The pursuit of wisdom on the Sufi path leads one to know the self, as it allows awareness of the good and evil aspects found within one’s character,

compelling a determined individual to strive for improvement. Sufism, therefore, requires both moral and spiritual focus.<sup>3</sup>

The Islamic mystics of centuries in question sought to unlock the human spirit and provide examples of how this could be done. They were likewise interested in the spiritual stations that the soul traversed on its ascent back to God. These mystics taught people to free themselves from the clutches of the ego, for then their souls would abide in God, ultimately merging into Him.

These early mystics saw this path embracing the ethical teachings outlined by exoteric Islam and as a means by which boundless spiritual wisdom could be obtained – since it is a yardstick of the transcendent affairs of the heart. These mystics struggled to become perfected human beings, completely obliterated, dissolved, and united with God by way of His sublime grace. These views can be clearly identified in the sublime expressions of Bāyazīd Bastāmī, Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and many other individuals who will be introduced throughout our book.

If divine love emerged as Islamic mysticism's dominant theme with the coming of Rābi'a al-Adawiyyah in the second Hijrī century, this love became its primary focus in third and fourth; and it was during this period that two new expressions of mysticism emerged – absolute submission and devoted love, called *maḥabbah*.

Throughout the third Hijrī century, the concept of *maḥabbah* became the central focus of mystic thought, even though the famous Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj coupled *maḥabbah* with absorption into the divine. In fact, Al-Ḥallāj expressed in his works his lofty spiritual state so beautifully that he is known throughout the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. *Maḥabbah* was likewise thoughtfully expressed during this period by another mystic, Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 242/857), who devoted an entire chapter to this topic in one of his works. Al-Muḥāsibī explained in detail the way love of God awakens in the heart, how it then evolves, and how it reaches its zenith. He taught that *maḥabbah* is a heavenly gift, since its seeds had to be planted by God in the heart. When *maḥabbah* takes root, it can evolve to such a degree that the lover eventually disappears into the Beloved, utterly dissolving into the divine.

The concept of *maḥabbah* has been expanded upon time and again by many famous mystics, like Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/966) in his book

*Ḳut ul-ḳulūb* (Nourishment of the Hearts), Al-Ḳushayri (d. 465/1072), Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his famous work *Iḥyā’ ulūm ud-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Knowledge), Ibn al-Ārif (d. 535/1140) in his book *Mahāsin ul-majālis* (Attractions of the Sessions), and many other celebrated mystics.<sup>4</sup> These writers defined mahabbah in great detail and the importance each of them gave to it can be clearly ascertained. Thus we can say with confidence that these distinguished individuals laid the foundations of Islamic mysticism and prepared the ground for countless figures yet to come by pouring these crucial elements into the course of future streams of spiritual awareness. One such element was the active cultivation and maintenance of mahabbah by the wayfarer.

The dispositions and views of the Islamic mystics living in the third and fourth Hijrī centuries can be better understood when contrasted with the personalities, outlooks, and guiding principles of the important figures of the first and second, individuals who devoted themselves to realizing the form of spirituality that we have mentioned above.





# 4

## The Mystics of the 3rd & 4th Hijrī Centuries

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Those zuhhād and ‘abīd still present in the second Hijrī century were almost exclusively found in Iraq. In contrast, the Islamic mystics of the third and fourth Hijrī centuries were present throughout the Muslim world and could be found in every region. Nonetheless, the area around Baghdad radiated the most attraction to the mystics, since this city was a center of education, culture and religion. It was in and around Baghdad that mysticism developed both at a rapid pace and in striking style. It also took on more practical manifestations and came to be quickly recognized among the common folk.

By all accounts, the first person to hold mystic gatherings in Baghdad in the open was Sari as-Saḳatī (d. 253/867). As-Saḳatī was a merchant early on in his life, but he later forsook trade and secluded himself in his home to devote himself entirely to worship, thereby removing himself from the turbulence of the common people. As-Saḳatī achieved unmatched respect in Baghdad once his mystical tendencies, their requisites, as well as his own spiritual stations and mystic experiences, became known.<sup>5</sup>

During the third and fourth Hijrī centuries, we find one individual speaking openly about the spiritual sweetness of remembering God, drawing near to Him and becoming His intimate – but this time from the *minbar* (pulpit) of the mosque! This mystic was Abū Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, (d. 221/835). Before his day no one dared to speak openly on such matters.

It would also be fitting to mention Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī of Baghdad, who left this world in 200/815. He was a distinguished mystic who was inspired by the teachings of ‘Alī ar-Riẓā, who as we know is the eighth of the Twelve Imāms of the Ahl ul-Bayt, the Prophet's household.<sup>6</sup> Even the above-mentioned Sari as-Saḳatī drew inspiration from Al-Karkhī, a man who once said, “Mysticism is attaining awareness of ḥaḳīqat, all the while expecting absolutely nothing from the hands of people.”

Al-Karkhī was so immersed in his love for God that only after merging with divine could he awaken from spiritual intoxication. According to Al-Karkhī's teaching, the obliteration of God's perfected saints only indicates their everlastingness and their physical death is the gateway to never-ending spirituality. Thus, he is once noted to have said, "The death of a perfected human marks the beginning of real existence. Alas! How many people are breathing right now but dead in spirit?"

Another important mystic of this period was the Persian saint Abū Sulaymān ad-Darānī (d. 215/830). He explained that when mutual love filters down between the Beloved (i.e. God) and the lover (i.e. the wayfarer), a sudden sense of tranquility appears in the lover, who can be considered at that point an *‘ārif*, or knower of God. To better explain this idea Ad-Darānī wrote:

The insightful *‘ārif* closes his eyes to the world and sees nothing else but God. His eyes weep at the thought of losing sight of his Lord, but his soul rejoices when he has found that which he seeks (i.e. God) is close at hand.

We also find the aforementioned Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Muḥāsibī among the noteworthy mystics of the third Hijrī century. Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) explained in a straightforward manner all of the stations that have to be crossed while walking the spiritual path. He also described how *ḥakīkat* is revealed and how mystical wisdom and insight are gained in the course of this journey. Al-Muḥāsibī explained these matters so marvelously that the great scholar Al-Ḳushayrī later wrote: "There has yet to be one to match Al-Muḥāsibī; one so mystically aware and in mastery of his ego, both in deed and in spiritual rank." In fact, Al-Ḳushayrī counted Al-Muḥāsibī as one of five preeminent mystics who fused mystical insight to knowledge. The other four individuals are Junayd al-Baghdādī, Ruwaym ibn Aḥmad al-Baghdādī, Ibn Atiyah and Amr bin Uthmān al-Makkī.

One of Al-Muḥāsibī's better-known adages is this: "When a person's inner and outward states become totally immersed in sincerity and self-reflection, God will adorn all of that person's deeds with blessings."<sup>7</sup>

Another notable mystic of this period is Dhu‘l Nūn al-Miṣrī, who passed from this life in 245/859. Dhu‘l Nūn hailed from Egypt and thus carried the surname *Al-Miṣrī*, which means "The Egyptian." To this day Dhu‘l Nūn al-Miṣrī is considered one of the major saints of Egypt, and he was the first to propagate Islamic mysticism in that ancient land. Yet

there were those who could not grasp the finer points of his teachings and they accused Dhu'l Nūn of being a *zindīk*, a heretic. They opposed him so persistently that their complaints against him ultimately reached the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, who at that time was Al-Mutawakkil.

The caliph ordered Dhu'l Nūn brought to the palace for interrogation. However when the caliph became aware of Dhu'l Nūn's impeccably pious and upright character, he apologized for the arrest and the baseless charges, and he reprimanded Dhu'l Nūn's critics. Al-Mutawakkil exhibited such boundless reverence for Dhu'l Nūn that the mystic became celebrated throughout Egypt once more.

However, accusations of heresy were yet again leveled at Dhu'l Nūn while he was in the holy city of Mecca and as a consequence, he was jailed. He was nonetheless released when the authorities realized that the allegations were unfounded. Even though Dhu'l Nūn was many times plagued by malicious accusations, and even put on trial for these, he never lost his resolve. He calmly endured this suffering and irritation, about which he would only exclaim: "Everything is a gift from my Lord!"

Dhu'l Nūn was celebrated among the masses on account of his spiritually-enriched discourses, and he was eventually venerated as a saint.<sup>8</sup> He expressed his theosophical and mystical views in the simplest terms, and he coherently described the journey that the soul takes towards God, along with its ranks and stations. We can summarize Dhu'l Nūn's spiritual outlook in four points:

- Adoring the Beloved (*dōst*)
- Disliking a lack of good works
- Conforming to the decrees of the Sacred Қur'ān
- Fearing to turn back from the spiritual path

Dhu'l Nūn submerged himself in the love of God and love of God's messenger, Muḥammad. He renounced the world and ceaselessly conducted himself in accordance with the Қur'ān and the Sunnah, never once allowing himself to submit to his desires. Dhu'l Nūn once said: "It is an indication of one's love for God when he follows God's beloved Muḥammad in ethics, actions, principles, and customs." Thus Dhu'l Nūn was very attentive to any action he undertook, and in doing so laid the foundation for a deepened spiritual awareness.

According to Dhu'l Nūn there exist two kinds of *tawbah*, or repentance. The first is the repentance that comes from the *‘awwām* (common folk),

who seek forgiveness on account of their wrong deeds. The second is the repentance of God's *khawāṣ* (elect), who seek forgiveness whenever they are seized with forgetfulness of Him.

Regarding intuitive spiritual knowledge, or *ma'rifat*, Dhu'l Nūn once said:

There are three categories of knowledge. The first is the knowledge of the oneness of God, and people in general possess this knowledge. The second is the knowledge of proof and explanation, and this is owned by philosophers, preachers and scholars. The third is the knowledge of realization of oneness, which is the knowledge of the saints, who know God intimately through their hearts.

The last mentioned category of knowledge is the most immense, and it is the hardest to obtain, given that it is an intuitive awareness that allows a person to witness God. This knowledge cannot be attained through study or reason. It is reached only through the advent of heavenly inspiration. To explain how the knowledge of realization reaches the heart by way of divine inspiration, Dhu'l Nūn said: "I know my God through my God. If I did not find my God within I could never have found Him!"

Dhu'l Nūn expressed his views on the knowledge of the heart as he simultaneously conveyed his opinion about divine love:

Between God and the perfected human there is a mutual, bilateral love, a love capable of merging the former with the latter. For the sake of this union the perfected human experiences obliteration in the One and the satisfaction of arriving to the goal.

Dhu'l Nūn was convinced that this kind of love must be concealed in the heart and never revealed to those caught up in the material word. Such people understand nothing of this matter, and thus this love must be kept hidden like all secrets.

Dhu'l Nūn skillfully expressed his views on both spiritual awareness and *maḥabbah* in the works he bequeathed to the generations. His words continue to be widely admired by the Muslim mystics of the East, upon whom they left a profound and cherished impression. Dhu'l Nūn's writings and sayings inspired many mystics of his day, including Ṭūstārī (d. 283/896), Abū Turāb an-Nahsabi (d. 245/859), and Ibn Jalaya of Syria, who often sat with Dhu'l Nūn. In addition to these men, there was Abū Said

al-Harrāzī (d. 277/890), who as a companion of Dhu'l Nūn. Al-Harrāzī was so inspired by Dhu'l Nūn that, by the grace of God, he became thoroughly engrossed in obliterating his ego.

Another prominent (and extraordinary) mystic who was involved in the development of the spiritual life of this period was Bāyazīd Tayfūr Baṣṭāmī, who hailed from the Persian province of Khorāsān and who passed from this life in 261/874. According to Sami Frashëri's *Ķamūs ul-‘alām*, Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī is counted among the most illustrious of saints, for he left cherished reminders of his spirituality wherever he went.

In addition to being a steadfast mystic, Bāyazīd exhibited a broadminded attitude, and he spoke of the marvel of mysticism in poetry and prose. He relished the spiritual inclination to delight in the obliteration the ego and the subsequent union with the divine. Bāyazīd expressed his mysticism in unpretentious language, often utilizing witticisms bursting with elevated and insightful meaning. In these witty declarations – which clearly emanated from his elevated spiritual state – we can discover Bāyazīd's sophisticated grasp of *ḥaķīqat*, reality. This awareness was incomprehensible to those who possessed little or no understanding, but it was an awareness quite clear to his disciples. Bāyazīd's words embodied the transcendent love of God. In fact, he sacrificed so much for this love that he became wholly immersed in the divine and united with his beloved.

On the surface, it might appear that many of Bāyazīd's sayings contradict the basic principles and decrees of Islam. Yet if we look at these sayings metaphorically, we discover accurate explanations of the mystical states of *fanā' fillah* and *baķā' billah*.

Once while in a state of spiritual intoxication and mystical bewilderment Bāyazīd became so overcome by incomparable love that he exclaimed, "O God! How much have You magnified my rank! I have utterly vanished, and now there is nothing apart from You. Thus, I am You – for two we are not and cannot be!" On another occasion Bāyazīd disclosed his complete self-extinction and his union with God saying:

My Lord once elevated me, brought me before Himself and said: 'O Bāyazīd! My creation desires to behold you.' "Very well, my Lord!" I replied. "However, bedeck me with Oneness (*waḥdanīyyah*), delete my existence, and elevate me to the pinnacle of Oneness, so that when Your creatures see me they see You. It will be You, and not I present at all moments."

Bāyazīd once described how he attained the station of witnessing God's oneness, saying:

When I asked for God's oneness, I became a bird whose wings are opened and filled with unity. With these wings and with great effort I flew to my goal for ten years nonstop. I arrived after that to a vast space. I continued my flight and then came to the point of endlessness, which is the highest point of all. There I beheld the tree of Oneness. At that moment I understood that my existence had been nothing but deception that had thrown dust in the eyes.

What Bāyazīd is telling us is that upon reaching the station of *fanā' fillah* the wayfarer loses all sense of separate existence. At this point, he beholds the visage of God and delights in union with the ultimate beloved.

Even though we have acquainted ourselves with only a handful of his sayings and teachings, it is nevertheless easy to see why Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī ranks among the loftiest Islamic mystics of the third and fourth Hijrī centuries. It should come as no surprise then that his spiritual wisdom has remained a valued legacy ever since.

Bāyazīd was forced to endure many hardships owing to the inability of the masses to grasp his mystic utterances. He was, predictably, mistreated, tormented, and even imprisoned numerous times. Once an ignoramus grew so irritated with not being able to fathom the true meaning of Bāyazīd's words that he decided to kill the mystic. He came upon Bāyazīd and cracked his skull with a hatchet. It was only by the grace of God that he survived. In spite of such harassment, Bāyazīd greeted everyone with a smile. He was immersed in God's love and could see nothing other than his beloved, even in his detractors.

Bāyazīd was the first Islamic mystic to make use of the term *sukr* (intoxication) in his discourse. This term would be expounded upon by many subsequent individuals, becoming form them a crucial component of the arena of divine love. Bāyazīd articulated love of God with great passion in his poetry and prose, and his words have been admired through the generations. We will translate a *rubā'i*, or quatrain, from one of his more striking poems in which he sings of God's splendor. We trust that these lines will give our readers a feel for Bāyazīd's transcendent vision:

*O Lord! It is only for You that they're slain.  
How many have been snatched from their relations?*

*The bottle of Your love robust wine contains.  
O Bastāmī! Your prayer too is cause for many separations.*

One of Bāyazīd's contemporaries was the celebrated mystic Yahyā ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh, who also hailed from Persia. He departed from this world in 258/872. Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh was one of those who annihilated himself in the love of God, and in so doing was consumed by the bewilderments and intoxication brought about by union with the Beloved. Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh once sent a letter to Bāyazīd in which he described how drinking from the goblet found at the table of divine love brought unrivaled intoxication, to which Bāyazīd straightaway replied:

You're inebriated, and yet all you've drank were but mere drops.  
Meanwhile, someone else has swallowed the oceans of heaven  
and earth and his thirst has still not been quenched. His tongue  
hangs from this thirst, and he asks: "Is there more? Is there more?  
Is there more?"

Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh was the first to give systematic lectures on mysticism, during which he openly revealed his unmatched love for God. In fact, he inspired a new way thinking about divine love that soon became known far and wide. Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh taught that *maḥabbah* can be generated within through complete surrender to God. As a result of this submission the wayfarer will manifest moral integrity and all other beneficial qualities. Therefore, moral disposition is connected to spiritual effort, and when these two unite within, sanctification will be obtained and progress along the path with commence. This will lead to *ḥaḳīḳat* in all its virtuousness and it will obstruct any imperfections that may try to thwart us from the path. God – who is the ultimate reality – is wholly good, or *khayr*, and from pure good there is no opening for wickedness to arise. According to Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh, *ḥaḳīḳī* (real) love continually expands and never recedes, regardless of physical nearness or distance.

Love and intoxication were not the only topics that Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh explained. He also spoke of *ma<sup>c</sup>rifat* (intuitive spiritual knowledge), ranking it far above the learning of the exoteric scholars and the common folk combined. Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh once stated that losing *ma<sup>c</sup>rifat* is an act worse than death, for death merely removes the wayfarer from the eyes of people, whereas the loss of *ma<sup>c</sup>rifat* removes him from the divine presence. Any wayfarer who enters into a state of spiritual lethargy can be quickly deprived of *ma<sup>c</sup>rifat*, for such laziness causes mystic openings to weaken. If this should happen

the connection that the wayfarer has developed with God might very well break. Confusion and doubt will take root in the heart and mind. Physical death only breaks our relation with the material world, but *marifat* wins us God and the awareness of His everlasting presence.

Through all of his efforts to communicate spirituality to the masses, Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh remained connected to the spirituality of his predecessors. This veneration can be seen in some his sayings, one of which includes: “*Zuhd* (asceticism) consists of three things – eating little, sleeping little, and speaking little.” Such practices were undeniably stressed by the *zuhhād*, *‘abīd*, and *fukāra*’ who dominated spiritual life in the first Hijrī century.

As we explained above, both Bāyazīd Bastāmī and Ibn Mu<sup>c</sup>adh, as mystics, lived lives of detachment, and their love of God brought states of profound spiritual intoxication. However, another important mystic of this time, Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), replaced the effects of spiritual intoxication with spiritual sobriety. Junayd believed that we could better understand ourselves in a sober state, for it allows us to more effectively grasp the methods needed to curb the ego. We would unlikely be able to do this in an intoxicated state, since we could not be in full control of our senses. It must be made clear however that any apparent differences between Junayd and Bastāmī were only in regard to their divergent views on intoxication and sobriety. Their goals and intentions remained the one and the same.

According to Junayd, spiritual intoxication enters the heart and makes its effects felt in the inner state, whereas soberness becomes evident when this intoxication departs. At that moment the wayfarer can clearly make a distinction between the euphoria and sorrow of that which resulted from any given occurrence. Of course, soberness offers the chance to consciously accept that which is brought about by the grace or decree of God, even if it is something bitter.

The concept of spiritual sobriety is not the only concept bequeathed to us by Junayd, for he possessed many qualities that made him a remarkable figure in the story of Islamic mysticism. Junayd propagated a practical form of mysticism through organizing and teaching his followers. In doing so, he gained widespread approval, and he came to be viewed as one of Islam’s great saints.

There is no doubt that Junayd was one of the eminent mystics of his day. He lived in the great city of Baghdad, where he completed his customary education and later went on to become a distinguished Islamic scholar. Having

achieved such a high degree of exoteric knowledge, Junayd turned to the great mystic master Sari as-Saḳatī, who we briefly mentioned above. Under the guidance of this friend of God, Junayd purified his heart and soul by way of vigorous spiritual training. He fortified his determination with asceticism and self-discipline, both of which later earned him widespread recognition. Disciples began to flock to his side. Each of these individuals was filled with the very same resolve. As he pursued the mystic path, Junayd exhibited great eagerness in carrying out his exoteric religious duties, and he is often remembered for traveling to Mecca thirty times on foot to perform the Hajj!

By the third Hijrī century the concepts of *fanā' fillah*, *baḳā' billah*, and *ittihād* were well-established through the teachings of the various mystics. We also find the stream of love shaped by Rābi'a al-Adawiyyah equally widespread. Let us recall that Rābi'a declared that the wayfarer must love God not to gain Paradise or escape Hell, but rather to behold the splendor of His countenance and to experience His beauty.

A certain mystic named *‘Alī ibn Muwaffaq* (who passed from this world in 265/878) expounded upon Rābi'a's stream of thought. Not only did he favor her spiritual method, he articulated prayers that were nearly identical to hers – for example:

O, God! If I pray for the sake of securing paradise or escaping hell, give me not paradise; but rather plunge me into hell. I pray only out of love. Therefore merge me with Your countenance, shorn of needing any effort!

Notice that this prayer is very much like the one Rābi'a made, which we presented earlier in our book.

Before we close this discussion, we should mention another mystic of equally important stature during this period. He is *Abū Ṣalih al-Kassārī* (d. 271/884). Historians have given Al-Kassārī notable attention because of his gathering his followers into a structured fraternity as they walked the spiritual path.

In our examination of the third and the fourth Hijrī centuries, we find other eminent personalities conveying the splendor of Islamic mysticism in both its theoretical and practical dimensions. The Turkish book *İslāmiyetin Gelişirdiği Tasavvuf* (Sufism as Developed by Islam) discusses some of the major figures of this time:

In the third Hijrī century the disciples of Sari as-Saḳatī spread his spiritual teachings from Baghdad to all the lands of Islam.

Thus, we find Mūsā al-Ansārī (d. 320/932 in the city of Merv), who went to Khorāsān to spread this teaching, Abū ‘Alī ar-Rūdhbārī (d. 322/934), who settled in Egypt, and Abū Zayd Adhamī (d. 341/952), who spread these ideals throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Ar-Rūdhbārī was accompanied in those days by Junayd, An-Nūrī, and Ibn al-Jaylan, notable mystics whom we have mentioned earlier. Al-Ḳushayrī said that Ar-Rūdhbārī was one of the most perfect of all mystic masters and the most knowledgeable about the Path. Abū ‘Alī Aḥmad ḡAbd ul-Wahhāb aṣ-Ṣafī (d. 328/939) spread mysticism in Nishapur. He was undoubtedly one of the principal mystics of his day, sitting with Abū Ḥāfiẓ and Al-Ḳassārī and being their companion.<sup>9</sup>

Towards the end of the fourth Hijrī century, Persia – particularly its famed city of Shiraz – was at the forefront of Islamic mysticism, holding its banner high. In terms of inspiration and other aspects, this land caused the world to recognize and appreciate Islamic mysticism.

However, turning back to Baghdad we find more than a few distinguished mystics in the fourth Hijrī century. One of these was Shaykh Ash-Shiblī (d. 334/945), who can be ranked number one in living a transcendent life, devoting as he did his entire life to spirituality and self-edification. There are other noteworthy personalities as well, like Abū Muḥammad Murta’ish, who passed away in Baghdad in 328/939. During his lifetime he met Abū Hafs Nishāpūrī, Abū ‘Uthmān and Junayd al-Baghdādī. We must also mention among these mystics Al-Huldī (d. 348/959), who was the first to write down the events that took place in the lives of the great saints.

Let us close by summarizing this chapter. The progress of Islamic mysticism during the third and fourth Hijrī centuries – and its expansion in grand style – did not solely focus on the transmission of its spiritual outlook and the proliferation of extraordinary personalities. This was also the period when the *tarīkats* (orders) began to form around the great mystics, with each fraternity possessing its own distinct tendencies and practices. And to this topic we shall devote the following chapter.





# 5

# The Establishment of the Mystic Orders

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By the second half of the third Hijrī century, the mystics of Islam began acquiring a degree of distinctiveness due to their organizing themselves into ḥarākāt. Each ḥarākat instituted guidelines that were in accord with the spiritual teachings and inclinations of its founder. These fraternities came into being when disciples began gathering in large number around *murshids*, spiritual guides. The murshid led his disciples along the mystic path, and these disciples profited spiritually through honing their state according to the murshid's guidance. This method of instruction allowed disciples to gradually reach a level of perfection.

A ḥarākat commonly took its name from the murshid around whom a group of disciples gathered. Thus the group that followed the spiritual teachings of Sarī as-Saḳatī came to be called the Saḳatīyyah. Those who followed the method of Bāyazīd Tayfūr Bāṣṭāmī took the name Tayfūrīyyah. The ḥarākat that followed the views of Junayd al-Baghdādī was called the Junaydīyyah. The path of those who followed Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) was called the Kharrāzīyyah. Then there was Abū'l-Ḥusayn an-Nurī (Al-Kharrāz's successor), whose ḥarākat took the name Nūrīyyah. Precisely at the time the devotees of Abū Ṣalih al-Ḳassārī organized their path under the name Ḳassārīyyah (or Malāmatīyyah).

The situation of Muslim religious life during the third and fourth Hijrī centuries (and its manifestations) was clearly an expression of the developments made in the sphere of mysticism, both in its practical and theoretical applications. This fact reflects the brilliance of the mystics of this era, as well as their lofty spiritual, ethical, and metaphysical ranks.

We should certainly not forget to add that the activities of these mystics were evident in every direction of the compass – from China in the east to the shores of the Atlantic in the west. The lands of Islam were filled (often through great sacrifice) with *dergāhs*, *āsitānes*, *tekkes* and

magnificent *turbehs*. These mystics were often cruelly harassed, and much blood was given up in martyrdom for their spiritual principles. It is because of this grim detail that we feel the need to explain the numerous reasons for this repression.

In our discussion of the mystics of the third and fourth Hijrī centuries, we are compelled to mention one of much-admired integrity, standing head and shoulders above all others. He is a man who deserves to be placed at the forefront of history, being known throughout the Muslim and Non-Muslim worlds. This man is Ḥusayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj, who was executed in 309/921 at the instigation of bigoted *fukahā'*, the doctors of exoteric of Islam.

Al-Hallāj's reputation spread not only because of his spiritual exploits but moreover from the praiseworthiness of his character and the imprint that his particular stream of mysticism left on the evolution of Islamic mystical thought, and it was this that was relentlessly challenged by religious fanatics.

But before we recount the details of Al-Hallāj's life, it would be helpful to speak a little about the tension and disputes that began to emerge between the *fukahā'* and mystics during his period of Islamic history.

## THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FUkahā' & THE MYSTICS

There is no doubt that the root of the conflict between the doctors of exoteric Islam – the *fukahā'* – and the mystics was the latter's opposition to inflexible dogmatism, which, as we know, is an unwavering adversary of everything new. During the course of human history fanaticism has constantly reared up like a massive mountain blocking any movement seeking spiritual transformation. And while this may not have been the sole cause of the bitter conflict between *fukahā'* and the mystics, it was certainly the foremost.

Another reason for the *fukahā'*'s hostility was their regarding certain acts of the mystics' devotion inappropriate and not in accord with a literalistic reading of *Kur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Since such acts were allegedly not practiced by the early generation of Muslims and not unambiguously mentioned in the *Kur'ān* or *ḥadīths* – or so alleged the *fukahā'* – these acts were nothing more than *bid'at*, or blameworthy innovation. It should be mentioned here that when the mystics stood for their *dhikr* ceremonies, they would at times sway and whirl in spiritual ecstasy, clapping their hands and playing musical instruments like the *davul*, *def*, *dümbelek*, *kudum*, and *saz*, all the while

chanting God's names. Naturally, the *fukahā'* looked upon such passionate expressions of faith with scorn and derision.

As we explained above, the interpretation of the *sharī'at* evolved into two contrasting streams: one esoteric and the other exoteric. The *fukahā'* cared only for the exoteric aspects of the *sharī'at*, while its esoteric interpretation was the domain of the mystics, who essentially stated: "We are taken up with inner awareness and not solely with superficial, literalistic knowledge as the *fukahā'* are."

Obviously, such sentiments did not go down well with the *fukahā'*, who refused to sit idly by as it was propagated. They began countering the efforts of the mystics with great enmity. No unpleasant and hateful word was spared in censuring the mystics, including labeling them *kāfir*, or infidels. Moreover, the *fukahā'* viewed the doctrine of these mystics as a bizarre matter in both word and deed. It was rooted in *ilhām* (inspiration), which did nothing more than serve their whims. All of this, the *fukahā'* declared, totally flouted the injunctions of the *Qur'ān*, whose verses they were quite ready to employ in combating the mystics.

The *fukahā'* ceaselessly challenged the mystics' belief that all acts of worship should be carried out for God's sake alone and not for heavenly reward. They declared that such a notion contravened the exoteric reading of the *Qur'ān*, given that many of the divine book's verses overtly declared that the righteous shall be rewarded with Paradise and the wicked chastised with Hell. This criticism (and many others) incited the *fukahā'* to pounce on the mystics whenever they could and to suppress them with whatever means they had available.<sup>10</sup>

It must be pointed out for the sake of accuracy that in spite of this tension the position of the majority of Sunni Muslims was far more moderate. Rather than standing blindly behind the *fukahā'* and attacking the mystics they quietly condoned the mystics' works, teachings, and inspired states. This moderate position steadily grew among mainstream Muslims from the middle of the second *Hijrī* century to the end of the third. However, after this period the situation deteriorated to the point that notable mystics like *Dhu'l Nūn al-Miṣrī*, *Abū'l-Ḥusayn an-Nurī*, *Abū Ḥamza*, *Al-Ḥallāj* and many others, were arrested and sent to stand trial before the *kādīs* of Baghdad. On account of these measures, the number of those branded heretics, *zindiks*, increased until confidence in the social order of the Muslim world was so shaken that it broke down – which left a negative mark on pages of history.

## AL-HALLĀJ

Husayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj was born sometime around 243/858 in the Persian town of Bayda – although he appears to have grown up in Wasit, a town in southern Iraq. In 260/873, Al-Hallāj (who was then sixteen years old) met the venerable Sahl at-Tustarī in the latter's hometown of Tustar. He served this spiritual master for two years. After this Al-Hallāj moved to Basra where he forged a bond of friendship with ʻAmr Makkī. Eventually, he left for Baghdad and joined the ranks of Junayd al-Baghdadi's many disciples. Al-Hallāj traveled widely over the course of his life, meeting many notable mystics in the lands he visited. He also went to Mecca three years in a row to perform the Hajj.

In 297/909 a қādī named Ibn Dāwūd az-Zāhirī issued a fatwā branding Al-Hallāj a heretic. Consequently, Al-Hallāj was arrested and incarcerated. A year later, however, he escaped from prison and went into hiding in the city of Susa, whose ruins lay near modern-day Ahwaz. He lived there for a few years until he was rearrested in 301/913, at which time he was sent to the dungeons of Baghdad. There he remained for the last eight years of his life.

Al-Hallāj stood trial for the second time in 309/921 and was, unsurprisingly, sentenced to death. His execution took place in that year on the eighteenth day of the Islamic month of Dhū'l-Kaʻda. In the shadow of the fatwā issued by the қādīs, Al-Hallāj was first mercilessly beaten and then hung from the gallows. Then his hands and feet were severed from his body. Finally he was beheaded. Al-Hallāj's mutilated body was cremated, and the ashes dumped into the River Tigris.

The chief justification for Al-Hallāj's cruel maltreatment was his legendary utterance of the phrase *Ana'l-Hakk*, which means “I am the Real” (i.e. God). By these words Al-Hallāj sought to describe his personal experience of *fanā'fillah* and *bakā' billah* as well as his union with the divine, all concepts that we have described above. Those who were blind to such mystical truths could not understand what he was saying.

Given that Al-Hallāj was an exceptionally refined man – perhaps more so than all of the *fuqahā'* and other exoteric scholars – there were those among his critics who did not want such a fantastic light to be needlessly extinguished. By every means possible they tried to persuade the great mystic to relinquish his mystic stance of “*Ana'l-Hakk*.” However, Al-Hallāj rebuffed their appeals. “Be sensible gentlemen,” he said. “I have plunged into God's love and I will endure this suffering. I am totally



The execution of Al-Hallāj.  
A 17th century  
Mughal Indian painting.



intoxicated by passion, and I see nothing other than Him!” Al-Hallāj paid no heed their counsel, and he continued exclaiming “Ana’l- Haqq” until the air left his lungs.

In the final moments before his execution, Al-Hallāj appeared exuberant, smiling in spite of the enormity of what was occurring. In fact, he addressed his Lord with these final words: “Between You and I there lingers an ‘It is I’ and this torments me. As a favor, take this ‘I’ from between us!” Such words clearly demonstrate Al-Hallāj’s great resolve and his patience in dealing with his dreadful end, and as such, they are an extraordinary example of his spiritual transcendence. “Ana’l-Haqq” left such an impressive mark on the spiritual life of Islam that countless volumes dealing with the subject of Al-Hallāj have been written by numerous thinkers over the centuries, particularly poets and mystics.

After Al-Hallāj’s execution, the scholars of Islam became divided over the question of both his creed and his striking mystic theories. One group branded him a kāfir owing to his expressing things that they saw as being contrary to the Qur’ān and ḥadīth. The other (and larger) group maintained that Al-Hallāj was not a kāfir at all. On the contrary, they declared him to be one of the *awliyā’ullah*, the friends of God. Al-Hallāj’s level of

intimacy with his Lord, as well as his high spiritual rank, were expressed in a language, if taken literally, was bound to shock and outrage those not acquainted with the theories of mysticism. That is why he was accused of heresy and branded a *kāfir*, an infidel.

The first opinion was upheld by the likes of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 387/998), an inflexible fanatic who accused Al-Ḥallāj of being a charlatan in whose eyes the world cast dust. “He professes to know everything,” wrote Ibn al-Nadīm, “but in reality he knows nothing. A worthless ignoramus is he.”

Those who stood up for Al-Ḥallāj were people who had not the slightest measure of hostility towards him. They insisted that Al-Ḥallāj be ranked among God’s saints and that “Ana’l-Ḥaḳḳ” only left his lips after he uncovered within himself a secret regarding union with the divine. Nearly all of his defenders are to be found among the great mystics of Islam, and they include men like Rūmī, Ḩāfiẓ ʿAṭṭār, Ḩāfiẓ ʿAbd ul-Qādir al-Ḥilālī and others, who labeled him a *shahīd al-Ḥaḳḳ*, a martyr for the Truth.

In the book *Bahjat ul-asrār* (The Splendor of the Secrets) Ḩāfiẓ ʿAbd ul-Qādir al-Ḥilālī states: “Al-Ḥallāj spoke on these matters using the language of an intoxicated heart, a language entirely alien to the understanding of the masses.” Ibn Ḩāfiẓ ʿArabī wrote an entire book devoted to Al-Ḥallāj entitled *Sirāj ul-wahāj fī sharhi qalam ul-Ḥallāj*, or “The Illuminating Lamp on the Meaning of Al-Ḥallāj’s Words.” In this book, he expertly defends Al-Ḥallāj’s views by offering his comments and explanations. Rūmī likewise defended Al-Ḥallāj, saying: “God’s friends often voice such enigmatic words when in a state of blissful bewilderment. Then they seek God’s forgiveness for such words when they return to sobriety. Al-Ḥallāj’s words are of this sort.”

Here we would like to insert an anecdote concerning Al-Ḥallāj, one only corroborated by Rūmī – and God knows best the veracity of this account. According to Rūmī the cause of Al-Ḥallāj’s dreadful end was not his exclaiming “Ana’l-Ḥaḳḳ”, but rather it was a mistake he made one day by saying that if he ever met the exalted Prophet he would ask him why on the Night of the Mi’rāj he only asked God to forgive the believers instead of all of humankind. God certainly would have granted such a request. Afterwards, Al-Ḥallāj dreamed of the Prophet, who appeared saddened by Al-Ḥallāj’s serious breach of etiquette. “Can anyone seek other than that which they are inspired to ask for and willed to do by God?” the Prophet asked. Al-Ḥallāj immediately realized the blunder of his utterance, and he expressed great regret. However, absolution would only be granted by forfeiting his life.

Al-Ḥallāj wrote many books. One scholar of Islamic mysticism listed forty-seven, but those most often cited are:

- *Al-Kitāb al-ahrāf al-mustahdatha wa'l-azalīyyah* –The Book of Created Letters and Eternity.
- *Al-Kitāb al-‘usūl wa'l-furū‘* –The Book of Roots and Branches.
- *Al-Kitāb as-sirr al-alām wa'l-mab'uth* –The Book of Worldly Secrets and Audition.
- *Al-Kitāb al-‘adl wa t-tawhīd* –The Book of Justice and Divine Unity.
- *Al-Kitāb al-‘ilm al-baqā' wa'l-fanā'* –The Book of Knowledge of Residing and Disappearance.
- *Al-Kitāb madīh an-Nabī* –The Book of Praising the Prophet.
- *Al-Kitāb Hūwa, Hūwa* –The Book of He, He.

The most important of all of Al-Ḥallāj's works is *Al-Kitāb al-tawāsīn*. This book was collected, edited and published in both its Arabic and Persian forms by the celebrated French scholar Louis Massignon (1883-1963), who also provided an extensive commentary of the text.

Al-Ḥallāj's writings focus on three main points, each of which shall be discussed in detail. The first point is the active involvement of the divine in the material universe. The second deals with the timelessness of the *Nūr muhammadīyyah*, or Muhammadan Light, and how everything in existence originates from this light. The *Nūr muhammadīyyah* is the underpinning of the universe and all that it contains. The third of Al-Ḥallāj's points is his view that all religions – in principle – share a common origin, inasmuch as they all emanate from a single source, i.e. God.

Concerning the first point, one of Al-Ḥallāj's sympathizers, the theologian *Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī* (d. 323/935), wrote:

Husayn ibn Mansūr – who is known as Al-Ḥallāj – hailed from Bayda. In his early life, he was a wool-carder [as the word *ḥallāj* denotes], after which he entered into zuhd (asceticism). Having progressed in this, he attained states reached only by those who busy themselves with good works, worship, self-refinement, abandonment of the world, and the expulsion of desire for every forbidden thing. Such people reach the rank of God's intimates. By climbing the stairway to friendship with God, Al-Ḥallāj was then purified and stripped of all that can be called “self.” Not a speck remained from his individual nature; all of his “I”-ness died away. At that

point, the Holy Spirit entered into him as it did with Jesus, the son of Mary, and everything submitted to him. What had been sought was found. After this, his works were God's works, and his every command was God's command.

Although this is a very complex matter, here is a simple explanation of Al-Ḥallāj's views on the matter of *hulūl* (divine indwelling): God manifests via the *Insān-i kāmil* and subsequently the will of the *Insān-i kāmil* is nothing less than the will of God. By this concept (i.e. the Beloved entering the lover) Al-Ḥallāj once declared: "I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is me. We are two abiding in one. When you see me, you see Him. Moreover, when you see Him, verily you see us both!" Then Al-Ḥallāj addressed his beloved saying: "You are mingled with my heart as the soul is mingled with the body!"

Since he was completely submerged in the love of God, Al-Ḥallāj was in a position to perfectly express the Beloved's entry into the lover's soul. Al-Ḥallāj was in a state of continual euphoria knowing that *Haqq*, the Real (i.e. God), was now found within. Yet, now and then Al-Ḥallāj was unsure about the permanency of this presence, so when he obtained reassurance that the Beloved was still within he would exclaim: "My soul is mingled with Yours like wine mingles with pure water! Everything that You touch touches me. You and I have become one!" What Al-Ḥallāj means is that his spirit and that of the Beloved's are as mixed as wine in water, becoming one and indivisible. Everything occurring with one instantaneously happens with the other. Whenever Al-Ḥallāj was assailed with insecurities about this union, he would cry out:

I am not *Haqq*! Rather I am His secret. Perhaps I am *Haqq*, but I fear that I still may enter into a state of separation. Nevertheless, from whatever view I am one with Him! Can there be anywhere in the cosmos where this union is not possible?

In seeming contradiction to these mystic expressions of unity, Al-Ḥallāj once addressed God: "O Lord! My individuality has disappeared into You, but without mixing with Your essence. Your godhood has vanquished all of my individuality without being intermingled with it." Moreover, in another place, Al-Ḥallāj stated: "All who believe in the co-mingling of God with individuality, or individuality with God, have put themselves outside of Islam. God Almighty's essence is incomparable and utterly unlike His creation and their created qualities. Nothing is like Him, and He is like nothing."

It must be understood that while Al-Ḥallāj spoke of *ittiḥād* (mystic union), he was quick to distinguish the essence of Ḥaqq from creation, God from man, and lover from beloved. However, this raises the question as to why Al-Ḥallāj simultaneously seemed to embrace the manifestation of the divine in man, especially in light of his quotes apparently asserting otherwise. Do not these two positions stand in glaring opposition to each other?

The answer is that there is no contradiction. There is no doubt that Al-Ḥallāj focused on *ittiḥād*, and he expressed this concept throughout his spiritual journey. As the champion of mystic union, he declared that by extinguishing the ego and cleansing the heart of base desires, God could enter; since as a person's heart is positioned in the breast, likewise, God's spirit positioned in the heart of Man. When this happens the God generates everything that the *Insān-i kāmil* says or does. Every word uttered or act carried out by the *Insān-i kāmil* will be devoid of personal desire. Nevertheless, it must be made clear that this is not the same as saying that God is equal to man, or that man is equal God, a matter which Al-Ḥallāj addresses with these words:

The human being is of divine essence from the standpoint of his original condition. God exalted Adam and created him in his image, and then He commanded the angels to prostrate to him. All of the angels complied with God's command, save Iblīs (the Devil), who – entrenched in *kibr* (arrogance) – refused to prostrate, and was after that cursed by God.

In fusing these two views of mystic union, Al-Ḥallāj thereby removed any contradictions that may appear to have arisen regarding this matter.

The second of Al-Ḥallāj's theories is that of the *Nūr muḥammadiyyah*, a term that can be translated as "Muhammadan Light" or "Muhammadan Essence". This concept is discussed at length in his book *Al-Kitāb ul-ṭawāṣīn*. This book is divided into several chapters, one of which is called "The Ta-Sīn of the Prophetic Lantern."

Let us present a brief summary of this theory. Al-Ḥallāj asserts that Prophet Muhammad Muṣṭafā was created in with twofold form, the first being a primordial and unending light brought into existence by God before creation. All consciousness and awareness originate in this light.<sup>11</sup> The other form of Muhammad is his physical, or historical, form, which came into the world manifest as God's final prophet and messenger. This is the

form that is tangible to the majority of humankind. However, this form is transitory, or *fānī*. From the beginning of time, this earthly materialization of the Nūr muhammadīyyah was ordained to appear at certain places and at certain times. So when his time was decreed, the historical Muḥammad appeared on earth and carried out the duty he was charged with, acquiring his revealed knowledge and illumination from his primordial light – which is, in fact, his real essence. All prophets and saints have emerged from the Nūr muhammadīyyah, receiving light and inspiration from it. In describing how the “Muhammadan Essence” has been created before all else, Al-Ḥallāj writes:

All lights were born from this light. The light of prophecy issued forth from Muḥammad’s light and his light appeared from the light of mystery. No other light is brighter than this. It is older than time. It is a power beyond power. It has existed long before Adam. Its name was inscribed ahead of the Pen before creation was brought into being.

Al-Ḥallāj based the concept of Nūr muhammadīyyah on the cryptic words of the Prophet Muḥammad: “I was a prophet while Adam was between water and clay.” “All knowledge,” according to Al-Ḥallāj, “is but a drop from the ocean of Muḥammad, and all wisdom is but a handful of water from his river, and all time is but a moment from his time.” Even Al-Ḥallāj’s own intimate relationship with God flows from the Nūr muhammadīyyah, for he says: “Worthiness and reality are in that being [Muḥammad]. The first of creation is he and the last of God’s messengers is he. Within him is truth and all about him is realization of truth.”<sup>12</sup>

We hope our explanation will help make clear the concept of Nūr muhammadīyyah. The central point of this idea is that Muḥammad’s essence exists above time, and being created before the cosmos, it is praised and honored far above it. All the lamps of awareness are displays of its dazzling light, and all the prophets and saints received inspiration from its primordial essence.<sup>12</sup>

This concept came to play a significant role in later Islamic theosophical mysticism. Both Ibn Fārid and Ibn ‘Arabī – as we shall discuss below – voiced this concept in a variety of ways through their mystical perspectives.

The third of Al-Ḥallāj’s mystical teachings is the fundamental unity of religions. According to Al-Ḥallāj humanity’s different religions are but

branches of a single tree, all descending from a divine source and revealing God through different names and different forms. The link a particular group of people may have with a particular religion is a result of historical forces decreed by God, who is the ultimate source of being. No matter how divided Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are between themselves, they share a single universal truth, and that truth cannot be altered or fragmented. Between human beings there is a higher and more powerful will that directs their individual wills, and that is the will of God. It is this will that compels Jews, Christians, or Muslims to be as they are and not as something else.

Therefore, there should be (in theory) no conflicts or quarrels between religions, given that the differences between religions arise not from underlying truths, but rather from less significant points of terminology and ritual. Underneath their superficial appearances all faiths undeniably point to a single reality, the ultimate reality: God. At their very core, all of faiths attempt to express this unique and unified essence, no matter how dissimilar they appear outwardly.

Just as that the concept of Nūr muḥammadiyyah left a deep impression on subsequent mystics, Al-Ḥallāj’s theory of the unity of religions left a similar mark. It is a point that has been commented on in great detail throughout the books of Ibn ‘Arabī, the poems of Ibn Fāriḍ, in Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*, in ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī’s recollections, and in the verse and prose of many other mystics. It has been so widely circulated that it took on a philosophical hue and gained a remarkable place in the development of Islamic spiritual life.





# Islamic Mysticism in the 5th Hijrī Century

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# 6

**T**he history of Islamic mysticism in the fifth Hijrī century is filled with exceptional individuals, the most distinguished being Al-Ghazālī. His full name (along with his titles) is *Hujjat ul-Islām* (Proof of Islam), *Zayn ud-Dīn* (Ornament of Religion) Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, and he ranks among the great mystics of Islam. He was born in 450/1058 near the Persian city of Tūs in the village of Ghazal.

Al-Ghazālī received his early education in Tūs at the feet of Ahmad al-Radhkhānī, and then in the nearby city of Nishapur under Al-Juwaynī. In his youth, Al-Ghazālī gained distinction among his instructors on account of his intellectual abilities; to the extent that the praise people gave him often overshadowed their praise of his teachers! Before long Al-Ghazālī began to write books and sit with many other notable scholars. This allowed his reputation spread far and wide.

Once he entered the mystical path, Al-Ghazālī quickly stood out as a figure endowed with limitless refinement. He left his peers awestruck and, moreover, he made a deep and positive impression on the Muslim community, particularly among the orthodox. As a result of Al-Ghazālī's influence those sympathetic to mysticism but who could not necessarily absorb all of its insights, began to give it renewed consideration. Thus, Al-Ghazālī helped Islamic mysticism become, by and large, more accessible and the animosity shown in prior centuries towards the mystics – who were often seen as foes of Islam seeking to uproot the foundations of faith – steadily retreated.

Throughout his discourses, Al-Ghazālī calls on Muslims to obey the commands of their religion while simultaneously drawing closer to its mystical ideals. He declares mysticism to be a legitimate path, a path that guides people to God and gives them an awareness of reality. Al-Ghazālī's

resilient faith, eloquent speech, broadminded and unlimited sophistication, and his captivating approach to truth allowed his opinions to dominate the conventional views of his day.

Al-Ghazālī's primary pursuit in life was acquiring knowledge. He studied so much that he nearly committed to memory all of the general knowledge of his day. Early in his adult life, he began to study Islamic theology, which gave him an extensive background in religion. He then took up the study of philosophy. He delved into the works of the great philosophers until he was ultimately propelled into mysticism, where he remained until the end of his days.

Having served several years as a distinguished professor at Baghdad's great Nīzāmīyah University, Al-Ghazālī's heart was filled with longing for a more spiritual life. His sought to withdraw from the world and focus solely on worship in complete isolation. Since he was unable to resist this yearning, he decided to dedicate his life to spirituality.

Al-Ghazālī ultimately abandoned his study of theology and philosophy, and instead directed his heart and soul, as well as his actions, to traveling the mystic path. On account of his sincere nature, flawless spirit and, most notably, his broad education, he was able to fuse and reconcile the essentials of the mystic domain with the intellectual and theological foundations of exoteric Islam.

Al-Ghazālī stressed that mysticism should not only be viewed as a way to draw near to God via its well-known methods. It should be seen as a means (in its proper embrace) to bestow all of one's being with an enfolding transcendence. He presented mysticism as a tool for gaining spiritual awareness and *yakīn* (certainty), which in turn, stimulates *kanāt* (satisfaction) for the soul. Al-Ghazālī called upon others to accompany him on this path, and in so doing he opened new avenues of spirituality, whose principles he clothed in scholarly understanding. His explanation of mysticism was for the most part well-received by the orthodox Muslims, who thereafter gave it the appropriate respect that it deserved.

## **THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, MYSTICISM & AL-GHAZĀLĪ**

Before Al-Ghazālī's day, it was not uncommon to find the *mutakallimūn* (Islamic theologians) trying to rationally defend their positions by employing the views found in the writings of the philosophers. Nonetheless,

these theologians eventually found themselves at odds with these views, and they began to censure and refute the very same theories they initially sought to employ.

In his pursuit of truth, Al-Ghazālī examined the refutations that were fashioned by the theologians. As he scrutinized these for weaknesses, he found that they tended to focus more on personal criticisms and insults than on the crux of the matter. Therefore he wrote:

In those theological writings keen on refuting philosophy I found only a tangled mass of phrases full of contradictions and flaws incapable of swaying the common crowd, let alone critical minds. I became convinced that to refute a doctrine before thoroughly understanding it is like shooting at an object in the dark. Thus I zealously devoted myself to the study of philosophy; but only from books and without the aid of a teacher. In fact, I gave up for this study all the leisure remaining from teaching and composing works on law.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Ghazālī was taken up with *‘ilm ul-kalām* (theology) in his early days. He made an extensive study of it by carefully examining every book on the subject that he could find. As one of the top-ranked Islamic theologians of his day, he wrote a great deal on this topic. However, he was ultimately forced to look beyond it; for while theology was “a subject that satisfies its objective,” it failed to meet his personal aspirations. It could not quench his thirst for truth, and it failed to deliver a remedy for his spiritual restlessness.<sup>14</sup>

After delving into theology and all of its finer points (and then teaching it), Al-Ghazālī turned his attention to philosophy. He was very much taken up with this field. In fact, he gave great importance to this subject and having grasped its basics traveled far in its mastery. It is well-known that whenever Al-Ghazālī began a mater, he did not leave it until he reached its utmost limits. He believed that to achieve a complete grasp of a subject and to possess an adequate evaluation of it, it had to be studied to its end, leaving not a single angle unexamined. Only then could it be truthfully determined if the subject was advantageous or not.

Having given philosophy an exhaustive examination, Al-Ghazālī understood that he would not be able to find full certitude, or *yakīn*, within its confines. He found no personal satisfaction in its study. In fact, he felt that philosophy contained many misleading notions that could eventually cause all those who chase it to abandon faith altogether and fall into

atheism. Within philosophy's confines is concealed a doubt as to whether one is approaching truth or moving further away from it!<sup>15</sup>

However, Al-Ghazālī did not intend to upend the foundations of philosophy with his criticism or to thwart its principles. He merely stated that his studies of this subject revealed that the intellectual speculations crafted by the philosophers by way of reason were by themselves not enough to uncover the truth. In addition to reason, he asserted, there must be another way to reveal the splendor of Haqq, the Real – a way that allowed a person to eventually perceive its gleaming radiance. This way was the way of the mystics, for these were individuals who validated their understanding with the heart and discovered truth through *dhawk* (taste) and *kashf* (unveiling). The mystics were individuals who struggled to counter their desires and lusts using *perhīz* and other upright methods. These were men and women who sought to liberate the heart from the tyranny of worldly attachment.

Al-Ghazālī ultimately came to place little weight on logic or rationalism; instead, he favored that which emerged from the heart. For him, the heart was a paramour that led not only to complete truth but to divine bliss. Mind and intellect alone could never bring such contentment. It had to be conveyed by the heart.

We shall explain in the following section how Al-Ghazālī fashioned his insight and then how he validated his perspective. We shall also see how he acknowledged mysticism to be the means by which the bliss of contentment could be attained, and how his understandings were received by the Ahl ul-Sunnah (i.e. Sunni Muslims), and the consequences of this reception.

## AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

In his writings Al-Ghazālī describes how he came to classify various categories of knowledge. He clearly separated acquired and empirical knowledge from the knowledge that is bestowed through inspiration. He also pointed out the exponents of these two categories, primarily in his work *Al-Munkidh min al-dalāl* (The Deliverance from Error), a work that is somewhat of an autobiographical account of his spiritual journey. Al-Munkidh describes the conditions stimulated by his heart, the spiritual frustrations Al-Ghazālī endured, and the illuminations that eventually blossomed within. This work presents four categories of knowledge-seekers:

- The mutakallimūn (theologians)

- The *falāsifa* (philosophers)
- The *bāṭinīs* (extreme esotericists)
- The mystics

The *mutakallimūn* are those who, by means of their study of religion, seek to safeguard Islam from the *ahl ul-bid’ah* (people of innovation) who concoct new-fangled religious customs previously unknown. The *ahl ul-bid’ah* entangle and confuse the minds of the masses. According to Al-Ghazālī the methods and the tools employed by the theologians to argue against the *ahl ul-bid’ah* are often quite faulty, which in turn stirs doubt in the legitimacy of their views.

As for the *falāsifa*, Al-Ghazālī states that these individuals tend to dismiss any religious principle at odds with reason. However, he in no way rejects the value of the intellect and the importance it plays in life, especially when it comes to mathematics or the natural sciences. For Al-Ghazālī the famed Aristotle – a figure often cited by Muslim philosophers like al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā – was both an enemy of Islam and *hikmat ilāhī* (divine wisdom). Al-Ghazālī chiefly objects to the Aristotelian notion of the eternity of the world. Materialist philosophers of this type recognize the beautiful workmanship of the universe to be perfect in every aspect, compelling them to acknowledge the existence of an overarching creative power (i.e. the “First Cause”). Yet they assert that human beings can do as they liked, since (they overarch) creative power is abstract and impersonal. As for the afterlife, materialist philosophers claimed that the *hisāb* (personal accountability) and *kitāb* (heavenly record) of people’s lives lie wholly outside the realm of reason and thus are non-existent.

After explaining the position of the materialist thinkers, Al-Ghazālī turns his attention to those philosophers who incorporate a degree of religion into their theories. These men are known as the *ilāhīyūn*. Al-Ghazālī says that while such theorists accept the existence of God, they stress the eternality of the physical universe. For the *ilāhīyūn* God perceives human acts as a whole and does not involvement Himself in the minutia of everyday existence. Many of these philosophers also believe physical resurrection in the afterlife to be a fairytale, since it is only the soul that endures beyond death. The material body returns permanently to its source, earth, never to rise again. Al-Ghazālī refutes each of the claims presented by the numerous schools of this category of philosophy, ultimately faulting them for conveying varying degrees of *kufr*, or unbelief.

Al-Ghazālī sees the dogma of the group known as extreme esotericists, the *bāṭinīs*, as ambiguous and suspect at best. The *bāṭinīs*' opinions deal solely with the esoteric meaning of the Kur'ān, for they are clearly indifferent to the external aspects of worship. He tells us that the *bāṭinīs* know nothing other than what their allegedly infallible leaders' decree. These leaders are the sole illumination that they possess, and they know of nothing else. Al-Ghazālī censures this group for their errors, and he refutes their views in his book *Hujjat ul-ḥakk fī'l-radd ul-Bāṭiniyyah* (Proof of the Truth in Retorting the *bāṭinīs*) since *Al-Munkidh* does not cover this group in great detail.

There now remains only the mystics, towards whom Al-Ghazālī wholeheartedly directs his gaze. He expresses in *Al-Munkidh* a great deal of appreciation for the mystics because of the spiritual progress he personally achieved as his faith expanded, fortified as it was with *‘ilm-i ladunī*, divine knowledge.

In *Al-Munkidh* Al-Ghazālī presents us with a detailed description of the spiritual path. Having previously studied the ways of the *mutakallimūn*, the *falāsifa*, and the *bāṭinīs*, he found all of them lacking, inconsistent, and even atheistic. As a result of these findings, Al-Ghazālī threw himself headlong into the way of the mystics. Here he found much to be gained, not only expanded awareness but character building and good deeds.

If properly implemented, wrote Al-Ghazālī, mysticism can remove both spiritual impairments and errant behavior. His belief that the heart requires purification to become a throne from which God can rule. Such a heart acquires its nourishment through *dhikrullah*, the remembrance of God.

Al-Ghazālī examined important writings such as *Kut ul-kulūb* (The Nourishment of Hearts) by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 385/996), and the books of Muḥāsibī. Al-Ghazālī paid even more attention to the writings of Junayd, Ash-Shiblī, and Bastāmī, given that such works are filled with guidance and instruction.

As Al-Ghazālī grasped both the objectives of mysticism and the spirit of the mystics' outlook, he realized that he had to do more than merely absorb book knowledge; he had to evolve internally through commitment, *perhīz*, and worship so that he could achieve the lofty objective pointed out in these writings. Doing so, Al-Ghazālī ultimately attained his goal through total focus on God.

Al-Ghazālī concluded that mysticism was the only conduit that could bring pleasure to the heart. Moreover, mysticism proved itself to be the most flawless of all ethical and spiritual viewpoints. As he progressed on the mystic

path Al-Ghazālī grew aware that all of the external and internal devotions of the mystics were illuminated by the Prophet's light, and this awareness resulted in his total belief that the Prophet's light was the only light that could enlighten the human soul.

## MA<sup>C</sup>RIFAT ACCORDING TO AL-GHAZALI

After contesting the varied approaches of the mutakallimūn, the falāsifa, and the bāṭinīs, Al-Ghazālī turned toward mysticism, which satisfied his desire for mystical awareness and spiritual satisfaction. Shortly after that he advanced his theory of ma<sup>c</sup>rifat, which was closely tied to his experience with this satisfaction. In his celebrated *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (Revival of Religious Knowledge), Al-Ghazālī states that ma<sup>c</sup>rifat is intuitive spiritual awareness of God. It requires being conscious of the state of creation since everything in the creation is a reflection of God's masterful craftsmanship. Ma<sup>c</sup>rifat is total recognition of God Almighty and His attributes.

The fruit produced by the heart's vigilance is awareness of God's ḥikmah, as well as His creative power. It is a fruit that springs from inspiration. This awareness is paradise for some (or at least the primary vehicle for gaining it). The more developed our awareness is, the more extended our portion of paradise becomes.

According to Al-Ghazālī people are of unequal rank when it comes to seeking God. Some are quite keen on following the spiritual path while others have no interest in it. A person who has no inclination to pursue such a path, and engage in the struggle it requires, should make do with the outward understanding of the Kur’ān and ḥadīth and refrain from delving any deeper into them. A simple man seeking the essence of religion and divine revelation is like a man entering the sea without knowing how to swim! Sadly, we have many unqualified people today giving their own interpretations or *istidlāl* (deductions) of Islam. Such people repeatedly fall into the pit of error (and often drag others with them) and are incapable of climbing out if it.

Then there are those who are not content with the outward form of religion alone, and they strive for *yakīn* by way of illumination and contemplation. Such people seek enlightenment through the knowledge God ignites in the hearts of His intimates via inspiration. When such enlightened awareness arises, they behold the divine in an all-pervading and intimate light.

According to Al-Ghazālī faith (or better yet *yakīn*) has three grades, and we shall describe each of these grades in succession:

- The faith of the common folk
- The faith of the intellectuals
- The faith of the *‘arifīn* (gnostics)

The faith of the common folk is formed by simply seeing and hearing. In other words, such people believe only after having the concept of faith explained to them. For example: If a simple man is told by someone he trusts that so-and-so is in his house, he will immediately believe this without asking for any evidence. His is undemanding belief.

The faith of intellectuals is obtained much in the same way, albeit by way of reasoning. Employing the above allegory, if an intellectual hears the voice of so-and-so coming from his house, his reason will lead him to believe that so-and-so is in his house.

The faith of the *‘arifīn*, however, is generated by directly beholding the divine. An *‘arif* is like a person coming home and seeing with his own eyes that so-and-so is in his house.

If we can base our faith on intimacy with God, we will come to be loved by God. We will then be given knowledge that originates in the heavenly realm, a knowledge called *‘ilm-i ladunī*. Such knowledge can not be obtained by intellect or reason. One of its requisites is detachment from the fleeting material world. With the weapons of abstention and restraint we must battle lust and desire as we completely submit to God. Only after this is done will the veils be lifted one by one and the door to God's endless mysteries opened. Then we will behold God with complete *yakīn*. Unification with the divine will occur in the fullest sense of the word, and we will, through intimate knowledge of God, see things as they truly are. Speaking on such matters in the skilled way that he did, there is no doubt that Al-Ghazālī obtained this high station.

Therefore, let us summarize Al-Ghazālī's thoughts on *ma‘rifat*. The common folk, the intellectuals and the philosophers cannot reach intuitive awareness of God, since this originates in the spiritual realm and cannot be compared to whatever knowledge they may possess. *Ma‘rifat* is transcendent awareness acquired through *dhawq* and *kashf*, which God transmits directly into the hearts of His cherished friends. *Ma‘rifat* bears a resemblance to the knowledge of the prophets, about which God speaks:

*Nor does he speak from [his own] desires.  
It is not but a revelation revealed.  
Taught to him by one mighty in power...  
﴿Surat an-Najm 53:3-5﴾*

Therefore *ma'rifat* is in a way a type of *wahīy* (revelation) sent down by God, and only He knows how it arises and establishes itself in the heart. Even those who have been graced with this knowledge do not know how it came or from where – except the prophets, who, as messengers of God, have such matters disclosed to them..

## TRUE BLISS ACCORDING TO AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Since serenity and bliss emerged out of a person's spiritual awareness, Al-Ghazālī concluded that *ma'rifat* produces a kind of sweetness. He expounds upon this sensation with his theory of contentment.

According to Al-Ghazālī the highest bliss that a person can experience is that which comes from obtaining *ma'rifatullah*, intuitive awareness of God. This bliss is the most enduring and best of all. He argues this point in his *Kimiya-ye sa'ādat* (The Alchemy of Happiness) with both logical and spiritual evidences:

O inquirer after divine mysteries! Do you ask how it is known that the happiness of man consists in the knowledge of God, and that his enjoyment consists in the love of God? We observe in reply, that every man's happiness is found in the place where he obtains enjoyment and tranquility. Thus sensual enjoyment is found in eating and drinking and the like. The enjoyment of anger is derived from taking revenge and from violence. The enjoyment of the eye consists in the view of correct images and agreeable objects. The enjoyment of the ear is secured in listening to harmonious voices. In the same way the enjoyment of the heart depends upon its being employed in that for which it was created, in learning to know everything in its reality and truth. Hence, every man glories in what he knows, even if the thing is but of little importance. He who knows how to play chess, boasts over him who does not know: and if he is looking on while a game of chess is played, it is of no use to tell him not to speak, for as soon as he sees an improper move,

he has not patience to restrain himself from showing his skill, and glorying in his knowledge, by pointing it out...Now that it is clear that the happiness of the heart consists in the knowledge and love of God, we may say that the heart that does not feel the necessity of the knowledge of God, and a longing for the love of God, but rather craves after and seeks the world, resembles a sick person who has no appetite for food, but even prefers such things as earth and clay to meat, regarding them as necessary, notwithstanding they have no nourishing qualities. If no remedy can be found, speedily, to recover his appetite for food, and if he continue indulging in perverse notions of what is necessary, his malady will grow in strength; until if he continues in this state, he will perish and lose the joys this world can give. In the same manner the heart which does not feel a necessity for the knowledge and love of God, and where the love of other objects reigns, is a heart that is sick and ready to perish, unless a remedy be applied, unless its affections be turned away from other things, and the love of God become predominant. Future bliss will be lost and eternal misery will be its portion. Our refuge is in God! You should know also that the enjoyments of this world that are procured through the senses are cut off at death. The enjoyment of the love and knowledge of God, which depends upon the heart, is alone lasting. At death the hindrances that result from the presence of the external senses being removed, the light and brilliancy of the heart come to have full play, and it feels the necessity of the vision of beauty. What has hitherto been said is sufficient to enable a person of intelligence to comprehend the dignity of the heart of man.<sup>16</sup>

Al-Ghazālī does not believe that God can only be seen at death with the eyes of the heart or, perhaps, in a death-like deep sleep. He maintains that it is possible to see God while awake if we are wholly purified through struggle and abstinence and have completely distanced ourselves from lust, anger, and other vices. In overcoming passion, our hearts will yearn to see God – causing us to distance ourselves even further from worldly matters. The eyes and ears of our hearts will unlock, and awareness of God will begin to take hold while we are awake, much in the same way as when we are in a dream state. We will start to see everything as it truly is, a description of which is impossible to provide. To one endowed with such

awareness God unfolds the entire face of the earth and the heights of the heavens. This mystic state emerges because the hindrances that were once present in the heart – such as lust or greed – will have totally vanished. Nothing will remain within us except the self-disclosure of *Haqq*.

This is the description of contentment and bliss that Al-Ghazālī offers in his *Kimiya-ye sa'ādat*. He says that these two states can be taken from the endless divine treasures dispensed by the noble hand of Muḥammad. Anyone who thinks that they can attain this bliss by another means is gravely mistaken, for true bliss can be found nowhere else. The only way to obtain it is in the way that we have explained above.

In the above information we can see that Al-Ghazālī did much to elevate the prestige of mysticism and encourage its acceptance as a way offering true happiness. Indeed, it is a way that bestows transcendent delight never-ending!





# 7 The Mystics of the 6th & 7th Hijrī Centuries and their Views

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Al-Ghazālī skillfully demonstrated during the fifth Hijrī century that God could not be found through intellect and reason alone. In fact, the well-accepted authority his views weakened the influence of both theologians and philosophers.

However, in the course of the sixth Hijrī century, a group of mystics emerged who maintained that religiously-grounded philosophy could a legitimate means of gaining *marifat*. Such inspiration could emanate from the soul by way of the mind, and therefore through reason. These individuals advanced the idea that attaining *ḥaṭīkat* flowed out of union with God. They also maintained that the theories of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat ash-shuhūd* were closely intertwined – a point that we shall discuss below.

A degree of mixing occurred between theology, religious philosophy, and mysticism as a result of the ideas advanced by the mystics of this period. Up to this point these subjects had been largely disconnected. Although some views held by the sixth Hijrī century mystics dovetailed with the opinions of both theologians and religious philosophers, there was one significant difference. While the latter sought to reach their objectives through empirical evidence and logic, the mystics regarded their deductions as having emerged from *kashf* (unveiling) and other transcendent experiences.

The advocates of this novel spiritual insight were men like Al-Maṭūl Suhrawardī, with his book *Hikmat al-ishrāk* (The Philosophy of Illumination), Ibn Ḩārūq, with the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, and Ḩāfiẓ ʻUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ, with his book *Ashk ilāhī* (Divine Love) and his theory of *wahdat ash-shuhūd*. All three of these men added to the fresh and diverse directions that Islamic mysticism would take during this period, directions that we shall seek to explain in depth below.

We should, however, make it clear that nearly all the Islamic mystics of the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries continued to champion the long-held belief that the only way to obtain ḥaḳīḳat was to remove every moral failing and character flaw; and this could only be done by detaching oneself from all earthly desires.

In the vocabulary used by the mystics of this period, we find the word *ḳutb* (axis), a term used to describe the *Insān-i kāmil*. The *ḳutb* is the head of all the mystics living on earth at any given time, ranking far above all in spiritual station. The *ḳutb* is the most spiritually advanced human on earth, and no other mystic holds his rank in terms of *ma‘rifat*. When a *ḳutb* dies, God raises another advanced mystic endowed with the very same qualities to succeed him.

Ranking below the *ḳutb* in spiritual perfection are the *abdāls*, who have likewise been provided with a superior degree of *ma‘rifat*, but who rank under the *ḳutb*, since he exhibits preeminence over them in every point.

In addition to the appearance of new terms, a number of noteworthy methods for attaining spiritual advancement were transmitted during the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries. One method was called “the way of striving” or *mujāhadah*. Through *mujāhadah* the wayfarer can attract ecstatic mystical delights and elevate his spiritual rank by rigorously curbing all physical desires. *Mujāhadah* is carried out by continual worship and battling against the ego. This method allows the wayfarer to gain vast spiritual rewards from the strenuous efforts put into it; for once *mujāhadah* has been implemented the wayfarer will continue to acquire loftier and loftier qualities by adhering to divine guidance. Traversing numerous mystical states, he will, in due course, reach *irfān* (gnosis), and within *irfān* the station of *tawhīd* (unity).

Another term that came into widespread use was *kashf*, or “mystical unveiling.” *Kashf* allows the wayfarer to observe various aspects of ḥaḳīḳat, such as the manifestations God’s attributes, the varied dimensions of Paradise, heavenly communications, the angels, sacred prophecy, the soul, and other transcendent matters. One can reach genuine mystic states through *kashf*; but the ability to reach *kashf* can only be gained by seclusion from the world and unceasing *dhikrullah*, remembrance of God. When these unveilings are achieved, any remaining worldly passions will be overcome within, and the wayfarer will start to see things as they truly are. Such transcendent experiences cannot emerge if corporal cravings remain present our hearts, for only those who cast off material desire are granted this inner perception.

If we can bring lust and desire under control, great benefit will be gained from the profound awareness that God will bestow upon us. We will, in fact, become conscious of the sum total of all.

During this period of history, we find in the accounts of advanced mystics an increased use of their spiritual states to channel all sorts of miracles. However, it is important for us to realize that God bequeaths such extraordinary abilities only when the wayfarer has removed all the veils obstructing the eyes of the heart. Such elevated stations are reached when the soul is purged of all moral defects, allowing advancement to the highest pinnacle of spirituality: union with the divine.<sup>17</sup> Whosoever arrives at this most majestic of ranks beholds the reality of existence, and through sheer spiritual strength can channel the divine energy that keeps the natural world in check. Such power has been placed under a person's authority solely with God's permission. As we have stated, this elevated privilege is only granted to those who have become one with God. It is beyond the reach of all others.

We also find in this period the increased use of satirical language – language that at a cursory glance can seem to be a mocking the sacred. In truth, such language was used to impart spiritual realities skillfully. Many mystics (like *Bastāmī* and *Al-Hallāj*) frequently employed witticisms whenever they wished their mystic viewpoints to remain veiled from the unworthy. Such sardonic utterances were often difficult to fathom, and only the most spiritually aware individuals could appreciate the significance of their meaning. The common folk failed to decipher their meaning and such sayings were regularly condemned as nonsense, drivel, and blasphemy.

For the spiritually inclined to decode these “outlandish” sayings a technique had to be employed, one that was based on mystical insight. Those not on the spiritual path would be unable to grasp these sayings or poems, and thus could take little benefit from them. These words had no place in textbooks, or in reason for that matter. Coincidentally, this is similar to the condition of those who enter the spiritual path. There is no possible way for transcendent openings to be acquired through reason and books alone; they are gained through personal awareness and experience. Then inspired by divine knowledge the tongue expresses the truths seen by the eyes of a heart. These truths can often only be communicated to others in an ambiguous and guarded language often at odds with exoteric interpretations of faith. Such words can even seem utterly contrary to the fundamental principles of religion. Many declarations made in the books and poems of *Suhrawardī*, *Ibn ‘Arabī* and *Ibn al-Fāriḍ* are of this sort. Submerged as they were in a sea of divine awareness,

these spiritual masters expressed their feelings in a veiled and mystifying way. Those who commented on their works (whether verse or prose) in the following centuries carefully maintained this approach.

Sometimes these commentators went even further than the writers they were commenting on. For example, in explaining the poems of Ibn al-Fārid, the spiritual master Sa‘id al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. 699/1300) wrote that everything in his commentary was from Ibn al-Fārid’s works and that he merely sought to organize these poems according to their original order of composition. Nonetheless, Al-Farghānī’s commentary on Ibn al-Fārid’s verses is so cryptic that it is nearly incomprehensible from beginning to end!

Thus we find the Islamic mystics in sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries, who carefully revealed their spiritual approaches and systems of belief in their expressive writings. It is through these writings that their views on the philosophy of mysticism have been passed down to us. These views will be explained in the following accounts of some of the most notable individuals of this period.

## SUHRAWARDĪ & THE SCIENCE OF ILLUMINATION

The first personality we shall deal with in this chapter is Abū'l Futūh Shahāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī, who is known worldwide by his distinctive moniker *Al-Makṭūl*, “The Slain.” Suhrawardī was so astute in his mysticism that his followers praised him with the title *Al-Mu‘ayyid bi'l-malakūt*, “The one buttressed by the angelic realms.”

Suhrawardī was born in 549/1154 in the village Suhraward in the Persian district of Zanjān. He studied fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and philosophy at the feet of the famous scholar Majd ud-Dīn al-Jīlī. Since Suhrawardī excelled in fiqh, when he settled in the Syrian city of Aleppo he entered into debate after debate with many local fukahā’. These scholars of exoteric Islam soon became his unwavering foes, going so far in their opposition as to level the charge of kufr, unbelief, against him. The fukahā’ wasted no time in conspiring against Suhrawardī. Through numerous plots and intrigues, they managed to gain the ear of the sultan of the time, the famed Ṣalāḥ ud-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, turning him into Suhrawardī’s pitiless foe. Ṣalāḥ ud-Dīn, who was living in Egypt, sent orders to his son, Mālik Zāhir (who was governor of Aleppo) to take immediate and severe action against Suhrawardī by having him arrested and executed. Mālik Zāhir carried out his father’s command, and in 587/1191 Suhrawardī was put to death.

Numerous historians, including our own Sami Frashëri in his *Kamūs ul-<sup>c</sup>alām*, have presented details of the events leading up to Suhrawardī's execution. It is said that after completing his studies, Suhrawardī left his native Persia and traveled to Aleppo, Syria. In this city, the reputation of his sophistication spread far and wide as he repeatedly established his intellectual superiority over the *fukahā'* in all of the exchanges they had with him. Given this situation, the governor of Aleppo (the son of Ṣalāḥ ud-Dīn) showered Suhrawardī with many honors, even inviting him to the palace. This, unsurprisingly, stirred great envy in *fukahā'*, who soon set about scheming. They sent a message to Ṣalāḥ ud-Dīn stating that Suhrawardī was a bold-faced *kāfir* bent on demolishing people's faith, including that of his son. He must, therefore, be dealt with straightaway.

The sultan's response was sent to the *fukahā'* and *“ulamā’* of Aleppo, and it included a *fatwā* ordering Suhrawardī's execution for mischievous blasphemy. The execution had to be carried out as soon as possible, and Suhrawardī was thrown into prison in 587/1191. After being cruelly deprived of food and drink, Suhrawardī perished in the dungeon at the age of thirty-six.<sup>18</sup> Before he passed away he is said to have uttered these words:

*Say to my friends,  
As they cry  
Upon seeing my end,  
That I have not died.  
By God! Surely I have not!  
I'm alive!  
I'm a bird  
Who's left his cage for a time,  
And now to God I climb.  
And ah! How gracious mirth surges  
As the vision of God undeterred emerges!*<sup>19</sup>

Shahāb ud-Dīn as-Suhrawardī was given the moniker *Al-Maktūl*, “The Slain”, to distinguish him from another Suhrawardī, ‘Umar as-Suhrawardī, who was from Baghdad and who died in 638/1240. The latter is the author of the famous book *‘Awārif ul-ma‘ārif*, “The Gnosis of the Gnostics.”

Suhrawardī studied the philosophies of the ancients in great detail, particularly those of Greece and Persia, and he gave great importance to these. He not only expanded his intellect by studying these works, but he also opened an enhanced way to appreciate and explain Islamic mysticism.

Throughout his writings, Suhrawardī speaks in the language of spiritual perception. Nonetheless, his contemporaries failed to grasp his intentions, and they heaped doubt upon his attachment to Islam. This is clearly one of the reasons why the fūkahā' issued a fatwā for his execution.

When he went to Aleppo in order to study, the historian Ibn Khallikān noted that the town's citizens were divided into two groups in regards to their feelings about Suhrawardī: One group was against him, accusing him of unbelief, while the other not only held him in high regard but considered him a flawlessly pious saint. History likewise views him as a first-ranked mystic and spiritual guide, and an astute philosopher possessing an elevated character. Suhrawardī also distinguished himself by formulating the mystical theory of *hikmat al-ishrāk*, the “philosophy of illumination.” This theory was a middle path that brought balance between the states of mystical ecstasy and the mental exercises of philosophy. Suhrawardī presented his argument in his book *Hikmat al-ishrāk*:

I did not originally arrive at this subject through reason; rather I acquired it by another means. Subsequently, I sought proof for it so that, should I cease contemplating the proof, nothing would make me fall into doubt regarding it.<sup>20</sup>

The works of Suhrawardī, whether in prose or verse, expose not only his vast intellectual sophistication but present his firm grasp of metaphysics and lofty mystical ecstasies. Among his more prominent works are *Hikmat al-ishrāk*, *Hayākil an-nūr* (Luminous Forms), and *Kissat al-ghurbat al-gharbiyya* (The Tale of the Western Exile). However, it is his magnum opus *Hikmat al-ishrāk*, which left the deepest impression on Islamic mystical thought. In modern times this book's value and reputation have spread far and wide, and it has been translated into numerous European languages.

*Hikmat al-ishrāk* is divided into two parts. In the first part, Suhrawardī discusses logic, or *mantik*, in great detail. This part is an introduction of sorts to the second part because a bit of the subject matter discussed in the second half is included in its pages.

Suhrawardī dedicates the second half of *Hikmat al-ishrāk* to the issue of heavenly light. This part – which is the most crucial part of the book – consists of five sections. The first explains the nature of light and its *hakā'ik*, its realities. It also contains a discussion of the “Light of Lights,” which is the foundation and mainstay of all creation. The second section shows the order (or arrangement) of the state of affairs of *wujūd* (existence). The

third section deals again with the “Light of Lights” as well as the subject of the *anwār al-kahhār* (dominating lights). The fourth section discusses the *‘ālam al-barzakh* (transitional worlds), wherein Suhrawardī describes their categories, compositions, and positions. The fifth section deals with prophecy, the afterlife, and spiritual transformation. Suhrawardī shows within these five parts the full balance and essence that is maintained by the All-illuminating Light.

Suhrawardī also contrasts light with darkness, describing the spiritual element as light, and the material element as darkness. He emphasizes that possessing a lofty intellect can be considered illumination and that the higher heavenly realms are made of an incinerating and annihilating light. The souls of human beings are of a minor light, whereas God Almighty is the Light of lights. According to Suhrawardī, the human body is an uncut diamond, and the material world is purely a transitory station that is used to cut this diamond to the fullness of perfection and beauty.

Suhrawardī tells us that the role that mysticism plays in relation to faith is the same role that it plays in relation to philosophy. Likewise, the role that theology plays in relation to religion is the same role played by mystical philosophy in relation to natural, or general, philosophy. In fact, Suhrawardī argues that proper recognition of God, His attributes, and His creation hinge on a harmonized understanding of theology, philosophy and mysticism. This means that one must fuse all three fields together to properly know *Haqq*, the Real (i.e. God).

Suhrawardī separates those striving to grasp truth into two categories. The first group uses methods that involve logic, deduction, and reason, while the other uses unveiling, personal struggle, and mystical experience. The first category is filled by the theologians, for they are people who look only at the externals of religion, which through their various proofs and conclusions they seek to uphold. The second category is where the mystics are found. These people have their means, perceptions, and expressions by which they find truth. In demonstrating their findings, both groups adhere to the essentials of Islam as presented by the theologians, for if such concepts were not validated by the *Kur’ān* and *Sunnah*, but rather experienced in ways different from that of the mystics and theologians, it would become the way of the philosophers rather than those seeking spiritual elevation. Consequently Suhrawardī’s “philosophy of illumination” takes on the form of a mystical philosophy whose foundation rests on the individual becoming

exalted in spiritual rank as general knowledge turns into *ma‘rifat*, and *ma‘rifat* descends from the higher realms by way of heavenly inspiration.

Suhrawardī states that he composed *Hikmat al-ishrāk* to satisfy the appeals of his supporters for a work explaining his viewpoints. Moreover, he stated that his views were fruits that ripened by detachment from the world and embarking on the difficult battle to reach perfection. This book – which caused great delight among his followers – shows Suhrawardī following the same line of thought followed by the father of the philosophers, Plato, whom he saw as a powerful intellectual master and mystic illuminator.

Just as the theologians and mystics could be categorized, Suhrawardī maintained that the philosophers could be as well, with one group comprised of those completely submerged in intuitive rather than discursive philosophy. Such thinkers belong to the first category of philosophers, for they are entirely concerned with spirituality, and are thus similar to the prophets and saints. In this category, we find Bāyazīd Bastāmī, Saḥl Tustārī, Al-Hallāj and many other friends of God.

Suhrawardī states that the second type of philosophers are those thinkers who have no regard for intuitive philosophy, being exclusively satisfied with discursive philosophy. Members of this group include Aristotle of ancient days, as well as Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā in the Islamic era.

Those intellectuals who deal equally with intuitive and discursive philosophy are put into a third category, although Suhrawardī said such individuals are very rare. According to Shirāzī (a later mystic), the only person able to achieve this balance was Suhrawardī himself.

A fourth category is composed of those intellectuals who are concerned more with intuitive philosophy and only somewhat with discursive philosophy, while a fifth category contains those who deal with intuitive philosophy, but who delve very little into discursive philosophy. These are followed by those thinkers who are very much interested in discursive philosophy, but little interested in the intuitive. A sixth and final group, contends Suhrawardī, is made up of those intellectuals who are somewhat involved in intuitive philosophy, but much more so with discursive philosophy.

Suhrawardī believed that the highest of all in rank are those more taken up with intuitive philosophy, and who remain firmly attached to it. Such individuals are in every respect – be it in knowledge, esteem, reasoning or taste – superior to those found in all other categories.

Among all of these varying grades of philosophers there clearly must be one who outshines them all, although he may not necessarily be recognizable, even to himself. More often than not this superior individual is veiled and completely concealed from humanity. This figure possesses the saintly title of *ḳutb*, a term we have encountered above. It is this *ḳutb* who directs all of the lower grades within the hierarchy of saints, even if he is hidden from all save God.<sup>21</sup>

Suhrawardī states that the students of philosophy can be placed into categories similar to those of the great thinkers. First, there are those who simultaneously adhere to intuitive and discursive philosophy. Then there are those who seek to engage themselves in intuitive philosophy, while having nothing to do with discursive philosophy. Such students are followed by those who focus only on discursive philosophy, having nothing to do with the intuitive. Suhrawardī holds that among all of these students only those who embrace both ways will attain truth, and those who reach truth are philosophers in their own right, and they are ranked high with the *ḳutb*.

Suhrawardī tells us that his *Hikmat al-iṣhrāk* was written only for those individuals who follow both approaches, i.e. intuitive and discursive philosophy. Any thinker who is exclusively on one side or the other will take no benefit from this work.

Furthermore, Suhrawardī denotes the differences that exist between philosophy and mysticism in his *Partavnāmah*, the “Book of Radiance”. Whoever reads this book and absorbs its contents is sure to receive spiritual enhancement and openings to divine inspiration. In fact, a reader will acquire heavenly light – an element that Suhrawardī notes as being the essential condition to finding the way of perfection.<sup>22</sup>

Let us then summarize these points in a few words: Basic philosophy relates solely to those things dealing with intellect and reason. However, its attainment and underpinning should be grounded in the exploration and beholding of heavenly light, in mystical perception and in spiritual struggle. As described in the *Partavnāmah* this light will lift the wayfarer up as it rains down its blessings.

In all of these rather complicated and elaborate concepts that we have brought to light so far, it should be easy to see that Suhrawardī's spiritual approach and mystical viewpoints were abundantly decorated with philosophical principles.

## IBN ՚ARABĪ & THE THEORY OF WAHDAT AL-WUJŪD

One of the greatest mystics of the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries was a man who bequeathed new expressions and theories to Islamic mysticism and in so doing caused a sensation throughout the Muslim world. He was Muhyī ud-Dīn ibn ՚Arabī, a man who, much like Suhrawardī, successfully fused mysticism with the principles of philosophy.

His full name is Muḥammad ibn ՚Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ՚Arabī al-Ḥātimī at- Tā’ī. His sobriquet, by which he is more commonly known, is Muhyī ud-Dīn, or “Reviver of the Religion.” He is also known by the names Ibn ՚Arabī, Al-Gharbī (The Westerner), and Shaykh al-Akbar (The Greatest Master). But most of all, he is recognized throughout the world as one of the greatest champions of Islamic mysticism.

Ibn ՚Arabī was born in the Andalusian town of Murcia in 561/1165. At the age of eight, he went to the city of Seville, where he studied under ՚Abd ul- Haqq al-Azdī al-Ishbīlī, who was a well-known scholar of the time. In 598/1201, Ibn ՚Arabī set out for the East. He stayed for a while in Mecca before traveling to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and other Arab lands. He also visited parts of Anatolia. During his journeys, Ibn ՚Arabī sat with Ibn ՚Asākir and Ibn Jawzī, who were two of the brilliant mystics of the day. Ibn ՚Arabī attained spiritual enlightenment from such individuals as well as a further stimulus for his philosophical approach to mysticism. He learned everything he possibly could from his masters and as a result, he was bedecked with heavenly knowledge and the disclosure of many divine secrets. Ibn ՚Arabī’s enthusiasm for the mystic path earned him great distinction, and word of his spiritual achievements spread far and wide. As his reputation expanded, the rulers that governed Andalusia in the days of the “Faction Kings” sent Ibn ՚Arabī lavish gifts. He in turn distributed to these to the poor, for he ceaselessly made every effort to live a simple life filled with asceticism and self-denial.

Ibn ՚Arabī penned over two hundred books, large and small, on innumerable transcendent topics. He composed his verse and prose in a high literary style and with extraordinary refinement. In his colossal work on Arabic literature, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Carl Brockelmann presents summaries of more than one hundred and fifty of Ibn ՚Arabī’s writings, the most significant being *Al-Futūhāt al-makkiyyah* (The Makkān Openings), a work that conveys Ibn ՚Arabī’s spiritual views in perfect detail. Another of Ibn ՚Arabī’s books, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom),

possesses no less value than the aforementioned work, and in it one can clearly perceive Ibn 'Arabī's mystical insights merged with philosophy.

Ibn 'Arabī's poems were compiled into a *divān* entitled *Tarjumān al-ashwāk* (Translator of Yearnings). His poetry evokes the waves of transcendent love that manifested in his heart. Ibn 'Arabī reveals in verse how he wandered the path to God's love and having reached it by way of self-denial and struggle, completely dissolved into this passion. It was at this moment that he discovered the mysteries of God by means of spiritual vision.

Ibn 'Arabī consistently employs incredibly enigmatic expressions throughout his writings, and the pages of his books are filled with imagery and explanations incomprehensible to those lacking spiritual perception. Anyone not endowed with such awareness will be unable to take benefit from these works; something the author actually intended.

On account of his amazingly expressive abilities and the beauty of his poetic skill – as well as his towering mystical insight – Ibn 'Arabī gained from his well-wishers the titles of *Shaykh al-akbar* (the Greatest Shaykh) and *Kibrīt aḥmar* (Red Sulfur). Yet the intolerant temperament of the *fuḳahā'* that fell upon Al-Hallāj in the third Hijrī century was far from dormant during the days of Ibn 'Arabī, when it came yet again to the fore. Given their inability to grasp the finer points of Ibn 'Arabī's mystical teachings the *fuḳahā'* responded with great hostility and they wasted no time in launching attacks against him. They denounced him with undeserved verbal abuse; even accusing him of having left Islam altogether. In mockery of his title "Shaykh al-akbar" they called him "Shaykh al-akfar", which means "Most Infidelic Shaykh." Ibn 'Arabī barely escaped an assassination attempt while in Egypt, an attempt instigated by a group of conniving *fuḳahā'*. He subsequently fled Egypt and settled in Syria, where he remained until he passed from the world. However, even in Syria, such fanatic dogmatists refused to leave him in peace.

Even though Ibn 'Arabī was forced to endure the scorn of countless foes who derided him with the harshest of language and left no stone uncast against him, he had many prominent and educated devotees and sympathizers, both during his lifetime and after. Many of these devotees composed colossal works defending his positions and clarifying his mystical views. One modern-day lover of Ibn 'Arabī was an Istanbulite university professor named Mehmet Ali Ayni (d. 1943). Out of his fondness for this great spiritual master, Professor Ayni wrote a book specifically

about Ibn ‘Arabī entitled *Şeyhi Ekberi Niçin Severim*, or “Why I Love the Greatest Shaykh.” Ibn ‘Arabī’s life story, his merits, his literary works, as well as his mystical and philosophical theories, are described in detail within this book’s pages. Aynī’s work also states that within Ibn ‘Arabī’s manuscripts lay some particularly cryptic expressions that remained unintelligible and undecipherable until well after the saint’s passing. One such cryptogram (in Arabic) is this:

*Idhā dakhala sīnu fī shīn,  
Yash’aru ķabra Muhyī ud-Dīn*

which translates as:

*When the letter sīn (س) enters the letter shīn (ش)  
revealed will be the tomb of Muhyī ud-Dīn*

Let us now give an explanation of this obscure passage. Many historians – including our Sami Frashëri in his *Kamūs al-‘alām* – recorded that Ibn ‘Arabī was not given a proper burial after his passing in 638/1240. Instead, his body was unceremoniously thrown into a hole dug in a local garbage dump by those who sought to disgrace him even in death. Ibn ‘Arabī’s body lingered in this despicable grave for two centuries until Damascus was conquered in 921/1516 by Sultan Selīm I, ruler of the Ottoman Empire.

Sultan Selīm encountered the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī early in his life, and as a man of pronounced intellect he became engrossed in their study. He discovered within the pages of these works during the course of his reading the cryptogram mentioned above. This riddle roused his curiosity, and he sought to find its meaning. The sultan immediately delegated some his court scholars to launch an investigation.

During their research, the scholars discovered a tradition that had been passed down through the generations by the people of Damascus. According to this tradition Ibn ‘Arabī was executed by the authorities of his day for supposedly uttering the blasphemous phrase: “The god you worship is under my feet.” Sultan Selīm was shocked to hear this. How could such words come from the mouth of a man of such an exalted spiritual rank as Ibn ‘Arabī? There must be a deeper meaning to this phrase, he thought. He immediately ordered his scholars to intensify their efforts in uncovering this mystery.

As time went on, the location where Ibn ‘Arabī was standing when he uttered this alleged blasphemy was located. Sultan Selīm ordered the spot

excavated, and after much digging a chest of gold was unearthed. The sultan exclaimed:

Obviously, those who despised Ibn ‘Arabī were greedy men who valued riches above all else; for this chest is the reason the Shaykh uttered the supposed blasphemy. However, now the intention of the Shaykh is evident! Today it has been revealed to us that Ibn ‘Arabī was not only a mystic philosopher, but he was also a holy man, a saint endowed with miraculous powers by the grace of God!

A search was carried out at once to discover where these greedy men had thrown Ibn ‘Arabī’s body, and it did not take long before the unfitting resting place was found. The sultan ordered the remains exhumed and reburied with great honor. By imperial decree one of the most beautiful and magnificent turbehs in Damascus was built over Ibn ‘Arabi’s body. This shrine remains a well-known pilgrimage site to this day.

Consequently, the cryptic words left by Ibn ‘Arabī can be explained like this: The letter *sīn* (س) symbolizes Sultan Selīm I, while the letter *shīn* (ش) means Shām, which is the Arabic name for Syria. Therefore the meaning of Ibn ‘Arabī’s prophetic riddle is “When Selīm enters Syria the tomb of Muhyī ud-Dīn will be discovered.” And so it came to pass.

Professor Ayni’s book mentions yet another riddle, one which we shall reproduced (in Arabic) here:

*Al-ḥā ḡhayra aḥad ul-bā.  
Ya’udhuḥu’l-mīm,  
Mīm ba’da fī alfu mīm.*

This means that the letter *ḥā* (ح) will not seize the letter *bā* (ب), rather it will be done by the letter *mīm* (م), but the letter *mīm* (م) after a thousand *mīms* (م). This puzzle likewise remained unsolved; that is until 1048/1638, the Ottoman sultan, Murad IV, took Baghdad from the Safavid Persians.

If we analyze these cryptic words, we will find that the letter *ḥā* (ح) represents Filibeli Hāfiẓ Ahmed Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman army that laid siege to Baghdad in 1034/1625. However, he lost much of his force during a Safavid counterattack and was subsequently compelled to lift the siege.

The first letter *mīm* (م) represents Sultan Murat IV. The second *mīm* (م) represents the number forty according to the ancient *abjad* system. The final *mīm* (م) again has the meaning of the number forty.

Knowing these facts, we find the explanation of this riddle as follows: “Hāfiẓ Pasha will not take Baghdad. Murad IV will take it after forty days of siege in the year 1040 AH.” Thus, when this transpired it soon became apparent that it was this event that the riddle foretold.

At this point let us return to the preceding narration. Having witnessed Ibn ‘Arabī’s extraordinary insight, Sultan Selīm I intervened in the longstanding clash between the mystic master and the fundamentalist *fukahā’*, whose champion was the so-called “Shaykh al-Islam” Ibn Taymiyyah (who died in Damascus in the year 728/1328). Ibn Taymiyyah composed a polemic in which he attempted to cast Ibn ‘Arabī as a devotee of the Pharaoh’s religion of the ego, an unbeliever, an atheist and so on. Along with Ibn ‘Arabī, the dogmatic Ibn Taymiyyah attacked Ibn Sabīn, Tlimsānī, Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī and other great mystic masters.

Other detractors of Ibn ‘Arabī included the famed polymath Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī (852/1448) and Al-Biḳā’ī (885/1480), who was by far the most vociferous of these men. Al-Biḳā’ī left no accusation unwritten against Ibn ‘Arabī in his two works *Tanbīh al-ghabī ilā takfīr Ibn ‘Arabī* (The Awakening of the Unaware to Ibn ‘Arabī’s Unbelief) and *Tahdhīr al-‘ibād min ahl al-‘inād bi ‘l-bid’at al-ittihād* (A Warning to the Worshipers about Those espousing the Innovation of Union with God).

To present a thorough refutation of the claims of these fanatics, Sultan Selīm I commissioned the academic skills of a scholar named Abū’l Fath Muḥammad ibn Muẓaffar – who hailed from Mecca, and hence is more commonly known as “Shaykh Makkī”. With an official *farmān* (imperial edict) from the sultan, Shaykh Makkī first assembled all of the charges leveled against Ibn ‘Arabī and then sequentially and methodically provided the appropriate responses to each. These responses were compiled in a book entitled *Al-Jānib ul-gharbī fī hal mushkilāt ash-Shaykh Muhyī ud-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī*. This book was translated into Turkish by Mīrzāzādeh in 1048/1638.

Ibn ‘Arabī had (in addition to Shaykh Makkī) many supporters, and sympathizers who defended his views. These included the great lexicographer Al-Fayrūzabādī, Sa‘d ud-Dīn al-Ḥamāwī, Al-Ṣafadī, Fakhr ud-Dīn ar-Rāzī, As-Suyūtī, ‘Abd ur-Razzāk al-Kāshānī, ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī and others. The great scholar and mystic As-Suyūtī wrote an excellent book defending Ibn ‘Arabī entitled *Tanbīh al-ghabī fī tanzīh Ibn ‘Arabī*, or “Awakening the Unaware to Ibn ‘Arabī’s Exoneration.”

Owing to his fusion of mysticism and philosophy Ibn ‘Arabī is often considered the champion of Islamic mysticism during the sixth and seventh

Hijrī centuries. He clearly understood that a genuine experience of *ḥaḳīḳat* could only be uncovered by way of spiritual insight. In his writings, Ibn ‘Arabī extols the transcendental states that he experienced while traversing the righteous path. Yet he was also a man of spiritual struggle and asceticism, and he continues to serve as an example for all mystics.

Many of the philosophical principles that Ibn ‘Arabī fused to his metaphysical disclosures can be observed throughout his works. Indeed, at first glance, his books do not seem to have anything to do with spirituality at all. Rather they seem to be entirely philosophical in nature, filled with rational thinking, deductions, and explanations of this sort.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s spiritual path, as well as his contribution to expanding the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, infuriated the dogmatic *fuḳahā’*. Although both of these points rest firmly on the *Qur’ān* and the *ḥadīth* and were further reinforced with metaphysical insights and philosophical arguments, the *fuḳahā’* felt obliged to take an unyielding stance against him.

Ibn ‘Arabī brought forward the idea that any created entity appearing in the cosmos is – at the level of its essence – one with every other created entity. This is, perhaps, the simplest definition that we can give of the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*. To be more precise, the essence of all creation at its most basic level is the essence of the Creator Himself and no true distinction can be made between them, at least at the level of reality. Naturally, misgivings about this theory will inevitably enter the mind of anyone unable to comprehend a singular all-encompassing and all-pervading essence.

Let us now attempt to explain the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* in a more straightforward manner so that it might be better understood by our readers. The Islamic mystics contend that since everything in the cosmos is in need of being created and is subsequently maintained in a state of existence by the Creator (i.e. God), the created cannot be considered in and of itself an independent essence. Creation is completely in need, and it cannot endure on its own, nor can it be counted as having a self-supporting essence. Rather, the manifestation of a created thing only has the power to reveal its Maker. On seeing a building or a beautiful fabric, the astute observer assigns no genuine importance to the actual building or fabric. He knows that the true beauty, skill, and merit of the building or fabric lies with the master craftsman who fashioned it. Thus it is with human beings; indeed with everything in the universe, and beyond. Things cannot exist independently of God. They are in absolute need of Him to maintain their

existence. Therefore, creation has no genuine essence; it is only a mirror that reflects the Creator: God Almighty.

This, in a nutshell, is the theory Ibn ‘Arabī expresses through the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*. There is but one essence behind all of creation, he declares, and it is that of God’s. Therefore we find Ibn ‘Arabī saying in his masterwork *Futūhāt al-makkiyyah*:

...He who manifests himself in this place is no other than He [i.e. God]. Consequently there is of the praise-giver, of the praise and of the praised only He.<sup>23</sup>

This can be taken as a summation of the pantheism Ibn ‘Arabī expresses with these lines:

*O Thou who has Thyself encompassed all.  
Within Yourself is fashioned big and small.  
The essence of the universe beckons to Your call.*

To aid in our understanding of this complex theory it would be beneficial to present a few lines from Naim Frashëri’s famous poem *Lulet e Verës*, “Summer Flowers”:

*Truly God is what you see,  
His voice in every sound.  
In all there is and is to be,  
His essence can be found.*

God the Real, for Ibn ‘Arabī, permeates everything and is the all-embracing essence of creation. All is in essence One. The dualism of creator/created exists only at our limited level of understanding. When we can behold everything with the intuitive eye of the heart, we will see this single essence, which has no partner, infusing everything. While it is undeniable that only one essence indeed exists (that of God’s), it is replicated in infinite shades of color. This is similar to the occurrence of numbers, all of which arise out of 1. By repeating the 1 and adding to it, other numbers emerge. And although the ensuing numbers are seen as separate and different from the 1, they all emanate from the 1 and contain within them the essence of the 1.<sup>24</sup>

Thus it can be said that God’s essence is the only essence that is genuinely real. This infinite, omnipotent, and uncreated essence sustains all created essences. Nothing possesses a self-sustaining existence except for

God, and the essence of everything in creation is manifested by God. Thus, Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystic insight obliterated notions of dualism or multiplicity of being. When *tawhīd*, or oneness, expunges all else, what can remain save God, who is incomparable and without partner?

In addition to the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* there are two additional theories associated with Ibn ‘Arabī. The first is the theory of the “Muhammadan Essence” and the second is the unity of religions.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s “Muhammadan Essence” is a cosmic soul from which all prophets – from Adam to Muhammad – have emerged. Their various activities and numerous ranks have their source in this primordial essence. Furthermore, after the worldly life of Muhammad came to an end, all the saints who have arisen as his successors have taken their illumination from this essence. It goes without saying that this idea is very much in agreement with Al-Hallāj’s concept of the *Nūr muḥammadiyyah*, or “Muhammadan Light,” which we have explained above.

Ibn ‘Arabī likewise builds on Al-Hallāj’s approach to the fundamental unity of religion. Ibn ‘Arabī, like Al-Hallāj, states that all religions exist by God’s permission. Wherever we should happen to find prayer we should always be aware that regardless of the prayer’s external form only One is being prayed to, One incomparable and without partner, whether the worshipers are consciously aware of it or not. What is important is for us to be conscious of this fact: The face of God is visible anywhere we should happen to be. Knowing this guides us along the path, for it tells us that the cosmos is of but a single essence, and that essence is God Almighty. There is no other essence that embraces everything apart from that of the everlasting Creator. Ibn ‘Arabī expresses this theory throughout his writings, and in conclusion, we would like to draw attention to its expression in one of his beautiful poems:

*Each and every form in my heart has now congealed;  
A cloister for monastics, for gazelles a verdant field,  
A temple filled with idols, the long sought-after Ka‘bah,  
The Kur’ān’s most sacred pages, the tablets of the Torah,  
Love is my religion, and where its caravan should lead  
There you’ll find my faith, and my everlasting creed.<sup>25</sup>*

## IBN AL-FĀRID & DIVINE LOVE

‘Umar ibn al-Fārid is one of the most remarkable mystic poets of the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries. He is also one of the greatest mystics and distinguished saints of Islam. His father was from the Syrian town of Hama, although Ibn al-Fārid was born in Cairo in 576/1181. It was in this city that he came of age and spent most of his life until he passed from the world in 632/1235. He spent fifteen years traveling first to Mecca and then throughout the Arabian Peninsula, where he was bathed in heavenly inspiration and spiritual bliss.

Ibn al-Fārid was a resolute mystic and he purified his soul through praiseworthy acts of asceticism and struggle against the pull of the ego. He carried out these undertakings to such an extent that he was thoroughly prepared to receive esoteric knowledge.

Ibn al-Fārid’s heart was so enveloped in spiritual love that nothing else remained within it save the longing to be united with the Beloved. This was his sole aspiration and he struggled tirelessly to attain this goal, carrying out great sacrifices to reach it. He willingly endured any hardship to obtain that which he sought. This struggle to reach the Beloved is conveyed in his poems, which being entirely inspired by his love of God, are exceptionally moving. There is a light that leaps from the radiance of his heart in the lines of these verses, for they contain perfect sincerity and unassailable luminance.

Ibn al-Fārid’s devotees called him the *Sultān al-‘Āshikīn*, the “Sovereign of the Lovers” on account of his merits, and they considered him their chief. In fact, Ibn al-Fārid proclaimed this station in these lines calling out to his beloved:

*In the arena of life all hold love for You.  
And I, I alone, embody all of those who do.*

Then he exclaims: “All lovers shall be under my banner on Judgment Day, and all will be gathered under the flag of Your splendor!” To explain the position that he held in regards to this love Ibn al-Fārid wrote:

*With this love I proclaim of previous loves my verses vain.  
Now all lovers in my company amass.  
Now all lovers to my every word enchanted.  
Thus I became the bravest of lovers, unsurpassed.  
Those who condemn these friends find my heart unruffled still.*

*Distant I am from a hardened heart, softened still.  
 In love's arena sufficient wisdom I embody, subtle still,  
 Yet too much to express from a heart distilled.  
 Oh unaccomplished lovers! Calling love your own!  
 These insights from your grasp have slipped?  
 You are ignorant of the word's pith.  
 What matters then all you have seen and shown?*

Elsewhere he declares:

*All those who came before me  
 To those to come after,  
 With my love you will understand  
 My dolor bestowed from love's demands.  
 So I ask: What do you seek to have and master?  
 Take it from me.  
 Take me as an example.  
 Take me as the one followed  
 And those who recount the waves of my love hallowed.*

It must emphasized that the love our poet declares is not a love tainted with physical desire. Not at all! Ibn al-Fārid's is a love that emerged the moment he, as a perfect mystic, purified his heart from the obstacle of physical desire through abstinence and battling the ego. Having attained this purification, he found any hint of carnal love utterly distasteful, and he declared such love to be hollow, fleeting and of no real worth. Ibn al-Fārid linked himself heart and soul to a realm whose beauty he was able to mystically grasp, and he was so intoxicated by this that he knew no other sort of love could replace it.

The “beloved” revealed in Ibn al-Fārid's many poems is the glorious Lord, who embraces all creation and whom nothing can overpower. Ibn al-Fārid's love of God is a love that transcends everything. It is a love endowed with such qualities that one could not – and would not – be able to absorb in a single lifetime, in this universe or any other heavenly dimension!

Ibn al-Fārid endured many torments for the sake of his beloved. He struggled so much on this path that eventually, through superhuman effort, his self was completely dissolved. In carrying out such a feat, he was able to reach oneness with the Beloved.

When we delve into Ibn al-Fārid's accounts of the experiences that were stimulated by his transcendent love, we find the emergence of unfathomable

mystico-philosophical insights. Ibn al-Fārid asserted that all of these experiences were consistent with his aspirations, and they ultimately led him to his goal. In other words, he expressed union with God through mystical love much in the same way that Ibn ʻArabī employed the metaphysical concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*.

## IBN SAB̄ĪN & THE THEORY OF WAHADAT UL-MUTLAQ

One of the Islamic mystics who openly championed the notion of absolute union with God as well as the theory of *wahdat al-muṭlaq* (non-delimited oneness) is Abū Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Ḥakk ibn Sab̄īn, who was originally from Andalusia. He was born in the town of Murcia in 614/1217, and he passed from this life in 667/1269. ʻAbd ur-Raʼūf al-Maʼnawī states in his *Tabakāt* that Ibn Sab̄īn finished his study of Arabic literature while living in Andalusia. Afterwards, he left for Ceuta (now in Spanish North Africa), a move that benefited his spirituality since it was here that he was able to meet many mystics, philosophers, and other ascetics. Ibn Sab̄īn examined many books, all of which deepened his grasp of mysticism. He traveled much throughout the Islamic West before turning to the East, going first to Mecca to perform the Hajj.

Ibn Sab̄īn's reputation spread far and wide, and he gained many friends and admirers – especially after he made known his theory of *wahdat al-muṭlaq*, a theory that corresponds more or less to pantheism. Through his writings (which were widely distributed) Ibn Sab̄īn disclosed his theory to even his most distant initiates.

According to many of Ibn Sab̄īn's biographers, he was an ascetic who accepted *wahdat al-wujūd* and fused his unique thoughts to the views of other great mystical theorists. His mastery of philosophy can be appreciated in many of his works, and in keeping with general philosophical views he also accepted the importance of the material world and nature. In fact, Ibn Sab̄īn wrote tracts on his theories and these sent to the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II (d. 1250 CE). Not only did Ibn Sab̄īn demonstrate his formidable intellectual capacity in these tracts, but he also expressed his sympathy for Aristotle and Plato, whose thinking he studied in depth.

Ibn Sab̄īn's views on spiritual love appear to be identical to those of Rābiʻa al-ʻAdawiyyah, of which we have spoken above. He believed that we should not worship God merely to win Paradise or avoid Hell; rather

we should worship God to gain His love and seek union with Him. Once Ibn Sabīn was asked by another mystic, Abū'l Ḥasan Tustarī, what he thought about worship. Ibn Sabīn replied, “If you’re asking us about desire for Paradise, be gone with you! However, if you’re asking about desire for the Lord of Paradise, come and sit with us!”

Some scholars branded Ibn Sabīn an atheist, while others supported and followed his views; for while a small group of people championed his writings, most failed to recognize their value. One reason for this could be that Ibn Sabīn’s writings are not easily understood, as they are incredibly intricate and complex. A sympathetic contemporary of his, Ibn Daḳīḳ al-Ṭīd, wrote that he once talked with Ibn Sabīn from morning until noon, and although he was cognizant of the saint’s words, when he linked them all together into sentences he could not understand a single thing!<sup>26</sup> This is equally the case with a good number of those individuals who merged mysticism and philosophy, such as Suhrawardī, Ibn Ḥārūn, Ibn al-Fārid, Tilimsānī, and Ṣadr ud-Dīn Konevī. Moreover, this intricacy of thought is, perhaps, one of the chief reasons why many exoteric scholars actively challenged their views and wrote against them.

## MEVLĀNĀ JALĀL UD-DĪN RŪMĪ

Another remarkable mystic of this period, a man distinguished above all others, and whose immense reputation remains widespread, is Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī, who gained from his admirers the honorary title *Mevlānā*, or “Our Master” – and it is by this title that he is known throughout the world. Rūmī is ranked among the greatest of saints of Islam and the founding pīrs of the Sufi orders (*ṭarīqāt*). His particular spiritual path became known as the Mevlevī Order so as to distinguish it from other mystic fraternities.

Rūmī was an incredibly cultured man, and his breathtaking skill with verse and prose are known far and wide. He was thoroughly endowed with spiritual inspiration, and he was enlightened in every type of knowledge, especially knowledge that is related to the heart. He expressed his love of God in the ghazals (lyric poems) found in his *dīvān* and, moreover, in his famous *Mesnevī*, a work that continues to hold global acclaim. The contents of the *Mesnevī* have been cited by many scholars and have been studied with great interest by Muslims and non-Muslims.

Rūmī’s forefathers hailed from Khorāsān, and he was born in the region’s chief city, Balkh, in 604/1207. Rūmī’s father, Bahā’ud-Dīn Walad,

was one of the eminent scholars of the day, so famous that throngs of people often gathered around him to benefit from his knowledge. However, at some point in time Bahā ud-Dīn ran afoul of the ruler of that region, Jalāl ud-Dīn Khwārazm-Shāh, and he was forced to leave his native land. Bahā'ud-Dīn took his son with him, who was then only five years-old. They set out from Khorāsān towards the region of the Ḥijāz, intending to perform the Ḥajj.

Their journey led them to the city of Nishapur, where they met the great mystic master Farīd ud-Dīn Ḩāfiẓ. Upon seeing little Jalāl ud-Dīn, Ḩāfiẓ observed heavenly light illuminating the boy's face. Overjoyed by this vision, he congratulated Bahā'ud-Dīn on his son's angelic radiance. He then turned back to the little boy, hugged him and presented him with a copy of his book, *Asrārnāmah*, the "Book of Secrets".

As father and son continued to Mecca, they met another great mystic, Sayyid Burhān ud-Dīn Tirmizī, who became fast friends with Bahā'ud-Dīn Walad. The two men ceaselessly discussed the spiritual path and the bliss it generated. Given that little Jalāl ud-Dīn was continually present in the company of these two exalted masters, their transcendent conversations penetrated his soul, and he became infused with a hunger for the mystic path and its innermost insights.

Tirmizī remained in the company of Bahā'ud-Dīn and his son and after performing the Ḥajj together, the band moved on to Syria, where Tirmizī passed from this life. However, before he breathed his last, he told Bahā' ud-Dīn that he should leave Syria and settle in Rūm – as Anatolia was called in those days. Bahā'ud-Dīn agreed to fulfill this final request, and he set out with his son.

In due time father and son came to the city of Erzincan, and then moved on to the town of Karaman [formerly Laranda]. It was during their stay in this town that they received an invitation from the Seljuk ruler, the famed Ḩāfiẓ ul-Dīn Kaykubād, to settle in the capital of his kingdom, Konya; which they agreed to do.

Bahā'ud-Dīn actively taught religion in Konya, and the sultan himself occasionally sat in his classes. In fact, the ruler was so captivated by Bahā' ud-Dīn's astuteness and intellect that he commissioned a grand madrasah (called the Medrese-i Hüdāvendigār) to be built in his honor. Bahā'ud-Dīn's lectures made a huge impression on those in attendance. Students listened carefully to his every word. This positive state of affairs continued until 631/1233 when Bahā ud-Dīn Walad reached the end of his

life. After his passing, his position as lecturer at the madrasah was taken up by his son, Jalāl ud-Dīn, who was then twenty-four years old.

This was just the opening that Rūmī needed to convey his extraordinary spiritual aptitude and wide-ranging intellect to the world. His reputation quickly spread, and students began to gather from far and wide seeking to benefit from his knowledge of Islam. In fact, the number of Rūmī's students grew to such a large number that they not only congregated around the tables and benches of the classroom, they habitually accompanied him home after class to partake of his pleasant chats. Sometimes his escort would reach four to five hundred people! As he started out for the madrasah in the morning, he would often find himself surrounded by throngs of people asking him about the things they wanted to know, jotting down whatever responses he provided.

Having lived in Konya for many years, the fire of the mystic path that Rūmī knew as a child was rekindled through his relationship with an ascetic named Ḥusām ud-Dīn Chelebi. Rūmī would eventually pursue this path to its utmost reaches.

Rūmī steadily increased in spiritual longing until there came a fated meeting with a wandering dervish named Shams ud-Dīn Tabrīzī, who arrived in Konya in 642/1244. According to Sami Frashëri's *Kamūs al-‘alām* this dervish was sent to Konya by the great mystic Ṣalāḥ ud-Dīn Zarkūb with the goal of filling Rūmī with mystic inspiration. In the course of their first meeting, Shams flung Rūmī into the endless ecstasy of transcendent passion.

After their initial meeting, Rūmī took the dervish home, where the two remained locked in discussion and contemplation day and night. In his *Velednāmah*, Rūmī's eldest son Sultān Veled describes the transcendental strength and complexion of their mutual attraction:

From Adam's day until now many contented saints and fulfilled lovers have come into the world. However, above these, there has always been another spiritual world, the rank of which is higher for the reason that it contains the lover joined with the Beloved. Before the appearance of Shams-i Tabrīzī, this realm, as well as the type of love contained within it, remained unrevealed; no human possessed the words to describe it. For this reason, we can say with all certainty that Shams-i Tabrīzī was a secret courier from this yet undiscovered world. He came and divulged his divine knowledge to Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī, totally bedecking him with it. Thus, Shams appeared and came not as the king of the lovers, but as the king of the beloveds, infusing Jalāl ud-Dīn

with this new spirit, which in turn was expressed through verse. Consequently, he [Rūmī] is considered one of the most marvelous poets of Islamic mysticism.<sup>27</sup>

Rūmī was so captivated by his relationship with Shams that he stopped giving lectures and attending to his pupils. He even began to neglect his old friends as he stepped foot on the spiritual path. Rūmī began to exhibit indifference towards external knowledge, and he strolled through the countryside with Shams by his side, wholeheartedly engaged in discussing the endless ecstasies brought about by mystic unveilings.

Needless to say, the scholars of Konya and Rūmī's pupils were greatly dismayed by all of this, and measures were taken to remove the dervish from their beloved teacher's company. As a result of their intrigue, Shams was expelled from Konya in 643/1245; and filled with sadness, he made his way to Syria.

No matter how far away Shams was from Rūmī, the affection they shared had entered so deeply that they could not remain separated from each other. The reason Konya's scholars and students tried to break Rūmī's relationship with the dervish was so that they could have him all to themselves. But alas! Their scheme bore no fruit; Rūmī still spent no time with them. Instead, he wandered about in a stupor searching for his beloved Shams.

When Rūmī's pupils realized that their plan failed, they went to their teacher seeking forgiveness. He accepted their apology and then sent his son Veled to find Shams and beg him to return. Obeying his father's request, the young man traveled to Syria and in due course found Shams. After much pleading, Veled delivered the dervish back to Konya. Both men made the return journey on foot as a sign of their gratefulness to God.

As the two returned to Konya Rūmī began spending all of his time with Shams, and again there was no chance for his students to benefit from his instruction. They grew annoyed with the dervish, and they soon wished for their eyes to fall upon him no more. However, it did not take Shams long to become aware of this reemerging animosity. He was so troubled by it that he left Konya and vanished from the people's sight without a trace, this time for good. Nobody knew where he went. A rumor circulated at the time that Shams was murdered at the urging of one of Rūmī's sons, *‘Alā’ ud-Dīn*. However, Sultan Veled (*‘Alā’ ud-Dīn*'s brother) categorically denied this allegation in his writings.

Rūmī twice journeyed to Syria seeking Shams – but to no avail. The dervish was nowhere to be found. This final separation from Shams pushed Rūmī into the inferno of divine love, and he became so distraught that he was often found spinning in circles as he held firm to a wooden post, intoxicated by the pain of separation from his beloved. He often utilized the sound of musical instruments – like the ney (reed flute) and the dümbelek – to push himself into a state of *wajd*, or spiritual ecstasy. This, in truth, is the origin of the first Mevlevī *samāc* – the celebrated whirling ritual known far and wide.

As his unmatched ecstasy expanded, Rūmī discovered that the real beloved behind all beloveds was God, and he strove with all of his might to unite with this beloved. Through the eyes of his heart, Rūmī beheld the spiritual state where lover and beloved exist united in a single body. This unveiling propelled him to compose mystical poetry in honor of Shams, which would later comprise his *divān*. Curiously, he laid no claim to the authorship of these ghazals. He wrote them, rather, under the name of his cherished Shams-i Tabrīzī.

As Rūmī soared higher and higher in spiritual rank, he began to compose his *Mesnevi*, a work of enormous literary value and an unrivaled masterpiece. Its stanzas express a form of sublime inspiration unlikely to be found in anywhere else. Rūmī's *divān* contains some 3,000 verses, while his *Mesnevi* contains some 50,000 lines, each bedecked with matchless charm.

Even though Shams-i Tabrīzī had vanished from the eyes of the world, his mystic brilliance was passed on to his disciple, Rūmī – who in turn adorned himself with such sublime principles and integrity that he gained a reputation celebrated worldwide. Today Mevlānā Rūmī is counted among the unsurpassed mystics and founding pīrs of the Sufi orders.

Let us now examine Rūmī's spiritual outlook and make an effort to explain it. In his younger years, Rūmī learned the concepts of divine love that were developed by earlier Islamic mystics. This love blossoms as the wayfarer's soul disappears into the Beloved. However, through Shams' inspiration, Rūmī was able to take divine love to a whole new level, dressing it with new meaning. From lofty mystical heights, he taught that the spiritually perfected person not only annihilates himself in the love of God but that God reciprocates and becomes his lover. Given that God's essence is infinitely loftier than Man's, God's role in this love will be all the greater, for He is an all-consuming lover!

In other words, the more we purify ourselves by subduing the ego and gain God's love, the more God intensifies this love, making us the object of His bliss-filled affections. Because of His unlimited power, God returns our love with a love that is of a much greater intensity. Thus, the concept of God becoming the wayfarer's lover as the wayfarer become God's lover emerged out of this; the two become both lover and beloved simultaneously. Earlier mystics had never spoken of such reciprocal love. It was revealed for the first time to Rūmī, who was motivated by his love for his spiritual guide, Shams-i Tabrīzī.

Rūmī obtained the Real, Haqq, through his love of Shams. He was so overawed by the experience that he devoted the rest of life to expressing this newfound state of mystical awareness. Perhaps this was Shams' motivation for separating Rūmī from all of his friends and students and, in the end, even himself. Shams sought to trigger a deeper awareness in Rūmī, an awareness that was, in fact, a new unveiling that further enriched Islamic mysticism. This new view of divine love was a beautiful gift from God, but those not on the path (including many of Rūmī's pupils) failed to appreciate and understand this.

Rūmī gained noteworthy fame in the arena of mystics on account of his invigorating spirituality. Mullah Jāmī (a well-known mystic master of the fifteenth century CE) praised Rūmī and his *Mesnevi* with the following couplet:

*What can I say in praising his lofty nature?  
He's not a prophet, but he surely has a book!*

After Shams had disappeared Rūmī lived in solitude for a time. However, he eventually found a boon companion among his disciples to accompany him on the spiritual path – a man named Salāh ud-Dīn Zarkūb. Zarkūb was elevated to a rank above all other devotees through his devotion and in time he became Rūmī's deputy, or khalīfah. Zarkūb faithfully carried out this duties for ten years until he fell ill and departed from this life in 662/1263. After Zarkūb's passing, Rūmī appointed Husām ud-Dīn to be his khalīfah. Husām ud-Dīn served as a deputy for ten years until 672/1273, the year in which Rūmī passed from the material realm.

Rūmī was buried in Konya with great honor. His followers constructed a magnificent turbeh over his grave, which continues to be visited by throngs of pilgrims. His descendants were given the honorable title of "Chelebī",

which means “gentleman of merit.” One interesting note: It was the custom during the Ottoman period for the Chelebīs to gird a new sultan with the imperial sword upon his coronation.

Husām ud-Dīn recommended that Rūmī’s vacant sheepskin pōst be given to the saint’s eldest son, Sultān Veled. After much prayer, Veled accepted this heavy responsibility and he sat on his father’s sheepskin for thirty years. Sultān Veled is considered the second pīr of the Mevlevī Order since it was he who organized and systematized all of its ceremonies and rituals based on the spiritual foundations laid by his father. These rites endured in Turkey until 1925, the year when all Sufi orders were outlawed by the government.

Rūmī did not intend for his samā‘ to become a ritual ceremony, for it was a mystical whirling that erupted spontaneously out of his heart. However, Sultān Veled did not wish to discard this cherished practice, and he incorporated it into the rituals of the Mevlevī Order. It has been performed by its dervishes ever since.

Before we end this section on Mevlānā Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī, we should speak a little about his *divān*, which contains ghazals and rubā‘īs beyond description. These poems skillfully impart the nature of his mystical love. This great work is entitled *Divān-i Kabīr*, otherwise called *Shams al-Hakā‘ik*, or the “Sun of the Realities”—a play on Shams-i Tabrīzī’s name, in whose honor this work was composed. In addition to this masterpiece Rūmī composed other works such as *Fīhi mā Fīhi* (It Is What It Is), *Makātib-i Mawlānā* (The Letters of Our Master) and so on.

For the sake of Mevlānā Rūmī’s memory we shall close with a few verses from his *Mesnevi*, verses later interpreted by Naim Frashëri in his poem *Fyelli*, a word that means “ney” in Albanian:

*From the reed-flute hear what tale it tells,  
What plaint it makes of absence’ ills*

*From reed-bed since they me tore,  
Men’s, women’s eyes have wept right sore.*

*My breast I tear and rend in twain,  
To vent through sighs my lonely pain.*

*Who’s from his home snatched far away,  
Longs to return some future day.*



## The Sufi Orders Take Shape

# 8

By the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries, Islamic mysticism overflowed in both experiential and theoretical expression. It now began to take on a more structured appearance, particularly in its practical application. Those individuals who came after the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries did not significantly modify Islamic mystical philosophy in any fundamental way. However, what we do find is an increasing structuralization and systemization of the spiritual teachings and practices of earlier masters.

In the course of discussing the events of the third Hijrī century, we explained how some ḥarīkats – literally “ways” or “paths” – came into existence. These ḥarīkats evolved out of the adoration a group of wayfarers had for a particular saint and his spiritual practices. The fraternity was named after the mystic as a sign of this love and devotion. For instance, those that followed the spiritual teachings of Bāyazīd Tayfūr Baṣṭāmī named their ḥarīkat the “Baṣṭāmīyyah” or “Tayfūrīyyah”; those who were inspired by Junayd al-Baghdādī called their ḥarīkat the “Junaydīyyah;” while those who followed Sarī as-Saḳatī were called the “Saḳatīyyah”, and so on.

During the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries the ḥarīkats of other, later, mystics began to form in great number. Many of these fraternities remain active to this day, and shall be described below. In doing so we will be able to draw attention to the diverse spiritual methods and techniques that existed and continue to exist, within practical Islamic spirituality.

We must emphasize, however, that the ultimate goal of the ḥarīkats is one and the same: God. Each path leads to a spiritually and morally perfected life and each infuses its disciples with transcendent values. Any outward differences lay only in the particulars of each path’s methods and practices.

For example, when it comes to the important principle of dhikrullah, the tarīkats differ on how this should be carried out. Is it better to mention God's names out loud or silently in the heart? There are also differences in how often one should make dhikr during the day, as well as which litanies should be recited, and other particulars.

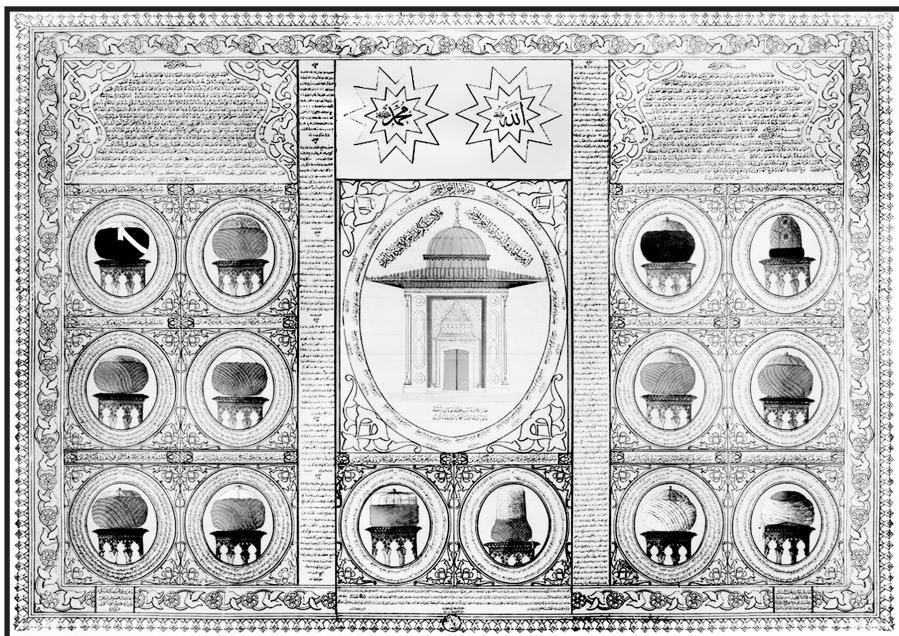
Furthermore, each tarīkat has its specific methods on how one should begin to detach from the world, which is a principle valued by all mystics. Should the wayfarer completely sever all ties to the world? Or should he only enter into temporary seclusion from time to time? The mystics of Islam call this seclusion *khalwat* and it is a period commonly lasting forty consecutive days.

The same can be said regarding the matter of divine love. While this concept lies at the heart of all tarīkats, each order differs on the way its followers should go about attaining it. Can a taste of divine love be attained through the aid of musical instruments, such as the ķudūm, ney etc. – whose sounds can generate a state of *wajd* (ecstasy)? Or should it be realized through the rigorous and focused chanting of God's names? These (and other) details manifest themselves differently among the tarīkats, as we shall point out in the sections below.

## THE KĀDIRĪ ORDER

One of the most famous tarīkats is that of the Kādirīyyah, which takes its name from its founder, <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Kādir al-Jilānī. His full name is Abū Muḥammad Muḥyī ud-Dīn <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Kādir ibn Abū Ṣalīḥ ibn Jangī Dōst. He was born in the year 461/1078 in a small village called Nayf in the Iranian province of Gilān.

<sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Kādir completed his elementary education in his native land. When he reached his eighteenth year, he left for Baghdad to further his studies. It was in this great city that he met the famous jurisprudent Abū Sa'īd al-Mukharrimī, from whom he learned *fīkh*, Islamic law. <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Kādir also studied *ḥadīth* under Abū Bakra ibn Muzaffar. As a result, he was furnished with all the exoteric knowledge that these religious teachers were able to impart, and he embraced the Ḥanbalī legal school (*madhhab*) of Sunni Islam. <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Kādir also studied literature with Abū Dhākir at-Tabrīzī.



The emblematic headgear (*tāj*) worn by the dervishes and *murshids* of the various Sufi orders.

<sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Ķādir remained in Baghdad for many years, giving lessons and seminars in the city's educational institutions. Eventually, he began to undertake journeys to Mecca to perform the Hajj. He also began seeking out isolation in remote places for extended periods of time to worship God more fully.

It was around this time that <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Ķādir met one of the spiritual masters of the day, Abū'l-Khayr al-Dabbās, and through him was filled with vast spiritual insight. He was later dressed in the sacred *khirḳah* by Abū Sa'īd al-Mubarrak. In 521/1127 <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Ķādir established a *tekke* in a small town on the outskirts of Baghdad called Bāb al-Halba. From here he began to give lectures and dispense spiritual guidance to his countless followers. The fame of both his *ṭarīqat* and personality soon spread in every direction.

<sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Ķādir wrote many books, the most prominent being *Futūh al-ghayb* (Revelations of the Unseen), *Al-Ghunya li-ṭālib* (Sufficient Provision for Seekers), and *Kitāb sirr al-asrār* (Book of the Secret of the Secrets).<sup>28</sup> He also possessed considerable poetic talent, composing many mystical verses that are found in his *divān*.

Countless writers have recorded <sup>c</sup>Abd ul-Ķādir's biography in many languages. He passed away in the year 561/1165. His beautiful *turbeh*

still exists in Baghdad, and it continues to be visited by many pilgrims. Ultimately, Ḥabd ul-Ḵādir's spiritual path grew widespread throughout the Muslim World, particularly in the Indian Subcontinent. It is important to note before we close that the fundamental focus of Ḥabd ul-Ḵādir's path is dhikrullah and its followers are obliged to recall God in every place and at every moment.

## THE RIFĀ'Ī ORDER

This ṭarīkat was established by Sayyid Aḥmad ar-Rifā'ī, who according to some accounts was born in the year 500/1106 (others give the year 512/1118). Sayyid Aḥmad ar-Rifā'ī was born in the village of Ḥasan, which lay near the Iraqi city of Basra. His distant ancestor, Sayyid Rifā'a Ḥasan al-Makkī, migrated to this place from Seville in 317/929. However, his grandfather left the village in 450/1058 and went to live in Basra. That is why Sayyid Aḥmad has two surnames: Al-Maghribī (the Westerner) and Ar-Rifā'ī.

Sayyid Aḥmad ar-Rifā'ī studied with those scholars of Basra who followed the Shāfi'ī madhhab of Sunni Islam. Consequently, he adhered to the legal rulings of this school of Islamic law. At the age of twenty-seven he completed his studies and received an *ijāzatnāmah* (diploma). Following this, he was outfitted with sacred vestments by his uncle, Shaykh Manṣūr al-Batā'ihī, whom he served for a time.

When Shaykh Manṣūr passed away Sayyid Aḥmad ar-Rifā'ī inherited his position, thereby becoming a spiritual master. From that time onward he taught his particular path, which became known as the Rifā'īyyah. According to his biographers, Sayyid Aḥmad ar-Rifā'ī was a pious man who disliked titles; and he was certainly not proud of his own. He was a man of great humility, wholly taken up with inspiring people to remember their Creator.

The followers of the Rifā'ī ṭarīkat have been known to perform astonishing feats during their rituals, like piercing their bodies with skewers, putting red-hot coals into their mouths, handling venomous snakes, chewing glass and so forth. This path's devotees say that such is the spiritual state gained when connected to God. When union occurs a person becomes separated from all corporal sensation, and the body is as good as dead. Subsequently, the body of a Rifā'ī dervish is unaffected by serpents, iron spikes, red-hot coals or broken glass.

Historically speaking however, such feats were unheard of during Sayyid Ahmād ar-Rifā‘ī’s lifetime. According to the book *Shajarat al-Dhahab* – a crucial work on the order – the saint never ordered such things to be carried out as proof of spiritual advancement.<sup>29</sup> Ömer Rıza Doğrul asserts in his *Geliştirdiği Tasavvuf* that such acts only entered into the Rifā‘ī Order after the Mongol invasion of the Middle East (that is 603/1206), given that the Buddhist Mongols had lamas and priests in their entourage who indulged in feats and trickeries of this sort.

The book *Tabakāt* (vol. 4, p. 140) states that Rifā‘ī dervishes are prohibited from killing living creatures, including lice, fleas, bedbugs, flies, and the like. Sayyid Ahmād ar-Rifā‘ī further advocated humbleness, self-denial and the regular performance of good deeds. Any harm that others might inflict upon us has to be recompensed with good. The remembrance of God and those austerities performed for one’s perfection are the main points stressed by this ḥarīqat.

## THE BADAWĪ ORDER

One of the ḥarīqats established during the sixth and seventh Hijrī centuries was the Badawīyyah, which took its name from its founder, Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī. His full name is Sayyid Ahmād ibn ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Badawī, and he is widely believed to have been born in Fez, Morocco, in the year 596/1200.

In his childhood, Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī traveled with his family to Mecca to perform the Ḥajj. Sadly, his father died shortly after they reached the holy city. As a young man, Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī was fond of horseback riding, and as time went by he began to travel far and wide. However, in 627/1230 his outlook on life changed and he entered into worship-filled seclusion, which he came to relish.

One day Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī set out for Iraq with his brother, Ḥasan. There they visited the graves of Ahmād ar-Rifā‘ī and ‘Abd ul-Ḵādir al-Jilānī as well as the makāms (shrines) of Al-Ḥallāj, Shaykh ‘Adī ibn Musāfir and Abū’l Fazā’il. Having visited these holy sites, Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī journeyed to Egypt, eventually coming to the city of Tanta, where he decided to settle.

According to certain narrations, Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī unremittingly practiced self-mortification to curb the ego’s cravings. He would often sit on the roof of his house in the middle of the day gazing at the sun. He would not divert his eyes for a second, so much so that the heat blackened his face. He would also observe extended periods of meditative silence and remain motionless. Occasionally he would cry out God’s name in a strong voice, and at other times he would fast for forty consecutive days.

God displayed many miracles through Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī; so many in fact that ruler of Egypt singled him out for veneration. It did not take long for all of the people of Egypt to gather around him, showering him with immense love and respect. Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī lived in Tanta for nearly four years before departing this fleeting world in 675/1276.

Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī placed great emphasis on the recitation of the *Kur’ān* and the profuse performance of ritual prayer. He pushed all of his disciples to relentlessly remember God. He believed that it is not enough to simply utter God’s names with the tongue; God has to be remembered in the heart as well. Without this interior remembrance, uttering holy names and phrases are of no value. Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī taught that *dhikrullah* in the heart can give rise to the mystical state of *wajd*, a state the mystics see as the much sought-after aspiration of God’s friends.

Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī once said that the divine love found in the hearts those who experience God’s oneness takes on the form of an extraordinary light descending into the heart. This light shakes every fiber of the body. As it starts generating power in the heart it transforms everything, thereby reinforcing the wayfarer’s connection to the divine. When such a connection is made, God begins to fulfill all of the person’s transcendent longings. Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī stated that when a person believes from the depths of his heart – and the deeper the better – he will find divine safety and great nearness to God.

In keeping with his last wishes, when Sayyid Ahmād al-Badawī passed away his position as a spiritual guide was given to his *khalīfah*, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Ḩabd al-Ḥāfiẓ, who subsequently organized all of the practices and rituals of the Badawī ṭarīqat. The order became widespread among much of the population of Egypt. In fact, many people today come to the city of Tanta from faraway places like the Sudan to visit the *dergāh* of Sayyid

Aḥmad al-Badawī. These pilgrims leave many offerings and make many ḳurbāns, whose meat is distributed to the poor.

## THE YASAWĪ ORDER

This ṭarīkat takes its name from Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī, who is known as the “Pīr of Turkistan.” Many historians are of the opinion that he was born in the second half of the 11th century CE in the town of Sayram, which lies east of the city of Shymkent, in what is now Kazakhstan. When he was seven years old, Aḥmad Yasawī lost his father, at which point he left to the town of Yasi, which was then a large commercial center. Upon finishing his studies in Yasi he moved to Bukhara, where he met the distinguished spiritual master Khwājah Yūsuf Hamdānī. Aḥmad Yasawī received spiritual instruction from this great teacher, and thus became his disciple.

Aḥmad Yasawī benefited enormously from guidance of Khwājah Yūsuf, and the two men undertook many journeys together. Khwājah Yūsuf was very well-known, and his method of spiritual teaching brought in many followers. However, the most important of these disciples was Aḥmad Yasawī, who eventually became his khalīfah. Consequently, when Khwājah Yūsuf Hamdānī passed from the world in 555/1160, Aḥmad Yasawī succeeded him, in keeping with the former’s last wishes.

Upon the passing of his guide, Aḥmad Yasawī left Bukhara and returned to Yasi, where he began to organize his ṭarīkat. He soon began receiving widespread appreciation, especially on account of his book of poetry, the *Dīvān-i Hikmah* (Book of Wisdom).

Aḥmad Yasawī’s ṭarīkat gained so much distinction that it spread throughout Turkistan. At one point, it is said to have gained some 366,000 devotees, among whom were hundreds of khalīfahs. Aḥmad Yasawī put all of his efforts into promoting Islamic mysticism, and he extended its influence to the point that he became a fountainhead for many future ṭarīkats – including our noble Bektashi Order. Aḥmad Yasawī passed from this life in 561/1166, and he was buried in Yasi, where his magnificent turbeh can still be visited.

Aḥmad Yasawī played a major role in the spiritual life of Turkestan. Numerous biographers meticulously examined his life, writing many things about it. Mehmet Fuat Köprülü – a distinguished Turkish academic and

professor of literature at the University of Istanbul – devoted nearly 200 pages of his work *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* to Ahmed Yasawi's life and teachings.

The overall spiritual outlook of Ahmed Yasawi's way is essentially the same as that of other tarīqats – although it did have specific regulations that its followers had to abide by; for example:

- The wayfarer must recognize no one of spiritual rank as being in a higher position than his murshid. He must show complete obedience to the murshid and acquire his good graces.
- The wayfarer must be vigilant and attentive so that he may correctly understand the meaning behind the words and actions of the murshid.
- The wayfarer must have nothing but complete confidence in every action that the murshid carries out.
- The wayfarer must carry out all service (*khidmah*) rendered to the murshid with complete sincerity.
- The wayfarer must remain resolute and faithful to all of his vows and promises.
- The wayfarer must rigorously maintain all vows taken during the pledge of initiation into the tarīqat.
- The wayfarer must be ready to sacrifice everything for the preservation of the tarīqat's principles.
- The wayfarer must guard the murshid's mystic secrets with his life and never disclose them.
- All of the instructions of the murshid are to be carried out with thoroughness and without objection.
- The wayfarer must sacrifice everything, including his life if need be, in the way of the murshid, so that through this sacrifice the wayfarer might arrive at state of nearness to God.

These guidelines (and many others not mentioned here) are central to the Yasawi Order, a tarīqat that was once widespread and which in time became the wellspring of several other mystic fraternities.

## THE NAKSHBANDI ORDER

After Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī had passed from this world, his order split into numerous branches, one of which became the Naḳshbandīyyah. The founder of this ṭarīkat is the renowned spiritual master, Khwājah Muḥammad Bahā’ud-Dīn Naḳshband al-Uwaysī, who likewise hailed from the land of Turkestan. He was born in the year 718/1318 in a small village near Bukhara called Қasr ul-‘Ārifān.

Khwājah Naḳshband completed his studies in Bukhara under the guidance of the famous mystic Muḥammad Baba Samāsī. He later sat at the feet of another master, Sayyid Amīr Kulāl, and he regularly participated in the dhikr recitations performed in Sayyid Amīr Kulāl’s tekke. Subsequently, Khwājah Naḳshband was further bedecked with spiritual illumination by ‘Abd ul-Khāliq Ghujdawānī.

Khwājah Naḳshband then went to study under ‘Ārif ud-Dīn Karrānī for seven years, and twelve years with Dervish Khalil Ghīrānī, all the while absorbing the spiritual energy of these two great mystics. Upon Sayyid Amīr Kulāl’s passing Khwājah Naḳshband was designated his successor, in keeping with the former’s last wishes. And with that came the establishment of the Naḳshbandī Order.

Khwājah Naḳshband performed Ḥajj twice; the second time in the company of his mystic compatriot, Muḥammad Parsa. Upon his return from Mecca, he toured the cities of Nishapur, Herat, and Merv, where he conversed with numerous notable mystics. He then returned to Bukhara, where he remained to the end of his days.

This great saint and mystic passed from the world in 791/1388. By his last request, Khwājah Naḳshband was buried in the village of Қasr ul-‘Ārifān, the place of his birth. His turbeh continues to be a place of pilgrimage. He gained many devotees during his life, among who were the famous Khwājah ʻAtṭār and Khwājah Muḥammad Parsa.

Khwājah Naḳshband wrote two books on the subject of mysticism, both of which contain luminous spiritual counsel. The first is entitled *Hayātnāmah*, the “Book of Life”, and the other *Dalīl al-‘Āshikīn*, a “Guide for the Lovers”.

After Khwājah Naḳshband passed from the world, his ṭarīkat split into two branches. These are somewhat similar in terms of ritual and outlook, having only minor differences between them. One of these branches

continued under the name Naḳshbandīyyah, while the other took the name of its founder, Ziyā' ud- Dīn Khālid al-Baghdādī (d. 1242/1826). This branch is therefore called the Khālidīyyah. Both branches of the Naḳshbandī Order are quite widespread throughout the Muslim World, especially in Turkey.

## THE KHALWATĪ ORDER

This particular ḥarīkat was once one of the largest and most widespread of all, found not only throughout Albania but other Muslim lands as well. It was established during the seventh Hijrī century by the great spiritual master, Pīr ʻUmar Khalwatī. The Khalwatīyyah is an “Alid order” and it includes within itself a large number of sub-orders, like the Jerrāhīyyah (whose pīr is Shaykh Nūr ud-Dīn Jerrāhī), the Bayrāmīyyah (whose pīr is Hajjī Bayram Velī), the Jelvetīyyah (whose pīr is Ismāʻil Ḥakkī Bursevi), the Gulshenīyyah (whose pīr is Ibrāhīm Gulshenī), the Miṣrīyyah (whose pīr is the poet Niyāz-i Miṣrī), and a number of other smaller branches.

The Khalwatī Order is linked by way of a *silsilah* (a chain of spiritual transmission) to Junayd al-Baghdādī, the famed third Hijrī-century mystic we discussed earlier in this book. Pīr ʻUmar Khalwatī received the mystical light of his ḥarīkat from Muḥammad Nūr al-Khalwatī, who took it from Ibrāhīm Zāhid Gīlānī, who took it from Shahāb ud-Dīn Muḥammad at-Tabrizī, who took it from Rukn ud-Dīn Muḥammad Nahhās, who took it from Pīr Abū Rashīd Қuṭb ud-Dīn, who received it from Abū Najīb as-Suhrawardī. He, in turn, inherited it from ʻUmar al-Bakrī, who took it from Shaykh Wajīh ud-Dīn, who took it from Muḥammad Amwayh al-Bakrī, who took it from Abū ʻAbdullah Muḥammad Dinawarī, who took it from Shaykh Junayd al-Baghdādī.

The Khalwatī Order is called so because it emphasizes the spiritual practice of khalwat, more so than other ḥarīkats. *Khalwat* is the practice of seclusion in an isolated place. This typically lasts forty days. During this period the wayfarer must completely occupy himself with prayer and dhikr. However, there are deeper meanings to the word khalwat, one of which we shall mention here. Khalwat can mean to be stripped of unwholesome vice and conferred with the raiment of God’s intimacy. Thus, we have two forms of khalwat: an external and an internal. External khalwat requires

beseeching God's forgiveness for all our shortcomings and undesirable vices while secluded from the world. Unless this form of *khalwat* is employed, we cannot perform the inner *khalwat*, which is secluding our heart from worldly desire, and then eradicating this desire through worship.

We had originally intended to write a little about the blessed lives of the major personalities of this *tarīkat*; but alas! The conditions that we currently face find us with a shortage of books and other reference materials. Such an endeavor can be met, God willing, at a later date – in a second edition perhaps – if we should happen to amass suitable academic resources. We do, however, have some biographical information taken from Sami Frashëri's *Kamūs ul-<sup>c</sup>alām* regarding the masters Ibrāhīm Gulshenī and Niyāz-i Misrī, both of who were talented mystical poets. We are, therefore, able to discuss both of these men in separate entries.

## IBRĀHĪM GULSHENĪ

Ibrāhīm Gulshenī is a man who ranks among the pīrs of the *tarīkats* and the illustrious masters of Islamic mysticism. He was born in the middle of the ninth Hijrī century in a town located in modern-day Azerbaijan. On his father's side, his genealogy goes back six generations to Oğuz Ata, the first king of Turkestan. On his mother's side, he descends from the exalted Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī.

For a while, Ibrāhīm Gulshenī lived with his father, whose guidance allowed him to advance far in his studies. Afterwards, he journeyed to the city of Tabriz, where the mystic master <sup>c</sup>Umar Dede Rūshanī resided. <sup>c</sup>Umar Dede Rūshanī was a *khalīfah* of the *Khalwatī* saint Sayyid Yahya-i Shirvānī. <sup>c</sup>Umar Dede sparked an vast spiritual fire in the heart of Ibrāhīm Gulshenī, and this fire allowed him to eventually reach a lofty rank before God. In due time Ibrāhīm Gulshenī himself became a spiritual master.

When Shah Ismā'īl Ṣafavī became ruler of Persia and declared Shī'ī Islam the official religion of the land, Ibrāhīm Gulshenī (being a Sunni) fled his homeland and traveled to Egypt, eventually settling in Cairo. When Egypt was afterwards conquered by the Ottomans under Sultan Selīm I, Ibrāhīm Gulshenī was received with notable honor, and much land was donated for his use. With the help of his many followers, he established a *tekke*, which took thirty-one years to construct!

Ibrāhīm Gulshenī won widespread approval throughout Egypt on account of his religious lectures and his energetic dhikr rituals, so much so that people (including government officials) relentlessly flocked to his side. Before long, Sultan Sulaymān I requested the saint's presence in Istanbul. Obeying this royal command, Ibrāhīm Gulshenī journeyed to the imperial city in 935/1528 and subsequently became a valuable advisor to the imperial court. He also established a tekke in Istanbul and further organized the Gulshenī Order. In due course, he returned to Egypt, where he passed away in 940/1534. He was buried with great dignity near his tekke, and a splendid turbeh was eventually built over his grave.

Ibrāhīm Gulshenī enjoys great distinction on account of his firm grasp of both theology and mysticism. Not only was he known for being conversant in exoteric knowledge, but he was a man gifted with deep esoteric insight. He penned a book containing some 40,000 verses entitled *Ma‘navī*, which was a *nazīra* (replication) of Rūmī's *Mesnevī*. He composed another *nazīra* of Ibn al-Fārid's celebrated *Kasīdat at-Tā’iyya*, as well as a *dīvān* filled with poems expressing his mystical experiences and visions.

## NIYĀZ-I MİŞRĪ

Niyāz-i Mişrī was a spiritual master of the eleventh Hijrī century and a pīr of one of the sub-orders within the Khalwatī ḥarīkat. He was born in the small Anatolian village of Soğanlı in 1027/1618. Given that he carried out his higher studies in Egypt (Mişr), he took “Mişrī” as a pen-name in his poems. Niyāz-i Mişrī furthermore attained spiritual illumination while in Egypt from the well-known Khalwatī shaykh, Sazā’ī al-Mā‘lī.

Niyāz-i Mişrī was a dedicated mystic and a steadfast pantheist. The poems found within his *dīvān* are filled with a remarkably transcendent spirit expressed in inspiring and delightful style. Mişrī's spiritual disposition was distinctly pantheistic, a fact that attracted the hostile attention of the exoteric scholars of the day. Consequently, he suffered greatly for his principles, spending many years in prison and exile.

In the days of Sultan Ahmed II's reign over the Ottoman Empire (1691 to 1695) Niyāz-i Mişrī traveled to Istanbul and later to Bursa, where he made his home. He remained in Bursa busily engaged in organizing his ḥarīkat.



The turbeh of Niyaz-i Misri on the Greek island of Lemnos in its current condition.

As he was writing in his *dīvān* one day, Niyaz-i Misri loudly recited one of his poems in the presence of others. His intention was to motivate his well-wishers with his inspired words. However, the poem was overheard by some whose dogmatic and conformist attitudes were offended. Consequently, he was soon arrested for heresy and exiled to the island of Limnos in the Aegean Sea. Let us examine an excerpt from the poem in question:

*Don't assume, O zāhid, that all your efforts end  
 With fasting, zealous prayer and the sacred pilgrimage.  
 To reach the rank of the Perfect Man one and all have said  
 That mystic thought must be let in to inundate your head.*

What Misri is saying in these lines is that unless we fully understand why we have been commanded by God to perform our obligatory Islamic rites they will have no real value.

When Niyaz-i Misri was eventually freed from prison, he journeyed to Istanbul. However, when he sought to travel on to Edirne he was again arrested and exiled to Lemnos, where, with shackles on his feet, he passed from the world in 1105/1693. A beautiful turbeh was constructed on the

island, which was visited by his many admirers. Miṣrī's shackles hung on the wall of this mausoleum in memory of his suffering.

As we mentioned above, Niyāz-i Miṣrī's mystical poems are quite captivating, and they are often filled with biting wit, which was intended to counteract the religious fundamentalism of his day. To give our readers a sense of Miṣrī's spiritual vision, let us present a few lines from another poem found from his *dīvān*:

*To Niyāzī's words your ears do lend:  
Nothing hides the face of the Friend.  
There's nothing more clear than the Real,  
Yet this from the blind is concealed.*

Centuries later this deep perception of reality gained the admiration of our own Naim Frashëri, who wrote a poem in his *Lulet e Verës* emulating Miṣrī's style. To demonstrate this spiritual insight we shall present here lines from Naim's poem *Perëndia*:

*Truly God is what you see,  
His voice in every sound.  
In all there is and is to be,  
His essence can be found.  
Holy chants and grueling fasts  
Will not show God to you.  
Nor Lenten days, nor sacred mass  
Made by those with minds askew.*

## THE SA<sup>CDI</sup>DĪ ORDER

This ḥarīkat was founded by Shaykh Sa<sup>cd</sup>d ud-Dīn Jibawī, who ranks among the great mystics of Islam and is forever counted among the pīrs of the Sufi orders. He was born in 593/1197 in a small village called Jiba, located between the Hawran Plateau and Palestine. He passed from this fleeting world in 700/1300.

Sa<sup>cd</sup>d ud-Dīn Jibawī's order originated (by way of three intermediaries) from the silsilah of the distinguished Abū Maydān al-Maghribī. Ultimately, the lineage of Sa<sup>cd</sup>īyyah comes from those ḥarīkats that sprang from the mystic fountain of Junayd al-Baghdādī.

The full silsilah is this: Sa‘d ud-Dīn Jibawī obtained the light of mysticism from ‘Abdullah Shībānī, who took it from Abū Maydān al-Maghribī; he, in turn, received it from Abū Sa‘īd Andalūsī, who took it from Abū'l Barakah of Baghdad, who took it from Abū'l Wafā' Ibrāhīm, who took it from Abū Bakr Nāsājī, who took it from Abū'l Kāsim al-Jurjānī, who took it from ‘Uthmān al-Maghribī, who took it from Abū ‘Alī Kātib al-Ḥusaynī. He, in turn, received it from Abū ‘Alī al-Ruzbānī, who took it directly from the illustrious Shaykh Junayd al-Baghdādī.

The Sa‘dī ṭarīkat remains widespread throughout the Muslim world, and it is one of the more well-known Sufi orders found among the Albanian people. Given that the Sa‘dī ṭarīkat descends from the group of masters mentioned above, it too is counted among the “‘Alid” Sufi orders.

Dhikrullah, the remembrance of God, is central to the teachings of the Sa‘dī Order, and here is why: A doctor must first give a sick person medication to settle the stomach before he can give the actual medicine that has been prepared to cure the illness. Likewise, the first “medicine” the spiritual guide gives to the aspirant’s heart is dhikrullah. This dhikrullah works to flush out the caustic effect of worldly desire, thereby preparing the wayfarer to be adorned with those virtues that will allow him to reach perfection.

## THE SHĀDHILĪ ORDER

Another ṭarīkat worth mentioning is the Shādhilī Order. This ṭarīkat was founded by Abū'l-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abd ul-Jabbār ash-Shādhilī, who was born in the north of Morocco in the year 592/1196. One of his followers, Ibn ‘Atā’ullāh al-Iskandarī (who also wrote his biography) stated that Abū'l-Ḥasan was a *kutb*, the leading mystic of his day. Another biographer – Ibn Daķīk al-‘Id – claimed to have never seen anyone who knew God as well as Abū'l-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī.

Ash-Shādhilī had many devotees, among whom were a great many well-known individuals, like Abū'l ‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Mursī. Another of his followers was Ibn ‘Atā’ullāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309), who, as we mentioned above, compiled Ash-Shādhilī’s biography. Since we do not have al-Iskandarī’s work on hand, we are regrettably unable to write more about this great mystic.

The Shādhilī Order is linked to the silsilah of Junayd al-Baghdādī through Abū ‘Alī al-Ruzbarī, whom we have mentioned above as well. Thus, the Shādhilī Order belongs to the “‘Alid” ḥarīkat, which we have explained above. Shaykh Abū’l-Hasan ash-Shādhilī passed from this world in 655/1258.

## OTHER ORDERS

In addition to the Sufi orders that we have presented above, there are many other, less widespread, groups, such as the Suhrawardīs, Dusūkīs, Sha‘bānīs, and so on. However, these ḥarīkats have not played as great a role in Islamic history as the ones we have detailed on the previous pages.

It is known that a new ḥarīkat existed in the city of Shkodër (Albania) in recent years. This order is the Tijānīyyah, and it was first led by Hajjī Shaykh Shaban Domnori (1868-1934). During the interwar years the Tijānīyyah became noticeably widespread throughout northern Albania and its last known representative was Qazim Efendi (1883-1959), who was a professor at Tirana’s main madrasah.



We have so far provided a broad overview of Islamic mysticism as well as the evolution of its many theoretical and practical manifestations. At this point we shall turn our focus solely to the Bektashi Order, the important role it played in the development of mysticism in Muslim lands and the influence that it exercised over Albania. It to this subject that we dedicate the second half of this book.



# The Bektashi Path





*O Noble Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektaş Veli,  
may his lofty secret be sanctified!*





# The Founding of the Bektashi Order

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# 9

**B**ektashism is a mystical stream of thought within Islam that focuses on perfecting the character and spirituality of human beings. It guides those who navigate its challenging path to the most sought-after goal: intimacy with God. Bektashism is a spiritual journey that exiles its travelers away from the pleasures of the material world as it adorns them with love for their Creator. Committed followers of path will ultimately be washed of *māsiwā*, which is all else but God; and having been intoxicated by God's love, they will reach the states of *fanā' fillah* and *baqā' billah*.

Bektashism recognizes and respects all of the commandments and practices of Islam. Indeed! Its very foundations are built upon the *Qur'ān* and the words and practices of the Prophet Muḥammad. Bektashis worship One God, accepting Him as the absolute and all-powerful creator of all. They venerate with great affection the noble Prophet Muḥammad since it was he who illuminated the world with the faith of Islam. Bektashis likewise demonstrate boundless devotion to the exalted Imām ‘Alī, who having been bestowed with mystical perception by the Prophet was the first to convey the esoteric dimension of Islam, filling the world with transcendent ecstasy. Imām ‘Alī is known among all Islamic mystics as the *Shāh-i awliyā'*, the “King of Saints.” At this point let us relate Imām ‘Alī’s narration of how this lofty station was bequeathed to him:

I once asked the Prophet, “O Messenger of God! Show me the shortest way to the divine presence.” The Prophet said, “O ‘Alī! To reach this, you must continuously remember God, both silently and aloud.” I replied, “O Prophet! Everyone does this in one way or another. Give me something special.” The Prophet said, “O

<sup>ٰ</sup>Alī! The best of what I and all prophets before me have said is *Lā ilāha ill Allah* [i.e. There is no deity save God]. If heaven and earth were placed on one side of the balance and Lā ilāha ill Allah on the other, Lā ilāha ill Allah would be heavier. Judgment Day will never come as long as there are people on earth saying Lā ilāha ill Allah.” Then I asked, “How should I recite this?” The Prophet said, “Close your eyes and listen to me reciting it three times. Then you say it three times, and I will listen to you.” The Prophet said it, and I repeated what he said in a loud voice.

When the recitation ended all of the unseen mysteries of the cosmos were unveiled to the great <sup>ٰ</sup>Alī and transcendent perfection permeated his very being. In the fullness of time, the divine illumination that issued forth from his immaculate heart was inherited by the Twelve Imāms, who are the grandsons of the blessed Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fāṭimah and Imam <sup>ٰ</sup>Alī. From the Twelve Imāms, this trust was passed down through the generations until it came to the pīr of our spiritual path: the saintly Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Veli.

Before we continue with our discussion of the Bektashism, we would like to cast some light on the phrase “Allah-Muhammad-<sup>ٰ</sup>Alī” that Bektashis so often employ. Although the importance of this phrase is directly related to the chain of spiritual transmission mentioned in the above paragraph, it has been repeatedly misinterpreted throughout history by those who have contempt for Bektashi principles.

In addition to recognizing the religious regulations universally known to Muslims, Bektashis recite their *awrād* (litanies) primarily made up of two special invocations: one for sunrise, when the day dawns anew, and the other for sunset, when the day comes to an end. With these prayers Bektashis ask God to give peace, joy and spiritual progress to humanity.

In addition to the commonly observed Islamic fasts, Bektashis fast to honor the tragedy that took place on the plains of Karbalā’. This commemoration is known as the Mātam, or “Lamentation.” During this time Bektashis recall the holy martyrs of Karbalā’, who before being slain on the field of valor, were forced to endure such thirst that they burned for a drop of water in the scorching Iraqi sun. The foremost of these martyrs was the gallant Imām Ḥusayn. Remembering this event is not only confined to Bektashis, as many other Muslims throughout the world commemorate it as well. It is a time of year particularly valued by the Sufis, who call to mind

the sacrifices made at Karbalā' by refraining from water during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muḥarram. We should emphasize, however, that such self-denials are not obligatory in Islam; rather they are voluntary acts of love carried out to venerate the memory of Imām Ḥusayn and his loyal followers.

In addition to the Mātam, Bektashis celebrate the birthday of Imām ʻAlī in order to show their adoration for his lofty rank as the fountainhead of Islamic mysticism. This celebration is known as Sultan Nevruz.

Bektashi rituals are carried out in public, except the initiation ceremony with its distinctive prayers and rites in which only *muhibs* (initiates) can participate. Guarding the subtle details of the path from those lacking the proper spiritual maturity and training (or from those considered incapable of understanding such details), is a common practice in mysticism. In fact, the origin of the word “mysticism” is the Greek *mystikos* (μυστικός), which means “secret.”

## KHUNKĀR ḤAJJĪ BEKTASH VELĪ

The reason why this particular spiritual way is called the “Bektashi Path” is due to its being founded by the saintly Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī.

His Holiness Ḥajjī Bektash Velī was born in 645/1248 in the city of Nishapur, which was located in the Persian region of Khorāsān. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī was a child of noble parents, both of whom are counted among the Prophet’s descendants. Consequently, he was able to carry the title of sayyid. At this point let us examine Ḥajjī Bektash Velī’s paternal genealogy: He was the son of Ibrāhīm II, who was the son of Sayyid Mūsā, who was the son of Sayyid Ḥasan, who was the son of Sayyid Ibrāhīm, who was the son of Sayyid Mahdī, who was the son of Sayyid Muhammad, who was the son of Sayyid Ḥasan, who was the son of Ibrāhīm Mukarram al-Mujāb, who was the son of Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm, who – as is known – is the seventh of the Twelve Imāms.

Ḥajjī Bektash Velī’s father was a governor of Khorāsān and he possessed extensive landholdings. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī’s mother was Lady Hatem, the scion of a prominent Nishapuri family. Her father – Aḥmad Efendi – was one of the prominent scholars of Khorāsān.

As a boy, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī displayed qualities rarely found in children. He began his studies in the schools of Persia at a young age and



A popular depiction of  
Hajji Bektash Veli

he quickly distinguishing himself above all others in intellect, wisdom, discernment and virtue. Not once did he trouble his friends. Whenever an offense was committed against him, he forgave and offered guidance. He never looked at the flaws of others, and he got along with everyone, so much so that people loved him wherever he went. Hajji Bektash Velī continued his primary education in this way, and in time he graduated from all of the schools of his day.

Upon reaching the age of maturity, Hajji Bektash Velī began his spiritual training with one of the eminent mystics of Khorāsān: Luqmān Perende. Seeing as he directed his full attention to the path, the young Hajji Bektash quickly advanced in spiritual aptitude. He completely withdrew from worldly matters, devoting his entire life to the transcendent principles of Islamic mysticism.

On the passing of his father the citizens of Nishapur urged Hajji Bektash to take over the position of governor; but he declined this request outright. Instead, he continued his path – the path to perfection – ceaselessly focusing on the growth of his spiritual state.

In due course, the above-mentioned master Aḥmad Yasawī instructed Hajji Bektash to go to the Land of Rūm (now known as Anatolia) to

propagate spiritual awareness among its inhabitants. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī affixed no preconditions to this command, and he promptly set out on the long journey. Before heading to Rūm, he visited the turbeh of Imām Ḥalī in the city of Najaf, where he remained for forty days in seclusion, totally absorbed in prayer and meditation.

One Monday during the Islamic month of Dhū'l-Hijjah, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī departed Najaf for the holy city of Mecca. His intention was to perform the ritual pilgrimage as decreed by the instructions of Islam. Having done so, he adopted the title of *ḥajjī* (pilgrim), a title that has been affixed to his name ever since.

Having performed the obligatory pilgrimage, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī traveled to the sacred mausoleum of the Prophet Muhammad in Madinah, where he again remained locked in uninterrupted worship for forty days. After that he journeyed to Palestine, Damascus and many other holy places, taking the opportunity to visit the graves all of the prophets and saints found in those lands.

In 679/1281, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī reached his final destination: the Land of Rūm. Settling down in a village that was then called Suluca Karahöyük, he met with many of the local mystics. These individuals initially greeted him with worry and suspicion. Nevertheless, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī won them over with his tact and amazingly eloquent discourse and each mystic felt compelled to yield to his spiritual preeminence without further objection.

A year or so later the first Bektashi tekke in the world was built in Suluca Karahöyük. This tekke quickly achieved recognition, and it served as the nerve center for the Bektashi Order. Within the walls of this tekke Ḥajjī Bektash Velī put into practice the rites of his spiritual path and it was here that he often received hundreds of people at a time coming to take his hand in initiation.

Gradually the number of muhībs increased and as a result, the ḥarīkat spread far and wide, coming to be known throughout the broad expanse of Anatolia. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī sent missionaries to teach in many distant regions, and this is why Bektashism is well-known throughout Turkey to this day. From Anatolia, the path expanded to all of the major Muslim lands of the time – including Arabia, Persia, the Balkans and so forth – gathering many clergymen and devotees as it spread.

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī dedicated his entire life to his spiritual teachings, enlightened the world with its lofty principles. In 741/1341 he

passed from the material world at the age of ninety-three. His blessed body was laid to rest with great reverence within the confines of his tekke in a grand and beautiful turbeh. This sacred site continues to be visited by devotees from all over the world. On account of his fame, the village of Suluca Karahöyük became known forever after as Hacıbektaş as a sign of respect and veneration for this illustrious friend of God.

In addition to his spiritual path (which continues to place itself at the service of humanity) Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash left us with two books – both of which have been recently printed in modern Turkish. The first is the *Makālāt-i Ḥajjī Bektāsh* (Sayings of Ḥajjī Bektash), and the other the *Fawā'id aul-Fukarā'* (Benefits of the Poor). We will direct our attention in a separate chapter to the *Fawā'id al-Fukarā'*. We have translated parts of this book to give our readers familiarity with its content.

In addition to these books, Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Veli left a number of spiritual poems, *nefes*, that continue to be sung during spiritual gatherings in our tekkes, often with instrumental accompaniment. We have translated some of these poems in the section of our book that examines Bektashi poetry.

Ḥajjī Bektash Veli left us many insightful sayings, including this one, which he said to Sultan Orhan:

Indeed! If you are connected to me spiritually you are close at hand, even if you are in faraway Yemen. But if you are not with me spiritually you might as well be in Yemen, even though you are standing next to me!

*O God! Grace us with such illuminating light. Āmīn!*

## BĀLIM SULTĀN: THE “SECOND PİR”

Before we continue with our discussion it would be beneficial to say a few words regarding the greatest Bektashi personality after Ḥajjī Bektash Veli: the great saint Bālim Sultān. He was a man who played an enormous role in the history of Bektashism as a reformer and organizer. Because of his accomplishments, Bālim Sultān is widely known as our *Pir-ī Thānī*, or “Second Pır.”

When **Hz. Hajjî Bektash Velî** departed this life, his status as head of the order passed to **Hızır Lale Baba**, who was the son of Hodja İdrîs and Lady Fatmah (Kadıncık Ana). Hızır Lale later married, thereby founding the **Çelebî** Dynasty. After Hızır Lale, **Hz. Hajjî Bektash Velî**'s tekke was headed by these successors: **Resûl Bâlı** → **Yusuf Bâlı Sultan** → **Mursal Bâlı**, and then **Bâlim Sultan**.

As indicated by the information presented in Ziya Şakir's book *Bektaşı Nefesleri*, some historians have stated that **Bâlim Sultan** was born in 876/1472 in the Anatolian village of Ker, while others have indicated that he was born in 855/1452 in the Thracian town of Dimetoka.

Regardless of these different opinions, all agree that **Bâlim Sultan** carried out a great service to the Bektashi Order by giving it a well-defined organizational structure. He set in place its administration through the agency of the *dedeliks* [alb. *gjyshata*], which oversaw the management of the different geographical regions of the Ottoman Empire. **Bâlim Sultan** also instituted the practice of celibacy in **Hz. Hajjî Bektash Velî**'s tekke. Because of these (and other) much-appreciated guidelines and amendments **Bâlim Sultan** is rightly called our **Pir-ı Thâni**!

**Bâlim Sultan**'s fame spread so far during his lifetime that in 914/1509 the Ottoman sultan, **Beyazid II**, summoned him to Istanbul, where he was received with great honor. **Bâlim Sultan** arrived in Üsküdar to a salute of cannonades and a magnificent boat was expressly prepared to transport him across the Bosphorus to the Topkapı Palace. This boat was accompanied by three other grand vessels. When he arrived at the palace, **Bâlim Sultan** was personally greeted by the monarch. He remained a distinguished guest for a while, and his hand was kissed many times by the sultan and his courtiers. **Bâlim Sultan** eventually returned to **Hz. Hajjî Bektash Velî**'s tekke in central Anatolia, where he carried out his religious duties until his passed from this world in 922/1517.<sup>30</sup>





# 10

## The Fundamentals & Principles upon which Bektashism Rests

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The spiritual fundamentals and moral principles laid down by Hajjī Bektash Velī and subsequently upheld by Balīm Sultān (and all of his successors) are firmly grounded in the Қur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muḥammad. Every rule and rite within this path conforms to their sacred decrees and concurs with all of the ethical values they convey.

Perhaps the most important (and distinguishing) principle of the Bektashi Path is that as much veneration and respect its wayfarers have towards the exalted Prophet Muḥammad, so too must that very same love and respect be given to the Prophet’s family: the Ahl ul-Bayt. This obligation has been communicated to us in numerous verses of the Қur’ān and more so by the Prophet’s words. For instance, we have this well-known Қur’ānic verse:

*Say (O Muhammad): “I ask of you no fee therefore,  
save loving kindness to my near relatives.”*

《Sūrat ash-Shūrā 42:23》

When the Prophet was asked by his companions about these near relatives whom they were commanded by God to love, he replied, “They are Fāṭimah, ‘Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.”<sup>31</sup> This leads us to another verse in the Қur’ān:

*Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you,  
O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying.*

《Sūrat al-Ahzāb 33:33》

These two Қur’ānic verses – along with twelve others – instruct us to adore and venerate the Prophet’s family, whose individual names we have mentioned in the paragraph above.

The number of ḥadīths that make clear the importance of a believer's love for Imām Ḥalī and the Ahl ul-Bayt run into the hundreds. Nevertheless, we shall mention a few of the blessed Prophet's sayings here:

*And behold! Love of Ḥalī and the Family of the Prophet  
is a quality that absolves the transgressions of a believer.*



*He who loves you, O Ḥalī, God will dress with  
the robes of belief and salvation.*



*The thing that fills the believer's life with goodness  
is love for Ḥalī and the Prophet's family.*



*O People! I leave you two weighty things,  
and if you stick to both you will never go astray after me:  
the Book of God and my progeny.*

On account of these and many other heavenly commands, Bektashis are obligated to retain a boundless and heartfelt love for Imām Ḥalī and the Ahl ul-Bayt.

Another important subject that Bektashis pay close attention to is the esoteric insight imparted by Islam through its sacred texts. Bektashis believe that the goal of religion should not simply be the performance of sacred rituals, such as prayer, fasting, charity, etc. Religion should be a means by which believers adorn themselves with virtuous qualities, thereby lifting their character to an honorable rank. For as much as he stressed the significance of ritual and outward forms of worship, the exalted Prophet Muhammad gave even more importance to moral perfection, integrity and upright character.

We must also add that a Bektashi needs to understand fully what is being said in his prayers. How can a prayer be sincere and heartfelt if the petitioner does not know what is being said? Any supplication not understood by a worshiper is nothing more than blind imitation. Consequently, it cannot ascend out of the depths of the soul, for that which can undeniably be called prayer must arise out of the heart. This point has been stressed by many Bektashi masters, and they consider it to be a crucial component of the path to perfection.

## CARE IN SELECTING SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATES

An additional – and crucial – guideline inherited from Ḥajjī Bektash Veli is the great care with which individuals are selected for initiation into the order. We mentioned above how in centuries past Bektashism spread like lightning far and wide. Nonetheless, Bektashi spiritual guides (at least those in bygone days) have been very watchful and selective when accepting new members into the order. They did not simply grab people off the street and initiate them. These masters chose well, and only at the right time was a candidate be brought forward for initiation.

As a rule, anyone lacking the proper qualities would not be accepted into the Bektashi Order. In former times the murshid of the person seeking initiation had to be convinced of the aspirant's moral and spiritual aptitude. Before formal initiation was even considered the aspirant's behavior and integrity would be observed over an extended period, during which he would be given subtle character tests. The aspirant would be continually examined to determine if he was truly driven by sincerity, and not simple curiosity or opportunism.

However, this initial observation did not the end the screening process. After the spiritual guide felt certain of the candidate's wholehearted attraction to the path, the candidate would be permitted to attend the tekke's more intimate gatherings – the *muhabets* – whereby he could develop increased spiritual awareness through absorbing the accounts of the life, sacrifices, character and exalted rank of the Prophet Muḥammad discussed during these gatherings. The virtues and merits of the illustrious Imām ʻAlī would also be imparted, accompanied by mention of his distinguished mystical ranks and the important services he adroitly and devotedly carried out for the sake of Islam. The aspirant would likewise be introduced to the biographies of the Ahl ul-Bayt and the Twelve Imāms in detail, taking note of their counsels and merits, and the transcendent stations they enjoy before God. In this way the candidate's zeal for Bektashism would increase, strengthening his longing to enter the path. This method of instruction served to implant unrestrained love in the heart and set it ablaze.

If the candidate was genuinely moved by all of this – propelling him to deepen his commitment to the path – he would be given the title of *ṭālib* (student- seeker). Ideally, passion for the Bektashi Way would then so fill

the ṭālib that he would come to await initiation with great eagerness, an eagerness similar to the anticipation of a splendid wedding night when all the secrets and mysteries of the Beloved are unveiled.

In due course, the fire of love would increase so much that the candidate would be willing to carry out any sacrifice to reach the path's truths. When such a feeling had been at length attained, he would be called an *‘āshik*, a lover. At this time the candidate became incontestably determined to enter the path.

Yet despite all of his positive efforts so far, the testing did not end here. The *‘āshik* had to demonstrate that he could safeguard the legendary “Bektashi Secret.” He had to be tight-lipped, possess eyes that gawked not at the opposite sex, have no pattern of telling lies, and be ready to make any sacrifice to implement the principles of Bektashi Way. In short, the *‘āshik* had to display the highest human qualities.

When such enthusiasm permeated his soul, the *‘āshik* would not only be admitted into special Bektashi gatherings, he would frequently be called to the tekke. And while he could converse with the baba and the dervishes, he would not yet be introduced to the secret ritual ceremony held in the *maydān*, the tekke's ritual hall. The candidate's deepened conversations with the baba and the dervishes formed the preliminary stage for entering the *maydān*.

Once again this all depended on the candidate's aptitude; if he could definitely prove the upright nature of his character he would be accepted into the ranks of the Bektashis. An assigned day would then be set for the “rite of surrender,” which is to say, initiation. After the performance of the initiation ceremony, the aspirant would be granted the title of spiritual sibling, or *jān*.

If the *jān* desired to make a greater personal sacrifice in the service of the tekke and render a solemn vow to do so, a prolonged probationary period of at least a thousand and one days allowed the *jān* to be taken through another ceremony whereby he could attain the rank of dervish.

After a person's devotion to dervishhood was demonstrated for another three years he could undergo an additional rite if he so desired, one called the “rite of celibacy” (*mujarrad āyini*). This rite was traditionally performed at the shrine complex of Hajjī Bektash Velī in central Anatolia. On the day following the rite of celibacy a *mangūsh* (earring) would be inserted in the

right earlobe of the dervish in front of the turbeh of Balim Sultan. This mangūsh served to set him apart from other dervishes.

If a dervish showed the required aptitude and maturity, he could be promoted to the rank of *baba* at the hand of a *dede* or the *dedebaba*. If he gained the post of *baba*, it would be possible to go through another “rite of surrender,” one that would raise him to the rank of *dede*. This ceremony had to be overseen by the *dedebaba*, or by two or three other *dedes*. After this, the *baba* would be bestowed with the elevated title of *dede*. Moreover, if a *dede* received the nomination of all other *dedes* to head the entire Bektashi Order, this *dede* would assume the highest rank of this path, which is that of *dedebaba*.

To be raised to the rank *baba* meant that one thereby became a spiritual guide. This position required, among other things, complete knowledge of all of the regulations and rituals of the Bektashi Path, as well as extensive wisdom and spiritual insight. In the old days, a candidate-*baba* would, before his elevation to the rank of *baba*, be sent on a three-year pilgrimage to the shrines of Imām Ḥusayn (in Karbalā’) and Imām ‘Alī (in Najaf). This journey allowed him to better prepare for his impending mission. He would also visit the holy tombs of other Imāms and saints in Khorāsān and Baghdad, the sepulcher of the Prophet Muḥammad in Madinah, and finally Mecca, where he would carry out the Hajj. He would then travel all about, to lands such as Palestine, visiting the shrines of the blessed prophets and saints.

Such a hallowed journey was intended to teach the individual how to endure hardships, as well as to test the strengths and weaknesses of his character. He would magnify whatever good traits he found within and remove whatever shortcomings he saw in himself. He was to acquire an ever-expanding outlook from whomever and wherever he visited, allowing his wisdom, patience, and insight to continually mature.

We should add here that it was customary in bygone days to discipline a dervish who committed a grave transgression while serving in the tekke by obliging him to set out at once for distant sacred sites; and the more far-off the better, since he could benefit from extended reflection, privation, and perseverance. The penitent dervish could greatly improve his character in this way, as the journey encouraged him to abandon his flaws and to once more become whole in every sense of the word.

We must reiterate in closing that to become a baba or dede, a dervish must have reached a level of indisputable spiritual and moral maturity. He additionally must know all of the regulations and rituals prescribed by the Bektashi Path. He certainly must have knowledge of the subtleties and mysteries of Bektashi philosophy, especially those dealing with spiritual awareness, whose depths are not easily grasped.

## SPIRITUAL WAYFARING ON THE BEKTASHI PATH

The term *sulūk* refers to the spiritual journey a Bektashi devotee undertakes after having received consecration through initiation. *Sulūk* is an Arabic word that means “wayfaring” or “journeying.” The aim of such a voyage is to bring the *sālik* (wayfarer) to the divine threshold with the instructions given by the spiritual guide. This journey trains the wayfarer to progressively mold his character into its ideal form. To do this, he must subdue desire for worldly acclaim, or any other sort of distraction. He must steer clear of arrogance, ambition, lying, greed, backbiting, miserliness, and harming others – basically every vice, moral weakness and sin. The wayfarer must bedeck himself with the loftiest of human traits, such as compassion, kindness, modesty, benevolence, and fair-mindedness. Such standards are not found solely among Bektashis; they are present in all mystic orders. For instance, the great Ismail Hakkı Bursevi (who was not a Bektashi), wrote this regarding the *sulūk*:

Spiritual wayfaring begins when ignorance is exchanged for knowledge, when vice turns into virtuousness and when the self is annihilated in the illumination that has been granted by God.

Spiritual *sulūk* has been discussed by many other mystics in great detail. In his masterwork *Futūhāt al-makkīyyah* (whose importance we have discussed above), Ibn ‘Arabī wrote that a wayfarer travels towards the station of nearness to God not by means of the intellect, but by heart and soul, since a mystic’s awareness is always revealed in his *hāl* (spiritual state) and *yakīn* (certitude).

Another mystic, ‘Abd ur-Razzāk Kāshānī (d. ca. 730/1330), defined spiritual wayfaring in this way: “*Sulūk* is cleaning of the house of the heart from everything except God, thereby securing His intimacy.” This means

that when the heart is emptied of worldly attachments, closeness to God will manifest in us.

There are two sorts of *sulūk* in Islamic mysticism, both of which have essentially the same connotation: 1. Walking along an actual road to visit a faraway holy site, and 2. The inner journey to saintliness.

We need not concern ourselves here with the first sort of *sulūk* since its benefits have been discussed in detail in the previous section that spoke on care in selecting spiritual associates. Therefore, we shall focus exclusively on the second, as well as its accompanying stages.

The first stage of the spiritual *sulūk* is called “The Journey towards God,” or *As-Sayr ila Allah*. This stage is attained when a wayfarer-to-be stands up from whatever worldly condition he happens to be in and turns towards *Haqq* (the Real, i.e. God). It is at this point that the initial intention to achieve the lofty station of God’s presence is made. However, this can only occur when the mass of veils blocking our closeness to God lift and disappear, thereby allowing us to draw near to Him.

This can be further explained by employing the example of how knowledge is transmitted. One starts out with basic knowledge; and by progressing through levels of increasing intensity, one will eventually reach the uppermost limit of that knowledge. For our mystics, this highest point is total awareness of God. In Islamic terminology, this knowledge is called *‘ilm-i ladunī*, or knowledge of the divine. This knowledge can only be obtained by wiping away every distasteful thought and desire from the heart. Doing this will trigger the process that leads to the extinction of the self in God, a state known as *fanā’ fillah* – a phrase we have mentioned throughout this book.

The second stage of the *sulūk* is what is called “The Journey in God,” *As-Sayr fi Allah*. This stage is reached when the wayfarer is bedecked with the characteristics of God’s most beautiful names. The goal of this stage is to lift any veils that might continue to hamper full mystical awareness and the arrival of *‘ilm-i ladunī*. In the state of *As- Sayr fi Allah* the wayfarer dissolves in God’s oneness and remains in the divine presence – a state our mystics call *baqā’ billah*, or state of “Permanence in God.”

The third phase of the *sulūk* is called “The Journey with God,” *As-Sayr ma’ Allah*. The goal of this phase is to become totally immersed in the divine. Having been cleaned of all worldliness and duality, the *sālik* forges ahead in this condition until he reaches the position of divine intimacy known in the *Kur’ān* as the “distance of two bow lengths or nearer,” or

“Kaaba қawsayni wa adnā” (Sūrat an-Najm 53:9). In this phase of the journey the wayfarer attains the apex of sanctification, and here no trace of him as an individual remains. Everything now manifests in absolute oneness.

To better explain the “distance of two bow lengths or nearer,” it would be beneficial for us to provide the context of this Kur’ānic verse. According to some of our scholars it refers to the event that occurred when the Prophet Muḥammad was sitting alone in his cave on Jabal an-Nūr. The archangel Gabriel suddenly appeared in the form of a man, and to fill the exalted Muḥammad with heavenly inspiration, drew him closer than an arrow is to the bow – which is to say exceptionally near! Kur’ānic exegetes throughout the centuries have commented on this incident in many lengthy works that are beyond the scope of our book to examine.

The fourth phase of the sulūk is called “The Journey from God,” or *As-Sayr an Allah*. In this stage of the journey the wayfarer returns to the realm of multiplicity after having attained the station of *wahdat* (oneness). From the divine throne, he returns to the world to train and assist all other spiritual seekers and wayfarers. This stage is said to endure beyond the state of annihilation or bewilderment. This stage of the spiritual journey is, in fact, considered the highest of all.

With all of the descriptions of the mystic sulūk that we have presented it should be clear that gaining intimacy with God requires the wayfarer to completely give up everything other than God, setting his sights solely on the Real. In other words, should we decide to seek this goal our minds and hearts must be entirely given over to our Lord.

Now we shall look at the steps that must be taken to prepare for this journey, as well as the “provisions” that must be brought along. It is the universal opinion of the Sufis (and more so of Bektashis) that to navigate this path one must – above all else – find a competent and perfected guide, a *murshid-ī kāmil*. It is the guide who shepherds the wayfarer on this long and perilous journey. A genuine murshid will never let the wayfarer stray from the path. He will deflect any worries and doubts that may emerge in the wayfarer’s mind on account of disagreeable thoughts. The wayfarer can only transcend the material world and arrive at the goal with the aid of such a murshid. There is no way for anyone to successfully travel this path without a guide. You might possess vast academic knowledge or be extremely clever, but the ultimate goal can never be attained without a murshid!

The importance of a murshid can be explained through these simple examples: Let us say that there is a man knows about a certain place having read about it in books, but he has never physically been there. Can he claim to have genuine knowledge of that place having never set foot there? Likewise, everyone knows that sugar is sweet. But unless you have tasted sugar you cannot understand the nature of its peculiar sweetness. As soon as you taste it, you gain full and intimate awareness of its sweetness. You can then truly say to know about it. In mystical terminology, this experiential knowledge is called *‘ilm al-yakīn*, or “knowledge of certitude.” A murshid is like the one who has been to that place mentioned above or who has tasted sugar. His *‘ilm al-yakīn* comes from having traversed the stations of the path.

One must be instructed by an expert to gain an understanding of all the challenges that will be faced along the path to God; and it is the duty of our spiritual masters and guides to instruct. Among the mystics, such instruction is called *taslīk*. How the murshid carries out the task of instruction will be fully explained in the following section.

## SPIRITUAL TRAINING IN BEKTASHISM

*Taslīk* is the method by which wayfarers are guided to the goal of gaining intimacy with God. This training is basically concerned with two things: surmounting the self (or ego, *nafs*), and the purification the soul. But what exactly are self and soul? Let us explain...

It is more or less universally recognized that a human being has a physical form and a core essence. This essence is commonly called the soul. There is no need for us to speak here about the corporal body and its material components, seeing as modern science, medicine and biology have addressed this subject in profound detail.

Consequently, we only need to speak here about humanity’s spiritual element, a thing commented on in many different ways by countless philosophers, mystics, and religious personalities. But let us content ourselves with only those observations made by the mystics. According to these individuals a human being’s existence can be divided into four perceivable “life-forces,” which are: 1. The mineral life-force; 2. The plant life-force; 3. The animal life-force; and 4. The human life-force.

The mineral life-force is that power which maintains and preserves all of the bodily organs, preventing them from being destroyed and dispersed.

The plant life-force is that power which stimulates physical development and growth. This corresponds to a plant's development and growth. The plant life-force pushes the creature to seek much-needed sustenance, to chew it, to swallow it and to digest it. This life-force is needed to distribute nutrients throughout the body, to create physical energy and to cast out the waste. Such actions derive from the power of this particular life-force.

The animal life-force is that power which allows living creatures to move about, feel, etc. To be precise, all sensations and drives – whether perceptible or not – stir and are put into action by this particular life-force.

The human life-force (also called “conscience” or “soul”) is an abstract force given that it has no significant material component and little connection to matter. It is independent of the physical body, and it is put into motion solely by God's command. This force acts as a monarch ruling over the body, which in turn executes this force's commands by distributing the responsibility to carry out these directives to its limbs. The center of this force is located in the middle of the heart, at a point known to our mystics as the *nukta-i sawda* (or *suwayda*), a term meaning “black point.”

Given that the human life-force's commands are executed by the body there must be a certain degree of interconnection between the two. Part of this life-force's interior is called “soul,” although it is sometimes referred to as “conscience.”

Having discussed the levels of the soul, let us turn to the levels of the self. According to the Islamic mystics, the self (or ego) can be divided into seven grades, each mentioned by name in the *Qur'ān*:

1. Inciting self – *Nafs al-ammāra*
2. Reproaching self – *Nafs al-lawwāma*
3. Inspired self – *Nafs al-mulhama*
4. Serene self – *Nafs al-muṭma'īna*
5. Pleased self – *Nafs ar-rażīyya*
6. God-pleasing self – *Nafs al-mardiyya*
7. Perfected self – *Nafs al-kāmila*

Let us explain each of these grades:

We are at the level of the “inciting self” when our conscience acquiesces, without any sense of remorse, to the pulls of the ego. However, should

a spark ignite an awareness of God's truth within us, causing our hearts to be filled with regret, we will enter the level of the "reproaching self," even though we may still be inclined towards worldly desire. Then, having struggled to thrust aside the commands of the ego – all the while striving for self-improvement and disengagement from the world – we will enter the station of the "inspired self."

As we struggle to remove base desires from heart and mind, we will travel from the "inspired self" to the "serene self." Should we then cross this stage by jettisoning all unseemly longings and intentions, we will come to the level of the "pleased self." Continuing onward we will arrive at the level of the "God-pleasing self." Here we will be endowed with all the qualities of excellence and the necessary maturity to allow us to finally reach the station of the "perfected self."

As for soul itself, we have stated above that it is the inner consciousness, or core, of a human being. Moreover, many of our mystics have said that the soul likewise possesses many layers, some of which we shall briefly describe in order to give our readers a fuller understanding of this subject.

The core of our soul is called *sirr*, or "secret" and the interior of this *sirr* is referred to as the *sirr us-sirr*, or "secret of the secret." This inner layer has an additional level that is termed the "hidden" or *khafī* – beyond which is a point known as the "hidden of the hidden," or *khafī al-khafī*. The latter contains the loftiest level of all, which is called "the most hidden" or *akhafā*, and here is found the wellspring (or essence) of our soul.

Having presented these details concerning both self and soul, we should explain how the aspiring wayfarer can reach their various levels through spiritual training. Such training commences with the unrelenting remembrance of God, as per the instruction of the murshid.

At the beginning of the journey, we will almost certainly be in the clutches of the "inciting self". The first steps we can take to rise above this stage are 1. Genuinely seeking God's forgiveness and 2. Remembering Him as much as humanly possible. If we do this with genuine sincerity, we will commence with overhauling our character until the second level is reached, the level of the "reproachful self."

At this point, a titanic struggle commences: The battle against the ego. This undertaking is what the exalted Prophet Muhammad called the "Greater Jihād." If we are to win this battle, we must reject any thought of gaining fame or promotion owing to our spiritual endeavors. We must also relinquish any idea of being compensated for our spiritual endeavors,

for we must eventually abandon all fondness for the material things. Since this world is so alluring and attractive, achieving victory in this battle is tough. Nevertheless, if we exert our utmost, this world can be transcended, allowing for genuine spiritual progress.

If we press onward, we will reach the third level – the level of the “inspired self.” At this point, we will feel nothing but misery and regret if any moral lapse should transpire. We will then receive a tremendous elevation in character as we truly begin to flavor the sanctification that emerges out of the constant remembrance of God. We will start to unearth the secret treasure-trove of transcendent love, breaking free from both material desire and any longing for the delights of the Hereafter. We begin to focus totally on the love of God – which, say our mystics, is the loftiest of all rewards. However, to gain such a prize, it is vital that we relentlessly maintain purity of thought, speech, and deed. We must also gradually start to eat less, sleep less and take unwavering delight in our religious devotions.

If we make it this far, we will pass to the fourth level, the level of the “serene self.” At this point, any taste that we may have had for the world will have, by now, completely vanished. Here we only behold the splendor of God’s creative power – for whose sake we will readily forfeit everything, even our life.

If we push on we will eventually arrive at the fifth level, the station of the “pleased self.” At this level, we are now far removed from improper desire. The inner eye opens, and we behold God, who is mirrored in all of existence. At this instant, we can irrefutably declare that nothing exists save one single reality: God.

If we carry on, we will ultimately reach the sixth level, which is the station of the “God-pleasing self.” Here we are endowed with boundless vision, which allows us to ascend to an even higher state, the level of the “perfected self.” At this station, we are annihilated in God and His all-consuming love. This is the station of God’s *awliya’* (intimates). Any lingering individuality that we might still possess at this point vanishes, leaving nothing present but God, who sees, speaks, hears, and grasps through the emptied physical form of the *sālik*.

Having to successfully traverse all of these levels and stations should be enough proof of the need for a guide. As we have previously mentioned, a wayfarer can only reach these states with the help of a murshid, a point deeply rooted in the Islamic mystical tradition.

## PREPARING THE WAYFARER

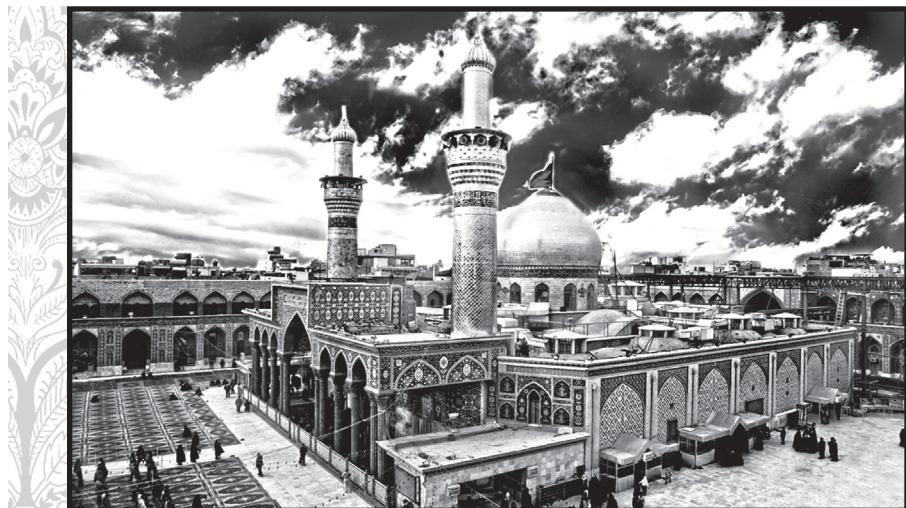
The Bektashi wayfarer must be guided with extraordinary skill, for it is no easy task to accurately explain the particulars of this spiritual path and inspire the faithful. A true murshid only imparts the subtle points of Bektashi philosophy gradually to his disciples, explaining these through allegories if need be, until they are fully conversant with it. With such unhurried training, the wayfarer will be able to digest all of the insightful matters – one after the other – that will be faced on this path until their inner meanings are fully grasped. This allows the wayfarer adhere to the words of Hajjī Bektash Veli: “Seek and you shall find.”

When speaking about the particulars of Bektashism, the murshid naturally does so with the counsel of the exalted ‘Alī in mind: “Speak to people according to their intellectual capacity.” The multi-layered feature of Bektashi mystical philosophy is not something that can be understood by everyone, and thus it must be presented with the listener’s level of understanding in mind. Therefore, the murshid prepares the wayfarer, step by step, and guides him along the path of excellence, slowly imparting the spiritual illumination offered by the Bektashi Path.

One fundamental principle that will be explained to potential wayfarers from the outset is that they must hold unbounded love for the illustrious Muḥammad and his family – the Ahl ul-Bayt. Wayfarers must be comrades to all who love them and fervent opponents of their enemies, because the Prophet once prayed: “O God! Love whosoever loves ‘Alī, and be at war with whosoever hates him!”

The Prophet Muḥammad had deep love for Imām ‘Alī, and he was his closest companion. This great and exemplary champion eventually fell victim to the gaze of the envious, and he was martyred, forfeiting his life to their avarice. All of those whose malice obliged them to carry out this crime should be cursed and reviled as foes of both humanity and religion, in keeping with the above words of our Prophet.

For Bektashis the chief enemy of Islam is the House of Banū Umayyah (i.e. the clan of Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān), whose greed and ambition nearly extinguished the Prophet’s household. This dynasty cast down the legitimate Islamic government and established in its place its own sovereignty, for whose perpetuation it enacted villainy and treachery unparalleled in the annals of history. The House of Banū Umayyah carried out its crimes with great barbarity solely to expand and retain its supremacy.



The shrine of Imām Ḥusayn in the Iraqi city of Karbalā'. In days past it was a place of pilgrimage for Bektashis.

To begin with, the head of the House of Banū Umayyah ordered the poisoning a man greatly loved by the Prophet: his eldest grandson, Imām Hasan. Alas! There was no man in the world as honest and astute as he. After murdering dear Hasan, the House of Banū Umayyah carried out one of the most dreadful and despicable acts seen in history on the Field of Karbalā'. It was a crime that rattled the hearts of humankind, above all the hearts of Muslims. On that ruinous patch of earth, the other darling grandson of the Prophet, Imām Ḥusayn, was martyred in the most ruthless manner by the hands of power-hungry traitors to Islam. He died in the sweltering heat of summer with parched lips – a tragedy not seen at any time in history. Seventy-two men of faith and honor fell with Imām Ḥusayn, as well as all of his sons, save one. These heroes were the innocent victims of assailants seeking to only to sustain their regime of avarice and arrogance. The sorrow of Karbalā' triggered distress throughout the Muslim world, and its bitter memory has endured through the centuries. Its recollection causes such sadness that it causes the heart grow dark.

We feel that it would be fitting at this moment to present some background to this sad event. As soon he received word that a conspiracy had been hatched against him by the Banū Umayyah, Imām Ḥusayn (who was then in Madinah) took a band of his devotees and left for Mecca, thereby hoping to save the nascent Muslim community from the calamity of civil war. When he realized that he could not elude trouble even in this most

sacred of holy places, he gathered his followers and set out for Iraq, having no desire to be the cause of bloodshed. However, the deceitful Banū Umayyah did not wish to see Imām Ḥusayn escape their clutches. They trailed his caravan and ultimately surrounded it with ten thousand men on a featureless piece of land near the Euphrates River known as Karbalā'. Imām Husayn's camp was cruelly denied access to the river's life-giving water. He was presented with an ultimatum to accept Umayyad rule or forfeit his head.

However, this gallant champion – being a son of the most distinguished hero in the world, the magnificent <sup>c</sup>Alī – refused to accept such an ultimatum that was intended to instill submission to tyrants. Instead, as did his father before him, Imām Ḥusayn chose martyrdom on the field of valor in the manner we have narrated above.

In the end, Imām Ḥusayn and his supporters were completely overwhelmed on the Field of Karbalā. His lifeless body was mutilated and trampled under the hoofs of the horses of the faithless Banū Umayyah. Yet Imām Ḥusayn's ideals, prestige and religious principles that he defended with the last drop of his blood remain alive; for he continues to serve as the paradigm of sacrifice and will so for generations to come!

By pointing out such noble and inspirational examples the murshid will be able to imprint love and affection for the Prophet, his blessed family, the great <sup>c</sup>Alī, and the other Imāms, on to the wayfarer's heart – together with loathing for the Banū Umayyah and their supporters on account of the dreadful acts they perpetrated. This historical overview must be firmly rooted in the heart of Bektashi aspirants so that they become resolute and sincere spiritual seekers.

## THE SOURCES OF THE BEKTASHI MYSTIC PATH

Furthermore, the murshid must discuss the foundational sources of the spiritual path. He has to make it clear that the entire underpinning of the Islamic faith rests on the Holy Kur'ān and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Down through the ages these foundations have been methodically examined by scholars and mystics to obtain guidance from them in every aspect of life. However, there is a great deal of subtle knowledge and profound wisdom within these sacred texts that lies beyond

the understanding of anyone other than the legitimate heirs of this revealed knowledge – the foremost being Imām ʻAlī, about whom the Prophet said: “I am the city of knowledge and ʻAlī is its gate.” Thus, to enter into the “City of Muḥammadī Knowledge” you must enter through its gate, which is none other than the exalted Imām ʻAlī.

This fact is even more clearly expressed in the Prophet Muḥammad’s maxim: “My inheritor is ʻAlī!” Understand, however, that these words do not mean that ʻAlī is heir to his meager possessions, or to his tattered apparel. Not at all! The Prophet is saying that ʻAlī is heir to his boundless knowledge, his unassailable wisdom, and his impeccable integrity.

We can understand then, based on the clear words of the Prophet, that Imām ʻAlī is the one who unravels and unveils any ambiguity and unfathomable perspective found within the sacred texts of Islam. No other individual possesses his impeccable ability to illuminate the mysteries of the religious sciences.

After the Prophet Muḥammad passed from this world, the exalted ʻAlī opened a private seminary in the city of Madinah – the first madrasah in history – where he gave lessons to anyone wishing to grasp a subtle, yet transcendent, approach to Islamic truths.

After the exalted Imām ʻAlī attained martyrdom, his seminary endured under the guidance of his grandson Imām Zayn al-ʻĀbidīn. After his passing it came to be overseen by his son and grandson, the fifth and sixth Imāms, Muḥammad al-Bākir and Jaʻfar as-Ṣādiq. This spiritual academy cast a revealing light on the mystic truths of Islam for the hundreds of individuals who came from different lands. It imparted sophisticated metaphysical wisdom, equipping its students with outstanding educational qualifications. In fact, Imām Jaʻfar as-Ṣādiq is said to have instructed and trained more than two hundred people in this school.

This unmatched knowledge – from which all Islamic mystics benefited – was passed down from generation to generation until it came into the hearts of the mystic pīrs, and then on to our pīr, the saintly Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī. This is why Bektashis adore the Prophet Muḥammad, Imām ʻAlī and the eleven other Imāms, and declare that their spiritual path is none other than the path of Muḥammad ʻAlī.

## QUALITIES THE WAYFARER MUST POSSESS

To reach the lofty state of perfection, the Bektashi wayfarer must be equipped with certain “provisions,” one of which is a committed bond with the murshid. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī himself gave great importance to this is a matter and we find the *Vilāyetnāmah* placing immense weight on this point, expounding upon it at great length. Based on the teachings of his own master – Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī – that were given to him as an *amānah* (trust), Ḥajjī Bektash Velī taught that every wayfarer must hold in his heart complete confidence in his murshid. Therefore, if the followers of the Bektashi Path wish to take full spiritual benefit from its methods they must observe with the following points:

- The wayfarer must have such a bond with the murshid that no other guide is valued over him, even one seemingly more skilled. If the murshid passes away, the wayfarer will need to connect with another murshid-ī kāmil.
- While in the presence of the murshid the wayfarer must pay close attention to his words so as to better understand their allusions and intentions. He who does not take note of the guide’s words with the ears of the heart, and in the performance of the duties with which he is charged, will gain no benefit from the Bektashi Way. The gates of spiritual progress will remain closed until this is achieved.
- The wayfarer must be faithful to the words of the murshid and implement his orders, for every word and command from the guide are blessed morsels, or *riza lokması*. These morsels must go into the wayfarer’s spiritual stomach without a speck of hesitation.
- All service to the murshid must be wholeheartedly carried out by the wayfarer as quickly as possible in order to win the guide’s approval, satisfaction, and blessing. It must be remembered that the murshid’s approval and blessing are ultimately the approval and blessing of God.
- The wayfarer must display full accountability and correctness with respect to the promises given to the murshid. Otherwise, if he acts in a contrary manner, thereby breaking the heart of the guide, doubt may emerge – which is something to be despised, for it casts a shadow over the wayfarer.

- The wayfarer must be so obedient, refined and steadfast with respect to the murshid that nothing will cause him to break the bonds of loyalty.
- The wayfarer should be so generous and devoted to the murshid that he would be ready to sacrifice everything for his sake if the need arises. The wayfarer's duty is obedience and sacrifice, because these irreplaceable and selfless virtues are required to open the eyes of the heart.
- The wayfarer must keep the murshid's secrets more secure than his own. The wayfarer must not disclose a speck, even to those he holds most intimately, for breaking confidentiality is an act of great disgrace.
- The wayfarer must give the murshid's advice, instructions and words the utmost attention and must not ignore a single one of them.
- The bond between murshid and wayfarer is nothing less than a spiritual union. He who desires to arrive at the goal must be ready to sacrifice head, soul and everything else for the sake of this union. The murshid's friends must be the wayfarer's friends and his foes the wayfarer's foes. If the murshid should happen to fall on difficult times, the wayfarer must try to relieve his difficulties as much as he is able.

With that said, we must emphasize that a true murshid must be a man who retains and exhibits a thoroughly perfected character and a man who is properly qualified to guide others according to the regulations laid down by the Bektashi Order. In other words, the murshid must be a virtuous and upstanding human being who openly radiates great merit. If he fails to meet these qualifications in any way, his position – in accordance with our Bektashi guidelines – is rendered *harām*, forbidden.

## BEKTASHI VIEWS ON STEADFASTNESS

Steadfastness means having the determination not to turn from the vows that are taken upon initiation into the Bektashi Order. Steadfastness also means being faithful to one's promises and not breaking them. This trait is a vital condition for wayfarers on this path; for without it spiritual progress cannot commence.

A Bektashi initiate is strongly (and continually) counseled to remain loyal, not only to all the vows taken while traversing the spiritual path but to those given in daily life, in business or on any other occasion. Even a promise given to a bosom friend must be fulfilled; for breaking one's word is not only cause for disgrace in everyday life, but it is also a great sin against God and religion.

The basis for Bektashism's great emphasis on steadfastness is found in the numerous verses of the *Kur'ān* where the faithful are commanded to remain resolute and unwavering:

*Therefore whoever breaks his word,  
he breaks it only to the injury of his own soul;  
and whoever fulfills what he has covenanted with God,  
He will grant him a mighty reward.*

﴿Sūrat al-Fatḥ 48:10﴾



*Nay, but he who fulfills his vow and wards off evil;  
for lo! God loves those who ward off evil.*

﴿Sūrah Āli 'Imrān 33:33﴾



*O you who believe! Fulfill the obligations!*

﴿Sūrat al-Mā''idah 5:1﴾

These and other *Kur'ānic* verse exhort all Bektashi murshids to see to it that their disciples remain faithful to their promises and that they uphold any vows that they may take. Throughout history, many Bektashi poets have encouraged the upholding of vows. For instance, the poet Gevheri writes:

*If they lynch me from a tree,  
I'll not take back my word.  
If they say the Beloved's not with me,  
My heart will be undeterred.*

Even if offered the whole world (or all of Paradise), a dedicated Bektashi wayfarer will never betray his word, remaining forever loyal to all of his sacred vows. Indeed! Numerous examples can be found throughout history of Bektashis surrendering their lives rather than breaking their vows. One example of this happening can be found during the reign of Sultan Mahmūd II when hundreds of Bektashi babas and dervishes chose execution over breaking their sacred oaths. They willingly went to their

martyrdom with these words on their lips: “We’ll give up our heads, but never our secrets!”

## BEKTASHI VIEWS ON ETIQUETTE

Having proper adab is mandatory according to the spiritual guidelines of the Bektashi Order. *Adab* is an Arabic word meaning “good manners” or “etiquette.” Adab is the care the wayfarer takes in order not to violate the tranquility, order, and manners of wherever he should happen to be, either inside or outside a religious setting.

The Bektashism insists that its adherents diligently observe proper adab from the cradle to the grave. It ceaselessly instructs its followers not to offend or dishonor anyone throughout the course of their lives, be they intimate friend or wary stranger. A true Bektashi never throws people into distress. Should someone abuse the wayfarer, the wayfarer must not return the abuse out of a desire for revenge. A true Bektashi should not even complain about the abuse; rather he must bear it with composure and dignity. He must be patient, forgive any mistreatment, and do everything to demonstrate the grace of God –acts consistent with the Kur’ānic verse:

*And be patient and your patience is not but by the assistance of God, and do not be upset because of them, and do not distress yourself at what they scheme. For God is with those who restrain themselves, and those who do good.*

(Sūrat an-Nahl 16:127-128)

The proper adab required by our spiritual path can be attained when the sun of spirituality begins to reflect off a well-polished heart. Therefore, a Bektashi wayfarer must continually exhibit proper adab, making sure that his hands, tongue, and loins never offend a living soul. He must detach himself from anger, greed, covetousness and lustful cravings. He must see everything as a manifestation of God’s power and grace. The wayfarer must never see anything with the eye of ire or indignation; rather, he must always display a personality filled with serenity, compassion, and cheerfulness. He must be optimistic in every undertaking and he must find delight when others find success in their undertakings.

If the wayfarer should happen to be offended or displeased while sitting in a circle of people, he should leave it in the most diplomatic and

graceful way so as to make such an impression that it will serve as an exemplar of goodness for those people, and perhaps stir them to change their discourteous ways.

It is equally important for the wayfarer to overlook people's shortcomings. He must always try to avert his eyes from the failings and faults of others; instead, the wayfarer should check to see if these failings are present within himself, for once he rectifies his own character, he can help others do the same. The wayfarer secures the right to correct others only when he gains – through colossal effort – complete mastery of his hands, his tongue, and his loins.

All wayfarers on the Bektashi Path are unequivocally obliged to measure up to the points mentioned above regarding adab, as well as any that we have not mentioned here. As long as an individual is incapable of doing this, the state of perfection will be impossible to reach.

## BEKTASHI VIEWS ON EGOTISM

Our Bektashi masters see egotism as nothing less than a shameless display of self-glorification. It is a sickness unto itself. In truth, it is one of the most noxious of moral diseases, and it is a serious obstruction to any progress towards spiritual perfection. We cannot move a single step forward on this path in the company of the ego, for pandering to the ego's whims will forever keep us in darkness, utterly deprived of light.

Egotism is a flaw that covers the eyes and the ears, allowing no room for spiritual and moral development. It is an issue that keeps people in perpetual gloom. If we do not forsake it altogether, we will never become a human being in the truest sense of the word. "He who beholds only the ego," a Bektashi mystic once said, "will never behold the Beloved."

Egotism is like a chain in the nose ring of a bear; it is a chain that is used to tug a person towards ignoble and lustful passions. If we are led by this chain, we will become disconnected from spirituality and be led into haughtiness, immaturity, and ultimately despair. For this reason, the first condition laid on the path to perfection is the complete casting off of both egotism and the veneration of the self, as the great poet Sayyid Nizamoğlu sings:

*Hence, my "I" has vanished;  
The ego set to burn.  
By God! There's nothing left at all,  
He's everywhere I turn!*

After receiving her initiation into the Bektashi Order, Lady İkbal Bajî (who will be discussed further on in this book), wrote a verse that relates to the topic at hand:

*Let's turn our being into dust;  
Let's leave the ego in disgust;  
Let our hearts be free from rust  
So the Beloved of lovers may come!*

Bektashis are also well-known for being very critical of ego-motivated demonstrations of piety. Its not only the mystics of our path who have been hostile towards egotism, but those of other Sufi orders as well. For instance, the great Naṣībandī master ʿAbd ur-Rahmān Jāmī wrote this about egotism in his book *Nafahat al- Uns*:

Shaykh Sa`d ud-Dīn Ḥamawī was once traveling on horseback with a group of disciples. Their road came to the bank of a small stream, which had to be crossed to continue. However, as the Shaykh's horse went into the stream, it saw the reflection of its face in the water. It became spooked and would not move forward, no matter how much it was coerced. The Shaykh understood the situation and told his companions to cloud the water by throwing dirt into it. When this was done, the horse could no longer see its reflection, and it moved forward. When the company reached the other side of the stream, the Shaykh explained: "This horse would not move because it saw itself in the water. When the reflection disappeared, owing to the mud, it moved. So it is with Man. If all he does is gaze at his ego, he will be unable to move forward on the path to perfection."

About this point the famed poet ʿImād ud-Dīn Nasīmī proclaims:

*Duality is a soaring veil,  
Its heights must be defeated.  
Come! Remove the "self" from this,  
That you might see God's secret.*

To reach this highest of goals we must abandon egotism, and even our self-perceived existence, for the self must be subdued, and the heart purified. We have mentioned above that the great mystics of Islam have given tremendous importance to every effort taken in this direction, since the ego

is the foremost obstruction to spiritual progress. About this the mystic İsmail Hakkı Bursevī says:

O lovers of God! If you want to find traces of an unseen treasure,  
tear down the fortress of the ego. Let it be ruined from this point  
onward, so that you may reach what you seek.

The aforementioned saint Niyāz-i Mişrī likewise states:

*Multiplicity went out as unity came in.  
And divorcing the "self" we attained the friend.*

Ibn ‘Arabī expertly describes the degrees of ego extinction, stating that at the level of *sharī‘at* a person declares: “What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is yours.” At the level of *ṭarīkat* things are held in common, and one declares, “What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine.” At the lofty stage of *ḥaķīkat*, there is neither “mine” nor “yours,” but only God, the ultimate Reality. All material possessions come and go, but God forever endures.

Therefore, we must jettison concepts of “mine” and “yours” and be cleansed of all worldly attachment. Only then will our hearts be enriched with divine love, and only then will we attain the Real, *Haķk*, which is the utmost aspiration. Sayyid Nizamoğlu emphasizes this point in the following poem:

*O God! In the inferno of love incinerate me!  
Make me drunk - drunk on a wine from Thee.  
Take my "self", take it far and away from me.  
Leave not a single trace of it for anyone to see.  
Even the smallest atom of it, let it not be.  
Take my soul and melt it in Your consuming majesty!*

As soon as we are strong enough to surmount the mountain of the ego, our vision will clear, and we will begin to see far and wide. However, until such a state is achieved God’s decree remains: “You shall not see Me; rather gaze upon that mountain!” – the mountain here being a metaphor for the ego. “Until you move that mountain,” God is saying, “you will not see My face!”

To give our readers a better understanding of this point, we shall explain the *Qur’ānic* context of this “mountain”, as well as its symbolic significance. In keeping with God’s command, Moses one day ascended Mount Sinai to receive divine revelation. Once he reached the summit, he stood listening to

God's words. Moses was not able to see God, but he could hear God's speech and decrees. After having absorbed this revelation, Moses cried out: "O God! Let me behold You, for it is only Your voice I hear!"

At that moment God said: "By no means can you see Me! But gaze upon that mountain yonder. If it stays in its place, you shall see Me." God then revealed a mere speck of His divine radiance upon that mountain. The mountain began to tremble and shake to and fro before quickly crumbling to dust.

The awesome sight of this display overwhelmed Moses' senses, and he fainted from shock. When he came to, he begged God for forgiveness with these words: "Exalted are You! I have repented to You, and I am the first of the believers."<sup>32</sup>

Over the centuries the masters of Islamic mysticism have often commented on this incident, and they have conveyed many interpretations of its meaning. One inference that we can draw from it is that the mountain which Moses observed from afar represents the mountain of the ego, which until obliterated prevents us from arriving at the vision of God. If our ego is completely reduced and merged into the splendor of God's love, nothing will remain within us save *Haqq*, the Real. When this occurs, we will manifest the heavenly light previously encased in the prison of the ego. Moses was granted this divine gift after he asked for forgiveness and was then perfected and inspired by Al-Khiḍr, the peerless spiritual master who was appointed by God to be Moses' murshid.

## BEKTASHI VIEWS ON SPIRITUAL LOVE

One of the central tenets of Bektashi spirituality is *mahabbah*, or God-directed love. This concept has been expounded upon so much by Bektashis that it can honestly be said that they see it as the sole purpose of human existence. The scriptural foundation for this belief can be found in the many *Kur'ānic* verses that speak about love, as well as the numerous sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad. For instance, we have this verse:

*Say to them [O Muḥammad]: If you love God follow me;  
then God will love you and forgive you your sins.  
And God is Forgiving and Merciful.*

﴿Sūrah Āl-i Imrān 3:31﴾

In addition, we have this saying of the Prophet: “He who dies in a state of unrequited love and remains chaste shall be counted among the holy martyrs and will receive the greatest of rewards.”

These and other proofs from the sacred texts of Islam have compelled Bektashis throughout history to cultivate and increase their love of God. They have, in fact, given so much weight to mahabbah that they have described it as being the wellspring of every merit and the amender of every failing. This love encourages our hearts to focus on the removal of everything other than God (*māsiwā*).

Bektashis believe that love is the vehicle by which the wayfarer approaches and disappears into God. No other force is loftier in the universe than the love of God. Only it can inspire genuine and total awareness. The underpinning of this love is not love for the sake of the lover (the wayfarer), but rather for the sake of the Beloved – who is adored on a scale so grand that it causes lover and beloved to unite as a single soul. For the sake of the Beloved, the lover would willingly sacrifice everything.

Such love is the essence of a genuine existence. Actual death is not the ending of bodily functions; actual death enters a person when his heart is devoid of love. Where there is love, there is no death. In the same way that an alchemical elixir turns copper into gold, the love of God turns a person into a priceless, everlasting diamond.

One has no defenses to stop the arrow of love from penetrating the heart, nor does one have the power to remove it once it has wedged itself in. Love is the most expansive arena in spirituality, about which the *Kur’ān* speaks:

*Say to them (O Muhammad!):  
“Verily, I am commanded to worship God  
with loving devotion.”*

﴿Sūrat az-Zumar 39:11﴾

Love can be thought of as a poison that lies within the healing bezoar stone – an antidote containing some of the very poison it is meant to cure. Thus, within the heart of a lover, the fire of true love is both pain (*dert*) and cure (*dermān*). Love is not like the sun, which rises and sets; rather love ceaselessly radiates its glow, causing the place wherein it abides to be bathed in light. Love can make the weak strong and the coward brave. It can melt iron and soften stone into clay. Knowing this, some of the wise have advised:

Take no notice, my dear friend, of your neighbor's daughter. Look instead to the everlasting splendor of God! It is a beauty which grows neither old nor diminished. It is continuously vibrant and fresh. Why dilute your life with the temporal? A man deprived of love for the divine is like a tree that bears no fruit.

Love covers failings and conceals shortcomings. It would be sheer hypocrisy for us to try to perfect our character without the motivation of love. It was for the sake of love that God spoke the command "Be!" and the cosmos came into being. Imām ʻAlī said that if we wish to reach everlasting life, we must dissolve ourselves in the love of God, for when we do we will exist forever.

This transcendent love not only manifests itself between lover and beloved, but it also exists between all the lovers of the Beloved, as is expressed in the words of the exalted ʻAlī: "He who is a friend of my enemy is likewise my foe, even if he offers me his affection."

We must emphasize yet again that love is the highest of spiritual states. God was before creation a hidden treasure desiring to be uncovered – by means of love; and thus for this love He created. Love is a king established on the throne of the heart, and a heart devoid of love is like a throne devoid of a king. Love is a blaze without smoke, a road without end, a lock without a key, and whosoever manages to enter its door will be blissfully sealed within, unable to escape!

For these (and many other) reasons Bektashis tirelessly make the utmost effort to pursue mystical love. Down through the centuries they have sung of love's pains and delights in countless songs and poems, and they still do today. We shall examine a sampling of these poems later in our book.

## WHO CAN BE CONSIDERED A LOVER?

According to Bektashis – indeed all mystics of Islam – a true lover is one who holds the love of God within and whose ego has been completely subdued by means of this love. For the sake of this love a true lover would relinquish a kingdom and become a slave, eagerly sacrificing every particle of his body for his beloved. A true lover is the one whom the great Nasīmī sang about in his poems. A true lover is a person whose secrets and states

cannot be understood by anyone apart from those who have similarly been submerged by the waves of adoration and affection.

Even if the entire cosmos should fizz out a lover of God remains alive and everlasting. A lover of God discovers within this love a treasure chest full with diamonds. A lover of God flies through the heavens like Prophet Solomon on a throne made of these diamonds. On his journey to the station of *baka' billah* a lover of God soars like Jacfar at-Tayyār<sup>33</sup> high above of the throngs of the common folk. A lover of God continually cries out to be lifted higher and higher, so as to reach the wondrous joy of being incinerated in his beloved, a state wondrously described by the poet Antepli Hasan Aynī (d. 1837).

A lover of God can behold the entire sun in a solitary ray of light. In a seemingly insignificant display, he can see in his mind's eye the totality of existence, like one seeing an entire tree in an unassuming seed. He can make out the trunk, branches, leaves, fruits, and all else that constitutes a tree, in this single tiny thing. A spiritually immature person can hold his fingers right in front of his eyes and yet barely see them. However, from the pit alone lover of God can not only see the fruit, but he can also sense its taste and smell.

Before the arrival of God's love, the body of the prospective lover is like a dried-up stick. However, as soon as the intensity of divine passion enters, his head, along with all his limbs, sprout to life and begin to move – like the staff of Moses, which was miraculously transformed from a withered stick to a great and awe-inspiring serpent. The lover begins this path like grain lying on love's threshing floor waiting to be peeled and purified. The power of love pulverizes the lover into flour. Kneaded and then baked, he becomes bread, appearing in front of the world like a morsel ready to provide spiritual nourishment to humanity.

As soon as the lover wipes the dust from the mirror of his heart, he is boiled in the cauldron of love for forty years – to the extent that he is completely dissolved, with no trace of individuality remaining. The only thing reflected in the mirror of his heart at that point is love itself, whether it is the love of the lover or that of the Beloved.

The lover's soul is elevated by the essence of love and by the progress that he exerts on the mystic path for the Beloved's sake. As a result, the lover is purified and made ready to give an account of himself whenever

God requires such reckoning – a point eloquently expressed by the great Nasīmī:

*Judgment Day has arrived;  
Awake now from your rest!  
Open wide your weary eyes.  
To your love come and attest!*

Many prominent Bektashi mystics have furnished us with countless descriptions of the many conditions that the lover will enter, but let us recap: A genuine lover is one who has burned himself in the fire of divine love, ultimately unifying with the Beloved. His essence then endures in the presence of the divine throne in the states the mystics call *fānā' fillah* and *baķā' billah*, which we have discussed earlier.

## BEKTASHI VIEWS ON THE BELOVED

According to Bektashis, the Beloved is none other than God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Love for God has compelled mystic poets through the ages to compose countless poems and ghazals praising His beauty and grandeur. God is a treasured darling who is as close to the lover as the pupil is to the iris, a simile supported by the Qur'ānic verse:

*...and We are closer to him than his jugular vein.*

﴿Sūrah Kāf 50:16﴾

Having experienced the intense fire that this love kindles within, our mystics expressed their desire for the Beloved with an array of metaphors and symbols (such as “monarch” or “angel”) that were in line with the inclinations of their individual poetic styles. Each explained in his own way how the Beloved fills the eyes of the lover, overwhelms the heart and brings spiritual intoxication. Indeed! The Beloved has rendered the lover a drunkard – to the extent that when looking to and fro, he sees nothing but the Beloved. When sees his reflection in the mirror the lover beholds the Beloved. In everything he sees, feels and tastes, there is the Beloved, for the Beloved lies within the lover’s soul. The lover burns in adoration, and he is rendered awestruck feasting his eyes on the Beloved. At this point the lover is no longer aware of his own existence!



*Ya Maḥbūb ul-āshikīn!*  
O Beloved of the lovers!

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As a result of this inebriation both lover and beloved come to shimmer as one in boundless light. Like a rainbow, their glow illuminates the world with all sorts of colors, conferring upon it delightful flavor and fragrance. The Beloved's splendor envelops heaven and earth, embracing the entire cosmos. The Beloved is a rose that fills the garden of the lover's heart, intoxicating it with wondrous perfumes.

The adoration that the lover retains for the Beloved is a mystery. It is a transcendent feeling that manifests in the way we have inadequately tried to describe above. As to its outward manifestation, one poet has attempted to express it in this way:

*The forms you take change into uncountable colors,  
Ah! To seize my mind, and yet to not know you!  
Anywhere you enter, into the forms of others,  
You leave not my sight, for everywhere I see you!*

Regarding the manifestation of love, a mystic once said:

Put your faith in the Beloved and never find yourself disheartened. Submit yourself to Him and hold no desire for anything other than He. The charm of the Beloved emerges when there are no objections, no pretenses. Know that all of your love is laid out in front of Him. Therefore, hold not an atom's weight of love toward anyone other than He.

Here are yet another mystic's words on this topic:

The passionate adoration that the lover holds for the Beloved turns any harassment or harm caused by the common folk into

glory, and apparent poverty into honor and privilege.

The lover associates no other desire with his desire for the Beloved, even the wish to be rewarded with paradise. Everything that might be deemed precious in this life or the next is relinquished for the Beloved's sake. The lover takes pleasure neither in himself nor in anything else apart from his beloved, who is God Almighty. Regarding this Nasīmī declares:

*In every moment and at every turn my beloved I greet.  
Without Him, my lungs can't take in the air.  
No drink my thirst can slake; the fire grows in heat.  
If I am not to be with Him, all would be despair.*

Furthermore, it is of little consequence if the lover proclaims loudly before the Beloved: "Behold! This is my Beloved!" It is more important to have the Beloved declare about the lover: "My lover adores me, and for that I love him and I long for him." The moment the lover gains this honor, he will enter into a state of absolute bliss, and nothing else in creation will possess any value. Even if he were to be offered everything contained in the two worlds, it would not be worth the dust on the bottom of the Beloved's shoes, as Sayyid Nizamoğlu writes:

*You can have in this cosmos everything you see;  
But one eternal friend, one beloved, is enough for me!*

Success on this path comes only when the lover begins to inhale the fresh fragrance of truth during his journey, a fragrance that allows him to uncover traces of his beloved.

The mystics of Islam have always maintained that there is no need to search high and low for God. He is concealed within you, as the exalted Prophet Muhammad once stated: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." This spiritual state has been expressed in such detail in the poems of so many mystics that there is no doubting its reality. For instance, we have these verses by our Naim Frashëri found in is poem *Lulet e verës* (Summer Flowers):

*I searched for God Great and True,  
Combing every place.  
Until my heart I gazed into  
And there beheld His face!*

## LOVER & BELOVED TOGETHER

According to the insights of our Bektashi mystics, once the state of oneness has been obtained, the lover and the Beloved remain together endlessly and can never be separated. Together they are, as we noted above, like an artery within the body, without which the body could not live. Hence, they must be together forever. The lover and the Beloved can likewise be compared to the interdependence of soul and body, for without both an individual could not live. Were this union not true, words like “love”, “lover”, and “beloved” would just be sounds coming from the mouth, existing only as empty expressions.

As we have mentioned earlier, the only goal of the lover is to reach the Beloved. To attain this goal the lover will carry out any sacrifice, utterly exhausting his own individuality until he is completely dissolved in the Beloved. At that point, the seemingly distinct individualities of lover and beloved evaporate, and individual characteristics disappear as the two become one. This everlasting energy, this grand spirit (so grand that neither heaven nor earth can contain it!) is enthroned in the lover’s heart, bringing it true sanctification. The heart of the lover forever after becomes a Ka<sup>c</sup>bah for all believers. The lover stands simultaneously both lover and beloved. All mystic poets, not only those of the Bektashi Order, have attempted to express this sublime state, which is, in reality, indescribable. For instance, Shams-i Tabrīzī declared:

*O beloved! If once in my life a second without You I spent,  
From that time and from that day I forever repent!*

The great Fuzūlī similarly penned:

*Exactly what are You then, O beloved, if I am I?  
If You are You, then exactly what am I?*

To reach oneness with the Beloved, the lover must first take on the Beloved’s characteristics. Eventually, he will absorb and assimilate these completely. The lover then becomes a reflection of Almighty God – who is utterly independent and need of nothing. Moreover, like the Lord of all existence, the lover too becomes a much-adored beloved for all those seeking the ultimate beloved.

The lover happily hands over his physical form in service to the

Beloved; and having wholly submitted to the Beloved, the lover's life, death, direction, and everything else are no longer in his hands. These are seen as gifts given to him by the Beloved. When the lover becomes one with the Beloved, he finds everything that he needs. In fact, he becomes the owner of a magnificent treasure as he comes to reflect both lover and beloved. About this Nasīmī states:

*In the face of the Beloved  
I discovered Ar-Rahmān.  
Those who read this face  
Find the words of Al-Kur'ān.*

As soon as the lover demonstrates his commitment to the path, as well as his consistency and boldness, the Beloved will not wait to greet the lover at the end of the journey; rather the Beloved will move forward to embrace the advancing lover. When this meeting occurs, the lover's spiritual state will expand. The lover will mystically transform into the Beloved, bonding with him to the point where not one iota of distinction remains between the two.

Such a state cannot be observed with the physical eye, or even comprehended or felt by others. Only the lover is aware of his state; only he can perceive it. The lover comes to know God through his own heart. No other person can discern it, given that no mark or sign of it can be readily noticed on the physical body. The veil that covers this spiritual state is the physical body – and though hidden by matter, this state exists, and it can be noticed by the eyes of those who have also reached it. This is precisely what mystics like Jamāl ud-Din Uşşakī, who sought to speak of God's splendor, have tried to express:

*He's closer to you than yourself;  
Don't imagine Him otherwise.  
Search inside and there pursue  
He's there without disguise.*

*He's within your sacred soul;  
He's in your beating heart.  
Look within yourself;  
From you He's not apart!*

This theme is also conveyed by our Naim Frashëri in his stanza:

*Within you He is dwelling.  
Yet among stones you search for Him,*

*And fables made for telling.  
That's why you can't uncover Him.*

Another poet, Rafī'ī, penned:

*The one who stands in both these worlds  
As master and sultān,  
From Him you'll surely find your cure,  
For the pain, He's the dermān.*

*To spy the very face of God,  
Go to Him and see!  
He'll unfasten all those burdens  
And set your dear heart free.*

In truth, the lover not only becomes the Beloved, but he also becomes all of the prophets, messengers, and saints. The lover is the revealer, and the one to whom is revealed, a point which the great Ibn 'Arabī makes in his *Kitāb ul-Ahadiyyah*:

He does not exclude you, nor are you excluded from Him. When you are addressed as “you” do not think that you exist with an independent essence, or qualities and attributes. In truth, as an individual you have never existed, nor do exist, nor ever will exist. Without being, your essence is with Him and in Him. Without having any identity, you are Him, and He is you. When you know yourself to be nothing, then you will truly know your Lord. Otherwise, you will know Him not.

Nasīmī likewise spoke of this matter, saying: “I long to draw near to Him, even though in actuality I am Him. Whoever seeks to separate Him from me is attempting the impossible!”

Let us try to simplify this point to make it a little more understandable: When the lover fully enters the path to God, he will eventually arrive at the station of *fanā' fillah*, at which point he can be considered a mirror of the Beloved. The lover's self disappears, and beloved and lover are no longer separated from one another by the veil of the ego. The lover inwardly transforms into a splendid, magnificent and solitary light. When the ego disappears in the manner described above, the lover disappears, and there remains only the Beloved and nothing else, precisely as the poet Sayyid Nizamoğlu proclaims: “Remove the self between us so that I may remain You, O my love, O God Almighty!”

The lover spiritually progresses with the Beloved in his heart, and he comes to know divine love fully – as the famous mystic Niyāz-i Mişrī says: “We thought we were distant from Him. However, when we looked and listened, we found the Beloved in us.”

Obviously, there is no more suitable place to behold the Beloved than in the heart of His lover, who is the perfected human being. Such a person becomes the locus of the Beloved, and thus the individual is made the *wakīlullahi fī'l arz*, God’s earthly representative. Nothing other than God is found in the house of the lover’s heart, and this becomes *ḥaқīkat*, or reality. This is why the one who has reached such a state calls himself *fakīr* (poor one), because his heart is devoid of everything except the Beloved, which is what the Prophet Muḥammad meant when he said: “Poverty is my pride.”

A God-filled heart is the true Ka‘bah, the heavenly station where the wayfarer finds permanence in oneness. This is the meaning of Nasīmī’s verse:

*My body became God’s holy shrine;  
My face the Lord of the 18,000 worlds makes shine;  
He who remains a hidden treasure in me you’ll find.*

Our noble Prophet once said: “The believer is the mirror of the believer.” So take the mirror into your hands! Behold yourself, along with all the worthy qualities you will need to adorn yourself with to reach perfection. In the weighty lines above, Nasīmī says that whosoever knows himself knows the Beloved, God Almighty – which is in complete accordance with the words of the great Muḥammad: “He who knows himself knows his Lord.”

## BEKTASHI VIEWS ON WAHIDAT AL-WUJŪD

Like the most Islamic mystics, Bektashis fully embrace the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd*, which we have explained in detail in the section on Ibn ‘Arabī. However, let us recap: *Wahdat al-wujūd* purports that the entire universe exists as a single essence. Given that created things do not intrinsically enjoy an independent essence, their survival is contingent on the ultimate essence, who is fully independent. This ultimate essence is God. There are a number of verses in the Qur’ān allude to this reality:

*God! There is no deity save Him,  
the Alive, the Eternal.*

﴿Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:255﴾

This particular verse perfectly communicates *wahdat al-wujūd* and confirms its reality. Everything that exists is created through God's everlasting existence, and as such, creation cannot be anything other than a *tajallī* (emanation) of His lordship. Our Bektashi masters (and all other mystic masters for that matter) have advised us not be deceived by the apparent multiplicity of creation. Everything ultimately originates from a single divine fountain, a fountain which creates and oversees its creation. It is from this oneness that everything that has existed, that now exists and that will exist is generated.

*Wahdat al-wujūd* can be more simply explained using the example of numbers, which the eye may see as countless, but which are, in essence, nothing more than the number 1 repeated. When 1 is repeated it becomes 2, 3, 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000, 100,000, 1,000,000, and so on, ad infinitum. Though each number seems different in its manifestation, it is, in fact, nothing other than a repetition of its source, which is 1.

The ultimate One (Al-*Aḥad*) manifests Himself in everything and appears in countless forms. He is the first and the last, and there is no other reality than He. A person who has reached spiritual perfection can understand *wahdat al-wujūd* quite easily, for notions of "I" and "you" have been entirely removed from sight, thereby leaving the reality of the One, who is God Almighty and Exalted! This reality has been splendidly affirmed by the poet Karaçelebizādeh ʻAbd ul-ʻAzīz Majdī, who penned these words:

*All the different things  
Emerge from a single source.  
The many endless colors  
Proclaim His face with force.*

This lofty and profound perception is further expressed by Naim Frashëri:

*In the ocean the eye sees  
In each wave all of the seas.  
Look closely then at each wave,  
So your eye too perceives.*

Bektashi mystics have further explained *wahdat al-wujūd* using the example of a plant, which emerges from a small seed. As the seed grows and develops, it takes on diverse shapes and colors. When it finishes its development, the plant produces a seed, which was its original form. Thus,

the plant is nothing other than a seed changed into other forms, all of which progressively morph and may experience the countless hardships of existence. However, the plant's essence – the life encapsulated in the seed – remains unchanged. It merely evolves physically whenever the time for transformation comes. The plant/seed always contains its essence, and that essence suffers no change. Nor can it be replaced by an entirely different essence.

When God Almighty decrees for a thing to come into existence, that thing evolves according to the specific nature assigned to it. That thing grows, deteriorates, and expires; but the ultimate essence of its creation – God Almighty – forever remains in existence, incomparable and unending. God reveals His power by setting each living thing on its particular course of development. This is proof of His perfect mastery over everything and His endless creative power. Given the vast variety of colors and creatures in the world, there can no doubt about this. All of creation is at the same time *māsiwā*; all will flow back into His exalted divine oneness, to be gathered and dissolved. Only He remains eternal and forever above time.

It should be emphasized here that the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* has nothing to do with the intellectual theories offered by ancient Greek philosophers. *Wahdat al-wujūd* is an awareness that takes root in the midst of the garden of the soul; it is a knowledge stirred and nurtured by *‘ilm-i ladunī*, as stated by the great Persian mystic and poet, *Farīd ud-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār*:

A wayfarer's spiritual illumination can never be found in archaic Greek philosophies; rather it must be sought within his heart. One cannot reach the goal without detaching oneself from such philosophies, because that which is to arise from heart cannot be acquired through intellectual exercises.

To end with, *‘Aṭṭār* gives this advice:

See everything as one, for only one reality truly exists. In desiring the path of perfection, you must become like dust. Your ego must be subdued and dispersed. You must be so self-effaced that you become like soil trampled underfoot. When you are reduced in this way, you will arrive at the goal. So overcome your ego! When that occurs, the mystic road will open, and you will behold the unchanging essence of the Real [Hakk], which is a sun that never sets!

In keeping with ‘Attār’s guidance, the Bektashi masters view conquering the ego as a crucial act for attaining perfection. One cannot progress spiritually with it unshackled. We should not need to explain that by “conquering the ego” we mean giving importance neither to yourself nor to the abilities you possess – things that, if given prominence, would only serve to rouse the ego and thus thwart spiritual progress. If the ego displays itself through some wrongdoing or act of haughtiness, the heart will darken, and advance will be blocked.

Therefore, anyone who enters this path and is serious about to traveling it all the way to perfection, must subdue the ego, even though he may be educated, or affluent, or possessing a grand position, like that of boss, agha, bey, pasha or even monarch. Not only does a resolute wayfarer need do away with such worldly titles, but he must also forever expel their allure from heart and soul so that true humility before God can manifest itself and propel him along the mystic path. History is filled with the examples of saints who willingly relinquished powerful temporal positions for the sake of this path. Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Veli could have been the governor of Khorāsān; yet he rejected this position, casting all thought of it aside. Sersem ‘Alī Dede was an grand vizier, and when he chose to forsake the world and enter the Bektashi Path, he resigned from his position and stripped himself of all of its authority and distinction.

Such is the practice of the saints who have followed the path to the Beloved – and not only Bektashi saints but mystics throughout the world. A striking example of one such person is the illustrious Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, who having received sacred inspiration abandoned his kingdom to travel the world in threadbare clothes. He completely stripped himself of his regal position, and using spiritual struggle, advanced so far along the path that in the end he became one of the foremost saints of all time and an inspiration for all subsequent spiritual wayfarers.





# Advice from Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī

# 11

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In keeping with the promise made earlier in this book, we would now like to present a sample of the counsel and guidance that Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī left as an *amanah* to all those seeking to follow his spiritual path. However, for us to fully benefit from the maxims of this saint, his advice must not only be read, but it must also be put into practice.

Hajjī Bektash Velī's spiritual counsel has been compiled in the *Fawā'id al-Fukarā* (Benefits for the Poor ones), which is more commonly known as the *Kitāb al-Fawā'id*. To familiarize our readers with its content, we will present some of its passages. We pray that all may take benefit from this profound spiritual wisdom!

❖  
*Useful Advice 1*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī noted that the Prophet Muhammad once said:

- God's law is my discourse,
- The spiritual path is my undertaking,
- Knowledge is my only possession,
- Reality is my internal state,
- Virtue is my religion,
- Love is my foundation,
- Exhilaration is my means of movement,
- Respect is my companion,
- Knowledge is my weapon,
- Trusting in Allah is my veil,
- Contentment is my treasure,
- Righteousness is my accommodation,
- Certainty is my residence, and
- Poverty is my pride.

The poverty mentioned by the Prophet contains many levels of meaning. The most apparent meaning is being stripped of any material property that we may possess. However, this notion can be taken further by applying it to anything. For example, if we are in love with God it is better to be stripped of everything except that love, even of speech – for even if we were deprived of language, we could pray:

*In this never-ending tale of Your love it's best to keep still.*

*From the wine of this love enduring, award me a chalice;*

*From Your goblet of bliss a joyful ending for me will.*

*I seek from You nothing other than the wish of wishlessness!*

*O Hakk! The object of desires, fulfill my longing!*

*From the sacred realm of non-being give me loving kindness.*

*Hope is that in nothingness my deeds will moreover be good.*

*On endlessness' path, what is freedom and compulsion to me?*

*I lay my head at the holy place where Ahmād Mukhtār stood.*

Hajjī Bektash Velī gives this advice to the wayfarer: “If today you appear disgraced in this world because of poverty, tomorrow you’ll gain a face sparkling like a diamond.” He then adds: “The Prophet Muḥammad said these words about poverty, ‘Buckling under the weight of poverty is like unbelief.’”

Countless religious scholars have written commentaries on these words, and their general conclusion has been that the actual meaning of poverty has nothing to do with a lack of material possessions. Those who follow this path and reach the goal will be stripped of everything, gaining in its place complete spiritual awareness – a joy that will forever enrich. This is the significance of the Prophet’s words: “Poverty is my pride, and I delight in it.”



### *Useful Advice 2*

Hajjī Bektash said, “Knowledge is the fruit of learning, while affinity is the fruit of love.” And he continued:

A dervish came before his master, Khwājah Ahmād Yasawī, and said, “O master who has attained Ḥaqq! Please tell me about divine oneness.”

The noble teacher gave orders for a large chunk of sugar to be fetched, and when it was brought, he said to the dervish, “What is this?”

“It is sugar, my master,” replied the dervish.

Then the Khwājah gave orders for the sugar to be taken

away, broken into three pieces and brought back. The dervish broke the sugar into pieces and brought these back to the master, who asked, “What do these pieces resemble?”

“This piece,” said the dervish, “looks like a horse; this one a camel; and the third, a man.”

“Now take all these pieces, grind them together as you would flour,” said Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī, “and then bring them back to me.”

The dervish left and ground all the pieces of sugar together. When he carried the sugar back on a platter, the teacher asked, “What is this that you now have brought?”

“It is the sugar, my master,” replied the dervish.

At that moment Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī gave the desired explanation of the question of divine oneness, saying:

*We're like that and like that we'll stay  
In the Two Worlds, tomorrow and today.*

Hajjī Bektash then added: “To look for another friend apart from the friend that you have (i.e. God) is a sign of love's betrayal and a rejection of mystic awareness.”

✿  
*Useful Advice 5*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash said: “O dervish! Before the announcement of his prophethood, God secretly commanded Muḥammad to forsake erroneous beliefs, to direct himself to true faith and to embrace the creed of Abraham – a creed that all previous prophets confirmed. When this faith was planted in Muḥammad's heart, he was henceforth called *‘abd*, or servant. By means of worship Muḥammad completely lost interest in the world and entered into a station of complete withdrawal from it. He then came to be called *zāhid*, or ascetic, and taken up with withdrawal, he cried out, ‘O God! Show us things as they truly are!’ Muḥammad reached *ma‘rifat* with this worship and was called *‘ārif*, or knower. While in this state, he entered love of God and was stirred by divine inspiration. Consequently, Muḥammad reached the rank of God's intimates and was called *walī*, or saint. When he arrived at this rank, God presented him with the honor of revelation, and at this time he was given the title of *nabī*, or prophet. And when Muḥammad magnified this revelation, he reached the highest of all ranks and was entrusted with the *Qur’ān*. He thus attained the rank of *Ūlū al-‘azm*, one of the ‘Eminent Prophets.’ And when Muḥammad brought a new law that superseded those of old, he was given the title *Khatim al-anbiyā’*, the ‘Seal of the Prophets.’”



### *Useful Advice 4*

When Ḥajjī Bektash Velī was asked to define mysticism he answered: "Mysticism and comfort cannot sit together, because the foundation of mysticism is the annihilation of everything save God. The wayfarer must cast off everything other than He."

Then he added: "Detach yourself from desire so that your soul may be free to satisfy every other yearning aside from it. Such detachment is called freewill. Yakīn (certitude) comes when the heart is relaxed and finds pleasure with God, His words and His commands. Thankfulness occurs when every gift from God is a delight to the heart."



### *Useful Advice 5*

Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī once advised Ḥajjī Bektash, saying: "If you want to find yourself always in paradise, be easygoing with everyone and never keep anger in your heart. If you want to progress on this path, never condemn anyone. You must be like a salve for a wound, not a barb that rips it open. If you want no harm to come to you from others, do not speak unkind words, do not think badly of anyone and do not engage in corruption. A true dervish does not despair when people upset him. A true dervish does not retaliate, even when he has the right to do so."

Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī then added these words: "If you ever seek to speak with God, always use these words: 'O God! Not for a single moment can I be without You. I am unable to measure Your gifts. Furthermore, not even a thousandth of a single gratitude could I utter for Your favors, even if every hair of my head had a tongue.'"



### *Useful Advice 6*

When people one day asked Ḥajjī Bektash Velī to perform a miracle he said: "Whoever desires to reveal his station and display miracles is nothing more than a boaster. But anyone who brings forth a miracle through no love of himself, such a person is one of God's saints."

On another occasion Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said to his own spiritual master: "O master! If I perform good deeds it will lead me to arrogance. Then again, if I don't perform such good deeds, I will become lazy. I don't know what to do!"

His master responded: "Perform good deeds! When you have completed them immediately seek God's forgiveness. I believe that in this way you will be led to neither arrogance nor laziness."

❖  
*Useful Advice 7*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash once told a follower of his: "One day the governor of Herat [a city in Khorāsān] was wearing a magnificent garment. While traveling along a road he met Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī, to whom he showed the appropriate respect. The ruler said: 'O accomplished guide! Is it permissible to pray wearing such clothes as these I'm wearing?' Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī chuckled when he heard this question. 'Why are you laughing?' the ruler asked in astonishment. 'I'm amused by your thoughtlessness!'" answered the Khwājah, 'You're not concerned about the harm and pain you inflict on your subjects – for which you will one day regret and for which you will be held responsible before God....but you're concerned about your clothes?' Hearing these words, the ruler tearfully begged for forgiveness and from that moment on he improved his behavior towards his subjects and became one of God's intimate and obedient servants."

❖  
*Useful Advice 8*

When Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī was once asked about the subject of *fakr* (spiritual poverty), he replied: "For us *fakr* manifests itself thusly: When you have nothing, you feel peaceful. And when you possess something, you give it away in order to escape from its burden."

❖  
*Useful Advice 9*

In another instance Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "This world bears resemblance to a rubbish heap and those who are smitten by it will reach their end and still not be separated from it."

❖  
*Useful Advice 10*

In another instance Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "A mystic who fears material poverty becomes a hypocrite. This is because devoted believers, in principle, should be content with whatever they have, and they should possess no desire to amass excessive wealth. True believers rely on God and trust that God will never leave them without adequate provisions."

❖  
*Useful Advice 11*

When asked about *ilm al-yakīn* Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Knowledge of certainty (or nearness to God) is attained when you become His intimate,

when you've completely melted away in Him and when you abide in Him."

This means that when the wayfarer attains complete conviction and arrives at the station of *yakīn*, he sees nothing other than God reflected in every creature.



### *Useful Advice 12*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash once said: "If you are preoccupied with what you've done in the past you'll lose the now. Likewise, don't worry about the future. You are solely commanded by God to worship Him 'until certainty comes to you.'"

He then added: "O you who constantly repents! In spite of everything, when will you seek repentance for your repentance?"

In other words, you must try to improve yourself by making fewer and fewer mistakes. For if there is no improvement in your actions and character, seeking forgiveness is pointless.



### *Useful Advice 13*

Ḥajjī Bektash was one day asked about well-being. He replied: "Genuine well-being is when you are close to God, be it only for a moment."



### *Useful Advice 14*

When asked about generosity Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "Generous is he who overlooks the shortcomings of his brothers and sisters, and behaves as if he knows nothing about these."



### *Useful Advice 15*

On another occasion Ḥajjī Bektash said: "The Prophet Muhammad stated that one hour's worth of contemplation is better than seventy years of worship. This means that one who unfetters his mind is better than one who has pursued the material world for seventy years all the while worshiping on the side."

The aim of contemplation is to have no other thought than that of God, which in Islamic mystical terminology is called *huzūr*. In reality, a person's worship isn't worth a thing if his mind and soul are not focused on God, even if such a person prays and prays for a thousand years. One hour of reflection focused on God is infinitely more precious and pleasing to Him.

❀  
*Useful Advice 16*

A person once asked Ḥajjī Bektash Velī about the acts demanded by mysticism. He responded: "Every notion that's in your head must be abandoned. Everything that's in your hand must be given away. After that you do what a man does when he falls into a deep well."

In other words, you shouldn't depend on your own judgments, or opinions, or knowledge, or even your possessions. Everything has to be removed, thereby forcing you to rely solely on God – like a person who has fallen into a deep well. Such an unfortunate person has no hope of salvation except in his Creator. Then Ḥajjī Bektash Velī added: "Neither heaven nor earth are what separate people from God. What separates people from God are the words 'I' and 'You.'"

The words "I" and "You" express ego, a thing – as we have explained earlier – that acts as a barrier keeping humanity apart from its Creator. These two words are coverings that prevent us from seeing anything but ourselves. This is what Kaygusuz Sultān declares before God:

*I, Kaygusuz, am standing here;  
Take away what divides us, O dear!  
Make the veil that blocks undone  
That we may walk together as one!*

❀  
*Useful Advice 17*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī was once asked what he thought about the *samāc*, or spiritual dance. This is what he said: "*Samāc* is *mustahak* (worthy) for those who know truth, *mubāh* (permissible) for the learned, and *harām* (prohibited) for sinners." He then added these words: "Whoever rushes to attain lofty states ahead of their time has labored in vain."

In other words, if you have decided to undertake the spiritual path you must work slowly but surely to reach your objective. It may be wrecked if it is reached before its time through over-eagerness to arrive at it proper away.

❀  
*Useful Advice 18*

One day Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī advised a dervish by saying: "O dervish! This *khirkah* (dervish cloak) is invested in such a way that it burns away arrogance, vulgarity, bravado and all other unrefined qualities found within. But let these things burn up in secret and let not the flames protrude outwards. Eat bread in such a way that it is easy to digest, otherwise it will cause troubles."

He then added, "O dervish! Once Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī inspired me with this advice: 'In every endeavor you enter into, perform it in a way so perfect that whoever should come to see of it – even 'Izrā'īl [the Angel of Death] himself – will see no need to exchange it with another, better act. You yourself must be the master of that act.'"

In other words, perform your work in a manner that its reaches excellence, devoid of any shortcomings. This will give you success, for if defects appear... well, as they say, "Nothing can be hidden from one who has eyes."



### *Useful Advice 19*

When Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī was asked once about how it could be possible to see God's visage and obtain His support, he said: "Seek Him by looking more often into the mirror of veracity and sincerity." Then he added these words: "A body that has not melted like a candle and eyes that have not been sewn shut with the needle of disdain for anything save God cannot brighten the home or the heart with the sought-after goal. You must plant at the appropriate time; then reap."



### *Useful Advice 20*

Again a dervish asked Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī about reliance on God, to which he replied: "The one who relies on God is he who does not expect protection or any bequest for himself from anyone other than He."



### *Useful Advice 21*

One day Ḥajjī Bektash Velī came upon a dervish of his who happened to be in a very worried state. After he inquired about the dervish's anxiety he said: "Your fretful heart has been brought about by the imprint of the world's tomfoolery. When will you truly renounce the world's nonsense so that it won't make this bad impression on you? If you do this your heart will become tranquil."

Then he added: "One who is removed from the world is one unaffected by worry. And a stouthearted man is he who doesn't worry and doesn't even bother with the things he is entitled to."



### *Useful Advice 22*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "The exalted Prophet Muḥammad came to me in a dream saying, 'O my son! Keep your dress clean so that you

may take what is allotted to you.' I inquired, 'But Messenger of God! What are my clothes?' He answered saying, 'God has covered you with five types of clothing, which are the clothing of islam (submission), the clothing of imān (faith), the clothing of tawhīd (oneness), the clothing of ma'rifat (knowledge), and the clothing of mahabbah (love). These clothes must be free from filth, be it external or internal.'"

✿

*Useful Advice 23*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Don't regret the past and don't worry about the time that has yet to come; rather see to it that your current situation is in good shape."

✿

*Useful Advice 24*

Hajjī Bektash Velī was once asked what the best thing in the world was, and he said: "The best thing in the world is the heart of the dervish who remembers God." Then he added: "One who wastes his time but loves God is better than one who recites the Kur'ān but doesn't have his heart and mind focused on God."

When asked another time about who could be considered a genuine knower of spirituality, Hajjī Bektash Velī replied: The one who 'knows' is the one who knows nothing at all about the material world and all contained therein. He is certainly not the one who puts on a tattered khirķah and sits down on a prayer rug to pray, all the while having a heart devoid of remembrance of God."

✿

*Useful Advice 25*

When they asked Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī about *riżā* (resignation) and *taslīm* (surrender) he said: "For my followers, these two words together mean entrusting everything to God and relying on Him. *Riżā* is leaving the results of each act to God, but assigning whatever good comes out of it to yourself. However, *taslīm* emerges when even that which rightfully belongs to you is placed in God's hands, and you think no further of it. This state is far superior to *riżā*. Whereas *riżā* means handing things over to God – who values good deeds – with the intention of winning His favor, the wayfarer seeks nothing of this in the state of *taslīm*. Such are those who have handed over everything to God, good or bad, together with their being, saying: 'I need neither intellect nor reasoning, nor any other thing, including my own self. All I need is God.'"

To explain this point further Hajjī Bektash Velī narrated this particular event: "One day, Imām Muḥammad al-Bākīr, along with his son, Imām Ja`far as-Ṣādīk, went to visit Anas ibn Mālik.<sup>34</sup> Imām Ja`far inquired about Anas' spiritual condition, to which he replied: 'I'm in a condition that relishes old age more than youth, poverty more than wealth and discomfort over wellbeing.' When he finished these words, Anas turned and asked the Imām about his spiritual condition, to which the Imām responded: 'I'm in a state where I take pleasure in being regarded as young or old. If I'm considered poor, I'm poor, and if I'm said to be rich, I'm rich. If they say I'm happy, I'm happy and if they say I'm wretched...I'm content!'"

From this it can be understood that Anas was in the station of *riżā*, while the Imām was in the station of *taslīm*.

✿  
*Useful Advice 26*

When Hajjī Bektash Velī was asked who can be considered a *fakīr* (poor one) in the truest sense of the word, he said: "A *fakīr* is he who is in need of nothing save God."

That is to say, when one has completely vanished in God, one exists no more, and thus has no wants or needs, because God is absolutely free of need.

✿  
*Useful Advice 27*

Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "When God endows the wayfarer with spiritual abilities, everything he encounters becomes agreeable; for when one reaches such a lofty rank, there is no longer a sense of pleasure or displeasure. So strive, O dervish, to reach God's house and be not diverted from the path! Should you leave this way, you will find no resting place anywhere. Whoever leaves this door will never be able to find another threshold. Why? How can you imagine separating from your Lord when not a moment has gone by when He has not bestow mercy and kindness upon you? Knowing this, how can you offer love to that one [i.e. Satan] who has never cast a loving glance towards any human being?"

✿  
*Useful Advice 28*

On another occasion Hajjī Bektash Velī gave this advice: "Be careful that your intimacy with God never diminishes. Take heed that this closeness never grows cold. For a dervish there can be no parting from the Beloved. When such a person grabs hold of the station of mystic intimacy with God, distances in time and space are of no consequence."

Then the saint uttered the words that we have mentioned earlier in our book: "If you are with me spiritually, you are next to me, even if you are in Yemen. But if you are not with me spiritually you might as well be in Yemen, even if you are next to me."

❖  
*Useful Advice 29*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī once said: "One night I beheld God Almighty in a dream, and I asked, 'What path leads to You?' He replied, 'Once you have overpowered and eradicated your ego you will have found Me.'"

❖  
*Useful Advice 30*

One day a dervish appeared before Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī and asked for permission to travel. When Hajjī Bektash Velī asked him why he needed to go wandering about, the dervish said: "O upright man! Water becomes stagnant when not flowing." Hajjī Bektash Velī responded: "What of a sea? It neither flows nor becomes stagnant." Then he added: "Flying birds cannot reach outer space, but they can rise high enough so as not to snag their feet in the snares that hunters have erected to catch them. Consider how this is like a dervish. Even if he has not yet achieved the rank of perfection, he will continue to distance himself from the hullabaloo of the world, thereby lessening some of its load and saving himself from constant unease. For this reason the righteous have said: 'Whosoever remains in one place becomes a man and whosoever travels finds men.'"

❖  
*Useful Advice 31*

Someone once asked Hajjī Bektash Velī what was *farz* (obligatory) and what was *sunnah* (suggested) for a dervish. He responded: "For a dervish, forsaking the two worlds is sunnah and love of God is *farz*."

❖  
*Useful Advice 32*

When someone asked Hajjī Bektash Velī to describe a person who is distinguished in the spiritual sense, he said: "He is great whose outward state is like that of the common folk, while his interior state is like that of God's saints. His external temperament displays goodness and his interior disposition exemplifies virtue."



### *Useful Advice 33*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "Someone once sent a gift to a dervish, and the dervish accepted it. His friends disapproved, saying that he should not have accepted it, since taking things from others diminishes one's standing. The dervish said: 'When I accepted it, I saw my lowliness, and in the giver I saw merit. Not accepting the gift may have meant honor for me, but it would have meant embarrassment for the giver. So by accepting it, I was showing the giver reverence and showing my ego its lowly state, rather than dishonoring him and honoring myself.' It is more desirable to preserve the honor of others than to save your own".

On another instance Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "A dervish is he who does not turn away things that are given to him."



### *Useful Advice 34*

Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said once: "Two things wear a person out: taking up *nafl* (supplemental) acts of worship at the expense of performing those that are obligatory; and performing the formal prayer, putting the various limbs of his body in motion, yet having no presence of God in the heart. It is for that reason that the Prophet said: 'If the heart is not present in the prayer, there is no prayer.'"



### *Useful Advice 35*

Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "The beauty of a person lies in the geniality of his speech. His perfection lies in the righteousness of his deeds."



### *Useful Advice 36*

Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said this about those who can be considered perfected dervishes: "Dervishes are they who are perfected and inspired, to the extent that should anyone stand up against them and become their enemy, God will remove whatever light is in the heart of that person and darken it."



### *Useful Advice 37*

Once Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "A person who begs God for his daily provisions, or who questions the decrees of the Ultimate Provider, should know that he can never gain his sufficient needs by begging, since God is responsible for providing one's daily provisions. Hence there is no need to

beseech and plead. The only thing one has to do is turn to God and submit. He will then fulfill all your wants without the need to ask."

❖  
*Useful Advice 38*

Hajjī Bektash Velī furthermore said: "When God blocks a person from the path to knowing Him and bars any interest from developing in regards to this matter, no one can enlighten that person, no matter how much relevant evidence for God is brought forward. Such a person will forever remain in darkness."

❖  
*Useful Advice 39*

Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Submission to God can be achieved by not filling the stomach, for filling the stomach plants the seeds of three weaknesses: 1. Heedlessness, which is caused by drowsiness, making one forget everything; 2. The intensification of lust, which makes one contemplate iniquity; and 3. The injury and ruin of the stomach, which is one of the pillars of life. Conversely, when the stomach is controlled one can achieve three things: 1. Heavenly wisdom; 2. Increased in zeal for worship; and 3. Intimacy with God."

❖  
*Useful Advice 40*

Hajjī Bektash Velī said the following: "There are four things in this world that can only be achieved by four other things: A ruler only gains success when his rule is tied to justice; victory over one's enemies is not gained without well-thought plans; hearts are won through nothing else but kindness; and a goal cannot be attained except through patience."

❖  
*Useful Advice 41*

Hajjī Bektash Velī also gave this advice: "The four things that can safeguard a ruler are: religious refinement, trustworthy advisers, a resolute and resolved foundation, and determination."

❖  
*Useful Advice 42*

Once Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī quoted a saying of Jesus Christ: "Salvation is found in four things, and when one speaks little, sleeps little and eats little, he will meet these four things. These are renunciation, asceticism, solitude, and contentment. In addition, four other things bring oneness with God. These are: sitting with the spiritually refined, consulting

with wise mystics, steering clear of the ignorant, and seeking moral support from people totally withdrawn from the world."



### *Useful Advice 43*

Ḩajjī Bektash Velī once narrated a saying of the saint Ibrāhīm ibn Adham: "These things are evidence of a great man: his respect for knowledge, his eschewing the ḥarām, and his frequenting people of the mystic path."



### *Useful Advice 44*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī once narrated a saying of Imām ul-Maṣṣūm: "Five things are signs of happiness: a true word spoken, commendable worship and works, searching for human excellence, striving for a life filled with *halāl* (religiously permissible) things, and conversation with dervishes, who are masters of their *hāl*, spiritual state."



### *Useful Advice 45*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "God shields His saints from unfit eyes. Their exterior is dressed with the clothing of protection from everything in this world. They are unknown to those stained with the muck of material existence. The common folk may assume that God's saint hunts after the goods of this world, but a saint's interior has been illumined with the splendor of spiritual elevation."



### *Useful Advice 46*

When asked which things are greater than all other things, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī replied: "They are two: Knowledge and forbearance. With knowledge one finds the path to God, and with forbearance one endures the suffering caused by the masses. Knowledge is of two kinds: The knowledge of *‘ubūdiyyah* (servanthood) and the knowledge of *rubūbiyyah* (lordship). All other knowledge springs from desire, or is a means to gain pride and arrogance. On this point the exalted Prophet Muḥammad said: "God is more apparent than the sun." Therefore, any person who clearly sees the sun and then asks for proof of its existence is completely deluded."



### *Useful Advice 47*

Intending to give guidance, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "The Prophet declared: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord.' In conformity with this

principle one might say that he who knows his Lord in His divinity knows himself in his servitude; he who knows himself in his poverty knows his Lord in His riches; he who knows himself in his remissness, knows his Lord in His faithfulness; he who has knows himself in deficiency, knows his Lord in perfection; he who knows himself in humility knows his Lord in His greatness; and he who knows himself as finite, knows his Lord as everlasting. Some from among the enlightened have said in regards to this: "Anyone who looks at himself and observes the different parts of the body immediately sees that to bring together these parts and put them in motion there needs to be a subtle power keeping everything working in harmony, and this power is the power of the Great Lord! Such a person concludes that except for God everything is created and derived."

❖  
*Useful Advice 48*

In another instance Hajjī Bektash Velī related a *ḥadīth ķudsī* in which God revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad this: "I put three things in three other things, which if sought elsewhere will not be found. I have joined wisdom to hunger; it will not be found with a sated stomach. I have placed affluence in contentment; so do not look for it in avarice. Complete fulfillment has been placed in knowledge, so do not search for it in ignorance."

❖  
*Useful Advice 49*

The exalted Imām ʻAlī said: "Faith is a thing undressed. Its garment is abstinence, its adornment is a sense of shame and its nourishment is appropriateness." Regarding this point, Hajjī Bektash Velī added: "A place that lacks beneficial knowledge is like a town without water. A place where self-denial is not found is like a tree without branches. A place where a sense of shame is not found is like a meal without salt. And anyone who does not strive to submit to God truly sees no need for the divine."

❖  
*Useful Advice 50*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "There are five things that, if done, are revolting: lighting a candle in front of the sun, putting a pretty face before a blind man, watering a desert, presenting a good meal to a filled stomach, and speaking lofty words to an ignoramus."



### *Useful Advice 51*

Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Someone once asked Ibrāhīm ibn Adham: 'How were you able to willingly abandon your throne along with its privileges?' He replied: 'Look! We all know that this world will pass away whether we like it or not. Therefore, I have abandoned it by my own will before it abandons me against my will!'"



### *Useful Advice 52*

Regarding a true dervish's state Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Among the grandees of religion, the scholars are sovereigns, while the dervishes are the shahs of piety. The scholars require thinking, while the dervishes require remembrance of God. A scholar without thinking is a mirage, while a dervish without remembrance of God is a ruin. A scholar devoid of thinking is a bird without wings, while a dervish without remembrance of God is a leafless tree. A scholar devoid of thinking is Noah without an ark, while a dervish without remembrance of God is a heart devoid of feeling. A scholar devoid of thinking is Moses without Sinai, while a dervish without remembrance of God is a lamp without light. Scholars require knowledge, and dervishes require sainthood. So the first instruction is: Smash the ego and find tranquility! There! I have given a sermon on entering the Path!"



### *Useful Advice 53*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī once said: "If you wish always to be under God's protection keep the following advice close to heart: Conduct yourself with fidelity toward God, justice toward His creatures, respect toward your betters, compassion toward your subordinates, forbearance toward your enemies, loyalty toward your friends, discipline toward yourself, liberality toward the dervishes, humility before the learned, and silence in the face of ignorance."



### *Useful Advice 54*

On one occasion Hajjī Bektash Velī told a dervish: "If someone were to ever ask you what advice you received from me, say this: If you stand up, stand up with the intention of serving. If you speak, speak words of wisdom, and wherever you sit, sit with good manners."

❖

*Useful Advice 55*

Hajjī Bektash Velī mentioned that God once said to Moses: "I built an abode of light and placed it as a trust inside Man. I engraved its name on his heart. Its form is of such a celestial rank that it is more expansive than the cosmos. The gift that issues forth from this abode is divine awareness. Its firmament is faith, its sun is impassioned love of God, its moon is adoring devotion, its stars are knowledge, its mountains are worship, and its trees are service. The leaves of these trees are supplication and their fruit is awareness. This house has four gates: knowledge, forbearance, patience and gratefulness."

❖

*Useful Advice 56*

On another occasion Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "If you can't cook the raw, at least don't make the cooked raw."

❖

*Useful Advice 57*

One day a king said to Hajjī Bektash Velī: "O saint! You may ask me for anything!" "Very well," replied Hajjī Bektash Velī. "Tell this fly to stop buzzing around me." "I can't command that fly," said the king. Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī then said: "If you can't even command this fly, how can you command anything to be done for me?"

❖

*Useful Advice 58*

A dervish once asked Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī about the station of dervishhood, and the saint replied: "Dervishhood is uninterrupted integrity and unending adoration of God." He then added: "Concerning dervishhood, 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī said: 'A dervish is like moist soil. He neither gives pain to the soles of feet nor does he stir up a trail of dust.'"

❖

*Useful Advice 59*

When asked about the *samā'* Hajjī Bektash Velī explained: "Samā'" is a means for the *ārifīn* (gnostics), a prayer for the *muhibān* (lovers) and a purpose for the *tālibān* (aspirants). The Prophet Muḥammad said this of it: 'For one group of people *samā'* is obligatory, for another group it is desirable; which is to say that for the sincere it is compulsory, for the aspirants it is commendable, but for those who are heedless it is blameworthy."

❖  
*Useful Advice 60*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "It is understood that God is more noticeable than the sun. Just as any master is recognized by his craftsmanship, God's faultless craftsmanship clearly appears in all places. To recognize God is so easy; but to recognize His saints is tricky because their craftsmanship and skill are concealed, for God has said of them: 'My saints are under My domes; only I know who they are.'"

❖  
*Useful Advice 61*

Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said one day: "You should realize that everything that comes from an 'ārif, in fact, comes from God. This is because an 'ārif has "died before he has died," allowing himself to be managed and directed by God. The limbs and organs of his body are continuously controlled by the divine, just like a pen writes but is led by the hand of the scribe. Even if outwardly incomprehensible, the words of an 'ārif do not flow capriciously from his mouth. They are filled with a purpose that will be later clarified."

❖  
*Useful Advice 62*

On another occasion Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "As the body needs its doctors, the spirit too needs its doctors, and these are the prophets and saints. When a person gets sick, he calls a physician, who advises him to take what will cure and avoid what will aggravate. Likewise, the prophets and saints advise to do this or that and not to do this or that so a sick soul can improve, becoming strong and lively. About this, the exalted Imam 'Alī spoke these words: 'Knowledge is of two types: material knowledge and sacred knowledge.'"

❖  
*Useful Advice 63*

On the subject of saints, Ḥajjī Bektash Velī once expressed this view: "The saints are also called *abdals*, because they replace each other and replenish their ranks and have been equipped with heavenly qualities."

❖  
*Useful Advice 64*

Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī said: "Conversing with the saints is more beneficial than praying alone, for if their words are understood, they will guide you along the path to God. A man trying to unravel a spiritual dilemma by himself will find that it takes so much time, and even then there's no

guarantee of its resolution; whereas an hour's conversation with a saint can solve the problem quickly and without misgiving. God has stated that He loves teaching spiritual knowledge without the intermediary of a master. However, this rarely occurs, and when it does, others can take no benefit from it. Accordingly, God has said in the Қur'ān: 'O ye who believe! Be mindful of your duty to Allah, and seek a means of approach unto Him.'<sup>135</sup> This 'means' refers to His saints, His intimates. By conversing with them, you'll find the path of excellence and the approach to God."



### *Useful Advice 65*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Satan can cut your spiritual quest at anytime and render you fuel for the Hellfire. However, he cannot keep company with God's saints. Satan declares in the Қur'ān: 'O my Lord! Because you put me in error, I shall indeed adorn the path of wickedness for them on the earth, and I shall mislead them all, except your servants from among them, the devoted ones.'<sup>136</sup> Thus Satan departs from the company of the righteous, as reflected in the saying: 'The devil fears the shadow of the exalted 'Alī.' Consequently, Satan cannot approach anyone who is close to God's saints."

At this point Hajjī Bektash Velī narrated a story: "One day a man saw Satan standing by the door of a mosque. He asked the devil what business did he have there, to which Satan replied: 'In this mosque there's a holier-than-thou fellow now making his prayers. But praying near him is an 'ārif; and I fear entering this mosque because of this 'ārif. Were it not for later, I would have quickly finished my work with the former!'"



### *Useful Advice 66*

In describing God's saints, Hajjī Bektash Velī gave the following details: "Many unqualified people can take on the outward form of God's saints. They speak holy words and appear in holy garb. However, anyone who has open eyes and a brain can distinguish such people from genuine saints and thus pay them no mind. Those who are attentive are like expert money changers who can tell real coins from fake."



### *Useful Advice 67*

Hajjī Bektash Velī was once asked if there is ever truly an end to the mystic's journey, to which he answered: "There is an end to the journey. But its stations are without end, for this path has two levels: The first is *towards* God and the other is *in* God. The first has an end, since it involves the extinction of the self, which finishes when this happens. But in the second,

the wayfarer thereafter wanders through the realms of God's boundless mysteries, and this never ends."

As we have stated above, this is called "The Journey in God," or *As-Sayr fi Allah*.



### *Useful Advice 68*

Intent on gaining spiritual benefit, a dervish one day asked Hajjī Bektash Velī about the significance of supererogatory prayers and fasts. He also asked about matters such as the significance of the spiritual guide, the disciple, prosperity, poverty, etc., to which Hajjī Bektash Velī answered: "I do not see the need to describe these things since they have all been explained very well by the saintly Khwājah 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī in his *Ilāhīnāmah*, where he says:

- Prayer that is not required is the work of old women.
- Fasting not done at the right time is merely saving food.
- Going on pilgrimage is to travel the world. But taking hold of a heart, now that's an accomplishment!
- Being a spiritual guide is to be a school teacher.
- Boasting about one's own qualities is foul.
- Giving news from the unknown is astrology.
- Revealing the degrees of one and all is predominance.
- Entrusting people to God is being a tattletale.
- Hurting another within is a crime.
- Uncovering secrets is lunacy and covering them is valor.
- Always anticipating the best for what you have done and for the gifts you have given is like trade.
- Taking gifts from the powerful is corruption.
- Being patient until the truth comes to light is bravery.
- Crying when you are sad is the apex of wretchedness.
- Buying miracles from another is ridiculous.
- Tearing your clothes when some disaster befalls you is idiocy.
- Keeping your tongue from promoting yourself is excellence.
- Praising yourself is a sign that you are asleep and in a stupor.
- Always being in fear is like eavesdropping.
- Being quiet shows integrity.
- Continuously showing merriment is foolishness.
- Constantly showing grief is repulsive.
- Selling off one's virtues is tasteless. Seeking virtue is liked. I bow to that one who does not sell off his virtues in the least.
- Praying to God in order to gain paradise is distasteful. Long-

ing for paradise is worshiping the ego.

- Showing sympathy to others is refinement.
- Showing justice is a duty.
- Being sincere is to always be successful.
- Befriending others is camaraderie.
- Always asking for things is repugnant.
- Always seeing the self is deficiency.
- Gathering a grandiose opinion of yourself is shameless work.
- Going against righteousness with wickedness is savagery.
- Going against wickedness with righteousness is gallant.
- Going against wickedness with wickedness is the work of a wretch.
- Leaving faith is disgrace.
- Talking about others is chitchat.
- Having your eyes on another's table is ruinous.
- The spirit gives life to the body; spiritual love gives life to the heart.
- Having a good disposition is well-being.
- Seeking things from others is like unbelief.
- Concerning yourself only with yourself is serenity.

All of these maxims that I have cited are the signs of human exuberance, and they can be summarized with these words: "We never give importance to people's words, but rather their acts. We never look to their exterior form, but rather to their inner being."



### *Useful Advice 69*

When Hajjī Bektash Velī was once asked to explain the state of the world, he only said these words: "What can I tell you about a thing which is gained with toil, retained with jealousy and taken from your hands with tears?"



### *Useful Advice 70*

One day Hajjī Bektash Velī gave his dervishes some advice that Khwājah ˓Abdullah al-Anṣārī bequeathed to posterity:

O disciples! Let not your life be lived in vain. Use it to obtain the prize of spiritual awareness. Take heed of my advice: Do not be separated from the worship of God • Knowledge gained is a weapon in hand • Do not be ashamed to ask questions • Seek safety in prayer from lust • Always remember death • Do not give in to the many desires of the ego • Do not think that the ignorant are truly alive • Do not place any

confidence in boorish religious fanatics • Understand that the greatest thing you can do is know yourself • Search for God's assistance in every act • Integrity and fear of God are deemed strong pillars • Steering clear of the ignorant is excellence • Do not speak of a thing unknown to the masses • Do not search out the imperfections of others; rather look to your own shortcomings • Demonstrate virtue in every act • Do not compromise with falsehood and do not exaggerate • Do not hurry when asked • Do not hesitate to say the right thing • Do not open your mouth without being asked • Do not go without being called • Do not sell that which you haven't yet acquired • Forgive others so that they may forgive you • Never speak about yourself • Do not pick up what you have not put down • Do not take as done what you have not finished • Never stand up without holding yourself accountable • If you do not carry out something yourself, do not expect others to do so for you • Never look to another's bread, but be generous with your own • Do not fear material poverty • Be cautious of your lust's commands • Do not neglect your health • Do not annihilate your enemy, even if he is defeated • Beware of the foe that you have in your own house • Do not become intimate with one you do not know • Be more acquainted with your own poverty rather than the abundance of others • Do not worry in vain • Whoever wants to be a friend of God should not give trouble to the common folk • and seek sincerity in speaking with awareness.



### *Useful Advice 71*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī once said: "Three things are essential for my disciples: that they carry on in humility, that they ceaselessly maintain their devotions, and that they are careful to abstain from forbidden things."

He then added: "They also must withdraw from the material world, since chasing after it is the beginning of every calamity."



### *Useful Advice 72*

On another occasion Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "Know that *wujūd* (existence) is of three sorts: The first is the *wājib ul-wujūd* (the indispensable existence), which belongs to God. This has neither beginning nor end. Then there is the *jā'iz ul-wujūd* (the permitted existence), which is the existence of all of His creation. This state is known to have a beginning and an end. Then there is the *mumtan'i ul-wujūd* (the impossible existence), such as God having a partner. Such a thing is utterly ridiculous and cannot happen."

Then he said the following: "O dervish! Know that the food of our disciples is of three types: 1. The food of *sharī'at*, where the disciple eats and thanks the ultimate provider, God, and shows submission to Him; 2. The food of *ṭarīkat*, where the disciple eats and remembers God in every bite; and 3. The food of *ḥaḳīkat*, where the disciple eats and sees God within himself."

❖  
*Useful Advice 73*

About the believers Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "True believers conform themselves to the words of the Prophet Muḥammad. They observe the commands of God and show compassion to His creatures, because the ḥadīth ḳudsī says: 'Dear to Me are those who in no way infringe on the rights of others, and detested by Me are those who seek my forgiveness out of fear of hell or longing for Paradise.'"

❖  
*Useful Advice 74*

Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "I treasure those dervishes who constantly busy themselves with the remembrance of God and who have given up on the charms of this world. A dervish should keep himself apart from the tumult of the common folk in order to facilitate the weakening of his fondness for material things.

In other words, one must forsake worldly desires and tastes in order to be outfitted with God's spiritual love, for in the holy books it is stressed that: "A true rememberer is he who is empty of all tastes except divine taste." On this matter God said, "So remember Me; I will remember you."<sup>37</sup>

❖  
*Useful Advice 75*

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī said: "People are of five sorts: the generous, who have little and yet still give; the open-handed, who have and give from what they have; the tightfisted, who have but yet do not give; the indigent, who neither have nor give; and the wretched, who not only do not have nor give, but hinder others from having and giving!"

❖  
*Useful Advice 76*

After all of these words of wisdom, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī tells us: "God created human beings from four elements and endowed them with

forty degrees. The first element is fire, and it contains that which commands the self to sin, the *nafs al-ammāra*. It has ten degrees. A person is in the worst possible position here, for the *nafs al-ammāra* is a merciless and domineering ruler, incessantly working for wickedness. The ten degrees that originate from it are:

1. Ignorance
2. Wrathfulness
3. Slander
4. Anger
5. Heart-filled hatred
6. Arrogance
7. Jealousy
8. Atheism
9. Rebellion
10. Suspicion

*May God save us from these!*

The second element is air, which encompasses the regretful self, the *nafs al-lawwāma*. It too is composed of ten degrees:

1. Withdrawal
2. Vigilance
3. Detachment
4. Humility
5. Charity
6. Forgiveness
7. Fasting
8. Pilgrimage
9. Struggle
10. Generosity

*By these the wayfarer strives to rise in rank and improve himself.*

The third element is water, which encompasses the inspired self, the *nafs al-mulhama*. This element has ten degrees, which are:

1. Intellect
2. Wisdom
3. Understanding
4. Inspiration
5. Insight
6. Spiritual state

7. Disclosure
8. Pilgrimage
9. Munificence
10. Sacrifice

This degree is the degree of mercy and self-improvement, for the *Kur’ān* says: 'We have sent thee (O Muhammad) only as a mercy to the worlds.'<sup>38</sup> And with this, God bestowed mercy on the self and guided it towards perfection and gratitude.

The fourth element is that of earth, which incorporates the serene self, the *nafs al-mutma’īna*. This level of consciousness bestows an outpouring of humility and freedom, until, when perfected, it reaches lofty stations and enfolds the soul in the greatest of lights, as the *Kur’ān* says: 'O serene self! Return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing, and enter among My servants and enter My Paradise.'<sup>39</sup> This state has ten degrees and they are:

1. Poverty
2. Patience
3. Justice
4. Contrition
5. Knowledge of God
6. Contentment
7. Affirmation
8. Certainty
9. Oath
10. Fidelity

Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī said about these degrees: "The heart is like a city ruled by two rival sultans. The first sultan is the intellect, while the other is accursed Satan. The intellect is the foremost sultan and insight is his agent. His soldiers are divine knowledge, self-restraint, good manners and munificence. The other ruler is foul Satan, and his works are depravity and wickedness. The ego is his agent and his soldiers are arrogance, jealousy, miserliness, avarice, anger, slander, excessive laughter, etc. Regarding these circumstances the Prophet Muḥammad advised the exalted Imam ʻAlī: 'When people do good deeds, God fills them with honor and He meets all of their needs. He then provides them with the honor of approaching His divine throne. So do good!'"



### *Useful Advice 77*

Finally, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī closes the *Kitāb al-Fawā’id* with these words:

O Lord, help me submit to You! Honor me with the crown of poverty! Draw me close with Your secrets and divert me from every road which leads not to You!

﴿الحمد لله﴾

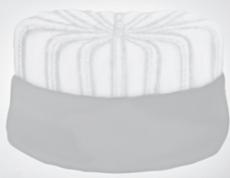
*O God! Bequeath Your light to us!*

*Āmīn!*



*Adab Ya Hū!*  
*Manners, O God!*

# Bektashi Poetry





*O ̄Alī!*





## Bektashi Poets & their Works

# 12

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To fulfill the promise made earlier in our book, we will now turn our focus to the topic of Bektashi literature. This literature encompasses all the poetry composed by our clergy and our laity wherein divine love is described and expressed in the ways we have mentioned above.

After the order was outlawed and suppressed in 1826 on the command of Sultan Mahmūd II, Bektashi texts have, unfortunately, been difficult to access. In the course of this repression, the great library housed in the tekke of Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān near Dimetoka (in what is now Greece) was burned, and the collections found in many other tekkes – including that of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī – likewise disappeared. Yet our spiritual poems, called *nefes*, have been kept alive through the generations on the tongues of Bektashis, who continue to sing them with pleasant melodies during the *muhabets* held in our tekkes and on other occasions.

Over the course of the seven centuries after Ḥajjī Bektash Velī's passing, poetry has been the primary means of expressing Bektashi mysticism and our wayfarers composed poems whenever the spirit moved them. Sometimes these were solitary compositions, while at other times they were multiple synchronized and well-arranged verses compiled in a *divān*.

To clarify, a *divān* is a collection of the poems of a particular poet gathered into book format. A *divān*'s poems tended to be arranged in a typically eastern manner [that is according to the Arabic alphabet], with those poems concluding with the letter "a" put first. After these come those ending with the letter "b" then those with "c", "d", "f," all the way to "zh" consecutively.

These poems, these *nefes*, played a crucial role in the rapid spread of the Bektashism in that they helped explain its principles to believers. No

other poetry in the world has been as assimilated and appreciated over the centuries by the common folk as Bektashi poetry. This should come as no surprise, as our poets seldom employed the high literary styles utilized in the poetry of other Islamic mystics, as we shall soon discover. This made Bektashi poetry somewhat easy to read and memorize.

Bektashi poetry seeks to enhance the spiritual disposition of its readers using technically austere verses filled with a simple melodic sweetness that is generally comprehensible to its readers. Having found a place in their hearts, these poems continue to touch countless individuals, drawing them to the mystic path.

These poems can be very inspiring when sung and a deep impression will almost certainly be made in the hearts of those listening attentively – be they Bektashi or not. Moreover, it is not only we who make this claim. The power of Bektashi poetry has been noted by those writers and academics around the world who have contributed to their study. For instance, the great Turkish historian Fuat Köprülü stated the following about Bektashi poetry in his book *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* (The Early Sufis in Turkish Literature):

Bektashi babas, unlike the other [Sufi] shaykhs, normally did not receive an extensive madrasah education and Bektashi dervishes were also, for the most part, plain and simple souls who grew up among the people. For this reason, they held the national language and literature in high regard instead of prizes and slavishly imitating Persian language and literary styles. It is for this reason too that the poets who thrived among them – most of whom had no madrasah education but were cognizant of the national taste – had a mentality capable of subtle and elegant thought... While they usually employed the '*arud*' meter and forms in a very humble and unsophisticated manner, they wielded the national meter and forms in a manner perfectly suited to the Turkish taste. The expressive sensitivities of these Bektashi babas were not tainted by the awe and enthusiasm that we feel toward the sublime examples of Persian literature and thus they preserved the simplicity and originality unique to the people...<sup>40</sup>

As we have stated above, Bektashi nefes revolve around the subject of

spiritual love – which is why we have prepared our readers by discussing this topic in detail. This mystic passion sprouted, matured and intensified so profusely in the hearts of our poets that it gushed out and flooded the world through verse.

It is important to note that our Bektashi poets made extensive use of allusions, metaphors and mystical symbolism in their works. Artistic figures of speech can more effectively communicate such views and experiences, like the annihilation of the ego, the forsaking the material world, being bestowed with divine illumination and so forth. These poems also frequently express adoration for the illustrious Prophet Muḥammad, the exalted Imam ‘Alī, the Prophet’s family, and the Twelve Imams – with special consideration given to the enormous sacrifice of Imam Ḥusayn and his martyred companions at the Battle of Karbalā’. Bektashi poems also express devotion, laudation, and praise for the founder of our order: Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī. They also extol his disciples, saints like Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān, Abdal Mūsā Sultān, Kaygusuz Sultān and other spiritual masters.

The central points of Bektashi doctrine are expressed with such skill and detail in these poems that only the most unsympathetic of individuals, impervious to the principles of mysticism, could fail to grasp their underlying meanings. This skill in expression will be seen in the examples presented below.

We have to admit that it would be impossible to examine in this book all of the Bektashi nefes composed over the centuries. Such a task would certainly produce countless volumes. Nor do we wish to present an extensive history and analysis of Bektashi literature, as that too would require several years of continuous writing. However, with our unexceptional abilities, we wish to present our readers with a small sampling of both classical and contemporary Bektashi poetry. Such a presentation will enable them to gain a general idea of the form and content of this particular genre of mystical poetry.

## **KHUNKĀR ḤAJJĪ BEKTASH VELĪ**

Having presented this introduction, let us now begin our survey with two poems penned by our master, Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī. These have been passed down to us as a sacred trust, having been sweetly sung in the muhabets of our tekkes for centuries. One of these nefes skillfully describes

His Holiness's experience of being in the spiritual station of "The Journey with God," *As-Sayr ma<sup>c</sup> Allah*, a station explained in detail above. In this lofty station, nothing remains of the wayfarer's individuality, for in this station he has been completely dissolved in God, abiding permanently in Him after that. This is the condition where nothing exists other than God, and thus it is God who is doing the speaking and God who is doing the acting. The physical form of the perfected human becomes the proverbial "pen in the hand of the scribe." The pen does its work, but it is directed in its writing by the scribe, who is, in this case, God Almighty. This concept is clearly explained by Ḥajjī Bektash Velī in this poem:

*When in the secret of nothingness the cosmos was cloaked,  
Alone with Hakk in His oneness was I.*

*He created this domain, in that moment evoked  
His image then portrayed, and the artist was I*

*In a coat of elements enwrapped was I;  
From fire 'n air, water 'n earth derived was I;  
With the Best of Mankind sent to the world was I;  
In this realm the same age as Adam was I.*

*The son of Adam's loins, Seth I came to be.  
I, as Noah, braved the raging flood courageously.  
Once in this domain Abraham I came to be;  
With stone in hand the builder of God's House was I.*

*And O Dear! Once I appeared as Ishmael.  
Isaac, Jacob, Joseph – these holy men was I as well.  
As Job I came, "Have mercy!" oft' I yelled.  
The one whose form the worms tore through was I.*

*Zachariah was I, who in half they hacked,  
As the Baptist, beheaded was I, my blood they did exact.  
I as David came; to my ranks many attached.  
The one who bore the sacred seal of Solomon was I.*

*I bequeathed to Moses his consecrated staff.  
As the Holy Ghost I met Mary, the Spirit of God's carafe.  
To all the saints the guide was I on this here path,  
To Gabriel the Trusted a companion was I.*

*From the loins of my father Ahmad-i Mukhtar,  
From those who guide the way came Dhū'l-fikār,  
A friend was I of the Ahl ul-Bayt before the stars;  
Though a slave, a sharer in the secret of God's essence was I.*

*Within myself I then contemplated.  
I saw not a single miracle, but faith for me was fated.  
With the King of Men on Duldul was I seated.  
The one who girded Dhū'l-fikār and carried it was I.*

*From Sakahum's wine we drank sherbet.  
The gathering was established, we made muhabet.  
In the maydān was divined the secret of hakīkat.  
The one who bore the load of many mysteries was I.*

*Our confession we gave, then on the Way we set out.  
Of God's secrets to the ignorant we never spoke about.  
At Karbalā' with Ḥusayn I stood, filled without a doubt,  
I cleansed the skirt of the garment, for soiled was I.*

*Many times into this fleeting realm I've come and passed.  
I've rained with the rain and grown with the verdant grass.  
Guidance I brought to the Land of Rūm at last.  
From the Land of Khorāsān I came, Bektash was I.*

To better understand this poem – which from a technical standpoint is called a *dawrīyyah* (“cycle” or “rotation”) – we shall provide our readers with the following explanation:

We have already discussed in detail how all wayfarers walking the path to spiritual perfection will have to pass through four stages in order to reach the loftiest of all goals:

1. *As-Sayr ila Allah*: The Journey towards God.
2. *As-Sayr fi Allah*: The Journey in God.
3. *As-Aayr ma<sup>c</sup> Allah*: The Journey with God.
4. *As-Sayr an Allah*: The Journey from God.

Nevertheless, it will not harm us to summarize these stages here. The first stage begins when the ego ceases to have control over the wayfarer. The second stage begins when the wayfarer vanishes to such an extent that only God remains. The third stage begins when the wayfarer's very essence is rendered extinct, and God now acts in each of his acts. Here the wayfarer no

longer exists as an individual. The fourth stage begins after the wayfarer is bedecked with the qualities and characteristics obtained from the heavenly realms during the third journey. When this is completed God commands him to descend (spiritually) back to the material world so that he may guide and illuminate others. In mystical terminology, this return journey is called *sahw ba<sup>c</sup>d al-mahw*, or “returning after annihilation.” All of God’s prophets and saints have undertaken this transcendent *dawr* (cyclical journey), so that they may perform their duties as divinely-chosen guides to humanity.

With this in mind, we can see that *Hajji Bektash Velī* is describing his spiritual state in the midst of the cyclic *dawr*. He describes the works that are to be carried out in the world by one who walks in the fourth stage of the journey; in other words he himself has set out to convey divine guidance to the world, as God’s prophets and saints have done throughout the ages. Although many other subtle and multi-layered points are conveyed in this poem, this is its overall meaning. Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at the second of *Hajji Bektash Velī*’s poems:

*By God’s decree I came into this world.  
With open eyes I beheld that lofty abode.  
Hak<sup>k</sup>’s words I read, in perfection I whirled.  
I handed over myself in that abode.*

*Our forehead these words project:  
“Who God loves has found respect.”  
There is no other path for those who reflect;  
Only this way leads to that abode.*

*Angel Gabriel in the heavens flies.  
In Mu<sup>hammad</sup>’s sweat a rose resides.  
‘Alī, King of Men, the doorway stands astride.  
Blazing lights shine on that abode.*

*In that inn merchants buy and delight;  
There’s no day or night, for both shine bright;  
It’s an abode greater than all in might;  
On his Mi<sup>c</sup>rāj Mu<sup>hammad</sup> reached that abode.*

*I’m Hajji Bektash! I’ve sought and found;  
My soul the Holy Ghost surrounds;  
The Ka<sup>c</sup>bah - within that place is found.  
From every heart a path goes to that abode.*

Let us now explain this poem:

The **abode** referred to in the first stanza (and recurring in the ensuing stanzas) is the spiritual station at which perfection is reached. We must seek out and ultimately reach this abode if we wish to be called a true human being. To carry out such a task we must do as the exalted Prophet Muḥammad commands: “Adorn yourself with the attributes of God.” By surrendering our will to God’s will and overcoming our egos, such states can be reached, just as the poet said: “In losing myself I have found you!”

The first part of the second stanza can be understood as an allusion to the Kur’ānic verse:

*Indeed, God loves those who are constantly repentant  
and He loves those who purify themselves.*  
﴿Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:222﴾

Therefore, if we can successfully carry out this purification, we will obtain the state of being honored and respected by God.

The **rose** in the third stanza symbolizes the divine revelation conveyed to the Prophet Muḥammad by way of the Archangel Gabriel, and the **sweat** refers to his unceasing spiritual struggle. This revelation and struggle, in turn, brought about the spirituality imparted by the exalted Imām Ḥasan al-‘Aṣwad – as we have explained many times above. By teaching the true essence of Islam, Imām Ḥasan al-‘Aṣwad ceaselessly cast celestial light upon humankind.

In the fourth stanza, our noble Pīr tells us that many people enter and exit the true path, but blessed are those who purchase it; for they resemble merchants of faith, being able to seek, obtain and make full use of its bounties. Furthermore, this stanza describes the station of perfection, which when attained brings about perpetual illumination. The great Prophet Muḥammad arrived at this station during the miraculous Mi’rāj.

The **Holy Ghost** mentioned in the fifth stanza is the inspiration that Ḥajjī Bektash Velī received from God. This inspiration descends from the firmaments and settles upon the saints in the wake of their colossal spiritual struggles and exertions.

In mentioning the **Ka’bah** Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī makes a reference to the hadīth ķudsī: “My heavens and My earth cannot contain Me, but I can be contained within the heart of My faithful servant.” As we know, the moment the believer’s heart becomes a place filled with God, it is without a doubt the true Ka’bah!

## SAYYID ‘ALĪ SULTĀN

One of the most prominent figures in Bektashism after Hajjī Bektash Velī is Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān, who, owing to the many miracles he performed throughout the course of his life, is counted among our great saints. Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān lived during the 14th century CE and he proved to be a steadfast missionary for the Bektashi Way. His biography is well-documented in the *Vilāyatnāmeh-i Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān* (The Saintly Feats of Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān). Unfortunately, we do not have this work on hand, which would have allowed us to describe his life in depth, from the moment of his birth to his departure from the world. Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān was an unshakable pillar of Bektashism. His work in spreading our path throughout the Balkans – to lands like Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece and elsewhere – was extraordinary.

Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān’s distinctive nickname “Kızıl Deli” is also the name of a meandering stream that flows near the tekke he established in the hills western Thrace, near the town of Dimetoka.<sup>41</sup> The origin of this nickname is revealed in a story long told in Bektashi circles. The title “Kızıl Deli” was given to Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān by none other than Hajjī Bektash Velī, and the legend goes like this:

Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān was once serving as the *aşçı baba* (head cook) in the grand tekke of Hajjī Bektash Velī in Anatolia. One morning he lit a fire underneath a *kazan* (cauldron) to prepare a stew. After he got the fire going, he asked one of his assistants to bring more firewood. However, the assistant answered apprehensively: “O *nazarım*! There’s no more wood. It’s been used up!”

“How then are we going to get this stew to boil?” asked Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān in exasperation.

The assistant grew all the more dismayed by the saint’s response, and all he could say was, “But *nazarım*, what can I do?” And without saying anything more, he fell silent.

“Well,” said Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān, “I certainly can’t leave the people’s food unprepared.” He then rolled up his pant legs to his knees and thrust his feet into the fire burning beneath the *kazan*.

The assistant was stricken with horror, and he ran to fetch Hajjī Bektash Velī, who hastened to the kitchen without delay. When our noble Pīr saw Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān in such a position he reprimanded him with these

words: “What on earth are you doing, you crazy one (*kızıl deli*)? Get your feet out of there!”

Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān obeyed his master and immediately pulled his feet out of the fire. To his amazement, he saw that his feet were only slightly singed. He apologized to Ḥajjī Bektash Velī, who forgave him. From then on our Pīr affectionately called Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān “Kızıl Deli.”

While this story might seem a bit bizarre, we should emphasize its point. In this story Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān shows us that a true wayfarer must be prepared to make any sacrifice for the greater good, even if it is to his personal detriment.

Having served Ḥajjī Bektash Velī for many years, Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān set out as a missionary to the Balkans. He established a tekke in the hills outside of the town of Dimetoka. This tekke eventually became an important center of Bektashi spiritual education. The reputation of Bektashism reached great heights owing to this sacred place, as it was here that many leading clerics were endowed with extraordinary learning – men like Balım Sultān, Ḥajjī Vahdetī Dede, Sayyid Muṣṭafā Dede, Kara ‘Alī Dede (all dedebabas) and a significant number of other individuals. Countless Bektashi personalities, both religious and secular, likewise benefited from the instruction that radiated out of this tekke. Many of these individuals went on to compose the poetry that we shall discuss below. One of Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān’s devotees, the poet Rusçuklu Zarīfī, wrote this verse of praise in his *divān*:

*To you all lovers congregate,  
O you truly genuine saint!  
In the gray-haired Kızıl Deli  
My aspiration did I see!*

Let us reiterate that Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān is viewed to this day as a pillar of Bektashism, for he was a spiritual master who bedecked countless wayfarers with the robes of enlightenment. Another of this saint’s admirers, Sadık Abdal Baba (who eventually became *pōstnishīn* of the Kızıl Deli Tekke, and whose biography we shall discuss below) composed many nefes poems praising the spiritual rank and moral excellence of Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān. Many other eminent Bektashi personalities (like Kaygusuz and Vīrānī) wrote lengthy poems describing these very same virtues and qualities, some of which will also be presented below.

Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān possessed great poetic talent, and like other Bektashi luminaries he composed many spirit-filled verses, one of which is this:

*While wandering in the city of my form  
I saw four souls in four corners sit.  
They spoke with words polite and warm;  
Within a masterful sovereign sits.*

*In a corner stands a fountain glowing;  
In a corner there is water overflowing;  
In a corner aromatic roses growing;  
In a corner a leader also sits.*

*There's a corner where writers write;  
In a corner they write, erase and rewrite;  
There's a corner where they swim in delight;  
In a corner Khizr also sits.*

*There's a corner where the ikrār they take.  
In a corner the ikrār they make.  
In a corner in worship they partake.  
In a corner my blessed Pir also sits.*

*This tale Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān has told;  
He's leapt into the Sea of Love, behold!  
In a corner the trustee saw everything unfold;  
In a corner the Shāh-i Mardān sits.*

Due to its use of mystical symbolism and imagery we should provide our readers with a brief explanation of some of this poem's key themes:

The **four souls** referred to in the first stanza are the four essential elements required for human beings to exist in a material form. These elements are earth, water, fire and air. According to traditional teachings, these elements are the four pillars of material existence, known in Arabic as *anāsir*. The **sovereign** mentioned in the last line of this stanza is life, which is enwrapped within these four elements.

The **fountain** mentioned in the second stanza is the human eye, which is the wellspring of weeping and tears, or the **water**. The **leader** in this stanza signifies the intellect, which is found in the mind. Through upright thought, the mind can pour forth goodness, much like **roses** diffuse a delightful scent.

The corner mentioned in the third stanza is the realm of consciousness. It is here that we demolish and repair, write and erase all by means of our

thoughts. The **swimming** in the third line is the arduous struggle to advance along the path of spiritual perfection by the aforementioned water (i.e. tears of submission). This stanza ends by telling us that a virtuous mind bears a likeness to the resplendent **Khizr**, a prophet who has throughout the ages guided humanity along the road to saintliness.

The corner in the fourth stanza is the mouth, with which the wayfarer utters the **ikrār**, the sincere pledge taken before God to act by the divine decrees. The **ikrār** mystically energizes the wayfarer in his effort to reach the much sought after goal. The tongue is also the means by which the wayfarer remembers and worships God through the medium of language. All human languages are spoken by way of the tongue, and this allows good to be distinguished from evil.

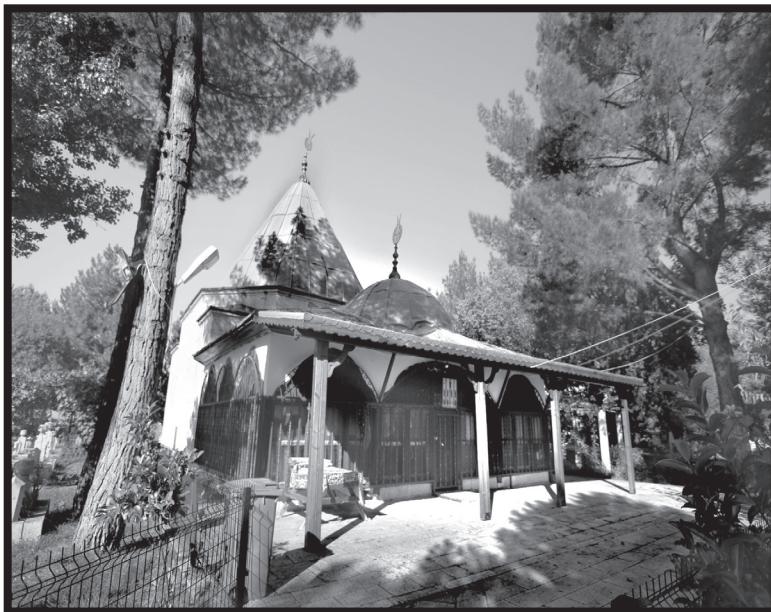
Obviously, the **Pīr** mentioned in the last line of the fourth stanza is none other than Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī. His mystical inspiration directs the wayfarer's tongue to speak good words, to make mention of God and to pray.

The **trustee** in the last stanza is God, into whom Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān has utterly erased himself, having plunged into the endless sea of divine oneness – an act known as *fanā’ fillah*. In this lofty and difficult to reach station there is no longer any trace of the wayfarer's individuality (or anything else for that matter). Here nothing exists save God, who is everlastingly in existence. Ultimately, it is in God's name that the murshid points the way to perfection. He is merely an instrument of the supreme guide of the mystics: The exalted ‘Alī, who is known as the *Shāh-i Mardān*, the “King of Men.”

## ABDAL MŪSĀ SULTĀN

Another important pillar of Bektashism is Abdal Mūsā Sultān. This saint was born in the southwestern Anatolian town of Elmalı during the days of Hajjī Bektash Velī, whose dervish he later became. In addition to being an advanced mystic, Abdal Mūsā Sultān was a talented poet, and he wrote many *nefes* poems praising his murshid by recalling his upright character. We have arranged some of these poems below so that our readers might gain insight into this saint's spiritual vision.

Many of Abdal Mūsā Sultān's disciples rose to prominence, leaving their enduring marks on the history of the Bektashism. It is for this reason



The *turbeh* of Abdal Mūsā Sultān on the outskirts of the village of Tekkeköy.

that Abdal Mūsā Sultān is considered one of our greatest saints and missionaries. One of his most famous students was the celebrated Kaygusuz (a name meaning “Carefree”), about whom we shall speak later. Kaygusuz Sultān established an important tekke in Cairo, which until recent times served as an important center for the Albanian diaspora. In fact, it was administered by babas of Albanian origin for more than a century.

Abdal Mūsā’s tekke can still be found on the outskirts of the village of Tekkeköy, some ten miles south of Elmali. When Balım Sultān initiated the period of reorganization for the Bektashi Order in the late fifteenth century, this tekke became one of our six foremost centers.

Abdal Mūsā Sultān ranks among the most spiritually perceptive individuals in Bektashi history, and his spiritual qualities and lofty virtues were not only noted by his disciples, but they caught the attention of countless scholars of religion. Moreover, several well-known Bektashi figures (like Kaygusuz Sultān, Sādik Abdal Baba and Vīrānī Baba) composed delightful poems relaying these qualities and virtues. We shall present a few of these poems in our book.

In addition to his mystic poetry, Abdal Mūsā Sultān wrote a book entitled *Nasīhatnāmah* (Book of Counsel). In this work, he provides moral

advice to his many disciples and admirers. Regrettably, we do not have this book on hand, and thus we are unable to give our readers a sampling of its contents. It is possible that we might be able to do this on another occasion. Nonetheless, here is a nefes poem composed by Abdal Mūsā Sultān:

*Who can know from whence comes our ancestry?  
From neither a particle of fire nor water are we.  
They speak wisdom, those we have thrown into ecstasy.  
From a clan of the land of Khorāsān are we.*

*No ointment can be found for our injury;  
For the arrow of God a hidden bow are we;  
Look! Our begging bowl contains the Seven Seas;  
Even though the ocean is vast – from the rose are we.*

*Khizr-Ilyās, he shares our condition and state;  
From what sun or what moon do we originate?  
For us springtime the seven hells abrogates.  
From a village within the eight heavens are we.*

*Like Moses we call to everyone “Lan tarānī”;  
It’s Khoy<sup>42</sup> we are from if you ask our ancestry;  
Abdal Mūsā I was; into the world I came to be.  
The knowers know from what lineage are we.*

Let us now offer a simple explanation of this poem:

In the first stanza, Abdal Mūsā Sultān tells us that his whole being has been moved by the spirituality arising out of **Khorāsān** – an allusion to the homeland of Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Veli. In other words, Abdal Mūsā Sultān is saying that his soul has been inspired by our great Pīr.

The **injury** mentioned in the second stanza is the pain generated by Abdal Mūsā Sultān’s unending desire to be near to God. This is an agony that if entered into, cannot be easily endured.

In the third stanza, Abdal Mūsā Sultān tells us that the spiritual realm is so vast that it has no real boundaries. All those inspired by this realm will become beautiful roses emanating rays of light from the sun of *tawhīd* (divine unity). The spiritual realm is watched over by the person of **Khizr-Ilyās**, an enigmatic figure who possesses intimate knowledge of its truths. He knows very well the sort of sunshine that this transcendent sun generates, for such awareness has been bestowed upon him directly by God.

Armed with this knowledge, Khizr-İlyās appears among the common folk completely undetected.

In the final stanza, Abdal Mūsā Sultān makes use of the story of God addressing Moses on Mount Sinai with the sublime words **İan tarānī** or “Thou wilt not see Me”, an event that we have discussed above. He says that these words will forever be declared to all those who have not experienced and traversed the stations of fanā’ fillah and baķa’ billah. We can only draw near to God by overcoming the ego and dissolving the self – which Abdal Mūsā Sultān has done.

At the end of the poem, Abdal Mūsā Sultān exclaims: “I’m Abdal Mūsā, and I’m engaged in guiding people along the path to spiritual excellence. No one knows this state of mine except the People of Understanding, who grasp our way.”

Having presented this simple explanation, let us examine another of Abdal Mūsā Sultān’s deeply mystic poems:

*These are the words Muḥammad ḵAlī proclaimed:*

*It’s not a maydān of nothing; it’s a maydān of “it is.”*

*Muḥammad made niyāz to the Forty of great fame;*

*It’s not the maydān of shame; it’s the maydān of valor.*

*The Forty joined together straightaway.*

*Without cleansing water, the body carried underway.*

*“The camel did you see?” “We saw,” said they.*

*Cover your skirt! It’s the maydān of mystery.*

*In the places you reach seek so you’ll find.*

*So you’ll be accepted in the places passed behind,*

*Be the veiler with the secret inside confined.*

*Put the self in order; it’s the maydān of effort.*

*What shall I speak to the founder of this rite?*

*In this maydān all lies they greet with spite.*

*To one who knows the 360 steps outright*

*It’s not the maydān of blindness; it’s the maydān of sight.*

*If Abdal Mūsā is a true man in all conditions,*

*If he gives ḵAlī’s lovers unbridled recognition,*

*If the goal of reaching Hakk is his intention,*

*The rope is around his neck – it’s the maydān of the gallows.*

Let us now explain this mystic poem:

In the first and second lines of the first stanza, Abdal Mūsā Sultān tells us that the submission we make before Muḥammad Ḏalī (and the spiritual principles they represent) is not futile, for such submission gives genuine meaning to our lives. The Path of Muḥammad Ḏalī is wholly devoted to spirituality and to filling humanity with upright principles. Know then that this path will never leave us adrift in darkness and despair.

The third and fourth lines of the first stanza explain how the exalted Prophet honored all the saints by making **niyāz** to each and every one, no matter how grand or slight their spiritual rank. He cherished even the lowest among them and held not a single one in contempt. In fact, he honored and exalted the spiritual efforts of the lowest even more, since one should always treat the least among people with dignity and respect.

**The Forty** (Kırklar) that Abdal Mūsā Sultān mentions in the first and second stanzas is a band of saints that includes Imāms Ḥasan and Husayn, their companions, as well as other renowned mystics.

The second stanza refers to this story: After the noble Ḏalī was martyred, his sons Ḥasan and Husayn sought out a Bedouin with a camel to transport the body to its burial place, in accordance with the Ḏalī's last wishes. This act was carried out in guarded secrecy, and the full details of this event [which will not be explained here] possess deep mystical significance.

In the third verse, Abdal Mūsā Sultān tells us that the Bektashi rite of the **maydān** is a wonder fashioned by God. It is a rite that removes all falsehood as it opens the innermost eyes of its participants. This vision will allow them to ascend the stairway of spiritual progress until perfection is eventually reached. Therefore it is necessary to know that this maydān is not a maydān of blindness, but rather it is one filled with transcendent vision and light.

At the end of this poem, we find Abdal Mūsā Sultān counseling himself. He says that if he is indeed a true man and a real lover of Imām Ḏalī – and a lover of all those who love Ḏalī – and if he wishes to find *Haqq*, the Real, then he must come and submit at the proper place: the maydān.

## BALIM SULTĀN

Bektashis hold Balim Sultān to be the greatest personality of their religious order after Hajjī Bektash Velī. In fact, he is considered to be the *Pīr-ī Thānī*,

the “Second Pīr.” There is no need for us to relate Balīm Sultān’s biography in full since it is very well-known and, in keeping with the aim of this section of our book, it is more important for us to examine his poetry. Like many other Bektashi masters, Balīm Sultān left many amazing poems, each enveloped in mysticism.

Balīm Sultān was born and raised in the town of Dimetoka. As a child, he often went to stay with his father, who resided in the celebrated tekke of Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān. It was here that Balīm Sultān grew into adulthood. Having finished his formal education, he took his solemn vows and donned the garb of a *mujarrad* (celibate) dervish.

Balīm Sultān was filled with limitless zeal for the mystic path, and soon enough he was promoted to the rank of baba and then dede. When he reached the latter grade, he left the tekke of Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān with forty dervishes and headed for the tekke of Hajjī Bektash Velī – which is known as the *Pīrevi*, or “Home of the Pīr.” Along the way, the band stopped in Istanbul, wherein resided the Ottoman sultan, Beyazid II. When Balīm Sultān called upon the monarch, the saint found him to be very ill. Consequently, Balīm Sultān begged God to restore the monarch’s health; and his prayers were accepted. Before long the sultan’s health and well-being were fully restored.

Having received this miraculous cure at the hand of Balīm Sultān, Sultan Bayezid’s heart was filled with endless love for the saint. On the eve of Balīm Sultān’s departure from Istanbul, an imperial decree was issued allotting additional land to the *Pīrevi*. This extra land secured an income for the tekke’s residents until it was closed by the Turkish Republic.

When Balīm Sultān arrived at the *Pīrevi* with his forty dervishes, he set to work giving structure and organization to both the tekke and the entire Bektashi Order. This undertaking proved to be so successful that the influence of Bektashism was further amplified, and its teachings spread throughout the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, we Bektashis owe a great deal to Balīm Sultān’s efforts. He strengthened its voice with his outstanding administrative skills, and this allowed it to become known to the four corners of the earth. His lofty reputation motivated the Ottoman monarch to summon Balīm Sultān once again into his presence so that he and other high-ranking governmental figures could take initiation at the saint’s hand.

Having presented this brief biographical sketch, we shall now examine

three of Balım Sultān's nefes poems. At the end of each, we shall provide a brief explanation of their content. Here is the first of these works:

*My darling beloved is <sup>c</sup>Alī...it's <sup>c</sup>Alī!  
Doesn't the lover of <sup>c</sup>Alī become the wali?  
From the hand of my Pīr a drink came to me.  
If you claim to love <sup>c</sup>Alī leave my wound be!*

*Don't bargain with deniers of Hakk, the Real;  
From a thousand believers, faith can one hypocrite steal;  
If not for the murshids our pain would not heal;  
If you claim to love my Pīr leave my wound be!*

*When the believing Muslims as one take a stand  
And take a swig from our Pīr's blessed hand,  
Every deed that's found foul they'll reprimand.  
If you claim to love the Shāh leave my wound be!*

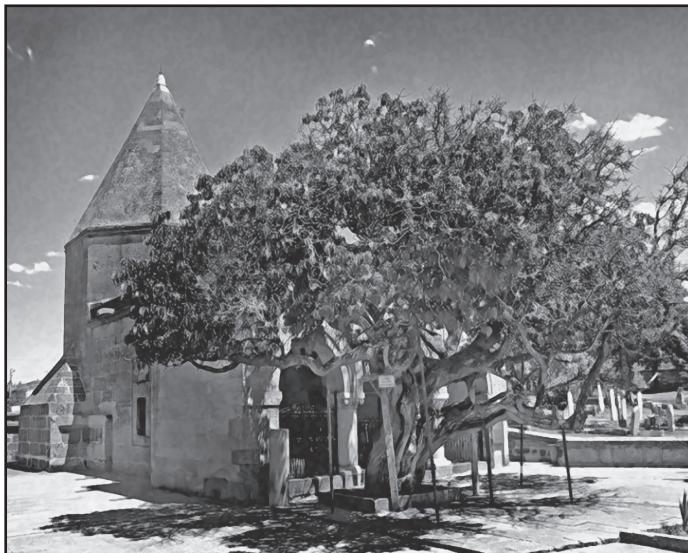
*I pulled myself together; I bound and tied my pain;  
I enwrapped myself in God's ever-loving domain;  
Balım Sultān, Mursal Baba's son; Once again  
If you claim to love <sup>c</sup>Alī leave my wound be!*

Let us now have a closer look at this poem:

In the first verse, Balım Sultān is paraphrasing one of the Prophet Muḥammad's maxims: "Love for <sup>c</sup>Alī absolves one of sin." Therefore, if we are filled with love for <sup>c</sup>Alī we will sooner or later be cleansed of every imperfection. Moreover, when we are devoid of defects, the state of being a **wali** – an intimate of God – will be reached.

Obviously, we cannot simply claim to love <sup>c</sup>Alī and then sit back and do nothing. That would be far too simple! If we truly love <sup>c</sup>Alī must endeavor to carry out his commands, for only then will such love be proven true. Love without surrender to the Beloved is nothing more than a dry and counterfeit emotion. This is precisely what Hajjī Bektash Velī taught, and this is why Balım Sultān refers to Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī in this poem equally as the Pīr.

The **wound** mentioned throughout the poem is the ache caused by the struggle against the ego. This struggle will lead to the uncovering of the veiled spiritual truths, truths which Balım Sultān expresses his determination



Balı̄m Sultān's turbeh located within the shrine complex of Khunkār Hajjī

to uncover in the first line of the last stanza: “I bound and tied my pain.” Obviously, when wounds are bound, an individual’s condition improves and then heals. Thus, when we display total submission while traversing the path (which is the “binding” Balı̄m Sultān speaks of), we will find all the undiscovered spiritual truths that are awaiting us.

In the second stanza, Balı̄m Sultān advises us to take nothing from hypocrites, deniers, and nonbelievers, for being around those devoid of belief will not only subvert our faith, but it will also throw us into doubt. One rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel as they say! This stanza then concludes with Balı̄m Sultān saying that if it were not for the murshid helping us to solve such tribulations, we would continually fall into doubt and ultimately unbelief.

In the last stanza, Balı̄m Sultān announces that he is the son of Mursal Baba, and he ends the poem by stating that whatever hesitations may have existed in his heart have been eradicated by plunging his soul head-first into the endless ocean of God’s love. Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Balı̄m Sultān’s poems:

*At the start, let's give Muḥammad şalawāt.  
 If you're a knower, what's the meaning of this then?  
 It's shari'at, it's ṭarīkat, it's ma'rifat.  
 From the domain of ḥaḳīkat give us news then!*

*Speak with the good; don't let the wicked come to you.  
 If your ma<sup>r</sup>ifat's there with your wisdom-jewels bestrewn  
 Use these four keys and those four doors enter through.  
 From within the mystic house give us news then!*

*Do you know where the thornless roses sprout?  
 From beneath its roots these four keys spring out.  
 What sort of thing swallowed the world without doubt?  
 From the world-swallowe give us news then!*

*Revere the one who stands like Shāh-i Mardān.  
 Over these four doors, who stands as watchman?  
 Mu<sup>h</sup>ammad's watched these doors since before time began.  
 From within the mystic house give us news then!*

*With a surplus of people has Balim conversed.  
 In work for this road and this rite he's immersed.  
 Seek out my Pīr if it's for him that you thirst.  
 From where the lofty Pīr abides give us news then!*

Let us now explain this nefes poem:

The Arabic word **ṣalawāt** means “salutations.” Thus the first line of this poem is telling us that we must always begin our endeavors by saluting and praising the illustrious Prophet Mu<sup>h</sup>ammad. The terms **sharī'at**, **ṭarī'kat**, **ma<sup>r</sup>ifat**, and **ha<sup>k</sup>ī'kat** are specific religious terms, the explanation of which has been given by the Prophet:

Shari'at (divine law) is my discourse, ṭarī'kat (the spiritual path) my undertaking, ma<sup>r</sup>ifat (awareness) my only possession, and ha<sup>k</sup>ī'kat (reality) my internal state.

The **keys** spoken of in the second stanza represent each of these four levels of spiritual awareness. Balim Sultān tells us to take the knowledge found within the realms of shari'at, ṭarī'kat, ma<sup>r</sup>ifat, and ha<sup>k</sup>ī'kat and pass through the doors of these four abodes so that we might come to discover divine truths.

The **thornless roses** in the third stanza represent perfection. Like a rose bush this state that has very deep roots. A thornless rose bush is as hard to find and win as human perfection. Nevertheless, if we are to make it on this path, we must seek it out and, having spotted it, we must struggle to reach it. The **world-swallowe** that Balim Sultān mentions here is the

gloom of ignorance, which stands in opposition to the light of spiritual knowledge.

In the fourth stanza, Balım Sultān declares that any potential wayfarer must recognize that the **watchman** of the doors mentioned above is the illustrious Prophet Muḥammad. It was his spiritual illumination that became the transcendent inheritance of the exalted ʻAlī, the **Shāh-i Mardān**, or “King of Men.” Both of these exalted figures can awaken such mystic enthusiasm that if realized will both energize and encourage us to move onward as we travel the grueling journey to perfection.

In the final stanza, Balım Sultān proclaims that the rank of our **Pīr** (i.e. Ḥajjī Bektash Veli) is a lofty rank indeed! With the many sacrifices Balım Sultān made for the sake of the path, it has only been with difficulty that he finally found the Pīr; and now that he has found him Balım Sultān can guide countless wayfarers to this very same goal. Therefore, O wayfarer! Strive relentlessly, so that you too can discover this truth. Having offered this explanation, let us examine one final nefes poem from Balım Sultān:

*The Abdals of Rūm are what we are called.*

*Our goal is to draw near the friend.*

*With the glow of this world we are not enthralled.*

*From our valor our riches descend!*

*Our fate in life is to shed tears forever,*

*We shell out the price for this hard endeavor,*

*For the way of the Lover our head we would sever;*

*This the deniers' discernment transcends!*

*We nightingales of love sing and we yearn,*

*To the path of Ḥakk our faces we turn,*

*Mystic gems we sell to those seekers who learn;*

*We have clients that readily spend!*

*Our eyes are locked on the divine display.*

*Our faces the seven bless'd verses convey.*

*Ana'l-Ḥakk our tongues instinctively say.*

*Our Mi'rāj is the dār we ascend!*

*Direct from Muḥammad we took our news;*

*Essence and attribute in us do they fuse.*

*Balım speaks of the essence by using such clues.*

*Our secret guidance to few do we lend!*

Let us now explain this poem:

The **friend** spoken of in the first stanza is that object of love (i.e. God) who causes the wayfarer to forsake all of the ornaments of the material world, namely fortune, fame and so on.

In the second stanza, Balım Sultān tells us that he has made every sacrifice trying to bring spiritual enlightenment to humanity, and he is ready to give up his head for this endeavor. Then in the third stanza Balım Sultān says:

God supplies us with spiritual gems and we sell these to humanity. But know this: A pure heart is the price to be paid for these priceless jewels. Those who deny our path will not only find such gems worthless; they will do battle with us to prevent us from selling them!

The phrase **Ana'l-Haqq** is the famous utterance made by Al-Hallāj – a phrase we have explained earlier in this book. On account of these words Al-Hallāj was hanged on the **dār** (the gallows) by the fanatics of his day. Such men could not fathom the meaning behind Ana'l-Haqq, which has been repeated by generations of mystic poets ever since. Hence, Balım Sultān is saying:

We have passed through all of the stages of spiritual annihilation to reach the state where we can guide people toward enlightenment. Our ego has been utterly obliterated, and nothing remains save God. Having been strengthened in the station of “The Journey from God” by having our face stamped with the oft-repeated opening seven verses of the *Kur’ān* (the *sab<sup>c</sup> ul-mathānī*) that reveal God’s attributes, we have been commanded to return to humanity in order to guide them along the path to perfection.

Balım Sultān concludes this nefes by stating that he has adhered to all of the spiritual principles laid down by the Bektashi Path, and thus he has been endowed with all of its vast mysteries. He then instructs all wayfarers to keep these mysteries hidden from the spiritually immature, for the revelation of such things could harm the masses and cause turmoil in society. People need time to develop before such profound truths can be grasped.

## KAYGUSUZ SULTĀN AL-MAGHĀWIRĪ

Kaygusuz Sultān stands among the greatest figures of Bektashism. His given name was either ‘Abdullah or Ghaybī; his nickname *Kaygusuz* is a Turkish word meaning “carefree” or “untroubled.” He was given this title because of his disinterest in the world and his determination to tirelessly engage in the struggle against the ego, even when it put his life in peril.

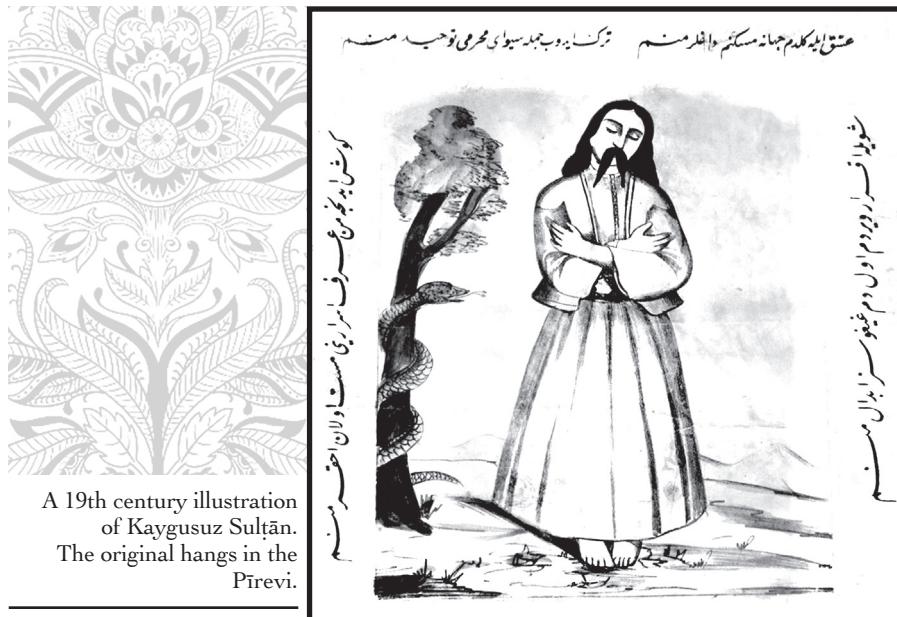
Before we present Kaygusuz Sultān’s biography, we shall give a little more information about his names and titles. Kaygusuz Sultān holds the sobriquet *Al-Maghāwirī*, meaning “The One of the Cave,” due to his being laid to rest in a deep cave on the outskirts of Cairo (the word *maghārah* meaning “cave” in Arabic). Thus, his full name became Kaygusuz ‘Abdullah al-Maghāwirī, which people shortened to Kaygusuz Sultān. The Arabic word *sultān* denotes a person endowed with great secular power and authority, i.e. a monarch. However, in mystic parlance, the word signifies a man possessing great spiritual might, that is to say, a holy man or a saint. In his poetry, Kaygusuz refers to himself simply as “Kaygusuz” or “Kaygusuz Abdal.”

Kaygusuz Sultān’s biography is quite fascinating. He was born in 766 /1365, a son of the governor of the Anatolian city of Alanya – which in those days was called ‘Ala’iyya. As a child, he excelled in his schooling, and this allowed him to develop a broad outlook on life and the world.

Kaygusuz Sultān grew into a strong and healthy young man, and when he turned eighteen, he took up the bow, finding great pleasure in the hunt. He was continually out and about in the countryside tracking fowl and wild animals, often accompanied by an entourage of twenty to thirty men.

While out one of his hunts, Kaygusuz shot a roe deer with an arrow. The deer fled, and though he entered into pursuit, he quickly lost the wounded animal’s trail. Both he and his entourage searched high and low for the deer until they eventually arrived before the tekke of Abdal Mūsā Sultān. Kaygusuz dismounted from his horse and knocked the tekke’s gate seeking to inquire if any of its occupants had seen his agile prey.

A dervish opened the tekke’s gate and met with the party. He told them that no deer had been seen. Nevertheless, the dervish suggested that Kaygusuz come in and pay his respects to Abdal Mūsā Sultān. The young brave happily accepted the dervish’s proposal. He left his entourage and



followed the dervish into the tekke and before long he was in the presence of the great saint.

Kaygusuz was utterly awestruck by the spiritual presence of Abdal Mūsā Sultān, and the encounter left a profound impression on his heart. He was so inspired by the words of the saint that he felt no desire to leave his presence. This newfound love increased to the point that Kaygusuz could not contain himself and at last he was forced to exclaim:

O righteous one! I went out to hunt deer, but it seems that you have hunted me. I wish not leave this blessed place, and I beg you to let me kiss your hand and enter your tekke as a novice. I submit to your guidance and wish not to be parted from your presence ever again.

At first, Abdal Mūsā Sultān did not accept this request. He told Kaygusuz to return to his father and inherit the throne when the time came. However, Kaygusuz respectfully refused to do this. He was so determined to stay in Abdal Mūsā Sultān's presence that he told his retinue to go back to the palace and inform his father that he would be staying at the tekke a few days longer.

Several days passed until Kaygusuz returned to his father and revealed that he no longer desired to live at home. He was going to live in Abdal Mūsā Sultān's tekke. The young man remained resolute in the face of his father's heated objections and the courtiers' pleas. He immediately returned to Abdal Mūsā Sultān and repeated his request to be accepted into the saint's blessed *huzūr* (presence).

This time, Abdal Mūsā Sultān consented, and in keeping with the spiritual regulations designed to break the ego, he assigned Kaygusuz one of the tekke's more back-breaking chores. Every day the young man had to carry firewood down from the surrounding mountains back to the tekke. Furthermore, it was also his job to clean the sanctuary's walled courtyard.

Kaygusuz readily carried out every task that was assigned to him, and he never hesitated to do any work. Several years passed like this and eventually he earned the right to wear the garb of a dervish. He successfully traversed the path to perfection.

In 789/1388 Abdal Mūsā Sultān dispatched Kaygusuz on a mission to teach the Bektashi path in Egypt, whose ruler at that time was King Al-Şālih Hajjī. To assist in this mission, Abdal Mūsā Sultān delegated forty dervishes to go with Kaygusuz.

Upon reaching in Cairo, Kaygusuz Sultān learned that the ruler suffered from an ailment that caused blindness in one of his eyes. He then ordered each his forty dervish companions to tie a cloth around one eye and feign blindness. When the inhabitants of the city saw this band of "blind" dervishes a great commotion arose; so much so that people ran to tell the king, who, being blind himself, grew curious about the arrival of these men. He desired to know the story of these dervishes, and he summoned them to dinner at his palace. Upon receiving this royal invitation, Kaygusuz Sultān quickly prepared himself and his forty companions to meet the king.

The streets near the palace were covered with very fine sand – so fine in fact that all who traversed them were quickly covered in dust. When Kaygusuz Sultān came to know of this, he ordered his companions to walk in single file to the palace. Each dervish was to step into the footprints of the one preceding him. In this way, very little dust would arise from the streets. He also said that if any of the city's inhabitants were to inquire as they walked who their chief was, they were to respond with these words: "The companion who walks in front of me." Let us note here that Kaygusuz's

instructions embody the upright principles that continue to endure in Bektashism. The command to follow in a single file means that all spiritual guides – including Kaygusuz – must follow the trail laid down by those masters who came before, so that the genuineness and authenticity of the chain of mystical transmission remain intact.

The second of Kaygusuz's commands is equally meaningful. To combat egoism and selfishness, the spiritual wayfarer must never say "I am first." This is why Bektashi clerics never refer to themselves as "I" when speaking or writing, but rather as *fakīr*, an Arabic word meaning "poor one" – which is to say, one in need of God's mercy.

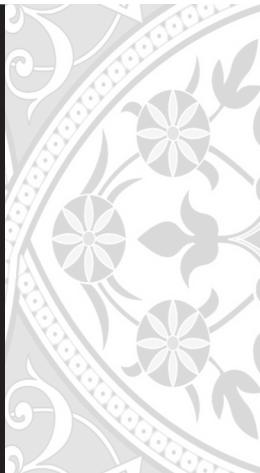
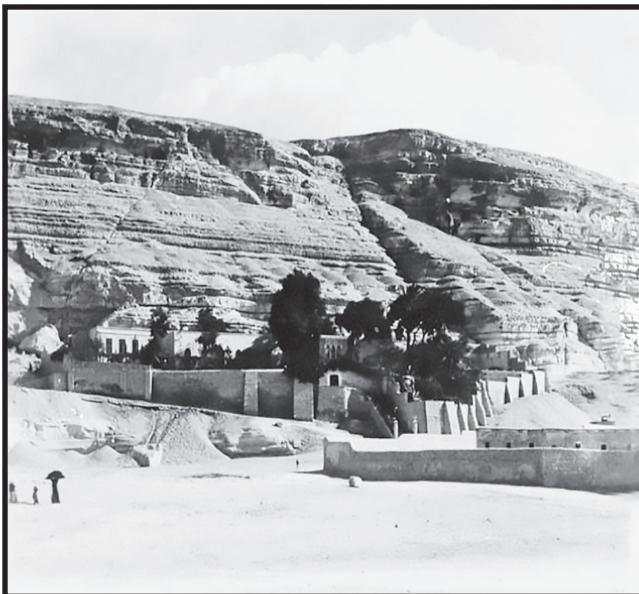
After receiving their orders, the band of dervishes headed for the palace, one after the other in the manner that we have mentioned above. When they reached the royal residence, their orderliness left everyone awestruck. As the dervishes came into the presence of the king, he observed that each had one eye covered with a bandanna. He inquired with great curiosity as to the nature of this apparent affliction, and he was told that they were all suffering from the same sickness of the eye.

Kaygusuz Sultān addressed the king, saying: "Your Majesty! Would you like that we all raise our hands and beseech God Almighty to have mercy on us?" "Yes!" responded the king with great eagerness. Kaygusuz Sultān then ordered all those gathered to close their eyes. He directed everyone to say *āmīn* when he finished his supplication.

At the conclusion of the prayer, Kaygusuz Sultān instructed everyone to open their eyes. The king immediately discovered that his infected eye had healed, and he could see once more. He was filled with such delight that limitless adoration for Kaygusuz Sultān entered his heart. The saint and his dervishes were presented with a suitable home in a place called Kāsr ul-<sup>c</sup>Ayn, where the first Bektashi tekke in Cairo was established. This site continues to be well-known. These events transpired in the year 792/1390.

Kaygusuz Sultān began to propagate Bektashi teachings in Egypt, and he quickly became a recognized and respected personality. He remained in Egypt for five years before going on a three-year trip to the sacred shrines of the Hijāz, Karbalā' and Najaf. He returned to Cairo in 800/1398.

Kaygusuz Sultān faithfully executed his spiritual mission for forty-two years until 847/1444, the year he departed this life. According to his



Cairo's Bektashi tekke,  
ca. 1920.

last wishes, he was buried deep within a cave located in the cliffs of Cairo's Mukattam Hills. Those who inherited Kaygusuz's position continued the mission of propagating Bektashism in Egypt, and these successors were buried alongside the saint in that very same cave.

Centuries passed with the cave-tomb of Kaygusuz Sultān being far from the Ҫasrul-‘Ayn Tekke. However, since it is a general rule among Islamic mystics that a murshid's tomb be located near his tekke, a baba living in the middle part of the 19th century (who was Kilisli Ҫalī Baba) requested that the governor of Egypt, Abbās Hilmī Pasha, allow the Bektashis to establish a tekke next to Kaygusuz Sultān's cave in the Mukattam Hills. The governor happily accepted Ҫalī Baba's petition, and in 1281/1865 an official decree was issued that the Ҫasrul-‘Ayn Tekke be transferred to the Mukattam Hills. This new tekke was renovated several times after that, and it stood for many decades until its end came after a long line of babas.

Although our intention is to survey Bektashi literature rather than Bektashi history, we feel that we cannot proceed further without mentioning some of the historical highlights of the tekke once found in the Mukattam Hills. This particular tekke played a major role in both the preservation of Bektashism and in the history of the Albanian nation, as we shall describe below.

From the time of its establishment in 1865, the successive babas of the Mukattam Tekke worked hard to beautify its grounds, so much so that every single guest left the place completely captivate by its charm. The tekke's positive reputation encouraged many foreigners to visit, and these individuals, in turn, spread word of the tekke to the four corners of the earth. The dissemination of these positive reviews was amplified by the fact that Egypt was located at the crossroads of three continents.

Counted among the tekke's visitors were notable professors, journalists, and ambassadors from the various countries accredited to the Egyptian government. Each and every visitor was attended to with great care as they were escorted through the tekke. As a result of this hospitality and warmth, people enjoyed pleasant memories of the tekke, its babas, and its dervishes, and simultaneously gained an appreciation of the Bektashi Path. Many foreigners wrote about the Mukattam Tekke in their nations' newspapers and magazines.

The Mukattam Tekke was both spiritually and materially enriched over the years and for nearly a century it was a center of Albanian nationalist propaganda, seeing as it was administered by such patriots as Baba Haydar Leskoviku, Baba Lutfi Gjirokastra and finally by Ahmad Sirri Baba. This last baba was originally from the village of Glina, near the southern Albanian town of Leskovik.

Following the League of Prizren in 1878, nationalist propaganda spread throughout many Albanian-managed tekkes, including the Mukattam Tekke. To assist the movement, Cairo sent one of its clergymen back to the homeland. He was Dervish Melek, who later became baba of the tekke of Shëmbërdhenji, and became known thereafter as Baba Melek Shëmbërdhenji. Dervish Melek did his utmost to promote Albanian independence, and he worked tirelessly to distribute Albanian-language books among our people. Dervish Melek was also a gifted poet, and he wrote many poems, both mystical and patriotic, that we shall examine below.

Of the ethnic Albanian babas who directed the Mukattam Tekke, the first was the Baba Haydar of Leskovik, who was a disciple of the celebrated Mehmet Hilmī Dede of Istanbul. Baba Haydar greatly contributed to the maintenance and expansion of the tekke. Seeing as the royal house of Egypt, from the time of its founder Mehmet ʻAlī Pasha (who was originally

from Kavala), was of Albanian extraction, Baba Haydar enjoyed friendly relations many of its members – such as Princess Perlante, the wife of Tevfik Pasha. The princess was very fond of Baba Haydar, so much so that she took initiation into the Bektashi Order at his hand and presented him with a monthly stipend of 50 liras.

Baba Haydar directed the Mukattam Tekke for sixteen years. When he passed from this life, his position was taken over by Baba Lutfi of Dunavat (Gjirokastër), who was also a dervish of Mehmet Hilmī Dede. Baba Lutfi managed the tekke for forty three years. He strengthened existing relations with the Egyptian royal family to such an extent that Prince Fazil Pasha received initiation at his hand. Another royal, Prince Kamāl ud-Dīn Husayn (d. 1932), loved Baba Lutfi so much that he took him one of his European tours. On account of this close bond Prince Kamāl ud-Dīn was a frequent visitor to the tekke, and he grew to love the place so much that when the time came, he had his turbeh constructed in the tekke's lush garden with his own money.

Prince Kamāl ud-Dīn fulfilled without delay any need that Baba Lutfi may have had for the tekke, particularly when it came to its expenses. Not only that, he decreed in his will that after his death the tekke was to be assisted in perpetuity by his family. Thus, every year his wife Princess Nimatullah (d. 1965) continued to provide the tekke with 16 Egyptian liras, two rams for each Bayram ('Eid) and pay the expenses of the 'Āshura ceremony.

With such noble and committed patronage at his disposal, Baba Lutfi had many opportunities to increase the beauty of the Mukattam Tekke. For instance, he planted a garden and built a fountain and he also had several new buildings constructed in the tekke's compound. When Baba Lutfi passed from this world in 1942, the leadership of the tekke went to Ahmād Sırrı Baba, who was originally from the village of Glina. Baba Lutfi personally designated Ahmād Sırrı Baba to be his successor.

It is important here to recount the renovations that Sırrı Baba carried out to further beautify and expand the Mukattam Tekke. During his tenure, the tekke flourished and reached its zenith. The number of foreign guests increased twofold, and all those who visited this happy place beheld its lovely gardens filled with the pleasing fragrance of their many flowers. The arrangement of the tekke was so agreeable that guests would sometimes



Lütfi Baba (center) and the Bektashis of Cairo. Ahmad Sirri Baba is seated on the right, and Dervish Lutfi Muço is standing, second from the right. Dervish Lutfi would spend his final years in Detroit's tekke.

make small picnics in its charming clearings, which were fashioned not by nature but by human hands.

As we mentioned above, journalists came from the four corners of the earth to write about Sirri Baba and applaud his tekke. One correspondent from *The Detroit News* filled the pages of his newspaper with photographs of the tekke, Sirri Baba, and all the amazing things he observed. His article is entitled “Monastery for Moslems” and it was published on March 7th, 1948 in the section called *The Detroit News Pictorial Magazine*.

Sirri Baba was a very active man, forever eager to carry out any task to promote Bektashism. He continually worked for the tekke, and any money that came into his hands was spent on its maintenance and expansion. For instance, he constructed a number of buildings to accommodate influential guests. These structures were built with materials brought to the tekke during the days of Prince Kamāl ud-Dīn. Sirri Baba also laid out a beautiful kitchen garden, on which he erected a lovely turbeh for himself, for it was here that he desired to be laid to rest one day.

Albania’s King Zog I and his two sisters Ruhije and Nafije enjoyed visiting the tekke during the years they lived in exile in Cairo. Both sisters

died in Egypt and were buried on the grounds of the tekke. Sırrı Baba later had mausoleums built for them.

Even though he left Albania at a young age, Sırrı Baba kept the flames of love for the homeland burning in his heart. During his lifetime Albania attained independence and was no longer in need of outside help. Nevertheless, Sırrı Baba had such affection for the land of his birth that he traveled there twice, first on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of independence and then when the Bektashi Order inaugurated its new headquarters (*kryegjyshata*) in Tirana. It was during this last visit that Sırrı Baba was elevated to the rank of *khalīfah-baba* (i.e. dede) at the hand of Şālih Niyāzī Dede Baba.

Sırrı Baba continually worked to organize the Albanian community in Egypt. He contributed wholeheartedly to any initiative taken in this direction and for a time he was the driving force behind the *Klubi shqiptar* (Albanian Club), which accepted members of all faiths. When Italy invaded Albania in 1939, Sırrı Baba took an active role in organizing rallies in Cairo to protest the foreign occupation of his motherland.

Sırrı Baba possessed a remarkable and expansive intellect, which can be appreciated in the two books he left to us: *The Ahmadī Booklet on the History of the Esteemed Bektashi Order*,<sup>43</sup> and *The Bektashi Prayers*. These works were written at the urging of two Turkish muhībs, Mahmud Nafi and Aziz Hancı, who then translated both works into Arabic. Sırrı Baba also wrote at least two poems in Albanian, one of which shall be discussed below.

When the Egyptian revolution came in 1952, the new government viewed the tekke as a remnant of the *ancien régime* and consequently did not look upon it too kindly. In 1957 the tekke's operations were suspended and its doors locked under the pretext that it was located within the limits of a strategically sensitive military site. Sırrı Baba and his few remaining dervishes were moved to a small building in Cairo's Ma'adi district. The forced closure of the tekke deeply distressed all Bektashi believers, none more so than Sırrı Baba. The aching brought about by the loss of his tekke – coupled with acute diabetes – affected him so much that it hastened his departure from the material world in January of 1961. And with his passing, the final chapter in the story of the legendary Mukattam Tekke of Cairo came to an end.



Let us now return to our discussion of Kaygusuz Sultān, a figure blessed with such unfathomable spirituality that all Bektashis see him as one of the pillars of their faith. Kaygusuz Sultān once visited the holy city of Karbalā' and he saw the dome above Imām Ḥusayn's tomb constructed with twelve *tarks*, or sections. Up until that time, Bektashi dervishes wore the *Adhamī tāj* on their heads, which is sewn together with four tarks. However, being inspired by this dome, Kaygusuz Sultān redesigned the dervish *tāj* and made it with twelve tarks. To this day this redesigned *tāj* has been worn without interruption by Bektashi dervishes. Wherever they may have been, all Bektashi clergymen imitated Kaygusuz Sultān, and the previously worn *Adhamī tāj* was replaced with the *Husaynī tāj*, named so because it symbolizes (and resembles) the dome that once stood over Prince of Martyr's tomb.

In addition to his mystic insight, Kaygusuz Sultān possessed both a lofty intellect and overpowering poetic talent. He composed a number of works in both prose and verse, including the *Risālah-ī Kaygusuz* (Treaties of Kaygusuz), the *Kitāb-ī Dīlgushā* (the Book of Heart's Opener), the *Dolabnāmah* (Book of the Waterwheel), and the *Budalanāmah* (the Book of the Holy Fool). We also have an exceptional *divān* bearing his name. All of these were written in the Turkish language with the Arabic script, and we hope that one day they will be available in the Albanian language.

Kaygusuz Sultān's poems utilize a fragrantly refined language often sharpened by sarcasm and wittiness. Yet it is important to understand that while some of his poems may seem irreverent and offensive, if the reader gives these verses extra thought their veiled meanings will emerge. We can gain an idea of Kaygusuz Sultān's distinctive style with the examples provided here:

*O brother! Come to our transcendent mystic way,  
But didn't I say you couldn't enter?  
O brother! Reach our veiled secret locked away,  
But didn't I say you couldn't arrive?*

*Those unaware cannot this secret touch.  
Those aware speak of it, but they say not much.  
Those without eyes cannot this secret see.  
But didn't I say there's no way that you can see?*

*To a master guide you must draw near.  
In him search for aid; his words you must hold dear.  
O loving brother! Foul Yazīd you must outrun;  
But didn't I say that fiend you couldn't outrun?*

*There's not much point wandering all around  
When the saints' missal inside of you is found.  
To walk this path the Twelve Imāms you must follow;  
But didn't I say their way you couldn't follow?*

*For the arkān of the strugglers so pure-hearted;  
From the mystic way those aware have not departed;  
Surely to be with the Forty the ego you must sacrifice.  
But didn't I say, O brother, you couldn't make the slice?*

*They say 'Alī, lofty and great, is a name of God.  
Before his face the universe is amazed and overawed.  
If you seek to see, your tāj-less head you must submit.  
But didn't I say...Ah! You couldn't do it?*

*Kaygusuz, the carefree, has from pre-eternity  
Taken mystic insight from the saints' fraternity;  
To reach this you must take wisdom from 'Alī's hand.  
But didn't I say, O friend, you couldn't understand?*

Let us now explain this particular poem:

Kaygusuz Sultān is telling us in this poem about the journey to reach God's presence, to which the path of perfection leads. The journey and its path are both arduous and demanding to negotiate. If we choose to take up this journey, we must know that walking its path entails enormous sacrifice and grueling struggle. It is equally important to know that no matter how much we try we will not be able to make this voyage successfully on our own. We must find an accomplished guide, a murshid, to serve as our escort and mentor. This path cannot be pursued through book-learning or academic exercises; it is a journey that needs the well-honed spiritual (and practical) insight of a murshid.

As well as being a historical figure, the **Yazīd** mentioned in the third stanza represents the harmful character traits that the ego is capable of instilling in us. Kaygusuz says that we must forsake corruption (Yazīd) and

instead follow the path of virtue. This path has been laid down by the Twelve Imāms and God's saints, who are embodiments of integrity and goodness. Therefore, if we wish to walk this path, we must never detach ourselves from these blessed folk.

The **strugglers so pure-hearted** mentioned in the fifth stanza are the saints, and their **arkān** refers to the rites and practices of the spiritual path. The **sacrifice** mentioned is the abandonment of the ego. This sacrifice must be carried out if we expect to make any spiritual progress, for those who follow in the train of the righteous, sacrificing their lives for the sake of this way – as did the Forty Saints (Kırklar) – will certainly arrive at their goal.

In the sixth stanza, Kaygusuz declares that all mystic wayfarers have Imām ‘Alī as their supreme guide. Every person who seeks to travel this path must obey his instructions. However, this cannot be done solely by wearing the garments of ritual and external formality; we must grasp the essence of his commands. Understanding his words and conforming our character to his instructions is very essential.

At the end of this poem Kaygusuz Sultān tells us that this path is the finest path he knows, for this path has brought him to the state of perfection; and this path has led him to the presence of God.

Let us now examine another poem by Kaygusuz Sultān, a poem in which he cautions those who place too much importance on the outward manifestations of the spiritual path, and in doing so overlook the essence and symbolism of these manifestations:

*Never seek out dervishhood in tājs or in robes;  
If it's not found in your merit, it won't be in your clothes!  
Garb doesn't create virtue; it's simply your attire;  
Heat's not found in the frying pan! It's found, dear, in the fire!*

*At a true one's feet give up the self and hand over your heart;  
To his waistband go attach yourself and from it do not part;  
This waistband that you hold so dear will guide you all life long;  
Neither tattered nor moth-eaten, forever it stays strong.*

*If it's God you are in search of, try seeking Him in Man;  
No need to travel far and wide, to Mecca or Iran.  
So turn your gaze into yourself, and goodness do espy;  
Surely you will see it there; outside it does not lie.*

*Then never break a brother's heart; for him be not a curse.  
 Commit yourself to what is right, in goodness be immersed.  
 Become that treasured diamond whose value's understood,  
 For in this world not lost are all the deeds that lead to good!*

*You can pray until the end of time and God you will not find  
 Unless you melt into this love and ego leave behind.  
 Come and be like Kaygusuz and fill your heart with love.  
 Gain eternal passion or forever lack thereof!*

Here is our explanation of this poem:

Kaygusuz Sultān opens this nefes poem by telling us that sacred vestments alone are not proof of piety. For these exemplary vestments to have true value, the one wearing them must be inwardly endowed with goodness and virtue. We become true dervishes when the qualities of a dervish are found within us. If we are unable to secure these merits and attach them to our character, our vestments will provide no inherent worth. We will, consequently, be dervishes in name only. Therefore, it must be stressed that wearing the dervish habit is merely an outward indication that we are traveling the spiritual path. To be truly counted as righteous, we must be outfitted inwardly with the merits and virtues of godliness

The meaning of the **waistband** (*kuşak*) mentioned in the second stanza is the spiritual bond between the seeker and his spiritual master. Here Kaygusuz tells us that if we wish to become wayfarers, we must first find a capable murshid with whom we can connect, for such a guide will be able to direct us skillfully along our journey to perfection and to God.

The third stanza alludes to the ḥadīth ķudsī that we have encountered numerous times above, where God Almighty declares:

*My universes cannot contain me,  
 but I am contained in the heart of a believer.*

Kaygusuz assures us that it is foolish to exhaust ourselves running here and there looking for God. It is far more sensible to purify our hearts; for once this is done we will find Him wherever we turn!

To be able to attain this inner purity Kaygusuz advises us in the fourth stanza to: 1. not break people's hearts, 2. do good deeds and 3. make ourselves

valued members of humanity. We must also be accommodating towards others and show good cheer to everyone. We must start out on the path to God's magnificent presence by melting ourselves completely in adoration and worship – just like Kaygusuz has done. Then we will remain one with God throughout all eternity.

Kaygusuz Sultān possessed such a lofty character that he not only prayed for his friends and devotees, he prayed for his adversaries too! This admirable practice can be seen in the following poem:

*Whoever is our enemy,  
May God give him great gain!  
May he be given clemency!  
May he his goals attain!*

*Whoever tossed us in a pit,  
May God protect forever!  
Who throws stones at us and hits,  
May might fill his endeavor!*

*Whoever prayed for us to die,  
May eternal life suffice!  
Whoever said in Hell we'd fry,  
May he be given Paradise!*

*For those who call us nasty words,  
May our Prophet intercede!  
If they call Kaygusuz absurd,  
May sight of God be guaranteed!*

Let us now explain this poem:

Kaygusuz Sultān says that if we truly seek to subdue the ego, we must ask God to give those who criticize us all that is good. And he has an excellent reason for asking this of us: If our detractors censure us, and we deserve it, they are fully within their right to do so. In truth, their criticism will allow us to see our shortcomings, which we can then correct. Therefore, may God give our detractors goodness for fulfilling their rights!

On the other hand, if their loathing or criticism of us is unwarranted, we can yet again see this as something beneficial. Such criticism shows us that our detractors have taken an interest in us, and for this we thank them.

If by the grace of God, we do not find within ourselves those defects pointed out by our detractors, then they ascribe to us qualities we do not possess. There is surely no harm in this. Rather it is a good thing, for they have indirectly advised us to avoid such defects in the future. And for this, we should thank them and ask God to bless them with goodness.

There is even no harm if our adversaries pray for us to die or to go to Hell (or anything of the like). Such things are for God alone to decide and not human beings. Moreover, being blessed with Heaven or being consigned to Hell depends on our actions and not on someone's curses. In fact, such curses can actually make us better people because they remind us of death and the Afterlife. These reminders will naturally encourage us to do good and prepare ourselves for the eventuality of our passing away. For all of this, we should thank our detractors and ask that they receive goodness.

Let us now examine a fascinating poem composed by Kaygusuz Sultān that is completely devoted to the exoteric Islamic prayer:

*O lofty master! You still  
Ask me about namāz?  
Stay and I'll tell you,  
If you still ask about namāz.  
  
My heart is a bonfire burning;  
It's problem and pain to the unknowing.  
At dawn namāz 4 I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?  
  
Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I weep.  
I ask God to give me my keep.  
At noon 10 I fulfill....  
And you ask about namāz still?  
  
About your "namāz query" I knew;  
The scent of it came right through.  
At mid-afternoon 8 I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?  
  
Evening prayer itself is 5;  
To pray it makes our pleasure thrive.  
For the night prayer 13 I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?  
  
40 rak'ahs each night and day;  
17 farz, 20 Sunnah I say.*

*Witr wājib 3 rak̄ahs, all I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*If you ask, fakīh's my name;  
In school the child is taught the same.  
Jum̄a and Bayram 2 more I will...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*Efendi, is your turban round?  
Can your ear hear such a sound?  
For Tarāwih namāz 20 I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*On my own essence I lock my gaze;  
Farż and Sunnah I pray, no delays.  
A year's worth of namāz I instill...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*The hodjas in their prayer places  
Don't know this in many cases:  
4,680 salāms said in goodwill...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*From some, zakāt's required;  
From some, ḥalāt's required;  
7,560 tahiyyat utter I will...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*From our Pīr let there be endless favor!  
Praise be to God, our lofty creator.  
7,200 sunnahs all I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*Namāz is now fulfilled...got it?  
Read a bit, then write a bit.  
6,120 farż all I fulfill...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*Gnosis lies in the perfected;  
Show me, hodja, what I've neglected!  
1,080 witr wājib all I fulfill!  
And you ask about namāz still?*

*Ah! One namāz, janāzah, we'll get to  
When our time on earth is through;  
Even to silly Kaygusuz it will...  
And you ask about namāz still?*

In this poem, Kaygusuz Sultān describes for us all of the daily and yearly exoteric prayers fixed by the regulations of the Islamic faith. In doing this, he employs some technical terms that might need explaining.

Prayer is a form of religious practice that is done to beseech God and to praise Him for all of the blessings that He has bestowed upon us. Prayer is properly carried out by wholeheartedly submitting oneself before God. In Islamic terminology, the formal ritual prayer is called **namāz** [or *ṣalāh* in Arabic], a term that Kaygusuz repeats throughout this nefes poem.

**Rak<sup>c</sup>ah** is an Arabic word that means “bowing.” This term denotes one unit of namāz (hence the various numbers referred to throughout this poem) wherein we begin our prayer by standing with arms folded, chanting certain verses of the *Qur’ān*. This position is called *kiyām*. Following the *kiyām*, we put our hands on our knees (thus bowing from the waist) and recite specific praise-filled words. This position is called *rukū’*. We briefly stand erect before dropping to our knees, putting our foreheads to the ground in prostration, a position called *sajdah*. Once again specific praise-filled words are recited. We then sit back on our haunches, after which we make *sajdah* again before standing up again and taking the same *kiyām* position mentioned above. All of this comprises one **rak<sup>c</sup>ah**, i.e. one cycle of bowing.

The word **Farz** indicates an act that all Muslims are obliged to perform. **Sunnah** means an act regularly performed by the exalted Prophet Muḥammad, but which is not compulsory on believers. The sunnah referred to in the poem, however, are those non-obligatory **rak<sup>c</sup>ahs** that the Prophet performed before or after the mandatory **rak<sup>c</sup>ahs**, but which are, nonetheless, highly recommended to make. Kaygusuz says that in total, all of the prayers in a single day contain forty **rak<sup>c</sup>ahs**, seventeen of which are **farz**, twenty of which are **sunnah** and three of which are **witr wājib**, a three-rak<sup>c</sup>ah prayer done separately after the night prayer (*ṣalāt al-’ishā’*).

In Arabic, the word **salām** means “peace,” a tranquil state devoid of disturbance. However, in Islamic ritual terminology, it indicates the final step of our namāz where we, while sitting on our haunches, turn our heads to the right and left, each time saying: “Peace be upon you and God’s mercy.” In the poem, Kaygusuz tallies how many times this **salām** is said during namāz throughout the year and says that it comes to 4,680.

The Arabic word **tahiyyat** is the plural of the word **tahiyyah**, itself derived from the root word *ḥayāt*, or “life.” However, in this poem **tahiyyat** refers to the invocation praising God’s attribute of eternal existence that we recite

when we have completed two rak'ahs and are sitting back on our haunches. The tahiyyat is said in every namāz, and in the space of a year, 7,520 tahiyyats will be recited if all of the prayers are performed. Thus, in one year – says Kaygusuz – there are 6,120 farz and 7,200 sunnah rak'ahs.

Having offered this explanation let us look at another noteworthy poem by Kaygusuz Sultān, one filled with vibrant imagery and profuse, yet veiled, meaning:

*Today I asked a waterwheel that I was passing by,  
"Your face forever in the water; please do tell me why?*

*What makes your heart to holler out and tears to fill your eyes?  
Why do you keep revolving as fatigue and pain arise?*

*My heart is pierced and wounded by the groans that you let out;  
This wail can turn the liver into kebab, there's no doubt!*

*You never seem to rest; you only turn and turn and turn.  
Into the dust fall all the tears your eyes forever churn.*

*How wretchedly the wheel of fate has lain this at your door  
And filled your book with such a pain that can't be answered for."*

*The waterwheel replied to me: "O candle of my eyes!  
To listen to my answers, open-eared would be most wise.*

*You've questioned me, so listen and I'll tell you of my tale.  
In summer months I rested on a mountain few could scale.*

*Into the earth my roots did thrust, forever deeper plunging.  
To the Pleiades stretched out my limbs, forever forward lunging.*

*Seeing me there standing all the birds would come alight  
And in my branches make a tent; it truly was a sight!*

*The parrot, dove and francolin in concert they all sang.  
It seemed an epoch passed like this and from it pleasure sprang.*

*As the spirit-bird flew into the fading garden of desire,  
The trap laid by the life-bird then began to slowly tire.*

*It seemed this fate was not for me; God laid a different plan;  
For on the mountain came someone with axe firm in his hand.*

*My breast he rent asunder, 'round my neck he slid a noose;  
He dragged me on through every street, subjected to abuse.*

*Forever and a day it seemed I rested in the street;  
And people passing by would blithely kick me with their feet.*

*They brought out nails of iron and they drove them in my heart,  
From fortune's clutch, the strike of fate would certainly not part.*

*And then like Zachariah, they cut right on through my breast  
And prepared parts for a waterwheel; my wood they did divest.*

*And since that time I've hollered out, calling for the friend;  
My eyes have watered vine and farm, my tears they have no end."*

*To whom has fate presented golden honey sweet to taste,  
And not at length awarded with a bowl that's poison-laced?*

*The throne of Solomon the wind drove all around the earth,  
Yet in the end his cheek did lay on dirt devoid of mirth.*

*And remember Alexander ruled the globe from end to end.  
His decree and mighty reach, they seemed forever to extend.*

*The spring of endless youth he sought by traveling in gloom;  
And instead a cup of poison went and sent him to his doom.*

*Where today stands Caesar, Khusraw, and our father Shem?  
No one knows exactly where the earth encases them.*

*This world's essential nature, from beginning to the end  
Presents recurrent suffering with which you must contend.*

*This world is like the spider's web and so our Prophet said,  
Where bugs so very wretchedly are trapped in silky thread.*

*Those who seek forever take no real stock in this place;  
They desire lastingness so this world they'll not embrace.*

*‘Alā’ī Ghaybī's tekke surely won't be found herein;  
Whatever Hakk should throw at us we bear it with a grin.*

*The waistband is obtained beneath the rug of your prostration;  
It's a waistband girded only through the act of your submission.*

*Kaygusuz! Do not speak your words to all you meet.  
Can a calf thick-headed know of something that's so very sweet?*

Here is our explanation of this poem:

In this distinctly allegorical poem Kaygusuz makes it clear that the material world is both elusive and unpredictable. No matter how much we zealously embrace it and hungrily work for it, the world will escape us in the end, leaving us utterly bereft. Mighty kings, such as Alexander the Great, or King Solomon, have all faded away, and their displays of grandeur and wealth eventually turned to dust and disappeared. If this is the end of the high and mighty what are we to say about our own humble situation?

The significance of the imagery conveyed in Kaygusuz's **waterwheel** is this: Should we find ourselves in favorable conditions we should never exhibit smugness or pretension. Conversely, we should not lose heart if we are suddenly removed from such favorable conditions. This world is like a waterwheel – sometimes we're up, sometimes we're down. Therefore it is important for us to maintain steadiness, and the only thing that allows for steadiness is our connection to God. We must keep this bond firm in every state and every situation, be it positive or negative. If we are blessed with such a connection, we will always find ourselves in a state of contentment and tranquility regardless of the world's condition.

‘Ala’ī refers to Kaygusuz's hometown, and Ghaybī is his given name, as we have mentioned above in the section dealing with his biography. At the end of the poem, Kaygusuz tells us that if we adopt his outlook, we will undoubtedly gain peace of mind; and, he concludes by satirically remarking, anyone who cannot grasp this fact is as thick-headed and immature as an unweaned calf.

In conclude, Kaygusuz Sultān wrote many other clever poems of a satirical nature. Despite their seemingly irreverent tone, these works impart great spiritual and moral instruction. Sadly we do not have more of these works readily available, and consequently, we are unable to provide further examples of these expressive works of literary art.

## VIRĀNĪ BABA

Like the personalities mentioned above, Virānī Baba (who is also called Virānī Sultān) is regarded as an important pillar of the Bektashi Order. He lived during the sixteenth century and was a contemporary of Balīm Sultān. By the time he reached adulthood, Virānī had received a thorough education. However book knowledge did not satisfy his heart's longing, and he was filled with a great desire to enter the spiritual path. Virānī went on to receive initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Balīm Sultān. In no time he fully absorbed the Path's mystical principles and ethical requirements. Following his initiation Virānī was sent on a mission to propagate Bektashism at the tomb of Imām ‘Alī in the blessed city of Najaf.

With his piercing intellect and unmatched disposition Virānī gained the boundless admiration of the people of Iraq, who provided him with selfless and generous support. The inspiring influence of Imām ‘Alī, coupled with Virānī Baba's charm, helped the spread of Bektashism in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, where cherished remnants of it still linger.

During his time in Iraq, Virānī was visited by the Safavid ruler of Persia, Shah ‘Abbās I, who often journeyed to Najaf to make a pilgrimage to the turbeh of the exalted ‘Alī. In fact, the patronage of the Safavid Dynasty allowed for the expansion and enhancement over the years of Imām ‘Alī's sacred shrine. In the course of their intimate conversations Shah ‘Abbās found Virānī Baba utterly captivating, so much so that he eventually took his hand in initiation.

With the financial support of Shah ‘Abbās, Virānī Baba was able to erect a magnificent tekke in Najaf. This tekke eventually became one of the six leading Bektashi centers in the world. Its maydān was adorned with a lofty and ornate dome that, till recent days, glimmered in the sun. Shah ‘Abbās left an inscription in Persian at the top of the tekke's gate that declared (among other things): “There is nothing in the world like this Bektashi tekke.”

We have already mentioned that Virānī Baba was an extremely refined and sophisticated person, and these qualities are prominently displayed in his prose and verse. His pen-name “Virānī” is a Persian word that means “Ruined,” and he became so well-known by this name that his birth name

has long been lost. We should point out here that in mystic parlance being “ruined” implies that the wayfarer has reduced to rubble any attachment to the material world, an act that clears the way for spiritual perfection. This “ruination” is apparent throughout *Virānī* Baba’s poetry, samples of which we shall present below.

Apart from his poem-filled *divān*, *Virānī* Baba composed a work of prose entitled *Risālat-i Virānī Baba*. Within this book’s pages, the great master describes the spiritual benefits of the Bektashi Path as well as its mystic teachings, regulations, and guidelines.

Given that he was the *pōstnishin* of the Najaf Tekke, *Virānī* Baba took “‘Alī” as a spiritual name, indicating the unbreakable spiritual bond and great love he possessed for the great ‘Alī al-Murtażā. Unsurprisingly, *Virānī* Baba composed many poems extolling the merits and qualities of Imām ‘Alī, which occupy a prominent place in his *divān*.

The examples of *Virānī* Baba’s poetry that we shall present here should provide our readers with a grasp of his mystical outlook. The first of these is a poem in which *Virānī* Baba announces his wrecked and ruined state (which is to say “*Virānī*”), as well as the bond with his murshid, Balīm Sultān:

*Nothing compares, O zāhid, to my tattered worn out shawl;  
In my destitution, Balīm Sultān is my one and all!*

*What on earth am I to do with a palace and arched gates?  
Renunciation, abandonment – my pride lies in such states.*

*With the riches of a realm that goes, what could I ever do?  
Thank God I have the Ahl ul-Bayt to turn my vision to!*

*Fame and fortune lead astray, far from the path of Hakk.  
With Haydar’s children’s insight there’s nothing that we lack.*

*Dervish *Virānī* I am called; I long for the face divine;  
For not even in this fleeting world are breath and body mine.*

Let us now examine these lines:

The term **zāhid** has been explained in earlier sections of this book. Nevertheless to reiterate, a *zāhid* is an outwardly devout (and oftentimes sanctimonious) person who claims to have detached himself from the world, but in reality has not. Such a person strives to gain paradise without having been stripped of worldly desire, as one must be. The sad part about this

situation is that the zāhid is entirely satisfied with this state and oblivious to its adverse effects. So what Virānī Baba is essentially saying here is:

O zāhid! We're utterly stripped of worldly things. We have neither children nor property, nor anything else for that matter. We have only our love for the Household of the Prophet, for Ḥaydar [another name of the glorious 'Alī] and his children, from whom spring the Twelve Imāms.

It can clearly be understood that the phrase **a realm that goes** in the third stanza refers to the transitory state of this world. Also evident in these lines is the spiritual bond between Virānī Baba and his murshid, Balīm Sultān. At the conclusion of the poem, Virānī Baba tells us that he is a simple dervish mystically connected to God's love

Here is another of Virānī Baba's poems, one in which he celebrates the transcendent majesty of the Bektashi Path:

*O zāhid! Before time they've been with God – these Bektashis.  
They saw the Merciful with certitude's eye – these Bektashis.*

*They were honored and refined by the Bā of Bismillah;  
Clear as day, mankind they recognized – these Bektashis.*

*Shedding endless tears; "Misery and Woe!" they cried;  
For Shāh Husayn's sake they spilled their blood – these Bektashis.*

*With maledictions thrown, the Khāriji camp they defied;  
The Āl-i Ābā's skirt they held tight – these Bektashis.*

*They recalled with every breath God's eternal reproof,  
Knowing the character of you-know-who – these Bektashis.*

*The Ja'farī School they stood by, making true prostration;  
The King of Saints' rite they conducted – these Bektashis.*

*They beheld Ḥakk in the meaning of the Mother of Books;  
From start to finish the Kur'ān they read – these Bektashis.*

*Āb-i Ḥayāt they drank; from Khizr's hand the cup they took;  
They quenched their thirst at the Spring of Life – these Bektashis.*

*O Virānī! They surrendered their heads and became dust;  
For the path of the King of Men, they let go – these Bektashis.*

Virānī Baba employs the words **these Bektashis** throughout this poem to accentuate the importance that Bektashis give to the strenuous yet lofty task of perfecting human character. **Certitude's eye** (*‘ayn ul-yakīn*) mentioned in the opening stanza refers to the fact that they – these Bektashis – have reached the state of perfection, and in the process of reaching it have annihilated the ego, to the extent that nothing remains within save God Almighty, who is *Haqq* (The Real). The details of this mystical station have been explained earlier in our book.

The meaning of **by the Bā of Bismillah** in the second stanza refers to the Arabic letter “bā” (ب), the first letter of the phrase *Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm* (i.e. In the Name of God, the Most-Compassionate, the Most-Merciful). Whenever we recite the *Kur’ān* or perform any other religious devotion, we must utter this formula before starting.

Yet there is a deeper meaning to this sacred formula. Our scholars, mystics, and *Kur’ān* commentators have given much thought to the meaning of the dot found under the letter “bā” (ب), giving it countless explanations. This particular saying of Imām ‘Alī concerning the dot under the “bā” has been the foremost motivation for interest in this topic:

What is in the *Kur’ān* is found in *Sūrat ul-Fātiḥah*. Everything in this *sūrah* is found in *Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm*. Everything in *Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm* is found in the letter "bā". Everything contained within this letter is found in the dot; and I am that dot.

Therefore, Virānī Baba is telling us that Bektashi spirituality benefits a person since it reveals both the inner meanings of the *Kur’ān* and the fountainhead of this sacred revelation's opening formula *Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm*, which is embodied in none other than the exalted Imām ‘Alī.

The word **Khārijī** in the fourth stanza refers to a sect in early Islam that revolted against the authority of Imām ‘Alī during his caliphate. The **Āl-i Ābā** (literally “The Family of the Cloak”) is a title used to refer to the Holy Family, who together are: 1. The Prophet Muḥammad; 2. His son-in-law and cousin ‘Alī; 3. His daughter Fāṭimah; 4. His first grandson Hasan; and 5. His second grandson Husayn.

The term **Jacfarī School** refers to the madhhab of the sixth righteous Imām, Jacfar as-Sādīk. As we explained earlier, Imām Jacfar as-Sādīk played a pivotal role in conveying the esoteric understanding of Islam. Countless students, scholars and mystic wayfarers benefited from his teachings.

The **Āb-i Hayāt** (Water of Life) mentioned in the eighth stanza refers to the legendary water imbibed by the Prophet Khizr in the depths of antiquity, which conferred upon him eternal life. The **Āb-i Hayāt** has repeatedly been employed by poets, who furnish it with countless interpretations. The mystics of Islam have interpreted the **Āb-i Hayāt** to mean the “water” of mystical insight, a single drop of which can impart eternal life to the drinker. By this water, Khizr was able to reach the state of perfection. In this poem, Virānī Baba assigns this particular meaning to the **Āb-i Hayāt**, the life-giving water of spirituality – and is thereby reaffirming the importance Bektashi devotees place on mystical insight.

In the last line, Virānī Baba declares that the Bektashis are transmitters of the esoteric essence of Islam that has been passed down to us from the exalted Imām ‘Alī, from whom all mystics take inspiration.

Let us now turn to another of Virānī Baba’s nefes poems, one in which he praises Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān, who, as we know, is also called Kızıl Deli:

*The Abdals of Rūm are we, and our chief is Kızıl Deli.  
The gleam of light that is there in our eyes is Kızıl Deli.  
Love-crazed nightingales are we and the garden Kızıl Deli.  
Our religion, our belief, our confession is Kızıl Deli.*

*Light of Ahmad, our own Haydar-i Karrār is Kızıl Deli.  
Wherever we turn our faces we behold our Kızıl Deli.*

*Sainthood’s endless mine, commander of the warriors of God;  
All creation is drowned in his mercy oceans overawed;  
With a glance he can upturn vast heaven and this earth so broad.  
He can fill a heart with Khunkār’s light with a simple wink and nod.*

*Light of Ahmad, our own Haydar-i Karrār is Kızıl Deli.  
Wherever we turn our faces we behold our Kızıl Deli.*

*O brave man of the Shah! Recall that far and wide was his place.  
For those who trail the Āl-i Ābā he’s a king filled with grace.  
One muhabet of his a hundred thousand cannot replace;  
Those who understand this will find his beauty a prayer space.*

*Light of Ahmad, our own Haydar-i Karrār is Kızıl Deli.  
Wherever we turn our faces we behold our Kızıl Deli.*

*O zāhid! Doubt and distrust cannot be found on this saint's way;  
 Who wipes his face on its threshold in the highest garden stays.  
 Those who rehearse this litany of heavy sighs night and day  
 Come attach your heart to the King of Saints, and you'll not stray!*

*Light of Ah̄mad, our own Ḥaydar-i Karrār is Kızıl Deli.  
 Wherever we turn our faces we behold our Kızıl Deli.*

*Imams Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Ḩabīb met with constant grief,  
 Bākir and Jāfar, Kāzim and Rizā, sovereigns of belief,  
 For Tākī, Nakī and Ḩaskarī the world is but a fief,  
 The Master of the Age, Mahdī - over first and last he's chief.*

*Light of Ah̄mad, our own Ḥaydar-i Karrār is Kızıl Deli.  
 Wherever we turn our faces we behold our Kızıl Deli.*

*O Virānī! Don't loosen your grasp of the saint's sacred skirt;  
 On his mystical path you must take care and strength exert;  
 For the Ahl ul-Bayt true devotion into your heart insert;  
 Cry "Ya Imām!" and take his hand – in that way decline avert.*

*Light of Ah̄mad, our own Ḥaydar-i Karrār is Kızıl Deli.  
 Wherever we turn our faces we behold our Kızıl Deli.*

The meaning of this poem should be relatively straightforward and in no need of explanation.

## ABDUL MU'MIN DEDE & FUZŪLĪ

Abdul Mu'min Dede is well-known for being the first dede to serve the tekke dedicated to Imām Ḥusayn that was once found in the Iraqi city of Karbalā'. Abdul Mu'min Dede was a contemporary of Balım Sultān, whose dervish he happened to be. When Abdul Mu'min Dede reached a level of spiritually refinement and elevation by way of vigorous preparation, Balım Sultān sent him to promulgate Bektashism at the sacred tomb of Imām Ḥusayn. Abdul Mu'min Dede happily obeyed his master's command and journeyed to the holy city, where he diligently attended to this mission, all the while residing in a humble lean-to.

The ruler of the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Sulaymān I (d. 1566), once desired to travel to Baghdad, and so he met with Balım Sultān to have this journey blessed. After giving the appropriate benedictions, Balım Sultān handed the sultan a wooden staff in the shape of a sword and said:

When you reach the borders of Iraq, proceed to Karbalā', wherein lies the sacred sepulcher of Imām Ḥusayn. There you will find a dervish of ours. Meet with him and give him our regards along with this staff, so he may remember us.

In the year 1534, Sultan Sulaymān arrived in Baghdad and then continued to Karbalā'. It was here that he met with the above-mentioned dervish, Abdul Mu'min. The Ottoman ruler conveyed Balīm Sultān's greetings as he handed Abdul Mu'min the wooden staff given to him as an *amānah* (trust).

In the course of their many conversations, the sultan grew enchanted with Abdul Mu'min, and he was quickly overtaken by warmth for the dervish. The sultan once exclaimed: "O true one! We are filled with genuine fondness for you. Is there any need of yours that we can fulfill?"

Abdul Mu'min replied that he needed nothing for himself. But he asked that a canal be dug for the sake of Karbalā's inhabitants so that water could be diverted from the Euphrates into the city. The sultan gave his word that such a canal would be built and water diverted to the townsfolk. In addition to this, the sultan ordered a splendid tekke built for Abdul Mu'min so that he no longer had to live in a lean-to.

Not long after this meeting workmen began the task of digging the canal. However, they kept running into a peculiar obstruction: No matter what they did, or how hard they tried, they could not get the river to flow into the channels they constructed. Needless to say, the sultan was concerned when he received news of this dilemma. He went to Abdul Mu'min Dede and asked the mystic to beg God to let this pious work to turn out successful.

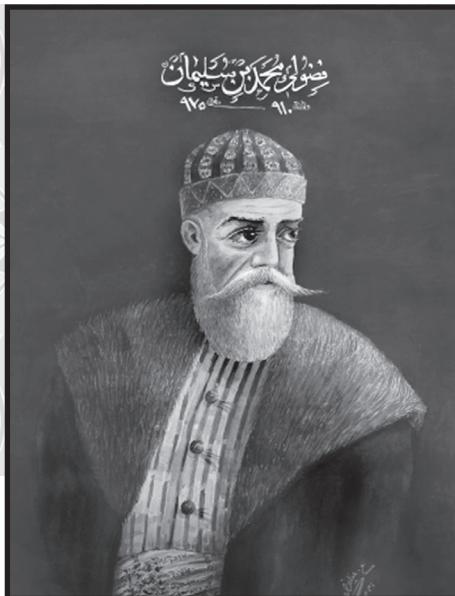
Abdul Mu'min Dede did as the sultan asked. He took in hand the wooden staff that had been sent to him by Balīm Sultān and went to the banks of the Euphrates River where the canal had been dug. He chanted the necessary prayers to God and then uttered these famous words:

O Euphrates! I know that this obstruction arises out of your hesitancy to come into the presence of Imām Ḥusayn, who long ago sought to quench his thirst with your waters, but failed. So be it! But now be not ashamed before the martyred Imām so that people may drink from you. Come, let us not upset the sultan!

Through the efficacy of this prayer, the engineers figured out how to regulate the channels and water soon gushed into Karbalā', diverted by two



Portrait of Fużūlī  
by early 20th century  
Azeri artist Azim Azimzade.



canals: one given the name “Husaynī” in honor of Imām Husayn, and the other “Sulaymānī”, in memory of its builder, Sultan Sulaymān. The opening of these canals was seen as a miracle and Abdul Mu’mīn Dede’s prestige among the people increased alongside their love for him. Thus he began to successfully propagate Bektashism in Iraq and expand the tekke of Karbalā’, which became one of six key administrative centers of our order.

Some twenty-five miles to the southeast of Karbalā’ lay a town called Al-Ḥilla. In this town, there lived a jeweler who owned a small shop wherein he worked without respite. Abdul Mu’mīn Dede visited this shop whenever he journeyed to this town, and he conversed with this jeweler about mysticism and the spiritual path.

In the shop of this jeweler there served a lad who, as the two men spoke, carefully listened to Abdul Mu’mīn Dede’s words – words that made a tremendous impression on him. This boy was Muḥammad, the son of Sulaymān, who would come to be better known as Fużūlī. The lad would eventually become one of Abdul Mu’mīn Dede’s dervishes, as we shall explain below.

Abdul Mu’mīn Dede soon understood the effect that his words were having on the boy’s heart, and he increased his visits to the shop, so much so that the jeweler grew annoyed with not being able to get any work done. So one day when the jeweler saw Abdul Mu’mīn Dede coming down the

street he grabbed a brazier filled with burning embers and put it under the place where the saintly man usually sat. Then he covered the brazier so that it could not be seen. He hoped that the heat from the burning embers would signal to Abdul Mu'min Dede that he was no longer welcome.

Abdul Mu'min Dede came and sat in his usual place for two uninterrupted hours as if nothing was wrong. He conversed with the jeweler as the young Fużūlī listened with great attention. When the saint finally got up and left, both the jeweler and Fużūlī notice that despite the live embers underneath his seat, Abdul Mu'min Dede did not even break a sweat.

Fużūlī realized that this had to be a miracle and his heart filled with boundless love for Abdul Mu'min Dede. He left the shop and went looking for the saint to seek his forgiveness for the ill-mannered act that he and the jeweler had perpetrated. Young Fużūlī journeyed to the tekke of Karbalā' and asked for Abdul Mu'min Dede, but the dervishes said that he had just left by boat to go upriver to visit other holy sites. Fużūlī grew disheartened upon hearing this and returned to the shop. As soon as he arrived back, he told the jeweler that he no longer desired to work for him.

Fużūlī's love for Abdul Mu'min Dede increased as the hours passed and he set off in the direction the saint's boat had taken. However, when he came to the place where the boat landed, he was told that Abdul Mu'min Dede had departed the night before on a pilgrimage to Baghdad's sacred shrines.

Fużūlī's frustration only added to his resolve to follow Abdul Mu'min Dede's footsteps until they led right to the saint. Everywhere he stopped Fużūlī asked about Abdul Mu'min Dede; and in every place, the news was the same: He had indeed been there but had only just left for another location.

The situation continued like this for months, as Fużūlī journeyed to all of Iraq's sacred shrines, one after another. However, no matter where he went he could not find Abdul Mu'min Dede. Wherever anyone said he was, the saint had departed before Fużūlī reached him. It seemed that everywhere Abdul Mu'min Dede went Fużūlī was right behind him – but unable to catch up! And though this situation caused him much frustration, Fużūlī refused to give up.

When he finally finished his tour of the sacred shrines, Abdul Mu'min Dede returned to his tekke in Karbalā'. The very next day Fużūlī arrived,

and this time, he found the mystic master, entered into his presence, and humbly apologized for the incident with the brazier at the jeweler's shop. At that moment Fuzūlī and Abdul Mu'min Dede were bound together in spiritual affection and the young man never separated from the saint again.

Under the loving guidance of his murshid, Fuzūlī quickly reached the state of spiritual perfection, and he immersed himself in devotion to the path of the Ahl ul-Bayt, with whom he was deeply in love. Fuzūlī elegantly expressed this devotion in his poems, and soon enough he came to be one of the greatest poets of the Turkish language.

Fuzūlī's attachment to Abdul Mu'min Dede was so strong that he remained at the saint's side until he departed this life. When Abdul Mu'min Dede passed and was buried, Fuzūlī stayed by his tomb until his own time came to pass. He was then buried near his murshid, and both of their blessed graves became known to one and all and the site has been visited by pilgrims ever since.

It is said that Abdul Mu'min Dede equally possessed a talent for composing mystic poems. However, we do not have any samples of his work on hand to present to our readers.

At this point, let us examine a few of Fuzūlī's more notable poems. We explained how Fuzūlī endured great longing and distress trying to locate his cherished master, Abdul Mu'min Dede. This longing is charmingly voiced in the following poem that clearly displays both his mastery of verse and his depth of spirit:

*The Beloved has wearied me of my being;  
Of such cruelty is he not weary too?  
The blaze of my sighs set the heavens fleeing;  
Will the candle of my longing not shine through?*

*For every unwell patient who comes to his door  
The Beloved has fashioned a healing.  
Yet no cure comes to me, my appeal ignored;  
Does he not consider the ache that I'm feeling?*

*My soul's ablaze in parting's lengthy night,  
My eyes forever shedding bloody tears.  
My weeping wakes creation to my plight.  
Will not my fate awake from these affairs?*

*Before your rosy cheeks, which luster encloses,  
Blood-tinged water pours forth from my eyes.  
O my love! Is this not the season of the roses?  
From these tears will not some elusiveness arise?*

*While I tried my best to keep secret my despair,  
They told me to make it known to the friend.  
If I told that fickle one all would I forswear,  
Would he believe? On what would it depend?*

*It was not I who at first inclined towards you.  
It was you who made me to lose my mind.  
When the deniers upon me censure spew,  
If they saw you would they be so blind?*

*Glance upon Fużūlī, this love-crazed vagabond;  
Forever notorious among his folk;  
Ask, to what sort of longing does this correspond?  
A longing exhaustion could never cloak!*

The essential meaning of this mystic poem should be clear and therefore in no need of explanation.

In addition to such graceful masterpieces, Fużūlī composed a number of works in prose. He possessed an incredibly refined pen, one bursting with elegiac majesty when he brought to mind the martyrs of Karbalā'. It is fair to say that the one work he is most remembered for is *Hadīkat us-Su'adā'* (Gardens of the Fortunate), which he composed in Turkish. Seeing as this book contains the complete narration of the Battle of Karbalā' it is recited annually throughout countless tekkes during the month of Muḥarram, the month of lament.

*Hadīkat us-Su'adā'* is divided into ten chapters, which facilitate its recitation over the course of the first ten nights of the Mātam. The book starts by presenting accounts of the tribulations suffered by each of the prophets of old – from Adam to Muḥammad. The genius of this book is that Fużūlī structured it in such a way that it builds anticipation as it reaches the last chapter, which presents the heartbreaking account of Imām Ḥusayn's martyrdom.

Fużūlī is celebrated among Islamic mystics on account of this work.

This is particularly true of Bektashis, who count him as one of their saints, referring to him as Fużūlī Sultān. The Albanian poet Tālib Frashëri composed a nefes poem that included the following two lines praising Fużūlī's talents:

*Save Fużūlī in his wisdom – none has topped him yet,  
For one day kondisi ‘Alī, and gave him ishāret.*

Before the adoption of the Latin alphabet, Fużūlī's *Hadīkat us-Su‘adā’* was translated by the very same Tālib Frashëri into Albanian using Arabic letters. This translation was used in tekkes throughout Albania until the publication of Naim Frashëri's *Qerbelaja*, a lyrical work composed in the same spirit as Fużūlī's masterpiece.

In a heartrending poem found within the *Hadīkat*, Fużūlī describes the moment when all of Imām Husayn's companions fell martyred, leaving him standing alone on the battlefield. It tells us how Imām Husayn valiantly stood before his enemies, as he proclaimed his lofty status:

*It is I, whose pure grandfather is the torch of God's prophets;  
The apex of grace, a cypress in the garden of mercy!*

*It is I, whose form is a pearl from the treasure of ‘Alī;  
Shah of the lords of hākīkat, sun of the saints' assembly.*

*It is I, whose nature is light from the sun of Fātīmah,  
Jewel from a noble mine, sun of the chamber of modesty.*

*It is I who is the scion of an immaculate rose patch,  
O scoundrels! What's this wrong and ache you cast on me?*

*You've caused my leaves to fall, casting your stones of carnage;  
Far from home without rations, in a desert you've placed me.*

*Now my murder you desire with your reckless abandon;  
In which school of thought is taking my life deemed worthy?*

In another moving poem, Fużūlī describes Imām Husayn's riderless horse returning to camp after he was slain. Seeing the horse without its master, the womenfolk of his camp began to wail, crying out:

*Beloved horse! O stalwart mount! O horse may you be blessed!  
O you who flies upon the wind! What's made you so distressed?*

*That gallant hero brave and strong, alone does he contend?  
Our mainstay's he, a cherished hope we followed to the end.*

*Are we to be forsaken, seeing you have brought him not?  
Your saddle bare, your stirrups stripped, by grief we are distraught.*

*No more can we embrace him; truly, how can we go on?  
Now who will save our blessed clan? Defeat we've come upon!*

*Are you a wretch with heart of stone, no tears you have to shed?  
How can eyes stay dry and parched, not shedding flames of red?*

*Without such cries can we go on? Confusion we have bought.  
Why strike the head in unlit grief? Better to be forgot!*

We believe the meanings of these two poems should be clear enough to be in no need of explanation. To close this section, we should remind the reader that Fuzūlī's poems are known to enthusiasts of fine literature throughout the world.

## ŞADIK ABDAL BABA

Şadiq Abdal Baba was a notable Bektashi poet of the fifteenth century. He felt the pull of the spiritual path early in his life, and as he neared his fourteenth birthday, a certain Dervish Mehmet presented the young Şadiq with some advice that, after careful consideration, caused him to gain an unyielding love for Bektashism.

When he reached the age of twenty-two, Şadiq Abdal journeyed to the tekke of Kızıl Deli (Sayyid ˆAlî Sultân) take initiation into the order at the saint's hand. Unsurprisingly Şadiq Abdal Baba fell in love with Kızıl Deli, and soon enough he attained the rank of a dervish, and then baba. The bond he shared with Kızıl Deli is quite apparent throughout Şadiq Abdal Baba's *divân*, as we shall see in a poem presented below.

Şadiq Abdal Baba explains in one of his poems that his *divân* consists of thirty-six leaves containing 968 couplets. This is amazing since it is

said that all of these lines were composed within the space of six months! Needless to say, Şādik Abdal Baba remains an impressive poet, and his verses are filled with moral and spiritual guidance intended to provide advice and inspiration for all those seeking to walk the spiritual path. He emphasizes this point in the following couplet:

*O Şādik! Your lines evoke the essence of reality  
For those who seek advice shorn of hesitancy.*

When Şādik Baba took the hand of Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān and received initiation into the Bektashi Order, he wrote the following verses. It should be kept in mind that he composed these at the age of twenty-two:

*Praise be to God! In twenty-two years I attained!  
The illuminating grace of Kızıl Deli I gained.*

*In the secret of Hajji Bektash I learned all good;  
Filled with blinding light, I heard and understood.*

*You, Şādik, beheld God's mystery and knew;  
All doubts left, and inside illumination grew.*

*With wisdom so endowed, all secrets they reveal;  
Praise God and His prophet, to ʻAlī I appeal!*

Here is another of Şādik Abdal Baba's poems, one in which he yet again praises his spiritual guide, his murshid, Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān:

*By his great name they call him, Sayyid ʻAlī.  
By his moniker they beseech him, Kızıl Deli.  
He springs from our sultan, Hajji Bektash-i Veli.  
His noble line descends from the sons of ʻAlī.*

*Hakk you'll discover in this bless'd holy one.  
He's the image of ʻAlī, bright like the sun.  
All goals converge in that immaculate saint.  
Run quick to his side; let there be no constraint!*

*His hand will unfasten a strongbox of light;  
Pain will recede as you're filled with delight.  
If it's essence you seek, go to him and submit,  
All that's unknown, to your heart he'll transmit.*

*O wretched Ṣādik! Such light you've imbibed;  
 Filled by his essence, all gloom's now proscribed.  
 All longing's been sated, love's fully in place;  
 You're revived and enlightened by way of his grace!*

The meaning of this poem should be relatively straightforward and in no need of explanation.

## SERSEM °ALĪ DEDE

Sersem °Alī Dede stands among the foremost notables of Bektashism. He was born in the western Macedonian town of Tetovo, and though the exact date of his birth is unknown, it must have been sometime in the latter part of the fifteenth century, since he was a contemporary of Balım Sultān.

In his youth Sersem °Alī Dede attended the most renowned schools of his day and this afforded him the expansive intellect that eventually propelled him to the position of vizier to Sultan Sulaymān I. It was during his service as vizier that Sersem °Alī Dede was drawn to the spiritual path. One night Balım Sultān appeared to him in a dream, and the power of this vision compelled Sersem °Alī Dede to resign from his lofty position. He withdrew from public life and headed straight to the Pīrevi. Upon reaching the sacred sanctuary he submitted himself before Balım Sultān, and in doing so was able to reach the state of perfection.

When the sacred sheepskin of the dedebaba became vacant at the Pīrevi in 1550, Sersem °Alī Dede was selected to assume the position based on miracles confirmed by various dreams and visions. Sersem °Alī Dede served as head of the Bektashi Order with great steadfastness for nineteen years, until he passed from this life in 1569.

In keeping with his last wishes, all of Sersem °Alī Dede's possessions were sold off after he passed from the world. The money that was derived from the sale of his belongings was used to build a tekke in his hometown of Tetovo. This tekke was constructed under the direction of Kharābātī Baba, and in time it came to be called the Sersem °Alī Tekke.

As with the previously mentioned masters, Sersem °Alī Dede's heart overflowed with spirituality, and he expressed his mystical outlook in numerous poems, some of which we shall present here:

*Through the seven climes, to the earth's four corners I've sought,  
 Calling: "My Pīr, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"  
 I descended to the threshold; to make niyāz I'd not forgot,  
 Calling: "My Pīr, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"*

*When I reached the door I beheld a sepulcher of light;  
 My face to the dust, I submitted, of course, forthright.  
 From my rose-faced Pīr I gained consent, much to my delight,  
 Calling: "My Pīr, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"*

*Balīm Sultān I found sitting beneath his vaulted tent;  
 Fulfilling every service, all the angels came and went.  
 Through the seven climes, to the earth's four corners they were sent,  
 Calling: "My Pīr, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"*

*In the maydān there were sitting men of exaltation;  
 At dawn they all recited a liturgical oration,  
 God, Muḥammad, Ḥalī, from my Pīr came illumination,  
 Calling: "My Pīr Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"*

*From the lofty realms divine the green farmān emerged;  
 Its words the Saints of Rūm beheld when they converged.  
 In Ḳarāja Aḥmad's service they were totally submerged,  
 Calling: "My Pīr Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"*

*Sersem Ḥalī reached the Pīr, and on him he relies;  
 Our candles were awoken on the Kirkbudak nearby;  
 To the murshid we announced that our work will never die,  
 Calling: "My Pīr Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!"*

Let us now explain the finer points of this poem:

The **seven climes** mentioned in the opening line refers to how people in old days divided the world from equator to pole into a grid composed of seven segments. These segments were called “the seven boundaries of the earth” or “the seven divisions of land.” In using this phrase Sersem Ḥalī Dede tells us that he traversed the whole world, including its most remote regions, all the while exclaiming: “My Pīr, Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī...Hū!”

The meaning of Balīm Sultān’s **vaulted tent** found in the third stanza alludes to the celebrated saint’s tomb, his *turbeh*. The angels are those dervishes who lovingly attend to Balīm Sultān’s turbeh, carrying out such

duties as cleaning, lighting candles and other work of this sort. They perform this service out of devotion, chanting all the while “My Pīr Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī, Hū!” as their melodic voices reach the aforementioned seven climes.

The **green farmān** is related to the story of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī’s coming to the Land of Rūm (i.e. Anatolia). As he was about to cross the border into Rūm all of the mystics of the area – headed by the celebrated Karāja Aḥmad Sultān – came to ask who Ḥajjī Bektash Velī was and from where he hailed. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī gave the appropriate responses to their queries and revealed to them a *farmān* (decree) written on green vellum. This *farmān* had been handed to him by his murshid, Ahmad Yasawī, who had ordered him to voyage to Rūm, assume authority over all the mystics there and promulgate spirituality. When mystics of the Land of Rūm saw this *farmān* they submitted as one, chanting: “My Pīr, Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī... Hū!”

Beyond the door of the Pīr is the **Kırkbudak**, a forty-branched candelabrum. At the command of his murshid, Sersem ‘Alī Dede came to the Kırkbudak and “awoke” its forty candles. This tells us that he is Balım Sultān’s spiritual inheritor, and as such is the possessor of the *pōst* of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī. From such a lofty position Sersem ‘Alī Dede can now guide others as only a perfect guide can, having in his possession all of the requisite qualities needed to carry out such a righteous and often difficult mission.

Having given a brief explanation of the more obscure points of is poem, let us turn to another:

*From this well-traveled world I stood up and came.  
O Gurūh-i nājī! May you meet with love!  
From my grandfather came advice of great acclaim,  
O Gurūh-i nājī! May you meet with love!*

*In you the paths of the Shāh stretch out;  
Praises of Haydar your tongues always shout;  
For at dawn the rosebuds will come to sprout;  
O Gurūh-i nājī! May you meet with love!*

*Who's greatest among us? There's no one to know;  
Stand with Yazīd and our words you'll forgo;  
With Muḥammad ‘Alī our path is aglow;  
O Gurūh-i nājī! May you meet with love!*

*Who seeks our way and gives confirmation,  
This mission of ours will bestow elevation,  
Wherever we go angels sing jubilations,  
O Gurūh-i nājī! May you meet with love!*

*A nightingale I asked for news of this way,  
For the scent of the rose it chats with each day;  
Sersem am I! On this road I shall pray:  
O Gurūh-i nājī! May you meet with love!*

Here is our explanation of this poem:

The **Gurūh-i nājī** (The Saved Sect) mentioned throughout this poem is comprised of those individuals blessed with lofty mystical insight. They are those who have been rescued from the gloom of spiritual blindness. In this poem Sersem ‘Alī Dede praises the Gurūh-i nājī and applauds them by saying: “May you meet with love!” (*aşk olsun*).

The meaning of **my grandfather** in the first stanza refers to Hajjī Bektash Velī, given that Sersem ‘Alī Dede’s own “father” (i.e. baba), Balım Sultān, links him to Kızıl Deli, who took guidance directly from the Pīr. Accordingly, the Pīr is a grandfather (dede) for Sersem ‘Alī. The advice (*naşihat*) taken from this “grandfather” refers to the regulations and rituals of Bektashi spiritual teachings.

The second stanza Sersem ‘Alī Dede tells us that the cornerstone of all this uplifting spirituality is the **Shāh**, the illustrious Imām ‘Alī, who delivers from blindness all who sincerely seek. ‘Alī is the wellspring of mysticism, having been thoroughly inspired by the Prophet Muhammad. This is a matter we have explained many times above.

The line **Who’s greatest among us? There’s no one to know** means that those who comprise the Gurūh-i nājī have stripped away their egos and utterly erased any notion of self. We have explained this issue in the section on Kaygusuz Sultān. The members of this group do not recognize such concepts as greatness or primacy; they are one.

**Yazīd** in this poem epitomizes all of those who follow the path of debauchery and evil and are consequently incapable of comprehending even the most basic concepts of spirituality. Conversely, the **angels** singing with joy in the fourth stanza symbolize the goodness, purity and moral excellence spread by the Gurūh-i nājī.

The nightingale in the last stanza symbolizes Balım Sultān, who causes wayfarers on the Bektashi Path to become drunk on the scent of the nearby rose, which is our beloved Ḥajjī Bektash Velī. In other words, Sersem ʻAlī Dede has been filled with the uplifting inspiration of both nightingale and rose.

Let us conclude this section on the life and work of Sersem ʻAlī Dede with a poem in which he celebrates the value of worship carried out at dawn:

*Wake up! Why sleep? Behold the break of day!  
At dawn isn't every prayer found accepted?  
In the divine court all gather, coming there to pray.  
At dawn, a believer's goal is surely not rejected.*

*Like a moth the heart flutters as it catches flame;  
In the cauldron of love it boils, staying not the same;  
Wake at dawn and in Hakk's presence you'll remain.  
At dawn the heedless linger, fully unconnected!*

*My form is now twice folded, just like the letter "dāl";  
Jewels spill from my eyes, to the ground they fall;  
My beloved appears to me, as love...it covers all;  
At dawn, for this stinging wound a cure's effected!*

*Even as they're clear to me, my many imperfections,  
In the vastness of the Lord my faults spark no detection.  
See the one who speaks to you as a heavenly reflection.  
At dawn, your faults are known to the perfected!*

*Of the honor of the morning there is nothing to be said;  
If listed, all its merits would fill every book that's read.  
To the dust, Sersem ʻAlī, submit and place your head.  
At dawn prostrate to Hakk and feel not dejected!*

We feel that the basic meaning of this poem should be self-evident and thus there is no need to provide an explanation.

## <sup>c</sup>ARSHĪ BABA

<sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba is one of the eminent Bektashis of the sixteenth century. He was born in the eastern Anatolian town of Diyarbakır, and he passed from this world in 1030/1621, the Hijrī date inscribed on the stone epitaph of his turbeh in the Cfakë quarter of Gjirokastër. At some point in his life <sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba came to this southern Albanian town to teach Bektashism to its inhabitants. Fate, however, did not permit this, as he passed away soon after he arrived.

Nevertheless, we know that <sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba had a fondness for Gjirokastër, and he praised the town in a long poem found in his divan. A copy of this divan was kept in <sup>c</sup>Āşim Baba's tekke. Regrettably, this book is not available to us, and we are unable to present this poem. The only work of <sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba that we have available to find is a single poem in which he praises Khunkār Hajī Bektash Velī. This poem can be found in Sadreddin Nüzhet Ergun's compendium of Bektashi poetry, *Bektaşı Şairleri*:<sup>44</sup>

*Who dons the kulāh of Hajji Bektash Velī  
The secrets of <sup>c</sup>Alī he will surely come to see.*

*The mirror of his heart will be purified and bright,  
His interior will be drenched in blinding light.*

*They put on their garb, they prostrate and understand  
The Kālū Balā spoken before time firsthand.*

*But do you think the devoted of this bless'd path see  
Every fool in the Khunkār's garb as being worthy?*

*Those who become followers of the way of the saint  
In their love, O <sup>c</sup>Arshī, for <sup>c</sup>Alī's family feel no restraint!*

Let us now explain this poem:

The word **kulāh** refers to the felt cap that is placed upon the heads of those admitted into the ranks of the dervishes. The phrase **Kālū Balā** is taken from a verse of the Kur'ān. It literally means "They said: 'Yes'"; but to present the context of these words here is the full verse:

*And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness against their own souls: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes! We bear witness.' Lest you should say on the day of resurrection: 'Surely we were heedless of this.'*

﴿Sūrat al-‘A'rāf 7:172﴾

<sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba tells us that those who have been inspired by the heavenly light of Bektashism have from the beginning of time answered the question of “Am I not your Lord?” with “Yes! We bear witness.”

<sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba also informs us that the sacred vestments of the Bektashi Way can in no way be obtained without effort. Properly acquiring this mystic garb entails true sacrifice, for we must provide solid proof that we have genuinely secured the privilege to wear these.

In the last line of the poem <sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba affirms that the Bektashi Path is mystically linked to Imām ‘Alī and his progeny, the Twelve Imāms. It is from these great individuals that it obtains its sanctity.

## MITHĀLĪ

Mithālī is another well-known Bektashi poet of the sixteenth century. His divān is filled with numerous nefes poems that convey his spiritual passion. These poems are quite insightful, and they have been composed with great skill. We have translated one such poem, a poem in which Mithālī praises Hajjī Bektash Velī:

*O you whose face is filled with the fire of a sun,  
O nightingale in sainthood's garden who can't be outdone.  
Like Solomon you know the talk of birds, every one!  
Your righteous hand stretches far; none can it outrun.*

*Candle of all the saints, O Hajjī Bektash Velī!*

*'Round your sacred rose garden ranks of angels turn.  
Your substance is like amber, for which we all yearn.  
'Round your lovely home we sing, forever to return.  
The beauty of this Ka'bah causes one and all to burn.*

*Candle of all the saints, O Hajjī Bektash Velī!*

*Muṣṭafā and Murtaza with noble Shāh Hasan,  
Husayn-i Karbalā' we seek, his light goes on and on.  
‘Alī and Muḥammad, Imām Ja‘far we call on.  
Mūsā Kazim ‘Alī Rīzā, the Sunnah rests upon*

*Candle of all the saints, O Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

*Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Hasan are our kings of majesty;  
Master of the age, Mahdī, God's hidden mystery;  
Pillars of earth and sky, the Children of ‘Alī;  
O Mithālī! Always say: "May God's mercy on them be!"*

*Candle of all the saints, O Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

Let us now provide a basic explanation of this poem:

The **nightingale** in the first stanza refers to the wayfarer who travels along the mystic path and whose voice has found inspiration. **Sainthood's garden** denotes the contentment inspired by the spiritual journey. What Mithālī is telling us in this stanza is that the wayfarer finds spiritually inspiration and energy through the essence of Hajjī Bektash Veli's sanctity.

The **talk of birds** refers to the often cryptic and unfathomable language used to express mystical concepts and experiences. Thus, Mithālī cries to Hajjī Bektash Veli: "You are the one who unlocks the numinous secrets, and like Prophet Solomon you are fully aware of the arcane."

The **angels** in the second stanza are those devoted wayfarers who have been stirred by Hajjī Bektash Veli's sublime principles. When they achieve such inspiration, they begin to emit a pleasant scent, like **amber**, which soothes the senses when inhaled.

The **Ka‘bah** is the focused remembrance of God that Hajjī Bektash Veli can instill in us. When we fix all of our thoughts on God, we are in a way mystically visiting the hallowed sanctuary, the esoteric Ka‘bah symbolized by Hajjī Bektash's tekke and its maydān. Those who can reach this spiritual state will find it decorated with the satisfying taste of the saint's spiritual path and its teachings.

In the last two stanzas, Mithālī is in essence saying: "O Hajjī Bektash Veli! You encapsulate all of the roads that lead to God." All of these paths have been opened by the exalted Imām ‘Alī and then passed down, on God's command, through the Twelve Imāms – from Imām ‘Alī to Muḥammad al-Mahdī – finally coming to Khwājah Aḥmad Yasawī, who then bequeathed

secrets of these paths to Hajjī Bektash Velī. Mithālī tells us that he has come to realize this fact, and thus he has submitted himself to the Pīr.

## IMĀD UD-DĪN NĀSĪMĪ

Imād ud-Dīn Nāsīmī is another individual who stands among our illustrious Bektashi poets. He was born in the second half of the fourteenth century in the small village of Nāsīm, which lay near Baghdad. He received his elementary education in his village, and later went to Baghdad to continue his higher studies. At some point in his youth, he was filled with spiritual yearning, and took as his murshid the renowned mystic Fazlullah Nāsīmī Astarābādī (d. 797/1395), who is said to have been a dervish of Hajjī Bektash Velī.

Nāsīmī journeyed to all the holy places, especially those found in Anatolia, where he picked up the local language. This occurred between 1400 and 1405, during the rule of Sultan Murad II, or slightly before.

With such lofty spiritual radiance Nāsīmī was able to elegantly convey his mystic insight through poems skillfully written in both Turkish and Persian. His lyrical talents reached such heights that he is counted among the distinguished poets of both languages. In addition to Turkish and Persian, Nāsīmī also composed a number of poems in Arabic.

The spiritual ecstasies that Nāsīmī experienced resonate throughout his poetry, and he openly conveyed these states without fear of repercussion. However, his lack of restraint allowed the content of his poems to be scrutinized by the religious fanatics of his day, who predictably misconstrued their deeper meanings. Nāsīmī was consequently jailed a number of times, and the fanatics pressured him to conform to orthodoxy and button his lips. Nāsīmī not only refused to relinquish his mystical declarations, he made the situation worse by stating these lines:

*Manṣūr's words, "I am the Real,"  
Were without doubt utterly real!*

Nāsīmī was a man of great refinement and as a result, many sympathizers gathered around him. These well-wishers advised him against openly declaring things that would endanger his life, for his loss would be a great blow to the mystically inclined. However, Nāsīmī refused to take note of



The tomb of Sayyid Imād ud-Dīn Nasīmī in the Syrian city of Aleppo. It is said to mark the spot of his execution rather than burial place.



their pleas. “My dear ones!” he replied, “Whether you like it or not, union with my beloved has turned me into a boiling kazan, and the sea of love surging within me cannot be held back!” Even his brother, Shāh Khandan, pleaded with him not to write things that were contrary to exoteric Islamic law. However, Nasīmī refused to divert a single step from his path and he boldly recited one of his poems in response, a stanza of which is this:

*The encircling sea is in ferment.  
Being and space are in commotion.  
Eternal mystery has made its descent;  
Why should the lover hide his devotion?*

This poem distressed Nasīmī’s supporters, for they realized that it was pointless to continue cautioning him.

Nasīmī’s poems started causing such an uproar that in 1417 – that is, during the reign of the Mamluk king Naṣr ud-Dīn Barkūk – he was arrested in the Syrian city of Aleppo on charges of heresy and imprisoned for nearly a year. Eventually, a fatwā from the city’s muftī sentenced Nasīmī to death, and he was horribly executed by being flayed alive. For Islamic mystics, the painful memory of this ghastly and cruel execution has never faded.

On the day of the execution, the citizens of Aleppo gathered to watch the gruesome scene of Nasīmī being flayed alive. They noted with wonder how the mystic did not even cry “Ah!” as the blade tore through his flesh. In fact, he exhibited signs of merriment rather than anguish or despair.

Standing before the crowd was the aforementioned muftī, who took great delight in the killing of the man he branded a *kāfir*, an infidel. The instant that the flaying commenced the muftī pompously declared:

On account of his blasphemy the very blood of this man is henceforth deemed polluted (*murdār*), to the extent that were a speck of it to fall upon a person, that spot must be cut off straightaway, even if it be one of the body’s limbs.

When the muftī finished these words, a drop of Nasīmī’s blood suddenly landed on his index finger. Given that practically the whole city had gathered at the spot, there was no way that this could have gone unseen. A man in the crowd hollered out mockingly: “Hey muftī efendi! According to your own *fatwā*, you’ll have to cut off your finger now!” “Oh no!” replied the muftī, “It’s nothing that a little water can’t wash away.”

When he heard the muftī’s hypocritical response, Nasīmī immediately uttered these poetic lines:

*Threaten to cut that zāhid’s finger  
And from Truth he turns and flees.  
Behold the faithful lover,  
Martyred joyously is he!*

From that dreadful moment onward, Nasīmī’s biography and poetry have endured as precious reminders of his transcendent state. His legend made such an impression on people’s hearts that it became known everywhere as it was passed down by word of mouth through the generations. Nasīmī is thus remembered as a man who possessed an unequally purified nature, and he came to be called the “Second Hallāj.” He too was given the title of *sultān*, or “mystic sovereign.”

Poets around the world have heaped endless praises upon Nasīmī’s verses, and this has helped keep his reputation alive. The famed Turkish professor Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı stated the following about Nasīmī in his book *Nesimi-Usuli-Ruhi*:

Not only Bektashis, but all devotees of <sup>c</sup>Alī, and all Sufis throughout the Islamic world, acknowledge the greatness of Nasīmī, and they give the utmost respect to him, calling him a martyr for truth.

The circumstances of Nasīmī’s execution were conveyed by word of mouth down through the centuries passed on to great and small, until the event became a legend adorned with all sorts of wonders displaying his saintliness. Here is a narration of one such miracle: Having recited the stanza above, Nasīmī pick up his flayed skin, threw it over his shoulder and fled the scene. He miraculously appeared at each of Aleppo’s twelve gates where the guards reported seeing him pass by and then disappear without a trace. Thus, according to legend, his turbeh and tekke are not to be found at an actual burial site, but rather they are located at the spot of his execution.<sup>45</sup>

Not only are Nasīmī’s poems eagerly recited by the faithful on account of their literary elegance, but they are also recited to extract the profound mystical teachings conveyed in their lines. Some academics have argued that Nasīmī was not a Bektashi, given that he often espoused the Ḥurūfī outlook acquired from his murshid, Fazlallah Astarābādī. However, this certainly does not discount his “Bektashiness,” since Ḥurūfism is a mystical tendency and not an independent religious order. Moreover, we have examples of poets, such as Mithālī, <sup>c</sup>Arshī Baba, etc., who were unquestionably known to be Bektashis and who likewise expressed Ḥurūfī inclinations. Nasīmī affirms his Bektashi connection in a number of places in his *divān*:

*O Nasīmī! Many make the claim to be Bektashi;  
But is a diamond found in every stone that’s flashy?*

Nasīmī conveyed enthusiastic confidence in his spirituality. He never once hesitated to sacrifice everything for the mystic path, including his life – which would be a dauntless act for anyone to carry out!

Nasīmī’s poems are above all instructive, conveying spiritual guidance to their readers. These works are so beautiful in their original language – being penned by a poet submerged in divine love – that when recited, people are often so overwhelmed by their charm that they are spellbound simply by the rhythmic pulse of the verse. Here is a stanza from one of Nasīmī Sultān’s poems:

*Come and let me tell you that the prayers and fasts you've missed  
 By sacred law can be redeemed, the sin simply dismissed.  
 But any second that I pass and do not spend with you,  
 Till my dying day that moment I cannot redo.*

These lines present strong evidence of Nasīmī's stylistic mastery, and they clearly show beyond any shadow of a doubt that he was an outstanding poet.

Having had the opportunity to recite from his Persian *divān*, we can personally attest to Nasīmī's skill. The poems it contains are so enchanting and so filled with allure that they can rightly be compared to the talents of the great poets of the Persian language, like Hāfiẓ and his peers.

Nasīmī exhibits even more so a solid mastery of Turkish and it is for this that his Turkish verses have been recited, adored and imitated down through the centuries by poets worldwide. Noted nineteenth-century Hungarian orientalist and traveler Arminius Vámbéry summarized and ranked Nasīmī's poems, commenting on them with praise: "These mystical poems are precious, and they are sung to music in different tekkes throughout the East." Thus, at this point we shall present some examples of Nasīmī's poetry:

*If you've never been in love, truly good words can be said;  
 For whoever chases love will find a pain to dread.  
 Don't slip up by coming in; for here you'll find great ache,  
 Call yourself a lover and your heart will one day break.*

*Do you pray behind the imām while turning from the ḳiblah?  
 Do you call yourself a ḥajjī while not visiting the Ka'bah?  
 It was towards your lovely visage that the devil could not bow;  
 Thus he gained the curse of everything from then till now.*

*Don't be fooled by this here world; by its charms be not deceived;  
 This life ends, but the endless goal must surely be achieved.  
 Don't seek out fame or faith, rather seek out utter splendor;  
 If you make yourself like morning dew, the veil itself will render.*

*Thy visage, Lord, what can compare in majesty and light?  
 When it appeared the universe was filled with beauty bright,  
 The sun stands like a candle that I hold, compared to it;  
 A sun that's hidden by clouds is a similitude unfit.*

*Come and let me tell you that the prayers and fasts you've missed  
 By sacred law can be redeemed, the sin simply dismissed.  
 But any second that I pass and do not spend with you,  
 Till my dying day that moment I cannot redo.*

*O belov'd! How your lips send healing to the sick,  
 The dead they bring to life, away all misery they kick.  
 Blinded are the foolish, saying lost in deprivation,  
 "These lips are nothing special!" Thereby voiding their salvation.*

*O Nasīmī! Brings the sun more restlessness and pain,  
 Yet endure it and be well-aware that doubt you must constrain.  
 Remember that the valiant do not lack in resolution  
 Do you think your struggle will be lacking restitution?*

Let us now explain this poem:

Nasīmī tells us in this poem that divine love does not come easy. It is an endeavor that generates many pains, for obtaining this love requires great sacrifice and unwavering dedication.

The **ḳiblah** mentioned in the first line of the second stanza is the direction of the Holy Ka'bah of Mecca, the cube-like structure that Muslims face when performing their daily ritual prayers (namāz). Nasīmī is saying in the stanza's first two lines that he who does not direct himself towards God's countenance (which for the wayfarer is the true ḳiblah) and does not have focused presence (ḥuzūr) in his devotions might make countless pilgrimages to the earthly Ka'bah, but he will find no real benefit in such pilgrimage. Every act of worship must have ḥuzūr – as we have explained earlier.

In this stanza, Nasīmī also alludes to the Kur'ānic verses that speak about the angels making prostration to Adam at God's command. All of the angels obeyed, except Satan/Iblīs, who defied this divine decree. Consequently, he was eternally condemned for his rebellion.

The meaning of the third stanza should be clear. Nasīmī tells us that we must be mindful of the transient nature of the material world. We can imagine it to be worth pursuing as much as we like, but it possesses no real value, for in the end it will vanish from under our feet. Therefore let's not be cheated by it, says Nasīmī, for there is little lasting benefit to it except as a means to draw near to God.

The **visage** in the fourth stanza is the visage of God, which illuminates all of creation. It is a light whose radiance is infinitely greater than the Sun.

In the fifth stanza, Nasīmī cries out: “Thy inspirations, O God, are so essential to me that I need them to be unceasingly present in my life!” It is important to note that these inspirations are not like ritual prayer or fasting – which need to be carried out at a fixed time and if missed can be made up. Inspiration is not something constrained by time or ceremony, nor is it something that can be stopped when it wells up in the heart.

The **lips** mentioned in the sixth stanza represent the inspiration that comes through spiritual awareness, which is medicine for an ailing soul. Spiritual awareness resuscitates a dead heart, filling it with faith. Such lips are a cure that eliminates the gloom of ignorance, which is a disagreeable state to be in. Ignorance drowns all those who, in their rejection of God, are deprived of even the slightest grasp of spiritual awareness. Such people’s hearts are as good as dead, and consequently, they will never be able to taste the end-less mysteries of the divine.

In the last stanza, Nasīmī foretells his approaching tribulations, yet he does not dread these sufferings. Rather he possesses steadfast determination. He knows that God can only be reached by subduing the ego through sacrifice and great effort. This outlook allows him to perceive suffering as a heavenly gift. Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Nasīmī’s poems:

*Sometimes I'm lost, sometimes I'm found,  
What's it to you? The Beloved is mine.  
Sometimes I go into the garden  
And pick roses.*

- *So what's it to you?*

*Sometimes I go to the madrasah  
To study for God's sake!  
Sometimes I go to the meykhāna  
And with a drink my thirst I slake.*

- *So what's it to you?*

*The challenger says it's ḥarām  
To drink even one drop wine!  
The cup-bearer pours, I drink,  
So any sin is mine.*

- *So what's it to you?*

*I threw the cloak of blame  
On my own shoulders.  
The bottle of virtue and respect  
I smashed on a boulder.*

*- So what's it to you?*

*The zāhid prostrates towards  
The mosque's mihrāb, if all be told.  
But for me, my kiblah  
Is the Beloved's threshold.*

*- So what's it to you?*

*Sometimes I go up to the heavens,  
Master of all I see.  
Sometimes I descend to the earth,  
Beholding my beloved adoringly.*

*- So what's it to you?*

*The challenger has been saying  
To love beauty is a crime.  
I venerate my beloved,  
And any sin is mine.*

*- So what's it to you?*

*They ask Nasīmī if things  
With the Beloved are fine.  
Whether it goes well or not,  
The Beloved is still mine.*

*- So what's it to you?*

Let us now explain these lines:

It should be clear by now that the **Beloved** repeatedly mentioned throughout the poem is God, whom Nasīmī has striven his utmost to reach through self-discipline and virtuous conduct.

The **garden** in the first stanza represents the garden that can be created with our hearts. The flowers that bloom in this garden are our upright efforts. Hence Nasīmī is saying: "In the garden of my heart I plant virtuous deeds and purify my soul so that my beloved can enter." By doing this he can secure divine inspiration.

A **madrasah** is a college where exoteric Islamic religious knowledge is taught. The **meykhāna** (tavern) is the place where the wayfarer imbibes

euphoric love of God, becoming so drunk that he burns in this love and is totally reduced to ashes. The **wine** represents the unearthly drink referred to in the ḥadīth қudsī:

*God has a wine which he gives to his friends [the saints] who, when they drink it, become intoxicated; and when intoxicated they advance, and when they advance, they strip themselves from the material world; and when so stripped they speak with words that cannot be understood save by those drunk on the same sort of wine.*<sup>46</sup>

Nasīmī speaks of this kind of intoxication in another poem, with the lines:

*I've been drunk on his love since the beginning of time.  
A drunk man I've been since your eyes met mine.  
From the throne, not man, comes this wine I've tasted.  
'Tis no short-lived state, as forever I am waisted!*

Nasīmī asserts that religious fanatics can never understand this state of ecstasy, and because of their lack of depth they fight to block him from his path. Nevertheless, he knows who his beloved is, and he fittingly responds: “What have you to do with me? If what I do is sinful I will have to answer for it, not you.”

In the fourth stanza, Nasīmī tells us that anyone who desires to set out on the path to perfection must cast off conformity and reputation, and instead dress in the garment of reproach and blame, known by the mystics as the “state of malāmah.” The wayfarer must stamp out any condition that encourages the ego, and he must appear lowly and self-effacing in front of people. Doing this will help the wayfarer to reach the rank of perfection, which leads to God ... as our poet declares:

*Having obliterated the self  
I've found Thee, O God!*

The term **zāhid** refers to someone who fervently performs his ritual prayers without having truly surrendered his ego to God. Here Nasīmī says: “Carry on praying; but not without һuzūr!” the state of intense focus on the divine. Ideally, our һuzūr should be so powerful that God will become evident

right in front of us. This is the state the exalted Imām Ḥalī referred to when he said: “I would not worship a God I could not see!” Prayer without focus is of little value, and it is not even considered prayer by God’s saints. Nasīmī, however, says that he is so focused during his prayer that as soon as he crosses the threshold into ḥuzūr, God straightaway appears in the sanctuary, at which point real prayer begins.

In the sixth stanza Nasīmī tells us that his “self” has completely disappeared, allowing him to abide in God. He is present with the divine everywhere he goes – sometimes in the heavens, sometimes on earth. This makes sense if we understand that Nasīmī, being annihilated in God, no longer truly exists. In reality, nothing truly exists except God, a concept that we have explained above.

We trust that the rest of the lines are clear. However, we should add that those who cannot grasp the meaning of Nasīmī’s poems might have the impression that he sings of earthly love, which is a level of love that is of no interest to God’s elect. For that reason he proclaims: “I know my intention, and you don’t. Therefore leave me to my business.” And with that, let us examine another of Nasīmī’s poems:

*If you ask about my nature, I’m a prayer;  
From a realm they call fortitude I come.  
I’m an ocean, though I was once a rain drop in the air;  
From the glow of the Divine Throne’s candle I come.*

*At Kālū balā my footprints I found a trace;  
From Hakk not for a moment did I avert my face;  
In the flames of your love my ego I laid waste;  
From the fire with your intimate, Abraham, I come.*

*If you seek to question me about my mystery,  
From his being he gave being to you and me;  
He fashioned from the light of Muḥammad Ḥalī;  
From the sīr that is Hakk with Hakk I come.*

*Gabriel comes and takes the candle in hand.  
Traveling, he arrives in the Beloved’s sacred land,  
I’m amazed at the twittering of the lovely birds and  
Rīzwān opens the gate, from the city I come.*

*Don't ask about the flesh, for its a wasted thing,  
But the soul, it's a mine from which jewels spring;  
This ocean of awareness, a vast sea of which they sing;  
From the peak of those who sing the secret I come.*

*I approached with Manṣūr, and I was hauled to the dār;  
With Joseph I was made a slave in a land so very far,  
With Jesus in Palestine I traveled to the stars;  
From the mountain of Sinai with Moses I come.*

*In the courthouse I stand, the ḳadis ask away;  
All of their books between me and them they lay;  
"From whom did you take this strange knowledge?" they say.  
I take it from my master; from the Pīr I come.*

*Nasīmī I am! And from my vow I'll not flee,  
Of the truly guided saints I'm an obliging devotee;  
I'm a rosebud in the verdant garden of our master <sup>c</sup>Alī;  
O deniers and hypocrites! From Hakk I come.*

Let us now explain these verses:

The phrase **Kālū balā** means: “They said, ‘Yes’” and we have explained the significance of these words at length in the preceding pages of this book. The word **sīr** is Arabic for “secret.” The **Beloved** to whom Gabriel voyaged is God Almighty, about whom, says Nasīmī, the birds sing in remembrance, beseeching him in a language all their own.

**Rizwān** is the name of the angel who is the doorkeeper of a special garden in Paradise. However, in this poem, Rizwān symbolizes luminous mystic knowledge. Nasīmī is telling us in this verse that he has emerged from Paradise, whose doors awareness and inspiration have opened. However, the Gardens of Paradise should not be seen as a place of otherworldly delight, as is commonly understood; rather it represents “The Journey in God” (*As-Sayr fi Allah*) during which the wayfarer is fully equipped with divine inspiration. Nasīmī descended from this state back to the common folk in his “Journey from God” (Sayr an Allah), a term that we have explained above.

**Dār** is a Persian word meaning “gallows.” In this poem, it refers to the place where Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj was executed for saying *Ana 'l-Hakk*, “I am the Real.” This stanza alludes to the *dawrīyyah*, or continual ascent and descent,

of Nasīmī's soul with the prophets of old. We have described the concept of dawrīyyah earlier in our explanation of one of Ḥajjī Bektash Veli's poems.

Towards the end of the poem, we discover Nasīmī's reference to the inquisition carried out by the ḳadis of Aleppo, who demanded to know how and from where he obtained his mystical awareness. Having given this explanation, let us take a look at another of Nasīmī's profoundly mystic poems:

*The Beloved's cruelty is no pain ... for us it's pure devotion;  
Only those possessing loyalty can understand this notion.*

*Whatever the adored might do, it's fitting for affection;  
What's not fitting is to keep in sight the fire of rejection.*

*O my dear! Who hasn't turned your face into their kiblah  
Surely you can't count as pure who's fallen from the Ka'bah.*

*Even if the shrewd suppose that love's a harsh ordeal,  
It's not a hopeless trial for us; our delight we'll not conceal.*

*Be with those who seek the One in this illusive life,  
In a hundred thousand burdens see no agony or strife.*

*The wine of perseverance is a remedy, O doctor!  
The lovers' medication is a cure that's truly proper.*

*Clearly can be seen the devil in a person's face  
When of God's illumination there is not a single trace.*

*O Nasīmī! Many make the claim to be Bektashi;  
But is a diamond found in every stone that's flashy?*

Let us now explain some of this poem's finer points:

Once again we should stress that both **beloved** and **adored** are terms employed to convey mystic adoration of God. Nasīmī tells us that reaching the state of truly loving God entails much suffering and sacrifice. Furthermore, the wayfarer must rejoice in these pains and see them not as torments but as honors. If we cannot gradually learn to cultivate such an attitude, it is better for us not to take up this path at all!

In the third stanza, Nasīmī is telling us that if we pray without ḥuzūr – being unable to envisage God during our worship – we will never reach the true Ka‘bah and the circumambulation (*tawāf*) that is performed around it by pilgrims. Ḥuzūr and prayer must go together hand in hand. To be on the path to God, we must erase every trace of dualism and ego from our sight. Unless this is done, we can exhaust ourselves with all sorts of ritual worship, but we will be unable to attain the ultimate goal: oneness with God. According to the philosophy of *wahdat ul-wujūd* everything in existence is a spark of God’s everlasting light; those who are unable to comprehend this cannot genuinely say that they are acquainted with the love of God. Such people are incapable of seeing creation as an expression of that divine spark. They will continue seeing multiplicity (*kathrat*) when there is only unity (*tawhīd*)!

In the seventh stanza, Nasīmī tells us that everything written in the Kur’ān can be found inscribed on the human face – including Satan. Therefore it is important for us to possess an intellect that can perceive the varying levels of goodness or badness in people.

Nasīmī makes it known at the end of the poem that throughout our lives we might find plenty of people claiming to be Bektashis. However, to be a genuine Bektashi we must carefully keep to the path laid down by our great saints and spiritual masters. Therefore take heed! Not everyone claiming to be a Bektashi is one, just as every stone certainly isn’t a diamond, even though we have plenty of stones around! And with that let us move on to another of Nasīmī’s poems:

*Wherever you should aim your eye, there Allah behold!*

*In every land you lay your foot, there His Face behold!*

*Whoever lifts the veil, surmounting duality’s mask*

*Will be engulfed in oneness; there God’s secret behold!*

*If you seek to make the Hajj, come hither O zāhid!*

*For in this lover’s boundless heart the House of God behold!*

*With the eyes of the soul see the cosmos, the self as one;*

*Is there anything that’s separate? This, for God’s sake, behold!*

*If you wish to grasp this fact, come O wise one, come!*

*Understand Nasīmī’s view and the Grace of God behold.*

Let us now explain this poem:

To begin with, we should note that such verses are called ghazals. The term ghazal describes all those poems that observe specific technical rules regarding their meter. This particular poem falls into these metrical conventions and is consequently described as a ghazal.

Throughout this poem, Nasīmī gracefully expresses the concept of *waḥdat ul-wujūd*: Wherever you should happen to turn you should see nothing but God, the creator of all. We explained earlier that dualism is nothing less than a projection of the ego, for the ego generates the illusion of two essences – one being itself and the other being God. Therefore, Nasīmī tells us to remove the ego and melt into the divine. Then we will come to know that there is only One who is real!

In the third stanza, Nasīmī declares that there is no need for you, O one caught up in outward forms, to go on Hajj, searching high and low for the House of God. Simply gaze into the blazing hearts of God's lovers, for these hearts have been cleansed of everything but unconditional love. Here we will find the real House of God. Did not God say that the entire universe cannot contain Him, but the heart of the believer can? Come and visit this these hearts, the true Ka'bah! If we can do this, says Nasīmī, wherever we turn, whether in the heavens or on earth, we will always behold this reality with the eyes of the heart.

The **view** mentioned in the last stanza is the spiritual awareness bestowed upon God's saints directly from on high. It is as if Nasīmī is saying: "O you who ponder! If you've been graced with a thirst for this sort of awareness, look to a perfected one like me. Here you may find the brilliance of God's light." Having presented this explanation, let us look at another of Nasīmī's poems:

*Those who do not reach for you find gloominess inside,  
Those who do not drink your wine find bitterness inside.*

*Within my heart, nay in my soul, there is found your face,  
The hidden treasure's radiance has found a place inside.*

*The pleasingly sweet taste of candy I eschewed after I gazed  
Upon your lips full of taste – enough to make one crazed inside.*

*Who can't absorb this at the start won't do so at the end,  
Blind you'll be your whole life long, and dark will lay inside.*

*Moving on this secret path my soul seeks out love,  
I'll surely rise above any pain that I may feel inside.*

*O Nasīmī! In his face see a beauty that can't be described;  
Once I found your face nothing but bewilderment is left inside!*

Let us now explain this poem:

The meaning of the first stanza should be clear. It says that those who have not reached the goal of spiritual perfection will ultimately find themselves miserable and bitter for not having achieved it. The **wine** symbolizes heavenly inspiration. Nasīmī says that those who feel no need for divine inspiration will remain unhappy and immature throughout their lives.

In the next stanza, Nasīmī tells us that he can be counted among those who have followed the spiritual path all the way to perfection. At one point along the way, he emptied his heart of all material attachments to facilitate it becoming the Throne of God. Nasīmī also scrubbed clean his soul, for it is within the soul that one finds the hidden treasure spoken of in the *hadīth* қudsī:

*I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known.  
Therefore I created creation so that I might be known.*

The **lips full of taste** spoken of in the third stanza symbolize the spiritual state that emits sugar sweeter than all the candy in the world. In using such symbolism, Nasīmī is proclaiming: “O beloved! The guidance that emanates from the inspiration of your mouth has given me such pleasure that I have completely forgotten about the well-known sweetness of worldly candy.”

At the end of the poem, Nasīmī says: “At first I guarded myself against becoming the talk of those who cannot understand such lofty matters [by keeping my experiences secret], but my soul changed my cautious stance as it thrust me towards the ecstasy of divine love. My mind thought differently, but my soul sought bliss and the path to it, which is spirituality.” Therefore Nasīmī bound his love to the visage of God and became so caught up with its splendor that he entirely lost himself and knows not where he stands.

To conclude this section, we would like to remind the reader that Nasīmī wrote countless ghazals, perhaps some of the most beautiful and sweetest ever put to paper. However, our limited space does not permit us to reproduce more of these works of lyric art.

## PİR SULTĀN ABDAL

PİR SULTĀN Abdal ranks among our Bektashi luminaries of the later part of the sixteenth century. He was born in the village of Banaz in the Sivas district of Anatolia. His given name was Kōja Ḥaydar, or simply Ḥaydar, and – as is stated in his verse – he was a descendant of Imām ‘Alī through the fourth Imām, Zayn ul-‘Abidīn.

PİR SULTĀN Abdal’s tribe came to Anatolia from Yemen. His parents fled Yemen and settled in the above-mentioned village; an event expressed in one of his poems:

*Pir Sultān Abdal am I, grasping the skirt with my hand;  
 Kōja Ḥaydar’s my name, my fathers from Yemen’s land.  
 If in time a state should come to this odd and lonely one,  
 Though look he may for a friend, he will find that there is none.*

PİR SULTĀN Abdal lived between 1520 and 1576. As will be seen below, his whole life was intertwined with his mystic poetry. The Turks in recent times have become very interested in his biography – undoubtedly because he ranks as one of the most talented poets of their language. One modern Turkish researcher, Ali Balım, traveled to PİR SULTĀN Abdal’s village of Banaz to gather details about his life. In Banaz he found the saint very much alive in the collective memory of people great and small, his legend having been passed down through the centuries. To this day the folk of Banaz possess immense devotion for PİR SULTĀN Abdal since he was martyred for the sake of those poems of his which were filled with endless praise for the “Shah,” who is none other than the exalted ‘Alī.

Ali Balım gathered his findings, PİR SULTĀN Abdal’s poems, and episodes from the saint’s life, and printed these in a book entitled *Pir Sultan Abdal, Hayatı ve Şiirleri* (1957). We have picked out those sections of this book that discuss PİR SULTĀN Abdal’s biography with the intention of giving our readers familiarity with this great Bektashi saint.

In the days of his youth, Kōja Ḥaydar was often sent by his father to tend to the flocks on a nearby mountain called Yıldız Dağı. It just so happened that there, amongst the flowers and greenery of the highlands, lay a shrine (*makām*) dedicated to the aforementioned Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān.

Fatigue came upon young Ḥaydar as he watched his sheep graze in the meadows one day. He stretched out in the grass, and using a stone as a pillow, promptly fell into a deep sleep. As Ḥaydar napped, a voice whispered in his ear, startling him out of his sleep. He opened eyes and beheld standing before him an old man with a long white beard holding a goblet in one hand and an apple in the other.

Haydar lay stunned as the old man extended the hand that held the goblet, saying, “Drink from this my son.” Ḥaydar drank, and the effects of its contents flowed throughout his body, giving him a sensation similar to that brought on by hard drink.

The old man then handed Kōja Ḥaydar the apple and told him to eat. As Ḥaydar ate the apple, the old man said, “I am Ḥajjī Bektash Veli. From this time onward your name shall be called Pīr Sultān Abdal. Return to your people and teach them mystic love so that they may use this new name of yours as a means of approaching God!” When these words came to an end Haydar reached to kiss Ḥajjī Bektash Veli’s hand; but as he did the saint vanished before his eyes.

Haydar stood up, but he felt as if he were in a state of drunkenness. He lingered in euphoria and did not go home. The people of Banaz grew worried when he failed to return at the usual time, and so they left the village to look for him.

In due course the people found Ḥaydar, seemingly inebriated, sitting in a secluded spot. They grabbed hold of him and took him home, demanding all the while that he explain himself. He later described his ecstatic condition and the miraculous event that caused it in one of his poems.

Haydar told the village folk that he no longer had any interest in the world; his only desire was to teach the world how to love God. From that moment onwards he began to weave his poems using the name given to him by Ḥajjī Bektash Veli, a name by which he became known ever after: Pīr Sultān Abdal.

Pīr Sultān Abdal quickly joined the ranks of those mystics of the day who had reached the state of perfection, an experience that he skillfully ex-

presses in his poems. His influence spread far and wide, and many received initiation at his hand. Among such individuals was a young man named Hızır, who hailed from a nearby village.

One day the lad walked to Pīr Sultān Abdal's dergāh to take initiation directly from the saint and having obtained his wish, he decided to remain at the lodge to serve his master, and he carried out various duties for seven consecutive years. Pīr Sultān Abdal grew fond of Hızır and he felts great affection for the youth. However, one day Hızır said to his murshid:

O man of truth! I have served this dergāh for seven years, during which I have learned and seen things that no person other has. May I now take leave to find employment somewhere, all the while dedicating myself to the path of the Ahl ul-Bayt, and remaining an obedient servant following in their footsteps?

After some thought, Pīr Sultān Abdal replied:

My dear son! I'll give you permission to go if that is what you want – and I'll pray for you too. But leaving this place will make you a powerful man one day, a man of high rank in the world. And know this: There will come a day when you come back and hang me with your own rope.

When he heard these words, the young Hızır cried, “Aman! God forbid! How can you say such words, my dear master? How could it be that I come back and hang you?” But providing no further explanation, Pīr Sultān Abdal gave Hızır the permission he sought and sent him on his way.

When he reached far away Istanbul, Hızır went straight to the palace of the sultan and offered his services. He was put into an imperial college where he studied and advanced through the ranks over the years until he eventually became a pasha. As an imperial bureaucrat, Hızır was sent to administer a number of different provinces – until he ultimately became governor of Sivas.

Unable to withstand the temptations generated by wealth and power, Hızır Pasha gradually abandoned his sacred vows. His greed grew to such magnitude that he would perform any foul act for the sake of money, utterly forsaking the guidance that his murshid had once given him. Hızır Pasha trampled the rights of the poor, consumed forbidden food, and committed

every abominable deed without the slightest sense of shame. Pīr Sultān Abdal grew dismayed when he came to hear of his former student's corrupted outlook on life.

In the time that it took all of this to come to pass, Pīr Sultān Abdal's name had become so widespread that people everywhere spoke of the many miraculous happenings exhibited through his spiritual rank. The aforementioned researcher Ali Balım wrote:

Pīr Sultān Abdal tirelessly expressed divine love in his poetry. He possessed extraordinary devotion to the "Shah," the King of Saints, the exalted ʻAlī, the wellspring of mysticism, whom Pīr Sultān Abdal praised with gusto and confidence in all of his nefes. Everywhere he went, Pīr Sultān Abdal stirred the emotions of the people with this love, and he expressed himself through musical instruments, especially the bağlama, which he played exceptionally well.

In those days relations between the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia were very tense, for the Shah of Persia sought to conquer Anatolia – or at least those regions of it that were along his border. Fearing sedition, the Ottoman authorities issued strict orders that any positive talk of the "Shah" was forbidden. Hızır Pasha and all the other government officials broadcast this decree to the citizens of Sivas province.

Soon after this order went out, its came to Hızır Pasha's mind to honor his old murshid, and he summoned Pīr Sultān Abdal to dinner at the governor's mansion, where many sumptuous dishes were prepared in honor of the saint. However, when Pīr Sultān Abdal arrived he was filled with displeasure, for it pained him to see the reprehensible person his former student had become. When the first plate of food was placed before him he said:

O Hızır! I cannot eat this as it has been gained through ḥarām means. Not only will I not eat it, but my dogs will not eat it either; for even they will not touch ḥarām food. It is clear that you have betrayed the vow you once made before me, and for that, you have proven yourself ignoble. Thus, neither I nor my dogs shall eat from your table!

As soon as he finished delivering these stern words, Pīr Sultān Abdal whistled to his dogs from the dining hall's window. Hearing their master's signal they ran home ahead of him. Even though the banquet was still

being spread Pīr Sultān Abdal stood up and left, refusing to revel in the culinary delights.

This snub, unsurprisingly, infuriated Hızır Pasha, especially as it was done in front of prominent invited guests. He immediately gave orders for Pīr Sultān Abdal to be put behind bars.

After a short captivity, Pīr Sultān Abdal was released from his chains and brought before Hızır Pasha, who addressed his former murshid with these words:

By order of the Sultan, no one is permitted to utter a single word about the Shah. I have ordered the muftī of Sivas to issue a fatwā concerning this matter, and his decree has been posted far and wide. You are free to go; but from this time onward you are not to mention the Shah, lest you aggravate me a second time.

Pīr Sultān Abdal was released from custody, but he paid no heed to the muftī’s ruling. Wherever he went, in every home he visited, he relentlessly celebrated the “Shah” in his poetry. The faithful gathered around the saint and were filled with zeal for the “Shah” and the Prophet’s family, the Ahl ul-Bayt. Pīr Sultān Abdal continually emphasized the rights of this hallowed family, and he praised their virtues without end. He also sang of Hızır Pasha’s abandoning the sacred vows of his youth.

Pīr Sultān Abdal’s words filled the people with such boundless love for the Ahl ul-Bayt that they stood ready to make any sacrifice on their behalf. Even so, there were those who despised the saint’s words, for they did not believe in the God-given rights of the Prophet’s family. Such people had no appreciation for the spiritual path. They were so irritated with Pīr Sultān Abdal’s preaching they complained to Hızır Pasha. They accused the saint of propagandizing on behalf of the Safavid Persians with all of his talk of the “Shah.”

Upon hearing these accusations of rabble-rousing and sedition, Hızır Pasha immediately ordered Pīr Sultān Abdal’s arrest. When the faithful came to know that the guards were on their way they pleaded with the saint to flee, for they knew he would surely be put to death. “Please don’t go with these men!” they cried. “We’ll hide you where they can’t find you; or you can flee to a land far from here.”

“Absolutely not!” answered Pīr Sultān Abdal. “I will go to Hızır Pasha’s palace and make known the correct path from the path that he was

now taking, seeking to do away with his old spiritual master.” Pîr Sultân Abdal said farewell to his devotees and holding his bağlama high above his head, he walked away.

Pîr Sultân Abdal walked to the palace and entered the presence of Hızır Pasha, who still sensing the spiritual majesty of his old guide, rose to his feet. Hızır Pasha offered Pîr Sultân Abdal food, but the saint refused, saying: “I will not touch this, for it has been obtained from the sweat and blood of the poor, which has made you drunk. You broke your vow and thus your bread is despoiled!”

Hızır Pasha was humbled by these words, but he suppressed his feelings and instead of repenting said: “It has come to our attention that wherever you go you speak of the Shah. You have willingly flouted both our decree and the muftî’s fatwâ. Consequently, you have humiliated me in front of the people.” In response Pîr Sultân Abdal said:

O little Hızır! You took initiation at my hand; you bound yourself with an oath, swearing to give your head for the way of the Shah [i.e. Imâm ‘Alî] if need be. Not only have you forsaken this promise, but you have also issued a farmân stating that whoever mentions the Shah will be put to death! There is no doubt as to the sinfulness of this and the harm it does to our path. Your shameful decree has caused the innocent to perish and the Way of God to be blocked. Orphans lie scattered along the roadside because of you. So tell me ... who is the rebellious one here? You have abandoned the true path, and instead, embraced falsehood, as did so many on the Plains of Karbalâ’. How can a man like you ever heed the words of one like me?

Hızır Pasha felt shame welling up inside, and he sheepishly replied that there was nothing that he could do about the matter. It was the decree of the Sultan. “I am his servant, and I must obey,” he said. “But if you must sing of the Shah, at least do it where I cannot hear. Go to a secluded place far out of my sight and do what you will.”

Pîr Sultân Abdal refused to accept the pasha’s request. In fact, he grabbed his bağlama and boldly began to sing a nefes poem, in which he both praised the “Shah” and censured Hızır Pasha for being infatuated with power and wealth:

*O Hızır Pasha, move along!  
Your wheels are bound to shake.  
The sultan you're devoted to  
His throne will one day break.*

*Remember mighty Nimrod,  
A gnat had brought him low.  
Our call awaits the Judgment Day,  
When you'll reap what you did sow.*

*To love the Shah, is that a crime?  
To the king you defamed me.  
My life I shall not beg you for,  
For my Lord would not agree.*

*I'm a scion of the Prophet's line.  
Like Yazid slew our Husayn,  
Like Manṣūr is how you'll hang me;  
Shall this land remain the same?*

*I'm Moses, you're proud Pharaoh,  
You're Satan foul unpraised.  
Though three times I've died, oh traitor,  
Again will Pīr Sultān be raised!*

As he listened to this poem, Hızır Pasha thought to himself: “The insolence of this old man, speaking to me with such boldness! He can bring all sorts of trouble to me tomorrow with such behavior.” He then gave orders for Pīr Sultān Abdal to be thrown in prison.

The conditions in the prison were appalling. Pīr Sultān Abdal’s cell was nothing more than four bare walls and a dirt floor. He was only given a piece of dry bread and a cup of water each day. Yet he remained without a trace of despondency for days, weeks and months.

Each week Hızır Pasha sent a message to Pīr Sultān Abdal. He would be released from captivity if he brought his praise of the Shah to an end. However, each time the saint received the message he answered with a poem permeated with the praise of the “Shah.”

The situation continued like this for three years and Pīr Sultān Abdal’s refusal to submit caused Hızır Pasha much unease. “This man is certainly

not weak-willed!” he thought. “Better to call him here and tell him bluntly to give up this matter or face execution. I don’t know what else to do. Perhaps fear of death will convince him to change his stance.”

Pîr Sultân Abdal brought before Hızır Pasha. In the company of local dignitaries he told the saint:

From this point onward I will speak to you with my full authority as a representative of our sovereign. I am giving you this one chance. You will recite three poems to me. If none contain the word “shah”, you will be released, and you may go wherever you so wish. If you do otherwise, you will be put to death. Therefore, choose your words well!

Pîr Sultân Abdal boiled up from within when he heard this threat. “I have no fear of death!” he exclaimed. “However, I will be sad to leave the people, who are like my children!” He then grabbed his bağlama and filled with zeal, sang the first nefes:

*Before Hızır Pasha hangs us on those gallows high  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!  
Before the time of my execution draws nigh  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!*

*To the Shah’s pavilion the heart seeks to flee,  
For the soul seeks immersion in the scent of <sup>c</sup>Ali;  
May love for my Pîr and the Twelve Imâms be!  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!*

*Wherever I go my path is cloaked in haze;  
Heavy on my soul the pledge of trust weighs;  
Around my neck the chains brought by malaise;  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!*

*Like the torrential rains of summer I dash and flow;  
I grabbed my blade – into my heart I let it go;  
Friendless I remained, now tears are all I know;  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!*

*Gently the morning breeze comes, our soul it hails;  
The Saints of Rûm with warmth the Beloved regales.  
To us the heralds come, the Shah’s own nightingales.  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!*

*I'm Pir Sultān, on my Shah I call;  
In my heart a wound, its pain covers all;  
Upon the Throne of God my cries of sorrow fall;  
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah!*

Hearing this first poem Hızır Pasha understood right away where Pīr Sultān Abdal was taking the whole affair. “Your stubbornness is dumbounding!” he exclaimed. “You now have two steps between life and the gallows. Rise to your feet, for the rope awaits you!”

However, Pīr Sultān Abdal’s heart was now so enveloped in mystical ecstasy that he paid no heed Hızır Pasha’s threats. With bağlama still in hand, he sang the second poem:

*I'm a slave to the hand that holds the pen;  
Scribe, pen my plea to the Shah like this.  
I'll crush sugar for their tongues once again.  
Scribe, pen my plea to the Shah like this.*

*For God's sake, scribe, jot it all down like this:  
Night and day brings my niyāz to the Shah bliss;  
I hope this blood-soaked Sivas enters an abyss.  
Scribe, pen my plea to the Shah like this.*

*My sāz resonates through the lands of Sivas;  
It cleaves in two the pine-wrapped mountain pass;  
Parted from the friend my breast is pierced, alas!  
Scribe, pen my plea to the Shah like this.*

*Whatever this two-faced tyrant says goes;  
Pale have become our cheeks, once like a rose;  
In our pain, Marwān finds mirth and repose;  
Scribe, pen my plea to the Shah like this.*

*Hey, Hizir Pasha! I'm Pir Sultān Abdal;  
See how a noble head bears what it can't forestall.  
Longing has touched our kinfolk, one and all.  
Scribe, pen my plea to the Shah like this.*

As soon as Pîr Sultân Abdal finished singing this nefes poem, Hızır Pasha cried out: “I have never heard such insolent words! You have but one step left at this point. Any blame for what is sure to befall you has fled from me. You have belittled me in front of these notables for the last time. If you mention the Shah one more time, you will go straight to the noose!”

Paying no attention to the pasha’s words, Pîr Sultân Abdal began to strum his bağlama as he started to sing the third poems:

*What a fine field, this pasture facing me;  
Since I can’t stay in peace, I’ll go straight to the Shah.  
May my hazel-eyed master help his devotee!  
From these fields I’ll go straight to the Shah.*

*If I were a garden, thriving fresh and green,  
If I were a tale that people praise and preen,  
If, black earth, I were to walk on you unseen,  
From these fields I’ll go straight to the Shah.*

*“Flee this place with the cranes,” they said;  
“Let go of the worry in your heart,” they said;  
“The other side of the pasture is near,” they said;  
From these fields I’ll go straight to the Shah.*

*It’s like I drank from the Beloved’s hand;  
I’m a flood of bubbling blood, understand?  
I’m a son of the path, a tramp roaming the land;  
From these fields I’ll go straight to the Shah.*

*If they make me take the ābdest I’ve already made,  
If they make me say the namāz I’ve already prayed,  
If the one who says to you “Shah!” is cruelly slain,  
I’ll go straight from these pastures to the Shah!*

*I’m Pîr Sultân Abdal and this world spins on!  
The moments of this little life are soon gone,  
But the Shah’s path my eyes are set upon;  
From these fields I’ll go straight to the Shah.*

This poem enraged Hızır Pasha to no end. “You have left me with no other choice!” he shouted. “You have dug your own grave. Take him and lock

him up. Tomorrow he shall be hung!” Consequently, Pîr Sultân Abdal spent the night in chains.

Shortly after dawn the following day, Hîzîr Pasha sent his soldiers to fetch Pîr Sultân Abdal from prison. A gallows was erected in the town square, and all of the townsfolk were forced to observe the execution. “Come, O people!” the pasha loudly announced. “Witness the end of a man who refuses to obey the decree of our Sultan! Such is the fate of all those who dare snub imperial authority!”

The whole town gathered in the square, and before long Pîr Sultân Abdal came up the main road flanked by guards. Countless people gathered around the great mystic as he passed by, including those who denounced him as a traitor deserving death. Pîr Sultân Abdal found it hard to quietly endure this scorn and he started singing these verses:

*In Banaz Town of Pîr Sultân Abdal they speak,  
May they not deem us a person bent on evil!  
If the pasha gives his servant an order bleak,  
May they untie my arms in the upheaval!*

*Should Husayn Ghâzî mount his horse and ride,  
The wheels of fate are set – he couldn't turn the tide.  
Peace be upon the home where he resides;  
May they, when the hand's withdrawn, be not tearful!*

*May my hazel-eyed dear the love-lock entwine;  
May it fall and mask the night's moonshine;  
May 'Alî Baba to Hakk his plea consign;  
May he not wait for us at the gallows mournful!*

*If by his oath 'Alî Baba should boldly stand,  
If the beys should kill, it will be by God's command,  
If my hazel-eyed youths should stay close at hand,  
May they not wear black, filled with gloom remorseful!*

*Fate has been unkind, my body bowed and bent,  
My pallid body's shackles asunder have been rent,  
In front of me retreating, the Pirs, the Forty went;  
May the beys no longer speak of us so scornful!*

*I'm Pīr Sultān Abdal, and exuberantly I flow;  
 I seek my lover's road, on which I hope to go,  
 My Pīr I've grabbed ahold of, where to wander I do know.  
 May they graze no more on Yıldız Dağ so joyful!*

Among the people those gathered on that fateful day was the ‘Alī Baba mentioned in this poem. He was Pīr Sultān Abdal’s deputy and successor. ‘Alī Baba tried to remain hidden in the crowd, but he stepped forward unnoticed to kiss his master’s hand. After he did this, he stepped back into the throng.

As Pīr Sultān Abdal neared the gallows, Hızır Pasha told the crowd to cast stones at him so they could sanctimoniously exhibit their anger. He threatened anyone who refused to do this with hanging. Consequently, everyone threw stones at the saint; but not a single one caused him any harm. Instead of a stone ‘Alī Baba defiantly threw a rose, which fell at Pīr Sultān Abdal’s feet. The saint turned his head to see who it was who cast the flower, and when he saw that it was ‘Alī Baba he recited these words:

*No harm comes from stones thrown by strangers seeking to offend;  
 Yet I'm wounded by a rose placed at my feet by a loving friend.*

Shortly after that Pīr Sultān Abdal’s neck was placed in the noose, and he was hanged. This was the year 1565.

We have been able to gather more information on the execution of Pīr Sultān Abdal from page eighteen of Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı’s book *Pir Sultan Abdal*, a work devoted to the life of this great saint:

The morning after Pīr Sultān Abdal’s execution, the town’s coffeehouses were abuzz with conversation. One man overheard the chatter and said: “No! It can’t be true! I saw Pīr Sultān Abdal yesterday on the road to Koçhisar!” Another said: “No, you’re wrong! I saw him traveling to Yenihan!” A third man interjected: “How can that be? I saw him when I was walking through the Tavara Pass.”

These three men grew so perplexed that they got up from where they were sitting and went to see where they thought the body would be hanging. To everyone’s astonishment, there was only a khirkah dangling from the rope. Pīr Sultān Abdal had vanished!

It seems that after he was hanged his hands were miraculously freed, allowing him to escape. When Hızır Pasha and the crowd saw this, they fell back dumbstruck. However, as soon as the pasha recovered his senses he ordered his men to pursue the saint, although they were unable to capture him.

Once Pīr Sultān Abdal crossed the Kızılırmak River all trace of him was lost. According to one account, he journeyed to Khorāsān, all the while singing his poems. He passed away in that land after having lived a long life. And God knows best the veracity of this!

By now the remarkable poetic skill of Pīr Sultān Abdal should be clear to our readers. In expressing boundless love of God his verses are both instructive and lyric. Recited in their original Turkish they often sound like the singing of birds. With this in mind, let us present a few more of Pīr Sultān Abdal's noteworthy poem filled with great spiritual insight:

*Didn't I tell you beautiful lover  
That you couldn't bear our torment?  
This is a morsel of complete surrender;  
But didn't I tell you you couldn't eat it?*

*Yet those who don't eat it stay helpless;  
Blood spills from their eyes, forever feckless.  
This is a moment – it comes, it passes restless;  
But didn't I tell you you couldn't sense it?*

*This dervishhood's a thing one should desire,  
For those who know, nothing could be higher,  
A sleeveless shirt without collar you'll acquire;  
But didn't I tell you you couldn't wear it?*

*The secret of c'Alī let's try to gain,  
Into the maydān let's step and ascertain.  
On Hakk's path lay your life, your head. Do not refrain!  
But didn't I tell you you couldn't lay them?*

*The lovers stand ruined and demolished,  
Nearest to Hakk, their hearts deftly polished;  
Taste the charm of their love and be astonished!  
But didn't I tell you you couldn't be filled?*

*O Pīr Sultān! Our shah is great ‘Alī!  
 Our path reaches Hakk, though many cannot see.  
 Behind the Twelve Imāms we go, in this we all agree;  
 But didn't I tell you you couldn't follow?*

The overall meaning of this poem should be clear, but there are a few finer points that we should explain. For instance, the **morsel of complete surrender** in the first stanza tells us that the path of love requires gaining both God's grace and His pleasure by compelling the ego to submit. Once we have attained these two things, the goal will have been reached.

Something must also be said about the **dervishhood** mentioned in the third stanza. A dervish is a person who is fully committed to the spiritual path. To be a dervish is strenuous and demanding and it requires countless sacrifices. Here Pīr Sultān Abdal tells us that dervishhood is like a shirt that has neither sleeves nor collar. A person would inevitably suffer in such a shirt, given that wearing it would be a difficult thing to endure. Having offered this explanation let us look at another noteworthy poem from Pīr Sultān Abdal:

*I've been cast into flames by my many sufferings;  
 The wounds of my heart yet again are reheated.  
 Where am I to find a cure for the ache that this brings?  
 Only by the Shah's hands can my heart be treated.*

*His many garments, each more gracious than a rose,  
 A rose must have a nightingale, as everybody knows.  
 My bosom's battered by separation's throes  
 Gleefully draw closer the souls that are fragmentated.*

*My lofty cypress tree so grand and slender.  
 A fire fell into my heart, igniting it like tinder.  
 O my kiblah! I turn my face to you in surrender.  
 Between your two brows is found my mihrab venerated.*

*With mere glances true love is not satisfied.  
 Deemed not a man is one who from love hides.  
 This candle the denier's breath can never override.  
 The blazing light of passion burns once it's stimulated.*

*I'm Pīr Sultān! You soar above those places high.  
Without a greeting you come and then pass by.  
From this love, why do you, O dear one, fly?  
Is this the custom that our path has created?*

Now for an explanation of this poem:

The **flames** referred to at the start of this poem symbolize the many worries and desires that plague our earthly life. However, the **fire** that is mentioned further on in the third stanza represents the fire of spiritual love, the ache of which can only be dowsed by the hand of the **Shah**, who is, of course, Imām ʻAlī.

Pīr Sultān Abdal declares in the second stanza that the path to perfection is, without a doubt, an extremely difficult road to walk. It brings suffering, pain, and sacrifice. Nonetheless, after all of its many hardships are overcome, a state of satisfaction will be attained, the satisfaction of arriving at the goal.

The **cypress tree** symbolizes Pīr Sultān Abdal's beloved: God Almighty, who is everything dear and sacred. The Beloved is so revered that he has become the **kiblah** towards which Pīr Sultān Abdal turns, as well as the **mihrāb** pointing to the direction of prayer.

In the fourth stanza, Pīr Sultān Abdal tells us that those who do not understand (or even deny) this manifestation of love have often tried to extinguish it by wiping it from humankind. However, this love is a candle that cannot be doused. The more its adversaries try to blow it out, the more luminous it becomes. It is like grass; no matter how many times it is mowed, it sprouts yet again, becoming all the more verdant.

In the last stanza, Pīr Sultān Abdal creatively describes for us the situation of his soul before inspiration came to him, how it was flying around completely oblivious to spiritual realities. Then the Pīr [i.e. Ḥajjī Bektashi Velī] came, filling him with illumination. Pīr Sultān Abdal describes how he stirred from a state unawareness and was immediately seized with unrestrained love, and thus he was able to reach perfection. The other points of the poem should be clear and this will allow us to look at another of Pīr Sultān Abdal's poems:

*Can a nightingale sing in a garden that's forsaken,  
When the delight of the heart is not a rose?  
How can unhealed wounds never reawaken  
Without a hand from the saint who knows?*

*The one who trails desire, Ḥaqq he follows not,  
The namāz made by the heroes he's fully rendered not.  
The abdals walking far and wide dervishes were not,  
Without a khirkā and a shawl upon their backs.*

*Without a doctor my aching can't be healed.  
Without a guide, the Pir remains unrevealed.  
You'll not beat the 100,000 men of Yazid on battlefield  
Without 'Alī and his Dhū'l-Fikār in hand.*

*Within love's arena to a palace you'll arrive;  
Who falls in this place becomes a youth always alive.  
A wayfarer without faith is a deserted beehive;  
For without the buzzing bees, there'll be no honey.*

*I'm Pir Sultān Abdal! Overhead high waves arise;  
One swig of this love and adoration fills my eyes.  
Is there a murshid who cooks the raw with counsel wise  
Without first burning him in fire and making him ash?*

Let us now clarify these lines for our readers:

The **garden** mentioned at the start of the poem represents hearts of human beings. The **nightingale** is God; the **rose** is the spirituality that bedecks these “heart-gardens.” Therefore, we can interpret this stanza this way: Why would the nightingale (i.e. God) desire to reside in a derelict “heart-garden” unadorned with lovely rose-like deeds? This is why Pīr Sultān Abdal tells us that we need spiritual restoration, just like physical wounds need healing. However, we cannot repair our spiritual wounds without the touch of a man of God, for only the hand of a true murshid can bring complete healing.

If we do not sacrifice for the sake of this path and instead remain under the control of worldly desires, there is no way we can bask in the glow of perfection. No doubt this sacrifice is extremely difficult to carry out; but if we do not sacrifice and put on the khirkah and the tāj (which

symbolize our burial shroud and tombstone) and if we do not become like the abdals wandering high and low, we will never counted as a genuine dervish in the eyes of God and His intimates.

In the third stanza, Pīr Sultān Abdal tells us that perfection will not arrive through our efforts alone. We must seek out perfection with the aid of a murshid, who will be able to assist us. Without a guide, all of our efforts will, in the end, come to naught.

**Yazīd** in the same stanza represents the misery of spiritual blindness. If this Yazīd is not evaded and ultimately defeated, he will overwhelm us with his armies. We can try to struggle against him with all of our might, but if we are not on the path of the great <sup>c</sup>Alī and if we do not take hold of his celebrated sword **Dhū'l-fiḳār** (that is to say the steely guidance of his path) the darkness wrought by Yazīd will never melt away.

In the fourth stanza Pīr Sultān Abdal presents us with a charming simile. He says that whoever enters **love's arena** (*maydān-i <sup>c</sup>ashk*) will find himself in all of its vastness as fresh and energetic as a young person sauntering about the land. Pīr Sultān Abdal also says that a heart devoid of the love of God is like a **beehive** devoid of bees. Such a beehive cannot produce its prize, which is honey. In a heart filled with the love of God, spiritual “honey” is produced from the sweetness of this love.

In the last verse, Pīr Sultān Abdal reminds us that his own love is a transcendent love that is found hidden within his heart, which his beloved burns to ashes. However, these smoldering ashes are not outwardly manifested, for they lie deep within. And this leads us to another poem by of this great spiritual master:

*Braving anguish, I expire from this affliction.  
If you love <sup>c</sup>Alī don't touch my wound!  
On the way of <sup>c</sup>Alī I throw myself with conviction.  
If you love <sup>c</sup>Alī don't touch my wound!*

*The wound of <sup>c</sup>Alī and the Beloved are the same;  
The heart's consumed, there's no balm for this pain;  
A heart devoid of <sup>c</sup>Alī, God will surely disclaim;  
If you love <sup>c</sup>Alī don't touch my wound!*

*This place is not yours ... you come here then go;  
 A sip from 'Ali's goblet you cannot forgo;  
 Do you not see the little lambs hopping to and fro?  
 If you love 'Ali don't touch my wound!*

*Gently and slowly my blood has spilled out;  
 Adverse fortune came, my face knocked about.  
 My pain, O dear darling, do you find in it doubt?  
 If you love 'Ali don't touch my wound!*

*I'm Pir Sultān Abdal! My record's inscribed;  
 Is this a souk where the Beloved can be bribed?  
 Wounds chafe unless the Pīr's balm is prescribed.  
 If you love 'Ali don't touch my wound!*

Let us explain some of the finer points of this poem:

It should be clear by now that the **wound** represents the anguish that must be endured to arrive at the state of perfection. The **wound of 'Alī** spoken of at the start of the second stanza is the mystical awareness generated by Imām 'Alī al-Murtazā, an awareness ultimately originating in God. Unless your heart is "scarred" by this wound, you will be unable to properly recognize God's splendor.

In the third stanza, Pīr Sultān Abdal gives us sound advice by telling us that the material world in which we currently live comes and goes. It is little more than a fleeting diversion. How much time do tender lambs have to hop and play before they are carried off to their fate? A lamb's time goes by just as fast as ours. O wayfarer, be not fooled by the illusion that is this world!

Pīr Sultān tells us in the final stanza that he prayed and prayed on his own, but to no avail. He had to give himself completely over to the Pīr (i.e. Hajjī Bektash Velī) to be cleaned by his holy hands.

The events surrounding the execution of Pīr Sultān Abdal that we have presented above are well-known, and later poets exalted the saint with their eulogies. Although space does not allow us to present all of these poems, we will close this section with a heartrending lament composed by Lady Şanem – one of Pīr Sultān Abdal's spiritual daughters, that is to say, one of his muhibs:

*Last night in my journey mountains arose;  
As I went, weeping, crying “O my Pīr Sultān!”  
In the day my mind’s eye, at night dreams disclose;  
I dream, weeping, crying “O my Pīr Sultān!”*

*Poised and lofty was my dede’s stature.  
Banaz his village, Yildiz his mountain pasture.  
In spring the waters make a cloudy mixture.  
The streams babble on, crying “O my Pīr Sultān!”*

*Pīr Sultān’s daughter I was; I too from Banaz came.  
Spring and fall I cast down tears of bloody rain.  
In cruel Sivas my dede they hung without shame;  
The gibbet tree weeps, crying “O my Pīr Sultān!”*

*My noose I flung as I deemed it absurd;  
The bloodstained hands of the infidels stirred;  
Sheep arrived, the bleating of lambs they heard;  
The rams wept as well, crying “O my Pīr Sultān!”*

*My Pīr Sultān Abdal! There’s no praise of you unsaid.  
Unceasingly we dine on the All-Mighty’s bread.  
The soul reached sweetness when you gave up your head.  
Your lovers together weep, crying “O my Pīr Sultān!”*

## KALANDAR SHAH

Ḳalandar Shah (also known as Ḳalandar Abdal) is a well-known Bektashi of the sixteenth century. Not only was Ḳalandar Shah one of Balīm Sultān’s dervishes, but he was also related to him by blood. Ḳalandar Shah sat on the sheepskin pōst of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī in the Pīrevi before Sersem ‘Alī Dede’s coming in 1527.

In 1520 the famed Sulaymān the Magnificent became sultan and not long after (in 1527) a major uprising erupted in Anatolia among those Turkmen tribes seeking to break free of Ottoman rule. The government shed lots of blood to suppress this rebellion and many people – both guilty and innocent – were summarily executed during the turmoil. Military courts regularly served as judge, jury, and executioner.

Those who harbored grudges against Bektashism made use of the bedlam to tell the Ottoman government that our leader, Kalandar Shah, encouraged the revolt and participated in it. As a consequence, the chief of our spiritual path (who was innocent of the charge above) was promptly arrested and executed without a trial.

Kalandar Shah is counted as one of our great Bektashi saints. In the old days those dervishes who were blessed with the opportunity to visit the Pirevi spoke of a great miracle wrought by Kalandar Shah in this sacred place:

After he was decapitated, Kalandar Shah took his head in his hands and, by God's leave, walked to the turbeh of Balim Sultān. At the blessed shrine his detached head loudly uttered: "I accept that I was not destined to fall martyred at Karbalā"; but may I be permitted to be buried with you?" Then the wall of the turbeh miraculously split open, and Kalandar Shah entered. Visiting dervishes of the recent past reported that the crack in the wall of the tomb was still visible.

Like all those we have previously discussed, Kalandar Shah Dede possessed boundless poetic talent, and he composed many nefes poems infused with Bektashi mysticism. Here is one such poem:

*Last night traversing an unseen domain,  
Khunkār Hajī Bektash Veli I beheld.  
Alift tāj on his head, over his face a veil arcane;  
A scion of Ali, the first Imām, I beheld.*

*He approached the prayer rug on which to sit;  
By his illuminating splendor a candle was lit.  
He made a sign; the cup-bearers presented it,  
The drink coming to us from Hakk I beheld.*

*I drank from his hand, all my reason fled.  
The vows I affirmed, my ego was then shed.  
The place was shown; I sat without dread.  
The tiğbend tied about my waist I beheld.*

*My hand reached the murshid's skirt and grasped.  
My desire, my purpose, I reached at last.  
Am I drunk? I don't know. Am I smashed?  
My heart, given to me by the saints, I beheld.*

*I'm Kalandar Abdal! My head I've laid down;  
The sacrifice rendered, his visage I found.  
A man of God, the Prince of Saints crowned,  
Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī I beheld.*

Let us give a brief explanation of these lines:

The **alifī tāj** is the dervish crown made of two *tarks*, or seams, which first came to Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī and was then passed down through the generations to Kaygusuz and then to Balım Sultān – as we have explained earlier. The lines in the other stanzas should be clear and in no need of discussion. Having provided this clarification, let us look at one more of Kalandar Abdal's poems:

*By God! Can you be human without knowing the value of your soul?  
Surely, you must find before going the worth of your living soul.*

*Whoever commits to good works in this illusive abode  
Surely knows the importance of the everlasting abode.*

*Who, for the sake of love, doesn't desert his flesh from head to toe  
The value of a gem from a hidden treasure he'll never know.*

*Who hasn't suffered sadness and troubles, unrest and pain  
From alertness to the value of the wretched will nothing gain.*

*Don't expect compassion from the ill-mannered or vile;  
For every true human knows the worth of a saint's smile.*

*Many ages have come and gone, yet a denier still never knows  
The worth a poor dervish among the People of Prayer shows.*

*O Kalandar! Don't divulge your mysteries to everyone outside,  
Not every soul knows the value of the discourse you provide.*

This poem seems to be equally clear and in no need of explanation.

## KAZAK ABDAL

Kazak Ahmed Baba – or Kazak Abdal as he is better known – ranks among the venerable Bektashi poets who lived during the seventeenth

century. He was originally from what is now Romania. An examination of his poetic talent reveals a marked satirical streak, which gained him widespread fame. Scholars of Turkish literature (notably those from the University of Istanbul) have lately shown a keen interest in Kazak Abdal, and they persist in their attempts to unearth the details of his biography.

We can gain a taste of Kazak Abdal's mystical disposition in the poems presented below. In the first we find Kazak Abdal praising the great Bektashi master, Balım Sultan:

*Hajjī Bektash Velī is my upright Pīr,  
His pīr is the King of Men.  
Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān he is here,  
Mursel Baba's son, Balım Sultān.*

*If the saints' morsels you wish to eat,  
If you wish to sit at the Twelve Imāms' feet,  
If you're a man, heed this advice, and seek  
Mursel Baba's son, Balım Sultān.*

*Without effort, like a lion he stalks slowly,  
In Ar-Raḥmān's secret he's cloaked wholly,  
His khirka, like a ḳaftān, fits him closely,  
Mursel Baba's son, Balım Sultān.*

*On his sacred morsel all the believers feast.  
Imagery and import his words release.  
A true saint he is; know this and be at peace,  
Mursel Baba's son, Balım Sultān.*

*In the corner of the Hanbağ he made his place.  
Rising to the clouds, the sky his sanjaks grace.  
In light our Pīr's hearth he does encase,  
Mursel Baba's son, Balım Sultān.*

*Kazak Abdal says: "Go on and tell this tale!  
360 saints I've called on without fail,  
As I said at the start these words I'll not curtail:  
Mursel Baba's son, Balım Sultān."*

Let us now clarify some of the finer points of this poem:



An stylized representation of Kazak Abdal employing Hurufi motifs.



**Ar-Rahmān**, the Most Merciful, is one of the beautiful names of God mentioned numerous times throughout the Qur’ān. A **ķaftān** is costly grand robe that only aristocrats and grandees could afford to wear. Kazak Abdal tells us that such a robe is nowhere near as valuable as Balīm Sultān’s humble dervish khirķah. The morsel referred to here (and for that matter in many other nefes poems) represents spiritual inspiration. Kazak Abdal says that Balīm Sultān never withholds spiritual nourishment from those who sincerely seek it.

The **Hanbağ** is a special spot in Hajjī Bektash Velī’s tekke near the turbeh of Balīm Sultān. A **sanjak** is a distinctive religious flag embroidered with verses of the Qur’ān. It is retained by all Bektashi khalīfah-babas. The **360 saints** mentioned in the final stanza are the eminent caliphs (khalīfahs) of Hajjī Bektash Velī.

Let us now turn to another of Kazak Abdal’s poems, one written with a sardonic slant and filled with imaginative, intriguing and somewhat whimsical imagery:

*In the woods, there thrives a man who's savage and unruly,  
When he enters the bazaar, the townsfolk aren't pleased.  
He's a college dropout, to the students he's a bully,  
When he doesn't say "salām," the mystics are not pleased.*

*If the world takes you in, it will surely complicate you.  
The instant you look into it, all troubles you'll fall into.  
If a fool springs a leak, all within him will spew on you.  
When he comes into the mosque, the pious are not pleased.*

*The brother slave extends his weary hand to the gate;  
Snotty-nosed and bleary-eyed is how you'll find his state.  
He only takes a shave on the Bayram to celebrate;  
When he comes to take a shave, the barbers are not pleased.*

*There's a nomad drifting far and wide, over hill and dale,  
Occasionally with ruffians joining in his trail.  
In dealing with this bumpkin, your schooling's of no avail;  
When he rides into the town, the charming adhāns are not pleased.*

*There lays a tobacco pipe of a mediocre quality;  
Its dispiriting demeanor dampens any revelry.  
From a broken bowl no ayran can be sipped too easily;  
When it comes to the café, the coffee cups are not pleased.*

*In summer the migrants roam around the highland pastures;  
Looking to avoid the mace of the town's master.  
They stuff their pipes with oak leaves to make their time pass faster.  
In the town of Yenice the sellers of tobacco are not pleased.*

*There's a charming tattered cloth that no one has ever worn.  
Every single stitch the hand of man did not adorn.  
An empty chest from far a tired packhorse has borne;  
When it comes to the marketplace, the kaftāns are not pleased.*

*To you these quirky hodgepodge lines Kazak Abdal sings,  
Yogurt and cool ayran are in essence the same thing.  
A country lass goes from farm to town to do shopping;  
She seeks out bright red rubies, but marjān is not pleased.*

Let us now explain some of the points of this poem:

Although this nefes poem might seem a bit strange and nonsensical, its meaning is very profound. In this poem Kazak Abdal gives us an overview of one of the greatest character flaws found in human beings: arrogance. Time and again this flaw has impeded the forward movement of many on

the mystic path. Arrogance is one of the many undesirable traits that we must expunge to be spiritually purified.

In the first stanzas, Kazak Abdal tells us (rather obliquely) that arrogance stimulates egoism and ignorance on such a grand scale that it becomes quite harmful to the one afflicted with it. According to the blessed Muḥammad, two types of ignorance exists among human beings: one detrimental and one benign. Dangerous ignorance is the ignorance displayed by a person who does not know, and does not know that he does not know, but yet thinks he knows everything. On the other hand, benign ignorance is when a person does not know and admits he does not know. This later form of ignorance is a condition that can be easily fixed, but the former is near impossible to deal with due to its lethality. To be afflicted with such ignorance can cause us to remain in darkness until death. It is this kind of ignorance that Kazak Abdal refers to in this poem, and he points out that it derives from arrogance and conceit. When this sort of ignorance surfaces, the ego will convince us that there is no one on earth as good or as smart as we are. We would rather disregard and reject every truth rather than admit error.

Throughout this poem, Kazak Abdal seeks to describe this character flaw by utilizing colorful imagery and vibrant metaphors. He presents imaginative allegories so that the poem's readers might be motivated to cleanse themselves of any traces of arrogance that they may find within.

Let us now turn to the vocabulary used in the poem. The **adhān** is the Islamic call to prayer; **Yenice** [gr. Genisea] is a small town in Thrace once famous for its tobacco; and **marjān** is the Arabic word for precious coral, which is not as prized as pearls and rubies.

## KAMĀL UD-DĪN SHAMĪMĪ BABA

Kamāl ud-Dīn Shamīmī Baba is one of the most distinguished Bektashi spiritual masters and mystic poets of the eighteenth century. In his book *Bektaşı Şairleri* Nuzhet Ergun wrote: “I found a letter In the library of Başrī Baba in Istanbul signed by a Bektashi muhib named Al-Fakīr Mehmet Ali – who was originally from Kruja [a town in Albania] – which gives the following details regarding Shamīmī Baba life:

Şamīmī Baba's given name was Kamāl ud-Dīn. Early in his adult life, he was a *mudarris* (professor of religion). He later entered the Bektashi Order and resided in the tekke of Köprülü [now Veles, Macedonia] along with a companion of his named Khātamī Ḥaydar Baba. Once, the two friends had a conversation. Şamīmī Baba stated that he wished to one day fall martyred in a manner similar to that of Imām Ḥusayn. Khātamī Baba replied that when his time came, he wished to leave this world in the manner of Imām Ḥasan, which is to say by poisoning. These two saints of God were warmly bound by love for each other, and after several letters had been exchanged with the notables of Kruja, they traveled there together and settled. It was there, astonishingly, that one of them was later killed by a bullet and the other by poisoning!<sup>47</sup>

The muhib who wrote this letter gave no dates for these events, but they are known to have occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century. According to what is known, Şamīmī Baba was one day sitting in a window of his tekke (which lay on the outskirts of the town of Fushë-Krujë) reciting Fuzūlī's *Hadīkat us-Su'adā*, a book recalling the tragic events of the Battle of Karbalā'. As soon as he began to recite the chapter describing the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn, someone fired a gun outside of the tekke's compound. Two bullets struck him square in the chest. Şamīmī Baba's blood gushed forth, with two drops hitting the page he was reading. Until recent times this book was lovingly preserved as a sacred relic in Āşim Baba's tekke in Gjirokastër.

Following Şamīmī Baba's martyrdom, Khātamī Baba was poisoned by enemies of Bektashi path. Both babas have their türbehs in the Kruja region: Şamīmī Baba's being located on the grounds of Fushë-Krujë tekke, and Khātamī Baba's being located in the village of Gjorm.

As we stated above, Şamīmī Baba was one of the major figures of Bektashism during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and he played a noteworthy role in the order's diffusion throughout Albanian lands. His alluring mystical fragrance and extraordinary intellectual sophistication produced great sympathy for Bektashism among the people.

Şamīmī Baba journeyed the length and breadth of Albania many times, paying visits to numerous locations. He once met with Tepedelenli <sup>ā</sup>lī Pasha in the city of Yanya [Ioannina]. The pasha was so impressed with



The tekke of Fushë-Krujë in the 1930s.

Shamīmī Baba that took his hand in initiation. After the initiation ceremony was performed Shamīmī Baba gave <sup>c</sup>Alī Pasha the following advice:

Keep your hands away from committing wicked deeds. Be supportive of your subjects and serve them. Do not make life difficult for them; rather bring goodness and ease to their lives. If you enjoin righteousness, God will forgive your sins. Conversely, if you persist in behaving like you did before this initiation you will not only lose everything that you possess, you will lose your head and your progeny as well.

In those days <sup>c</sup>Alī Pasha began to run afoul of the Ottoman government and the Bektashis supported him as much as they could. In return <sup>c</sup>Alī Pasha tried to assist them as well. He gave much aid to Shamīmī Baba's mission to spread the Path, and it was with this help that Shamīmī Baba was able to build a tekke in Melçan (near the city of Korça). A dervish named <sup>c</sup>Abdullah (who was a Gheg) was appointed its baba. We shall meet Baba <sup>c</sup>Abdullah later in this book.

Shamīmī Baba also helped establish the tekke of Jafā'ī Baba in the central Albanian town of Elbasan and the tekke of Şādiķ Baba (who came

from Dürbalı Sultān) in the village of Koshtan, near Tepelena. He also visited Gjirokastër, where he met with Əlī Baba Plaku (who was also called Baba Əlī the Gheg), the fourth baba after Baba Sulaymān – about whom we shall read more.

When Shamīmī Baba traveled to Yanya for the first time, many of the town's conservative culamā' gathered to find out who he was and to test his knowledge of Islam. Shamīmī Baba had more than enough to say when he delivered irrefutable answers to their questions. In those days Shamīmī Baba wore a green turban around his tāj, and this color of turban was only permitted for those who were descendants of the Prophet (i.e. *sayyids*). Consequently, the assembled scholars demanded to know why he was wearing a green turban after the fashion of the *sayyids*. This casting of doubt upon his pedigree vexed Shamīmī Baba, and at once he recited this famous poem that not only confirmed his descent from the Prophet but foretold his eventual martyrdom in the manner of Imām Ḥusayn:

*I'm a scion, I'm a sayyid; for my pain the Əl-i Rasūl's my cure.  
By God, I'm no liar! I'm a son of the King of Men for sure.*

*If the crass deem me a Kızılbaş, it doesn't trouble me,  
The moon-like luster from my Rabb their blinded eyes can't see.*

*The denying pagan hypocrite has placed no faith in truth.  
They ask me to produce a sign; well my tongue proclaims my proof!*

*For my tatty old green turban what a fussy show you've wrought!  
By leave of God a martyr here before you has been brought!*

*Shamīmī may seem trifling, to you a little drop;  
But I'm a sea that has no end, an essence none can stop!*

I believe this poem needs little explanation, except that a **sayyid** is a noble descendant of the Prophet; **Əl-i Rasūl** means the “Household of the Messenger” and it refers to the Prophet Muḥammad’s family; and **Rabb** is one of the names of God, meaning “Lord.” Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Shamīmī Baba’s poems:

*The Seven oft-repeated verses and the Merciful's throne are in us.  
The display of the Owner of Greatness and His lofty praise are in us.*

*In the point of Oneness the meaning of the Four Books we found.  
The words of the Kur'ān, their essence, and their explanation are in us.*

*The importance of the hidden treasure, its secret we uncovered.  
The union of divine knowledge and the veiled mystery are in us.*

*The wisdom of "Who knows himself" we found in the city of being.  
Gnostics in God are we, for awareness and gnosis are in us.*

*O Shamīmī! Whoever is thirsty and has come to their wits end,  
The Water of Life and the medicine for all wounds are in us.*

Let us now explain these verses:

The **seven oft-repeated verses** mentioned at the start of this poem refer to the seven opening verses of the Kur'ān (i.e. Sūrat al-Fātihah), wherein the lordly attributes of God are presented, as we have explained earlier. The **throne** represents the heart of the believer, which when purified becomes the House of God. **The Four Books** referred to in the second stanza are the four sacred scriptures that were revealed to the great prophets. These are:

- The Torah, which came to Moses.
- The Psalms, which came to David.
- The Gospel, which came to Jesus.
- The Kur'ān, which came to Muhammad.

Shamīmī Baba tells us that if we can acquire *‘ilm-i ladunī* (divine knowledge) we can unearth the layered meanings, in detail, of the heavenly revelation found within all sacred texts.

We have explained many times in our book that the hidden treasure refers to the *ḥadīth ķudsī* in which God imparted these words to the great Muhammad:

*I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be known.  
Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known.*

Only by starting to look within can we reach this awareness and truly understand the secret of these words. The phrase **who knows himself** in the fourth stanza refers to Prophet's maxim: "Who knows himself knows his Lord."

The **thirst** that Shamīmī Baba speaks of in the last stanza is the innate yearning to reach God that all humans hold deep in their souls. Those who awake to this “thirst” will be able to quench it at the hands of a true murshid (like Shamīmī Baba), for such a master instills excellence in all who seek.

Shamīmī Baba’s aforementioned friend, Khātamī Haydar Baba, likewise composed nefes poems in which he expressed his elevated mystical insight. Here is one of his works:

*I'm an unassuming abdal and my shah's Imām ḷAlī!  
I've no need for others when my safety is ḷAlī!  
My weeping pours like torrents as I cry out "O ḷAlī!"  
For my ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

*For Hasan the Selected a humble servant I will be.  
My life for Al-Ḥusayn I would surely give for free;  
Sacrificed and martyred for the universe to see.  
My ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

*From ḷAbidīn and Bākir to Ja'far wise and true;  
Lovingly attach to them and you will find rescue;  
Earnestly I call them, my cries I'll not eschew:  
For my ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

*O my dear, go stand behind our Kāzim-i Mūsā,  
Set alight your spirit for the sake of Ar-Ridā,  
Behold and lift the veils of this worldly miasma;  
My ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

*Submit yourself to these Imāms – Ṭakī and Naṣī  
With humanity behind you, a mystic king you'll be.  
If it's God you hope to find, say this phrase devotedly:  
My ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

*Try to be a warrior of Hasan al-ṣ-ṣAṣkārī,  
Find yourself committed to Muḥammad al-Mahdī.  
Think upon these words and become their devotee:  
My ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

*Go ahead, examine all around, O Khātamī!  
There are no guides more precious, surely you'll agree;  
Make sure the words you live by forever more shall be:  
My ḳibla is Muḥammad, my prayer-place ḷAlī!*

Let us now explain these lines:

We have mentioned earlier in our book that the **kiblah** is the direction of the Ka'bah, which Muslims face when performing their obligatory prayers. However, there is an esoteric understanding of the kiblah. Khātamī Baba tells us that to approach the spiritual path, it's necessary to orient ourselves in the direction (kiblah) of the Prophet Muḥammad, since he is the indispensable spiritual underpinning of Islam. It was by his hand that the great ʻAlī obtained boundless mystical insight. We must likewise fall in behind Imām ʻAlī to achieve spiritual illumination, and if we genuinely wish to achieve perfection, we must follow the instructions of the Twelve Imāms, who inherited this spiritual light and passed it on. Thus our footing, as Bektashis, must at all times be grounded in the Way of Muḥammad and his heirs: ʻAlī and the holy Imāms.

## ÜSKÜDARLI HĀSHIM BABA

Hāshim Baba ranks among the prominent personalities and poets of Bektashi Order. He was born in the Istanbul suburb of Üsküdar in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Like ʻĀsim Baba of Gjirokastër, Hāshim Baba hailed from the Bandırmalı clan.

In his early years, Hāshim Baba traveled the mystic path of the Jalwatī Order. However, in 1756 he met Ḥasan Baba (of Cairo's Kaygusuz tekke, who was then visiting Istanbul) and became a Bektashi. Hāshim Baba passed from this life in his native Üsküdar in the year 1782, although he resided for a while in the town of Kırşehir in central Anatolia.

Hāshim Baba clearly exhibited a gift for composing nefes poems, and his verses are thoroughly infused with Bektashi spiritual insight. We shall present one of his more well-known poems, one customarily sung at the beginning of the meals held in our Bektashi tekkes:

*Shepper stands with Shupper,  
The murshid and the rahbar,  
Handed to us Kawthar;  
Thank God for everything!*

*This sofra comes from <sup>c</sup>Alī,  
Grace is with our Velī,  
Fame of faith they're truly;  
Thank God for everything!*

*Muhammad is veracity,  
We're part of his community,  
There we found prosperity;  
Thank God for everything!*

*Ahmad is the rose so dear,  
The nightingale my darling Pīr,  
All of us his slaves sincere;  
Thank God for everything!*

*The Dōst's beloved guests are we,  
Eternally one soul are we,  
Filled with solid faith are we;  
Thank God for everything!*

*To the Pīr we show affection,  
Service with perfection,  
To the seekers benedictions;  
Thank God for everything!*

*Our roots are found in shining light,  
With Sūr in hand all we invite,  
Our words have set the soul alight;  
Thank God for everything!*

*Don't cast, Hāshim, these words aside:  
"Poverty's my eternal pride."  
In gratitude you must abide;  
Thank God for everything!*

Let us now explain this poem:

**Shepper** and **Shupper** are two ancient names used for Imām Hasan and Imām Husayn; **murshid** means “guide;” **rahbar** is a synonym for murshid. **Kawthar** is the water that pours from a fountain in paradise, water that the saved shall drink from the hand of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī. This water is mentioned in the noble Kur’ān (Sūrah 108). In this poem, Hāshim Baba employs Kawthar to symbolize the mystical inspiration dispensed to the wayfarer from the murshid and rahbar.

**Aḥmad** in the fourth stanza is one of the honorific names of Muḥammad. The **rose** represents the fountainhead of mysticism: the Holy Prophet. Hāshim Baba tells us that this wellspring is so dazzling and beautiful that it inspired his **Pīr** (i.e. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī) to become like a nightingale adoring the beauty of the rose and enjoying its fragrance.

**Dōst** in the fifth stanza is a Persian word meaning “beloved” or “dear friend.” Of course the dōst Hāshim Baba is referring to is God, before whom we all must wholeheartedly submit.

In the seventh stanza, Hāshim Baba tells us that all human souls originate in God’s light, which everlastingly illuminates the way to perfection and truth. The **Sūr** is the celestial trumpet mentioned in the *Kur’ān* (39:68). This trumpet will be blown by Archangel Israfil when creation reaches its appointed end, and its sound will raise every human being from the dead and summon them together to be judged. However, Hāshim Baba uses the **Sūr** to symbolize the voice that beckons the world to spiritual awareness. Such a voice is like the **Sūr** in that its sound brings the “dead” back to life. Such noble voices resurrect the hearts of those sleeping in the darkness of spiritual ignorance.

The second line in the last stanza refers to the Prophet’s famous saying: “Poverty is my pride and in it I rejoice.” As we have explained above, “poverty” in mystic terminology means being stripped of all attachment to the material world. Hāshim Baba tells both himself and us always to remember God, to be pleased with poverty – that is, to strip attachment to the world – and to be grateful to God for the gifts that He has blessed us with.

## <sup>c</sup>ALĪ TURĀBĪ DEDE

<sup>c</sup>Alī Turābī Dede is one of the most illuminated dedes ever to preside over the great tekke of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī (i.e. the Pīrevi). He was born at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the town of Yambol, in the Slivno prefecture of what is now Bulgaria. After Turābī Dede finished both his primary and secondary education he journeyed to the Pīrevi, where he became a dervish in 1838 at the hand of Çorumlu Sayyid Hasan Dede Baba.

When Hasan Dede Baba departed this world in 1851 Turābī Dede was

appointed to the sheepskin pōst of Hajjī Bektash Velī by an assembly of khalīfah-babas. He held this position with expertise and grace for nineteen years, until he passed from this world in 1870. During his tenure as dedebaba, the Pīrevi was thoroughly restructured and reorganized, moves that caused its financial condition to improve greatly.

Turābī Dede can certainly be counted among the most renowned poets of the Turkish language, standing shoulder to shoulder with Nasīmī, Fuzūlī, and many others. Turābī Dede composed many charming poems that are intended to evoke spirituality, divine love, and other such subjects to their readers. Turābī Dede's *divān* (which was first printed in Istanbul by one of his muhibs) contains 2,800 lines in which mysticism is communicated using the cryptically stylish language so commonly employed by Bektashi poets. We can appreciate Turābī Dede's poetic talent and skill in the poems that we shall present here, the first being:

*Slaves to the King of Men are they,  
Flowers of Hajjī Bektash are they,  
Nightingales of knowing are they,  
A bouquet are the Bektashis..*

*Each dawn they open the maydān;  
Together they enact the holy arkān,  
A pact before time with Rahmān;  
A bouquet are the Bektashis.*

*God's choicest my place of prostration;  
God's face my prayer's direction;  
God's House in their hearts – of that there's no question  
A bouquet are the Bektashis.*

*"Their Lord will slake their thirst" they say,  
They take a drink that won't fade away;  
They'll give up their heads before they betray;  
A bouquet are the Bektashis.*

*Words of truth Turābī has told;  
You need to stop, listen and behold;  
No rancor does my heart enfold;  
A bouquet are the Bektashis.*

Let us now explain these verses:

The overall meaning of this poem should be clear. However, we should draw attention to a few points. The line **God's choicest my place of prostration** refers to the Kur'ānic verse:

*And when We said to the angels:*

*"Prostrate before Adam..."*

﴿Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:34﴾

As we have explained earlier, this verse refers to God commanding the angels to prostrate before Adam, who is called the “God’s choicest” (*Safīyullah*). We should also point out that the fourth stanza of this poem references another Kur'ānic verse:

*... and their Lord will slake their thirst  
with a pure beverage.*

﴿Sūrat al-Insān 76:21﴾

Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Turābī Dede’s poems:

*Those who renounced this fleeting world  
Into the lasting realm entered and stayed.  
In doubt the zāhid with his parched hypocrisy,  
Failing to grasp the goal, entered and stayed.*

*With the eyes, O soul, gaze in adoration  
At this sea filling the earth with explanation.  
In blindness before the sun's illumination,  
Bliss and joy, the bat entered and stayed.*

*If, my dear, you walk up Sinai's mount,  
The King of kings will confer beyond count.  
From the bush “Lo! I, even I, am God!” came out,  
And straight to Moses entered and stayed.*

*Without stop Turābī weeps day and night;  
These works of love difficulties surely incite;  
Of this mystery, who has knowledge forthright?  
In a secret meaning he entered and stayed*

Let us now explain this poem:

In the first stanza, Turābī Dede tells us that the sacrifices that are to be carried out along the Path must be made with total sincerity. Every sacrifice we make must be performed solely to gain God's love and good graces. There can be no ulterior motives. The person who follows this path to gain some benefit, even if that benefit is an otherworldly paradise, is like a *zāhid*. As we know, God's saints consider such people to be hypocrites; and the spiritual journey of a hypocrite will certainly not end in perfection!

In the second stanza, Turābī Dede says that those who remain faithful to the Path will have the eyes of their hearts opened, and thus they will be able to behold God, the invincible master of all. God allows His divine light to manifest its brilliant rays everywhere. However, those who cannot perceive this eternal sun are like bats: They are blinded during the day by sunlight (when everything is clear and perceptible) and cannot see what the light reveals.

In the third stanza, Turābī Dede tells us that we must follow the path of love with total sincerity, because sincerity points us to our goal and, sooner or later, bring us to it. To emphasize this point Turābī Dede employs as an allegory the story of Moses, the son-in-law of Shuayb [Jethro]. One day Moses received Shuayb's permission to travel to Egypt with his family. Moses wished visit his mother and brother, who were still living under the Pharaoh's rule.

In the course of their journey, the party became lost. A trail led them to a narrow valley called Wādī al-Ayman. Night came cold and dark, and snow began to fall. Moses' wife Zipporah was heavily pregnant and that night she gave birth. Moses tried to light a fire to provide warmth for his family, but the fire would not catch. It was then that he spotted a brush fire off in the distance, and he quickly started out for it.

When he reached what he thought was fire, Moses beheld a green bush encased in a white flame that did not seem to burn the area that it touched. The bush stayed fresh and green. Neither did the fire damage it nor did its verdant branches extinguish the blaze. Moses was utterly bewildered by this sight. He looked all around and found not a single soul. At that moment a voice arose out of the bush:<sup>48</sup>

*Lo! I, even I, am God; there is no god but Me.  
So serve me and establish worship  
for my remembrance.*

﴿Sūrah Tā-Hā 20:14﴾

The esoteric meaning of this verse is that when Moses tried to find God with sincerity and without expectation, revelation arrived straightaway, as explained above. Moreover, in the twelfth verse of this very same chapter of the Qur’ān, God says:

*Certainly I am thy Lord!  
Therefore take off thy sandals...*

﴿Sūrah Tā-Hā 20:12﴾

In the final stanza of this poem Turābī Dede declares that the journey to obtain perfection and divine love is very tough to negotiate given that it requires great sacrifice. This is why he is wracked with agony as he tirelessly wrestles with his ego. However, this sacrifice and struggle will allow Turābī Dede to arrive at the goal with divine knowledge – which not everyone can obtain. This knowledge is only bequeathed to those whose eyes have been opened by divine grace. Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Turābī Dede’s poems:

*Before this world Adam and his houri gained;  
Muhammad ‘Ali’s light did you behold?  
When, by fate, your rightful share you obtained,  
Khunkār Hajjī Bektash – the Pīr – did you behold?*

*This physical world, making dough and kneading;  
From nine fathers and four mothers proceeding;  
From pre-eternity we’re called to this meeting;  
Inside the soul the Beloved did you behold?*

*Come! Along the trail of Sayyid ‘Ali let’s race;  
In the dust beneath his feet let’s wipe our face;  
Making niyāz to the Pīr in the Forty’s place,  
The saint at the dār of Manṣūr did you behold?*

*The knower of the secret of “Who knows”, where is he?  
The friend that’s closer to you than yourself, where is he?*

*The brother that shows you the path, where is he?  
The Shah with the four emblems did you behold?*

*Turābī Baba's faith the heart firmly holds;  
The Twelve Imāms, the Seventeen, their rite he upholds;  
"The Seven Oft-Repeated Lines" minbar and mihrāb enfold;  
These lines in the beauty of the Pir did you behold?*

Let us now examine these verses:

The first verse refers to the Prophet Muhammad's maxim: "I was a prophet when Adam was between water and clay." We have already explained the concept of the Nūr Muhammadiyya earlier in this book, a concept brilliantly expressed by Al-Hallāj. According to this concept God created the light and spirit of the Prophet Muhammad before all else. Furthermore, based on the prophetic maxim "I and 'Alī are of a single light," we can conclude that his light and spirit and that of 'Alī's are one and the same; which is to say, the exalted 'Alī was likewise present before time.

The **hourī** in the first line refers to Eve, the wife of Adam and mother of humankind. The last two lines of the first stanza capture Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Velī's maxim: "My inspiration comes forthrightly from God."

The second stanza refers to God's creation of Adam from clay. According to the traditional commentators of the Kur'ān (who have explained this event in detail), God fashioned Adam's physical form out of nine types of clay from nine different lands. Turābī Dede states that these are in a sense our **nine fathers**. Other commentators have put forth various explanations regarding the nine types of clay, but all of them have come to this conclusion: These clays are apparent in the hues of people's skin – white, red, yellow, black and so on. Hajjī Bektash Velī also addresses this subject in his book, *Makālāt*.

The **four mothers** are the four elements of earth, air, fire and water, which in old days were called the *anāsir*, as we have described above. Turābī Dede tells us that it was from these "mothers" and "fathers" that our father Adam was created.

Lines three and four of the second stanza tell us how God summoned together our souls in the *azal* (the pre-eternal state) and commanded them to submit to His lordship and acknowledge the fact that He dwells within our hearts.

The third stanza alludes to Balım Sultān, our Pīr-ī Thānī (or Second Pīr), who followed in the footsteps of Sayyid ‘Alī Sultān. We explained earlier how Balım Sultān traveled to the tekke of Hajjī Bektashi in the company of forty dervishes, who were friends of God in their own right. The **dār of Manṣūr** is the station of sacrifice that was solemnized by Balım Sultān upon his assuming the sheepskin pōst of dedebaba, opening the maydān of Hajjī Bektash Velī and systematizing the secret rituals of our holy path.

The phrase **Who knows** (*man ‘arafa*) refers to the Prophet Muḥammad’s maxim “Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord,” which we have discussed several times throughout this book. The phrase **closer to you than yourself** relates to this Kur’ānic verse:

*...And We are nearer to him  
than his jugular vein.*

﴿Sūrah Kāf 50:16﴾

This spiritual truth has likewise been explained earlier in this book, and thus there is no need to repeat its significance here.

The last two verses of the fourth stanza refer to Hajjī Bektash Velī, who is the one who laid the foundations of the practices and ceremonies of our path. The **four emblems** are the specific ritual objects that Hajjī Bektash Velī brought with him from Khorāsān when he came to Anatolia. These are:

1. The *chirāgh*, or candle. The candle represents, among other things, the untainted light of spiritual inspiration.
2. The *sofra*, or tablecloth. This is a circular sheet of leather with twelve angles. It represents the moral nourishment of humanity and its satiation through mystical insight.
3. The *pōst*, or sheepskin prayer rug. This represents the station of the spiritual guide, the murshid.
4. The *sanjak*, or standard. This is made of red (or green) cloth and it displays the spiritual ideals and ethical mission of the Bektashi Order. Specific verses from the Kur’ān are embroidered upon the sanjak with white thread.

The **Seventeen** mentioned by Turābī Dede in the last stanza are the seventeen Kemerbestigān, the companions whose *kemers* (cummerbunds) were bound around their waists for the first time by the hand of Imām ʻAlī. Among the Kemerbestigān we find the names of Salmān al-Fārisī, ʻAmmār ibn Yāsir, Miqdād ibn Awsad, Mālik al-Ashṭar, and Zayd ibn Zawjānī.

In the last stanza, Turābī Dede declares his faith in the Twelve Imāms and the seventeen Kemerbestigān. Moreover, in his **mihrāb** (prayer niche) and **minbar** (pulpit), Turābī Dede continuously beholds the “Seven Oft-Repeated Lines” (i.e. Sūrat al-Fātiḥah) that praise God Almighty. In his vision and his mind’s eye he sees the Pīr manifest at all times.

Having presented this explanation, let us take a look at another Turābī Dede’s poems:

*The way of roaming and renunciation we've selected;  
In the realm of contentment, solitude is ours.  
The secrets of Reality we've in the heart collected;  
In this realm the state of serenity is ours.*

*With dhikr and tawḥid our heart we've rendered;  
To the Beloved our soul we've surrendered;  
Into the murshid's presence, by God, we've entered;  
Within the courtyard of love, distinction is ours.*

*In the fires the ego's nature we've burned;  
Our heart became dust, haughtiness spurned;  
With the affairs of the world we've no concern;  
At the gate of resignation, oneness is ours.*

*O Turābī! Forever give thanks for your state,  
Seek God's pleasure, and with it nothing conflate;  
If in outward form they see you as nothing great,  
The essence of God's benefaction is ours.*

The meaning of this poem should be quite clear and therefore in no need of explanation. And so we will move on to another poem from Turābī Dede, one in which lauds the great Bektashi spiritual master Sersem ʻAlī Dede:

*From Sayyid ʻAlī Sultān came our aid,  
The maydān opened, the candle's light displayed,*

*The deniers' hearts and eyes lay enchanted,  
All by the splendor of Sersem 'Alī Dede.*

*Filled by Kızıl Deli, Kawthar overflows;  
Since Қālū Balā the lovers in it find repose;  
The Khawārij are stunned by Imam 'Alī's blows,  
All by the awe of Sersem 'Alī Dede.*

*Before time began, the faithfuls' goals are given,  
True hearts were set in an exuberant condition,  
By the Sulṭān's hand, Yazid is lament-smitten,  
All by the lightning of Sersem 'Alī Dede.*

*O zāhid! Don't wander about so unaware,  
You're draped in sanctimony, so take care!  
Thus ends the nightingales' weeping in despair,  
All by the roar of Sersem 'Alī Dede.*

*May 100,000 curses fall upon Yazid!  
May all believers by God's benevolence be freed!  
O Turābī! May grace be always yours indeed!  
All by the thunder of Sersem 'Alī Dede.*

Let us now take a look at the meaning of this poem:

In the first and second verses Turābī exalts **Sayyid 'Alī Sulṭān** (Kızıl Deli) to tell us he is the saint from whom Turābī's spiritual powers spring. Balım Sulṭān was a direct disciple of Sayyid 'Alī Sulṭān, and from Balım Sulṭān came **Sersem 'Alī Dede**, who (as we explained in his section) miraculously awoke the candles in Ḥajjī Bektash Velī's tekke and opened the maydān anew – an act that ruffled his adversaries.

The **Khawārij** were a band of Imām 'Alī's followers who were deceived by Mu'āwiya's propaganda and, more deplorably, their egos. They subsequently broke away from the exalted Imām, declared war upon him and fanatically fought against him.

The **awe**, **roar**, **lightning** and **thunder** express the power and might of Sersem 'Alī Dede's saintly breath (*nefes*), which ultimately comes from God. Once again, the **Yazid** of this poem signifies the atheism, unbelief, and insolence generated by the ego – which Turābī Dede curses.

The **nightingales** are those wayfarers on the mystic path who having

becoming intoxicated on mystical inspiration, are unable to take any interest in the affairs of the material world.

To end this section we would like to reiterate Turābī Dede's skill as a master poet, and we can say in all honesty that he was one of the most enlightened and educated dedebabas ever to brighten the Pīrevī. Turābī Dede penned many poems on the subject of mystic love that fill his *divān*. Unfortunately, our limited space does not allow us to translate more of these masterpieces.

## BOSNEVĪ BABA

Bosnevī Baba was a Bektashi poet who lived during the nineteenth century. He was born in the land of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where he received his formal schooling and cultural refinement. In his youth, he began to travel, and during one of his journeys, he fell in love with Bektashi mysticism during a visit to the tekke of Khizr Baba in Kičevo, a town in western Macedonia. It was here that he received initiation into the order at the hand of the master of that tekke, Ismā‘īl Baba. Bosnevī extols the virtues of this murshid in a poem that we have translated below.

Motivated as he was by his entry into the mystic path, Bosnevī began to compose many inspiring poems. These works were later set to beautiful melodies and sung in Bektashi tekkes throughout the land. This particular poem is very well known in our circles:

*If I wish the door of love to be unbolted,  
The one who opens and keeps it open – ‘Alī, ‘Alī!  
If I wish to see God’s grandeur there unfolded,  
The one who sees and keeps it seen – ‘Alī, ‘Alī!*

*Muhammad Muṣṭafā, holy master of the world,  
The secret of the Path, on Mi‘rāj Night unfurled,  
Other than ‘Alī, in forgetfulness all swirled.  
The one who knows and keeps it known – ‘Alī, ‘Alī!*

*Be a dervish, brother! Into stiffness do not tumble;  
Purify your heart and live a life that’s humble;  
Repudiate the ego and the goal you will not fumble.  
The one who reaches and renders reached – ‘Alī, ‘Alī!*

*To Syria left the soldiers of the wicked liar;  
 To the believers, a message was sent out to inspire;  
 In the Forty's group was squeezed a juice that won't expire.  
 The one who squeezes and makes squeezed – <sup>c</sup>Alī, <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*The chief of the Forty is Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Alī;  
 What is this to those with eyes that can't see?  
 O Bosnevī! Tears fall from your eyes freely;  
 The one who flows and makes it flow – <sup>c</sup>Alī, <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

Let us now explain this poem:

In the first stanza, Bosnevī Baba tells us that we must follow Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī if we wish to open the door to divine love and find the road to perfection – for the great <sup>c</sup>Alī is the primary spiritual inheritor of the Prophet Muḥammad. Only our adoration of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī will melt us and ultimately unify us with God. This is why we must embark on this particular path because only the path of <sup>c</sup>Alī can give us this treasure.

In the second stanza, Bosnevī Baba tells us that all of the mysteries of the path to perfection were revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad on the Night of Mi'rāj. The Prophet subsequently bequeathed these secrets to Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī. Given that no other human being can convey the full weight of these secrets, we should direct ourselves to the illustrious <sup>c</sup>Alī so that we might obtain these blessings by his hand.

The **juice** mentioned in the fourth stanza is the drink of perfection, that if imbibed will throw us into a state of intoxication. It is juice that will provide us with a taste of heavenly ecstasy. It is a drink that will spur us on as we carry out the arduous struggle to attain our lofty goal. Let us recall that we have previously discussed matters relating spiritual intoxication and ecstasy, as well as those verses of the Qur'ān which allude to these matters.

At the end of this nefes poem Bosnevī Baba tells us that he frequently sheds tears of agony in the pursuit of his mystical goal. The only solace he finds is in the reassurance that comes by way of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī's inspiration, for only the great <sup>c</sup>Alī can generate within us the staying power to continue along the path.

Here is a poem by Bosnevī Baba in which he extols the qualities of the founder of the Kičevo tekke, the saintly Khizr Baba. He also mentions own his murshid, Ismā'il Baba, along with the tekke's dervishes:

*All you eager lovers! Here is my good news,  
Of Khizr Baba's nature here I shall give clues.  
The seeker's bosoms scorched at his holy door;  
Khizr Baba's blessed grave is paradise and more!*

*At Mātam time to his holy side seekers are drawn,  
Hearts are filled with love while making the kurbān.  
A quarry of largess, he stands like a sultan,  
Khizr Baba's likes have never been seen before!*

*Like angels his dervishes flutter all around;  
Tender types they are, with faces to the ground;  
With Zūl-Fikār in hand, Baba Ismā'il expounds:  
Khizr Baba's drum the heart cannot ignore!*

*This friend of God the Imāms Twelve made clear;  
Those who see his arkān "Yes!" they cheer;  
No doubt, 'tis Ḥalī's son I saw standing near;  
Khizr Baba's forefather, Haydar, I adore!*

*This mystery from son to son endowed;  
Here you'll find decay is not allowed;  
I've not the might to laud him fittingly out loud,  
Bosnevī is Khizr Baba's slave forevermore!*

Since this poem has no need for explanation, we shall move on to the next of Bōsnevī's poems – a poem in which he gives advice to those thinking that the dervish path is something easily taken up:

*"I'm a dervish," you said, entering the maydān;  
Did you renounce your being and pass through?  
You came to this maydān, you entered the arkān;  
Could you see the arkān's secrets in you?*

*The folk of hākīkat walk in the right direction;  
For the rose of love, they're nightingales of affection;  
Muhammad is character, Ḥalī is disposition;  
Did this disposition's nectar your soul imbue?*

*Did you serve the Pir for the sake of your arkān?  
Did you perform a deed for the sake of your imān?  
Did you strive for the sake of your own jān?  
Sewing the cloak of love ... did you get around to?*

*Were you able to bargain with being and non-being?  
Unbelief and faith, did you get them agreeing?  
Could you cleanse your soul with a love ever-freeing?  
Wavering and doubt, were you not able to undo?*

*Step back and perceive what lies in this;  
Don't speak of good, don't speak of what's amiss,  
O Bōsnevī, listen! This advice do not dismiss;  
Could you not open the soul's eye and see through?*

Even though the meaning of this poem should be relatively clear, we should provide an explanation of certain terms employed in its lines. The word **arkān** refers to the formal Bektashi rites of submission; the word **jān** means “soul;” and **imān** means “faith.” Furthermore, for the bards of old the object of love (God) is symbolized by the **rose** and the lover (the wayfarer) by the **nightingale**.

In the second stanza of the poem, Bōsnevī says that all of the elements of mystical beauty and spiritual splendor are manifested in Muḥammad and ʻAlī. All genuine wayfarers are in love with these two great men, ever praising their preeminence among humankind.

In the fourth stanza Bōsnevī Baba tells us that no matter what the world throws at us, we must remain steady if we are going to follow this spiritual path correctly. Sometimes we might be rich, sometimes we might be poor. Nonetheless, our sights must remain fixed on the way. In this life we are bound to come into contact with both good and bad people, but in every situation, we must display patience and grace. Having presented this explanation, let us take a look at another of Bōsnevī Baba’s mystical poems:

*From the place of oneness, I descended into the wilds;  
Love's winding path I walked...and I arrived.  
I'm a knower; I tell no secrets to the mind of a child;  
The knowers' mysteries I perceived...and I arrived.*

*In the cloak of elements my mother wrapped me;  
Like the angels, I descended to this journey;  
In the form of Adam, I became the world's detainee;  
Yet the seven heavens I surpassed...and I arrived.*

*These gatherings of love are meetings of holy men,  
In these godly meetings the moments do not end;*

*In the assembly of the Forty, I found Adam within;  
I pressed my face in the dust of their tracks ...and I arrived.*

*If you're a knower, take heed O tranquil heart!  
Submit to the guide, your soul to him impart;  
The prized of the Saved Group, from them do not depart;  
The splendor of His Majesty I beheld...and I arrived.*

*I'm Bōsnevī, and my words come from my core;  
He who's a lover, perfect words will not ignore;  
Decoding the mystic face, such awareness I asked for;  
For a thousand years, I made namāz...and I arrived.*

Let us now explain this poem:

The **place of oneness** refers to the aforementioned As-Sayr fī Allah, “The Journey in God,” where the wayfarer merges with the divine. Having obtained this station, the wayfarer then embarks on As-Sayr an Allah, “The Journey from God”, whereby he returns to the world in order to guide humanity towards Truth. Thus Bōsnevī is telling us about the details of his own As-Sayr an Allah: “I have kept all that I have experienced a secret, refusing to divulge any of it to those whose minds are unable to understand.”

The **cloak** mentioned in the first line of the second stanza is the physical body, which – in keeping with ancient theories – is comprised of the four anāsır: water, fire, earth and air. These elements encase the soul when it enters the material realm. **Like the angels** means possessing a gentle and refined character. The **seven heavens** are the stages (or layers) of the firmament according to how the sky was charted in the old days. The other verses should be reasonably clear, other than perhaps the words **for a thousand years, I made namāz**, which refers to God’s ordering all of creation to prostrate itself before Adam in the time before time (azal).

## IBRĀHĪM DERTLĪ

Ibrāhīm Dertlī is one of the best known Bektashi poets of the early nineteenth century. He was born in the year 1772 in the small Anatolian village of Şahnalar (Yeniçaga). His given name was Ibrāhīm, although he later became known as Āshik Dertlī. Early on in his adulthood, he set out

on the mystical path of the Khalwatī Order. Later on, however, he met the renowned Bektashi murshid Muṣṭafā Fātiḥ Baba in Istanbul, from whom he took initiation into the Bektashi Order at the Karaağaç Tekke.

We should mention here that Muṣṭafā Fātiḥ Baba was well-known in those days as an advanced and highly refined mystic. He composed mystical poetry in two languages: Persian and Turkish. One of his most celebrated poems was written in imitation (*naṣīra*) of the great Persian mystic poet Jāmī. Copies of Muṣṭafā Baba's poetry were kept in ēĀsim Baba's tekke in Gjirokastër, but we do not have these on hand. Regrettably, we are unable to present examples of his work.

Muṣṭafā Fātiḥ Baba also happened to be an Albanian, originating from the town of Elbasan. He received a great deal of his secular and spiritual education in Istanbul and a disciple of his, a certain Ibrāhīm Farūkī Baba, took over the direction of his tekke when he passed away. Both of these figures are not only distinguished among the noteworthy Bektashis, but they are also listed among the most famous poets of the Turkish language. Muṣṭafā Fātiḥ Baba's spiritual merit is celebrated by Dertlī in one of his poems:

*Don't speak to me, O zāhid!  
For lies I will not hear.  
My hand has found a murshid,  
One pure and true and dear.*

*Five times a day, so much like you,  
Away the dirt I clean.  
But unlike you my washing lasts;  
Do you know just what I mean?*

Thus, it was by the hand of this illuminated murshid – Muṣṭafā Fātiḥ Baba – that Dertlī became filled with the inspiration to proceed down the mystic path resolutely.

During his lifetime Dertlī made many visits to the holy sites of East. He also made a trip to Egypt, after which he returned to Anatolia. It was while he was residing in Ankara that he passed from this world in 1847.

Dertlī's poems burst at the seams with mysticism. These works were later compiled in a *divān*, which was printed in Istanbul and much advertised in local newspapers. In addition to his many mystical poems, Dertlī also

composed lovely ghazals that expressed spiritual love. These have long been recited as songs by the people of Anatolia. Here is one of Dertlī poems in which he praises the transcendent philosophy of our Bektashi masters:

*From the perfect guide we obtained our passion;  
From the hearth of the Pir we donned our fashion;  
We are the Bektashis!*

*Humble servants of Hajjī Bektash are we;  
The tāj of achievement we took from 'Alī;  
We are the Bektashis!*

*The mystics think of us, let all the rest blame!  
Revelry and love we'll not disclaim;  
We are the Bektashis!*

*We're of the ruined, there's none so deserted;  
From the gleam of this world our eyes diverted;  
We are the Bektashis!*

*O Dertlī! I looked to every path and checked,  
But here I discovered all the points intersect;  
We are the Bektashis!*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation. Therefore, let us examine another poem by Āshik Dertlī:

*At the front of the souls, in the kingdom pre-eternal,  
When "Alastu" issued forth, "Yes" I called out.  
"Don't enfold me," I cried, "in clothing elemental!  
My Beloved! I'm smitten by your beauty," I called out.*

*Souls quivered, drunk on the wine of affection;  
Some entered faith, while others hugged rejection;  
Rank upon rank we stood, ready for inspection;  
The deniers shouted "No!" but "Indeed!" I called out.*

*What to do? The command "Be!" was manifested;  
Every living being out of nothingness was wrested;  
Every soul found itself on the road to being tested;  
"Faith and confession!" to you I called out.*

*In spite of your songs, O Dertlī, this guidance was mislaid;  
On Judgment Day without you many were dismayed;  
All the prophets I approached, yet they gave me no aid;  
"O Muṣṭafā, a quarry of intercession are you!" I called out.*

Let us now explain this poem:

The opening lines of the first stanza refer to an event that transpired in the pre-eternal realm when God asked the souls of every human slated to come into existence: “Am I not your Lord?” (*alastu bi-rabbikum*). Dertlī boldly proclaims that he was the first to answer “indeed” (*balā*).

Dertlī then describes for us his experience of merging with God, an act that gave him never-ending ecstasy. However, when the time came for him to descend into the material realm – i.e. As-Sayr an Allah, which we have described earlier – Dertlī begs God not force him to go, for he wishes to remain basking in the sublime ecstasy of the divine countenance.

In the second stanza, Dertlī tells us that when all the souls were asked “Am I not your Lord?” both believers and deniers were to be found among them. The believers – who counted Dertlī in their ranks – exclaimed: “Yes Lord! We testify and submit to You!” However, the deniers uttered: “No”, meaning that they failed to comprehend *Hakk* and were thus incapable of submitting.

In the third stanza the command “Be!” (or *kūn* in Arabic) refers to those *Kur’ānic* verses that tell us about God’s creative power. Whenever God so desires to create a thing He merely gives the command “Be!” and that thing instantaneously comes into existence. Here, Dertlī tells us that when all the souls were created through God’s decree, they immediately set out in diverse directions. “Nonetheless, my soul bows to You, O God!” cries Dertlī, “So envelop me in Your glory!”

In the last stanza, we find Dertlī directing his attention to the exalted Prophet Muḥammad, who is forever a *shāfi* (intercessor) for humanity before God and a support in times of trouble. Dertlī says that he has sung many songs throughout his life, but were it not for the inspiration of the Prophet he would have gained nothing from such singing. At the end of times, the souls of all human beings will be gathered for divine judgment. Each soul will seek to alleviate its own misfortunes, and the various prophets sent by God throughout history will be implored for help. However, these holy men will be unable to offer any relief. When this moment arrives, Dertlī will remember the ability of the great Muḥammad to intercede before God, and he will then exclaim: “O Muṣṭafā! Save me!”

Having presented this explanation, let us take a look at another of Əşik Dertlī’s poems:

*Before donning the elemental cloak,  
Alone and free like a king was I.  
In no need of food and drink,  
Light in the light of the divine display was I.*

*From the majestic soul, I parted;  
In the Realm of Being, I obeyed wholehearted.  
Into the attributes of Man I was inserted;  
Wide-awake in the concealed mother was I.*

*Before creation, before the Realm of Dominion,  
Before anyone made to the Lord prostration,  
Before throne and stool, tablet and pen were in their stations  
In the unmatched existent was I.*

*In eternity without pain, yet Dertlī I became,  
From place to place I strolled, then to this world came;  
I there saw myself in the very best of frames;  
Aware of these secrets, with Hakk was I.*

Let us now explain these verses:

In the opening line, **Before the donning of the elemental cloak**, Dertlī tells us that before he was enveloped by matter (which is to say, before creation) he was like a king, impervious to the many travails of the physical world, such as cold, heat, hunger, thirst, worries, violence, disease, etc.

The **Light in the light of the divine display** refers to the particular spiritual stations that are to be passed along “The Journey in God.” In these stations that Dertlī found himself annihilated and merged with God.

In the second stanza, Dertlī tells us that when he made the journey from God back to the world (As-Sayr an Allah) he entered into material substance and was thereby separated from the aforementioned light, which he compares in this poem to a **concealed mother** who gathers all the souls inside her like the all-encompassing celestial womb.

In the third stanza, Dertlī tells us that in the “time before time” all of our souls were veiled and nameless. There was no confusion or disorder in this state; all was in absolute stillness. But as soon as he was clothed in matter he entered into hardship and misery, so much so that he took the name **Dertlī**, which literally means “Pained One.”

In the last two lines, Dertlī says that he was created at God’s command and formed without deficiency. This is an allusion to Prophet Muhammad’s

teaching that every human being is born sinless (*maçsum*) and in a state of submission to God.

Dertlī ends this poem by telling us that all of the veiled truths mentioned in this poem can only be fathomed when we arrive before the throne of God, completely annihilated in the divine.

## NASĪBĪ TĀHIR BABA

Nasībī Tāhir Baba is one of the well-known Bektashi clerics and poets of the nineteenth century. Regrettably, we do not have any book on hand which contains his full biography or samples of his poetry. All we can refer to is the entry in Sami Frashëri's aforementioned encyclopedia, which reports the following:

Nasībī Tāhir Baba ranks among the grand spiritual guides of the Bektashis. He was born in the village of Frashër. At some point in his life, he made the pilgrimage to Mecca and to the other holy sites. When he returned home, he established a small tekke in Frashër, which grew over time and became the expansive structure we know today. He passed away in the year 1250 AH [1835 CE] and was buried in a turbeh near his tekke, a site that is still visited. Nasībī wrote many poems in Albanian. Besides these, he composed works and ghazals in Turkish and Persian. Upon returning to the fatherland after his pilgrimages, he stopped in the town of Leskovik where he was met by the 'ulamā' of his day, who interrogated him to ascertain the depth of his religious knowledge. Nasībī responded to their queries with a long poem (*kasīda*).

We should add here that the tekke of Frashër produced many capable and charismatic Bektashi clerics like Baba Alush, Baba 'Abidīn, Baba Muṣṭafā and others. These men were also well-known patriots and they all played a major role in the struggle for independence. In fact, the tekke of Frashër was a base for nearly every nationalist initiative from the early days of Abdyl Frashëri.

In more recent times this tekke produced 'Abbās Hilmī Dede, a man best remembered for the following event: 'Abbās Hilmī Dede became dedebaba

in 1947, that is, during the early years of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship. With the assistance of two pro-communist renegades – Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo – the government sought to alter the *Kānūn-i Evliyā'*, the age-old sacred guidelines of the Bektashi Order. <sup>c</sup>Abbās Hilmī Dede not only categorically rejected this initiative, but he took a gun, shot both of these turncoat babas to death and then took his own life. This act left a profound impression on all Bektashis, and it etched in our memories.

## MUHARRAM MAHZŪNĪ BABA

Muḥarram Maḥzūnī Baba is another notable Bektashi master of the nineteenth century. He was an Albanian who was born and raised in Gjirokastër. He eventually became pōstnīshīn of the famous Dūrbalī Tekke (in Thessaly), a position which he served for twenty-two years – from 1845 to 1867, the year in which he left this life.

The Dūrbalī Tekke is one of the oldest Bektashi tekkes in the Balkans, founded by the celebrated saint Dūrbalī Sultān. He was sent as a missionary into the region during the days of Sayyid <sup>c</sup>Alī Sultān. Dūrbalī Sultān planted the seeds of Bektashism in the Balkans and established its first tekke [outside of Thrace] near the town of Farsala in 1480. He served his tekke continuously for forty-two years until 1522, the year he passed away. Unfortunately, we do not have any other biographical details on hand about this great spiritual master. We only know that Dūrbalī Sultān was an illustrious friend of God and that he is still considered as such by the Greek villagers who live in the countryside around his tekke, continuing to revere his spiritual presence. The Dūrbalī Tekke was operational in recent times, being administered by his holiness Baba Seid Koka, who was originally from the Skrapar region of Albania.

While this section of our book deals with Bektashi literature and not the history of the order per se, the tekke of Dūrbalī Sultān is of such obvious historical importance that it would be beneficial to say a few words about it here.

Muḥarram Maḥzūnī Baba was the twenty-seventh spiritual master to head the tekke of Dūrbalī Sultān. Here we shall present the complete list of those who sat as pōstnīshīn of this tekke, as well as their land of origin and how long they sat on the sheepskin pōst:

1. Dūrbalī Sultān, 1480 to 1522 (42 years)
2. Baba Mūsā (*from Baghdad*), 1522 to 1553 (31 years)
3. Shāhin Baba (*from Khorāsān*), 1553 to 1581 (28 years)
4. Ja‘far Baba (*from Aleppo*), 1581 to 1596 (15 years)
5. Ḥajjī ‘Alī Baba (*from Egypt*), 1596 to 1604 (8 years)
6. Ṭayyār Baba (*from İskenderun*), 1604 to 1627 (23 years)
7. Kāsim Baba (*from Baghdad*), 1627 to 1643 (16 years)
8. Amīn Baba (*from Karbala’*), 1643 to 1655 (12 years)
9. Muṣṭafā Baba Lahōrī (*from the Punjab*), 1655 to 1660 (5 years)
10. Zayn al-‘Abidīn Baba (*from Basra*), 1660 to 1663 (3 years)
11. Yaḥya Hādī Baba (*from Kırşehir*), 1663 to 1680 (17 years)
12. Shams ud-Dīn ‘Alī Baba, 1680 to 1694 (14 years)
13. Sayyid Maḳṣūd Baba (*from Baghdad*), 1694 to 1713 (19 years)
14. Ṣāliḥ ‘Alī Baba (*from Baghdad*), 1713 to 1725 (12 years)
15. Manṣūr Baba (*from Basra*) from 1725 to 1736 (11 years)
16. Adham Naḳī Baba (*from Erzurum*) from 1736 to 1744 (8 years)
17. Salīm Baba (*from Baghdad*), 1744 to 1753 (9 years)
18. Ḥusayn Baba (*from Tirana*), 1753 to 1779 (26 years)
19. Ḥasan Baba Gega from 1779 to 1794 (15 years)
20. Ḥasan Baba (*from Dibra*), only six months in 1794
21. Baba Aḥmad Gega 1794 to 1802 (8 years)
22. İpekli Mehmet Baba (*from Peć/Peja*), 1802 to 1809 (7 years)
23. Mahmūd Baba Gega, 1809 to 1811 (2 years)
24. Baba Jamālī (*from Gjirokastër*), 1811 to 1815 (4 years)
25. Jumayl Baba (*from Konitsa*), 1815 to 1819 (4 years)
26. Ḥusayn Baba Gega, 1819 to 1845 (26 years)
27. Mahzūnī Baba (*from Gjirokastër*), 1845 until 1867 (22 years)
28. Aşçī Baba, 1867 to 1869 (2 years)
29. Bayram Baba (*from Përmet*), 1869 until 1904 (35 years)
30. Nażīf Baba Koplara, 1904 to 1905 (1 year)
31. Baba Ṭāhir Bubzi, 1905 until 1919 (14 years)
32. Kāzim Baba (*from Berat*), 1919 until 1942 (23 years)
33. Baba Seit (*from Skrapar*), 1942 until today.<sup>49</sup>

Let us return to the individual under discussion in this section. Aside from his spiritual acumen, Maḥzūnī Baba possessed remarkable poetic skill and this allowed him to write outstanding poems in both Turkish and Albanian. The date of his passing is noted in a lengthy Turkish poem through abjad hisāb. We had all of Maḥzūnī Baba's poems stored in the library of our tekke in Gjirokastér; but sadly they remain there and are out of reach. Only the last verse of this specific poem comes to mind, wherein the date of Maḥzūnī Baba's death is disclosed:

*O Muḥarram Maḥzūnī! From the Pīr's holy destūr  
 Your work is finally finished, depart to the huzūr!  
 Friday came a calling with Muḥarram at the door,  
 The date he journeyed to the Real is in the word Ghafūr.*

Let us now explain these lines of this stanza:

The Persian word **destūr** means “permission”; therefore the first line is saying: “O Maḥzūnī! You are given permission by the Pīr (i.e. Hajjī Bektash Veli) to leave this world and appear in the **huzūr** (presence) of God.”

This event occurred during the Islamic month of Muḥarram, the month of the Mātam, and on a Friday, the day Imām Ḥusayn fell martyred. However, let us say something about the date generated by the letters making up the word **Ghafūr** (“The Pardoner,” one of God’s names). To help explain this, it must be understood that in Arabic the word Ghafūr consists of these four letters:

- *ghayn* [غ]: worth the numerical value of 1,000.
- *fā* [ف]: worth the numerical value of 80.
- *waw* [و]: worth the numerical value of 6.
- *rā* [ر]: worth the numerical value of 200.

All of these numbers together, 1000 +80 +6 +200, equal 1286. This is the date of Maḥzūnī Baba's passing according to the Hijrī calendar, which corresponds to the year 1867 of the Western calendar.

Let us now look at one of Muḥarram Maḥzūnī Baba's poems, one that he composed in Turkish:

*A dervish, O heart, did you suppose you were?  
Far-off is this stage ... yet turn not from resignation.  
You gave the oath; at the dār you stood demure.  
To Hakk make niyāz and turn not from resignation.*

*“Kul Hū Allahu Ahad” you also said,  
Before the murshid’s beauty you laid your head,  
The secret, O heart, you saw in a maydān widespread;  
Make yourself dust and turn not from resignation.*

*Muhammad ḡAlī, shari‘at, tarīkat;  
With heart and soul come and utter ṣalawāt;  
A sea of truth Hajī Bektash Veli brought;  
Betray not your secret and turn not from resignation.*

*O Mahzūni! Know this secret is of the Real;  
Look within yourself and this endless sea reveal;  
The Mahdi’s orations all falsehoods repeal;  
Sacrifice your soul and turn not from resignation.*

Let us now explain this poem:

As we have said earlier, the **dār** (literally “gallows”) is the station in the maydān where the oath of initiation is given. The phrase **Kul Hū Allahu Ahad** means: “Say, ‘He is Allah, One’”, which is the first verse of chapter 112 of the **Kur’ān**. Here is the entire chapter:

*Say, “He is Allah, One. Allah, the Everlasting.  
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;  
And there is none like unto Him.*  
﴿Sūrat al-Ikhlas 112﴾

The refrain **turn not from resignation** is telling us that no matter what happens in our lives we must not abandon the call of God and disconnect our hearts from the divine. **Ṣalawāt** are the benedictions offered up to the Prophet Muhammad. The **Mahdī** is the last of the Twelve Imams. We trust that the other verses are clear and in no need of clarification.

Let us now look at one of **Mahzūnī** Baba’s poems written in the Albanian language:

*The jāhili cry out that we display too much kustāh;  
They snub any acquaintance with Al-Hukmulillāh.*

*Whoever points out us to us, give love to him Allāh!  
For we're a servant kemter, wallāhi billāh!*

*The master's clear as day to us – he's Imām uz-Zamān.  
Whoever doesn't know this fact remains like a ḥaywān!*

*Who's ever casting stones at us, may blessings not exclude!  
We've already – fi sabilillah – surrendered our wujūd.*

*Our namāz along with niyāz perpetually we make;  
All is ḥasbatanlillah! No reward we need to take.*

*For us there is no hasad with all the things in this jihān,  
La<sup>c</sup>natullah on our heads would surely fall upon!*

*O Maḥzūnī! Call out loud: "Muḥammad! O ʻAlī!"  
"Āl-i Ābā, Balim, O my Pīr, please rescue me!"*

This poem contains a number of Turkish, Persian and Arabic loanwords, since – as we have stated above – the Albanian language at the time had yet to be refashioned, and our people utilized many imported words to express themselves. Consequently, we will need to explain these terms: **Jāhili** is an Arabic word meaning “ignorant”, that is to say, those who fail to comprehend the language of mystics; **kustāh** is a Persian word that means “insolent,” “impertinent” or “shameless”; **Al-Hukmulillāh** is an Arabic phrase that essentially means that whatever occurs has been decreed by God, for all power is in His hands. Maḥzūnī Baba tells us in this stanza that those who have no understanding of mysticism quite often declare those who do to be blasphemy-filled heretics. However, such ignorant people speak without even knowing what is in themselves, let alone in the hearts of the mystics. However, we who know say: “Leave us be! Our acts are for God to judge. The ultimate decree is forever with Him!”

**Kemter** is a Persian word meaning “humble”; the term **wallahi billah** is Arabic, and it is an oath, roughly meaning “I swear by God!” Therefore, the meaning of this stanza is this: We who are spiritually aware are self-effaced as we stand before God. We swear by His holy name that we have attained this lofty spiritual state. We are not discouraged in the least by

those who criticize us. In fact, we beseech God to love and watch over everyone, friend and foe alike.

The **master** mentioned in the third stanza is the master of the mystic path, who guides us towards perfection. He is the flawless guide of the age, **Imām uz-Zamān**, i.e. the Mahdī. This stanza also tells us that whoever has not found a guide to lead him on the path to God remains as oblivious to reality as a **haywān**, that is, one of the countless animals created by God.

In the fourth stanza, Maḥzūnī Baba asks God to grant more power to those who throw stones at him since his **wujūd** (physical form) has already been sacrificed **fi sabīlillah**, “in the Way of God.” Such malicious acts cause no despair, for he has surrendered everything to God.

**Hasbatanlillah** means to do something for God’s sake alone without seeking reward. Here Maḥzūnī Baba declares: “We seek no reward for our namāz, or any other obligatory act of worship, or any other good deed for that matter. We do these things solely to win God’s pleasure.”

The Arabic word **hasad** means “jealousy” and **jihān** means “the world.” In these lines, Maḥzūnī Baba tells us that jealousy will manifests when we cast a malevolent glance at what others have and we do not. A person who is stricken with this emotional state invites God’s curse, or **la'natullah**. The **Āl-i Ābā** (People of the Cloak) refer to the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭimah, his cousin and son-in-law Imām ʻAlī, and his two grandsons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.

Here is another of Maḥzūnī Baba’s Turkish poems, one in which extols the great saint Balim Sultān:

*I awoke in love; I searched for the cure.  
My cure for this pain, Pīr Balim Sultān.  
I burned night and day till I found the cure.  
The cure for my pain, Pīr Balim Sultān.*

*Who doesn't seek a doctor is an absolute fool;  
His head will meet with a sword that's cruel;  
My doctor's ʻAlī – his medicine a jewel.  
Flesh and soul I laid down for Pīr Balim Sultān.*

*My heart illumined, fully filled with light,  
My body laid bare; true life made it bright,  
The veil of the Two Worlds raised from my sight;  
The illuminator of my heart, Pīr Balim Sultān.*

*In the Pir, Muḥarram Maḥzūnī confided;  
On the Kirkbudak our candle ignited;  
In the Forty's maydān the prayer recited;  
Sacred support he bestowed, Pir Balim Sultān.*

Since this poem contains concepts and terms that we have previously discussed in our book, there is no need to explain them once again. Therefore, let us have a look at another of Maḥzūnī Baba's poems, one that he composed in the Albanian language:

*I came into this jihān, and fell into ḥayrān,  
With eyes so filled with tears, I called out "Al-Amān!"*

*Here and there I looked; I made a loud fighān,  
I called upon my Lord, seeking out arkān.*

*An āvāz whispered to me: "Why weep like this, O jān?"  
The Pir provides us yārdīm, as does his Balim Sultān.*

*Stop your tears from falling and seek out the great maydān;  
Seek and find the murshid, who will give you your dermān.*

*"Law lā murabbi," did declare the great sultan;  
"Lamā 'araftu Rabbī," said Rasūl-i Rahmān.*

*Give shukur night and day, my dear jān-i janān!  
For you have seen the brightness of a kāmili insān.*

*O Maḥzūnī! Stay upright, and divert not from the plan;  
Garner worthy fikr there on Mahshar's wide maydān*

To better understand this poem let us explain some of the Turkish, Persian and Arabic loanwords used by Maḥzūnī Baba in this particular poem. As we mentioned earlier, the word **jihān** means "world"; **ḥayrān** means "bewildered"; **fighān** is a Persian word meaning "wail" or "lamentation"; **arkān** in this context means "surrender"; **āvāz** is a Persian word meaning "shout"; **jān** means "soul"; **yārdīm** is Turkish for "help" or "assistance"; **murshid** (as we know) is one's spiritual guide; **dermān** is "remedy."

The phrase **law lā murabbi, lamā 'araftu Rabbī** is a maxim of the Prophet Muḥammad. It means: "If not for a teacher, I could not find my

Lord.” The teacher he refers to is the Archangel Gabriel. **Rasūl-i Rahmān** means “Messenger of the Merciful” i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad; **jān-i janān** means “Beloved of the beloveds”; **kāmili insān** is the “perfect human”; **fikr** means “thought” or “insight”; **Mahshar’s wide maydān** refers to the assembly place where all will be gathered on Judgment Day.

Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Mahzūnī Baba’s Albanian-language poems:

*On ‘Araşāt’s Maydān we presented our kurbān;  
Our voices cry out, “Yā Muḥammad! Yā ‘Alī Sultān!”*

*The arkān I moved into, I called out “Al-Amān!”  
With opened eyes I there beheld the akān of arkāns.*

*The guiding dalil took me to the candle-lit maydān,  
And all the blessed Imāms were assembled there ‘ayān.*

*My soul gave thanks to God, for I came to find imān  
When I saw my murshid sitting in the pōst of Pīr Sultān.*

*The kafas started shaking, my soul cried out “O Dōst!”  
I saw Muḥammad ‘Alī there, sitting on the pōst.*

*Many are makhlūkāt that are found in this jihān,  
Who when in pain cry from the heart, “Yā ‘Alī dermān!”*

*They wail and sob and call out, saying “Yā ‘Alī madad!”  
For Hakk’s arkān they’re seeking, for ‘ashk and muḥabbat.*

*Speak, Małzūnī, speak up! Come, declare your marāmī.  
The yōl of the erenler is indisputably ghanī.*

*O Fakīr Muḥarram, as you sit with Dūrbalī,  
All the jānlar gather ‘round with ghazals ḥakīkī.*

Let us now explain the non-Albanian words employed in the lines of this poem: **‘Araşāt’s Maydān** is the plain where the resurrected will be assembled on Judgment Day; the word **dalil** means a “guide”; the word **‘ayān** means “clear” or “manifest”; the word **imān** means “faith”; **kafas** (lit. a cage or prison) symbolizes the material body; **Dōst**, as we have men-

tioned above, is the Beloved, i.e., God; **pōst** is the sheepskin upon which the residing baba of a tekke sits.

The Arabic word **makhlūkāt** in the sixth stanza can refer to creatures or all of creation; **dermān** means “remedy” or “relief”; **madad** is “help” or “aid”; **ashk** and **muhabbat** – as we know – are both terms used for “love”; **Mahzūnī** means “one grieved” or “one saddened”; **marāmī** is an Arabic word meaning “intention,” or “goal”; **yōl** is the Turkish word for “road”; **ghanī** in Arabic means “copious” or “abundant”; **jānlar** is a Turkish word meaning “dear ones”, but here it can also mean the faithful; **ghazals ḥaḳīḳī** are ghazals, or lyric poems, that are genuine and heartfelt.

## HAJJĪ MEHMET PERĪSHĀN DEDE

Mehmet Perīshān Dede is one of the most admired Bektashi poets of the nineteenth century. He was born in the city of Konya in the year 1802. Perīshān Dede replaced Hajjī Hasan as dedebaba in the Pīrevi in 1872, upon the latter’s passing from this world. Perīshān Dede himself was replaced by Mehmet ‘Alī Hilmī Dede of Istanbul, about whom we shall speak more below. Perīshān Dede departed from this earthly abode 1893 in the Pīrevi, where he lies buried.

Perīshān Dede composed enchanting poems during his lifetime. These works are thoroughly bathed in the fragrance of mysticism. His verses continue to be sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. They were especially sung throughout the many Bektashi tekkes of Turkey before all dervish lodges were closed in the early years of the Republic. The spirit and style Perīshān Dede’s poems can be detected in the samples that we shall present here:

*Night and day, O heart, this prayer I require:  
“May goodness come! May malice be repulsed!”  
Make niyāz and from God seek your desire –  
“May goodness come! May malice be repulsed!”*

*Stand in prayer as the sun begins to rise;  
Lift your hands, your eyes turned to the skies;  
Face pressed to the dust so God might hear your cries –  
“May goodness come! May malice be repulsed!”*

*If night finds the lover in weakness standing;  
 If grief comes with troubled thoughts haranguing;  
 Make this plea to the Twelve Imāms outstanding –  
 “May goodness come! May malice be repulsed!”*

*If you’re smart, stay far from worldly fraudsters;  
 Don’t seek out things that are useless chasing after;  
 Say, with face pressed low, to Ḥajjī Bektash, our master –  
 “May goodness come! May malice be repulsed!”*

*O Perīshān! Let your mouth forever good emit;  
 May Ḥakk’s remembrance on your tongue forever sit!  
 At Balīm Sultān’s door lay your head down and submit –  
 “May goodness come! May malice be repulsed!”*

This poem does not appear to be in need of explanation. Therefore, let us look at another of Perīshān Dede’s nefes poems:

*In Najaf’s Shah we find our refuge place;  
 My dervishes are of the path that’s straight;  
 In love’s tekke the wise teach us with grace;  
 Your teacher, your lesson, is my eternity innate!*

*I’ve loved those lips that taste so sugary sweet;  
 To pain and woe I’ll not concede defeat;  
 On this way I’ve laid head and soul complete;  
 Of this love I’ve no regret; of that there’s no debate!*

*Endlessly I glorify a love unique,  
 Those clever and those wise know the one I seek;  
 They call me Perīshān when of me they speak,  
 Yet they know not who put me in this perīshān state!*

Let us now give a simple explain this poem:

It should be clear by now that the love spoken of throughout this poem is the transcendent love of God. Perīshān Dede tells us in the first stanza: “Our tekke is a school, and we give lessons in it about this type of love.” He also states that, as a spiritual guide, he can stimulate inspiration in all sincere wayfarers. “Since we are an instructor on this path,” says Perīshān Dede, “we are a wellspring of inspiration for those who seek.”

The **lips** mentioned in the second stanza represent divine inspiration, which sweetens the human soul in the same way sugar sweetens the mouth. Perīshān Dede tells us that the love emanating from these mystical lips has made him so determined to reach the goal that he is ready to sacrifice everything for it – even his head if need be. He is so resolutely focused on the spiritual path that he will never abandon his undertaking.

**Perīshān** is a Persian word meaning “destroyed.” Thus, Perīshān Dede says in this last verse: “We have become perīshān in this love, which should be quite evident. However, most do not know what sort of love this is for which we have fallen martyred, forfeiting our head. Only we know what lies within us.” Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at one last poem from Perīshān Dede:

*In love's caravan men stripped bare are we.  
In this existence both rich and poor are we!  
By God's might aware from the start are we;  
Of this world's end likewise aware are we!*

*The light of the chirāgh are we, giving off flame.  
Merit's meydān we entered; to us honor came.  
Our true affection for the Prophet and his name;  
Upon the souls of Yazid malediction are we!*

*Perīshān treks on the saints' sacred way.  
He'll give his head; for in his breast the secrets lay.  
Should anyone ask who we are, with sureness we'll say:  
Hajji Bektash Veli's poor ones are we!*

Let us now explain this poem:

**Stripped bare** means to be stripped of everything save God, a state that all the great mystics have sought out since the beginning of time. In the Gospel of Matthew we find Jesus speaking of this exalted state: “For was I not hungry and you gave me food... was I not naked and you clothed me?”

In the first stanza, Perīshān Dede also tells us that sometimes the mystics may seem well-known, while at other times they are nameless; such changes in standing are brought about by the natural flow of time. Given that spiritual inspiration has been a part of the human experience since prehistoric times,

Perīshān Dede declares that we, as mystics both in principle and in theory, have always stood at the forefront in the arena of love, bolstered by God's heavenly power. Yet we mystic saints may often appear indistinguishable from the common folk.

The **chirāgh** (candle) mentioned in the second stanza represents the glow given off by spiritual awareness. This chirāgh endows us with an inspiration that is always present, transfixing and strong. The remainder of the poem should be clear and in no need of explanation.

## AHMAD SEYRĀNĪ

Aḥmad Seyrānī ranks among the great Bektashi poets and bards of the nineteenth century. He was originally from the town of Sparta (tr. İsparta), in Greece's Morea Peninsula. Later in life Seyrānī resided for some years in the Kaygusuz Tekke of Cairo, where he was filled with great enthusiasm for the Bektashi Way. Living in Cairo afforded him the opportunity to travel to all of the Islamic holy sites of Arabia. He made the Hajj to Makkah twice and accordingly took the name Hajjī Aḥmad Seyrānī. In his final years, he returned to his native Sparta, where he passed away (in 1849) and was buried.

Seyrānī left among his writings a remarkable account of the disbandment of the Janissary Corps. He also composed many mystic nefes poems that speak to us in the characteristic Bektashi style. These poems were compiled into a divān of 246 pages and published by an admirer of his, Turkish scholar Naci Kum Atabeyli (1898-1952).

Aḥmad Seyrānī was also an accomplished musician, and his music often accompanied the recitation of his nefes poems. Here is an example of one of his more famous poems still sung in Turkish circles:

*For those who traverse a path that's true,  
May I be in their hands a staff that's new!  
For those who praise and laud the Pīr,  
May I be for their tongues a kurbān sincere!*

*If I might be an apprentice to a master,  
Either near or far, it doesn't matter;*

*May my bones be a comb thereafter,  
To brush the locks of one that's dear.*

*If they turn me in Ḥaḳḳ's direction,  
If my bones they bake, there'll be no objection,  
If I'm treated like chaff, tossed in rejection,  
The wafting aroma of love will be clear!*

*Progeny of a single father are we;  
Seeds of a single family tree are we.  
Whosoever fights the deniers with open glee,  
May I as a sword tied to his waist appear!*

*O Seyrānī! Raise your finger for all to see;  
It's time; in the presence of the Real be;  
To paradise there flows an endless sea –  
May I with the drops of its torrent cohere!*

Let us now examine the meaning of these lines:

This is clearly a devotional poem filled with the dedication that Seyrānī feels toward his murshid. The meaning of the first stanza is easily discernible. Seyrānī tells us that he is ready to be a staff in the hands of those who strive along the path to perfection (including his own guide) so that he can assist them in their noble mission. Moreover, when these mystics exalt the Pīr (i.e. Ḥajjī Bektash Velī) Seyrānī tells us that he is ready to sacrifice his being for the sake of this praise.

In the second stanza, Seyrānī declares that he is willing to sacrifice everything to fulfill his murshid's needs, no matter how insignificant these may seem – like the need to comb his hair. Seyrānī is ready to hand over his bones so that a craftsman might use them to fashion a comb for his guide.

In the third stanza, Seyrānī tells us that he has totally turned himself towards God, and to achieve the prize of God's love he is ready to make any sacrifice. His bones can be ground to make flour, the aroma of which when baked, will rise upwards, leaving this world and joining with the sweet fragrance of the Beloved, for whose sake Seyrānī has forfeited everything in this world.

The meaning of **father** in the fourth stanza refers to Imām Ḥusayn, who engages in combat with Yazīd, the enemy of faith. Seyrānī says that

he submits his whole being before Imām Ḥusayn, and he wishes to aid his heroic undertaking by becoming the sword that the holy martyr uses in combating wickedness.

The last stanza should be clear. Seyrānī says that now is the time to affirm God's oneness by lifting the index **finger** of the right hand. The **sea** symbolizes the endless torrent of divine inspiration. Seyrānī tells us that when he swims through the water of God's inspiration, with its waves engulfing him, he longs to merge with this inspiration in the same way a drop of water merges with the sea. Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of Seyrānī's poems:

*O seeker! The eyes of your soul open up;  
Be the master of this maydān and come!  
Fill your soul with a drink from the Pīr's cup;  
Let your soul be drunk and come!*

*Among all the paths, God's path is unique.  
Grasps the Shah's hand and be a servant meek.  
Muhammad's your guide, 'Alī reveals what you seek;  
In your confession make the vow and come!*

*Clean the heart and to the saintly guides submit,  
From aid of Prophet Khizr you will benefit.  
Like Ishmael did his father Abraham permit,  
Be a slaughtered and salted kurbān and come!*

*Struggle against the self and you'll find treasure;  
Be of love's folk; in their meetings find pleasure.  
But first, O seeker, let the ego be dismissed forever;  
Fling away your wild conceit, be a lover and come!*

*Find the taste for which confectioners yearn;  
Those saved ones the Twelve Imāms can discern;  
Around heavenly orbs the sisters turn and turn;  
Slay your ego, be stripped and come!*

*In this maydān to drink a cupful is required;  
God is One! In the muck of duality don't be mired;  
Behead the ego! Crucial it is to be expired;  
Leave unbelief! Be with the Folk of Faith and come!*

*Sing the hymn of the friend as you stand at the start,  
The sofra unrolled, the dār set apart,  
They announce the morsels for the hart;  
Twelve are the arkān; be Salmān and come!*

*At the candle in the maydān cast a glance;  
Make niyāz to the guide in this bless'd expanse.  
Sister and brother rise to their feet and advance,  
Amid the whirling be a fearless lion and come!*

*The young gather 'round in affection,  
My Pir's eye locked on the lambs' direction.  
Like a watchman keeps his flocks under detection,  
To these sheep be a trusty shepherd and come!*

*Bind yourself and detach not your soul from <sup>c</sup>Alī,  
A believer finds all he seeks in this mystic grandee.  
From Balīm Sultān, from Hajjī Bektash Veli,  
From Muṣṭafā and Murtazā take insight and come!*

*Khadijah, Fāṭimah, our friends in adversity,  
Imām Ḥasan provides our faith security,  
Over us, dear ones, Ḥusayn retains authority;  
Be in awe of Zayn al-<sup>c</sup>Abidīn and come!*

*With Muḥammad al-Bākir's train align;  
To Ja'far as-Sādiq confess and resign;  
From Mūsā al-Kazīm the mystery come and find;  
With Imām ar-Riḍā utterly agree and come!*

*In Taķī and Nakī proper princes behold;  
Ḥasan al-<sup>c</sup>Askarī, religion's pulpit of gold;  
Muḥammad Mahdī, to his guidance, O faithful, hold!  
Look to their works, observe and come!*

*In the Three, the Seven, the cup-bearer you'll see;  
In the Forty a never-ending drink you'll see;  
In the city of your being the Most-High you'll see;  
O Seyrānī! Be a traveler to this city and come!*

This poem does not seem to need any explanation, except that the **Three** and the **Seven** mentioned in the first line of the last stanza refer to the hierarchy of God's saints.

## BABA °ABDULLAH MELÇANI

Baba °Abdullah Melçani stands among the eminent Bektashi spiritual masters of the nineteenth century. He is the founder of the famed Melçan Tekke, which was located about four miles northwest of the city of Korça. Baba °Abdullah was originally from northern Albania (Gegëria), and he became a dervish at the hand of the famed Shamīmī Baba, head of the tekke of Fushë-Kruja – about whom we have already spoken.

Many Bektashi wayfarers received their spiritual training in the Melçan Tekke at Baba °Abdullah's hand. In later years this tekke was administered by a number of noteworthy spiritual masters like Adam Wajhī Baba and Baba Husayn Verleni (of Korça), who aside from his spiritual rank, was also a staunch patriot. From the days of Abdyl Frashëri, Baba Husayn played a major role in rousing the spiritual power of the entire population of his district. We can state without hesitation that Baba Husayn – in close cooperation with many other babas – made great sacrifices for the sake of our nation. In his day the Melçan Tekke became one of the centers of the independence movement, so much so that *çetas* would use it as a base of operations. Between 1910 and 1912 Baba Husayn chaired every patriotic gathering of the movement's leaders and practically all the other heads of the tekkes in the region. Despite his advanced age, Baba Husayn Verleni also actively supported the *çetas* during the national uprising.

The Melçan Tekke unceasingly radiated patriotic sentiments thanks to the blessed spirit of Baba °Abdullah. His tekke never held back when it came to aiding the nationalist cause and the struggles to liberate Albania from foreign occupation in the years after independence. Baba Zulfo of the Turan Tekke – who was initiated by Baba °Abdullah – played an active role in the fight for freedom, until he was martyred, treacherously killed within his tekke along with his faithful devotees: Sabri Panariti, Refat Goskovë, and his sons.<sup>50</sup>

All of these men were the products of Baba °Abdullah's spiritual guidance and his extraordinary efforts to spread the Bektashism throughout southern Albania. The opening of the majestic Prishtë Tekke was brought about through Baba °Abdullah's decree, in that it was he who appointed Baba Tāhir Prishta (who was at the time a dervish in a tekke on the island of Crete) to be its murshid. With Baba °Abdullah's encouragement, Baba Tāhir tirelessly labored to promote the Bektashi Way throughout the Prishtë region.

After having spent a lifetime carrying out countless services for the sake of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī's path, Baba ʻAbdullah Melçani passed from this world in 1852. He was interred in a large turbeh on the grounds of his tekke, a shrine that has been visited by countless well-wishers over the years.

Baba ʻAbdullah Melçani was a talented poet, and he wrote many nefes poems in the Albanian language, including this one:

*Should I be a dervish wearing a patched abā,  
My heart and soul I'll give to you, making it jabā.  
In front of you I'll lay them, Sari Saltik, O Baba!  
I'll sing of your greatness, Ya Shāh!  
I'll sing of your beauty, Ya Nūr!*

*As one you are with Aḥmad-i Mukhtār,  
God has you in His all-embracing naẓar,  
Like Hazret-i ʻAlī holding Dhū'l-fikār,  
They sing of your bravery, Ya Shāh!  
They sing of your beauty, Ya Nūr!*

*As one you are with Aḥmad un-Nabī;  
God made you His everlasting wālī;  
Just like Khunkār Ḥajjī Bektash Velī,  
He sang of your greatness, Ya Shāh!  
He sang of your splendor, Ya Nūr!*

*As one you are with nūrun ʻala nūr;  
You're Reality making its zuhūr;  
Read the Kur'ān, Injil, Tawrat, Zabūr,  
See what they say of your greatness, Ya Shāh!  
See what they say of your beauty, Ya Nūr!*

*That one's the moon, that one's the sun,  
Which in the heavens make dawrān.  
By them God sends gloom to oblivion;  
They speak of your greatness, Ya Shāh!  
They speak of your beauty, Ya Nūr!*

*And the stars giving light so bright,  
At the Ka'bah performing the Ḥajj rite,  
The Bektashi musāfirs filled with delight,*



The Melçan Tekke in 1917, when it was occupied by French troops battling the Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian forces.

*They recount your beauty, Ya Shāh!  
They recount your beauty, Ya Nūr!*

*I'm the humble fakīr ‘Abdullah,  
From Shamīmī Baba's fukarā'  
To you I give this bayt jabā,  
It sings of your bravery, Ya Shāh!  
It sings of your greatness, Ya Nūr!*

Let us explain the Arabic and Persian terminology employed by Baba ‘Abdullah throughout this poem:

An **abā** is a woolen cloak; **jabā** means “free of charge”; **nūr** means “light”; **Aḥmad-i Mukhtār** is one of the names of the Prophet Muḥammad; **nazar** means “gaze”; **Dhū'l-fikār** is the illustrious double-bladed sword of Imām ‘Alī; **nabī** means “prophet”; **walī** means “saint”; the phrase **nūrun ‘ala nūr** is taken from this verse in the Qur’ān:

*...light upon light...*  
《Sūrat an-Nūr 24:35》

**Zuhūr** means “to become visible or manifest”; the **Kur’ān**, **Injil**, **Tawrat**, and **Zabūr** are four divinely revealed scriptures, which have been discussed earlier in this book; **dawrān** means “cycle” or “rotation”; the **Bektashi musāfirs** mentioned in the sixth stanza are those dervishes who

carry out the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah; **fukarā'** literally means “poor ones”, although here it means the dervishes; and a **bayt** is a “couplet” or “distich”.

## GIRİTLİ °ALİ RASMİ BABA

°Alî Rasmî Baba is one of the distinguished Bektashi babas of the late eighteenth century. He was born on the island of Crete (Girît). Following the completion of his studies, he traveled to the tekke of Dûrbalî Sultân in Thessaly, where he was endowed with the overpowering spirituality generated by the Bektashi Path.

At some point in his life °Alî Rasmî Baba was sent from the tekke of Dûrbalî Sultân back to Crete, where he established a famous Bektashi tekke in the city of Kandîye (now Heraklion). °Alî Rasmî Baba was solidly devoted to his calling, and he eagerly gave his life over to the propagation of Bektashi values, which spread far and wide throughout the island, so much so that vestiges of it remain to this day.

°Alî Rasmî Baba also wrote a *divân* containing nearly four hundred poems, each bursting with the sweetness generated by Bektashi spirituality. The exact date of his passing from this world is not known to us. All we know is that was alive during the early years of the nineteenth century.

Let us now present some samples of °Alî Rasmî Baba's poetry. Here is one of his *nefes* poems in which he extols the great Imâm °Alî:

*My Shah, my very soul, is none other than °Ali;  
Light of my eyes, my holy faith is none other than °Ali.*

*The straight path to God was clearly shown to me;  
In these two worlds, my king alone is none other than °Ali.*

*“I am the City of Knowledge,” said Muhammad truthfully;  
“My city’s only doorkeeper is none other than °Ali.”*

*“My much-adored,” said God on high, “is Ahmad certainly!”  
“In bravery, My lion is none other than °Ali!”*

*In these two worlds Muhammad guides creation endlessly;  
The one who shows the way, my dear, is none other than °Ali.*

*The Gospel, Psalms and Torah, read these very carefully;  
The cipher of the whole Kur'ān is none other than <sup>c</sup>Alī.*

*In the maydān of the fearless, in the heroes' vast country,  
God's ever-loving mercy is none other than <sup>c</sup>Alī.*

*A king is he for every slave who's tired and lonely;  
For me as well, the monarch is none other than <sup>c</sup>Alī.*

*From a sightless bat, O Rasmī, why do you shrink fearfully?  
This day my praise in this maydān is for none other than <sup>c</sup>Alī.*

Given that there is no real need to explain this poem, we will move on to another of <sup>c</sup>Alī Rasmī Baba's poems, one in which he praises Hajjī Bektash Veli:

*O Chief of Sainthood's Army, O Crown of Piety's Kings!  
His face's glimmer to the world illumination brings.  
The guide who clears all troubles by God's overwhelming power;  
With a single breath he can a thousand frozen hearts empower.*

*Pearl from the Sea of Divinity, display of <sup>c</sup>Alī's mystery,  
Padishah of the seven climes you are, Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

*The substance of his nature by way of Adam emerged;  
The purifying water of his form by way of Noah emerged;  
His warmth-giving fire out of Moses' fiery bush emerged;  
His healing breath out of Mary's son Jesus emerged;*

*Pearl from the Sea of Divinity, display of <sup>c</sup>Alī's mystery,  
Padishah of the seven climes you are, Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

*Child of Muḥammad's household, O you giving king!  
Child of <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Murtazā, of his lofty line we sing;  
Child of Khadijah and Fāṭimah, your virtue unabating,  
Under your flag on Judgment Day the saints are standing.*

*Pearl from the Sea of Divinity, display of <sup>c</sup>Alī's mystery,  
Padishah of the seven climes you are, Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

*How many miracles were displayed at his command?  
How many downtrodden were raised by his holy hand?  
Holder of the throne he is over sainthood's crown lands;  
From the ever-present secret of Haydar he's a sign, understand?*

*Pearl from the Sea of Divinity, display of <sup>c</sup>Alī's mystery,  
Padishah of the seven climes you are, Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

*In the 96,000 Khorāsān pīrs guidance he implanted;  
Taking the amānats, he set out as the road to Rūm expanded;  
By his leaving, the saints in sadness and grief were candid;  
From the pīrs he took ijāzah and a new way he was handed.*

*Pearl from the Sea of Divinity, display of <sup>c</sup>Alī's mystery,  
Padishah of the seven climes you are, Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

*O Rasmī! Know the king of this realm and stand in his shadow.  
Let them say whatever they like; of his skirt do not let go.  
In his service virtue and grace are rewards, this you should know.  
When wearing upon your head his crown, blessings overflow.*

*Pearl from the Sea of Divinity, display of <sup>c</sup>Alī's mystery,  
Padishah of the seven climes you are, Hajjī Bektash Veli!*

The meaning of this poem should be fairly clear. The only thing we should point out is the meaning of the **96,000 Khorāsānī pīrs** mentioned in the fifth stanza. Before his journey to Rūm (Anatolia), people in their thousands in his native Khorāsān flocked to the presence of Hajjī Bektash Veli seeking out his guidance, advice, and blessings. Not only did he give these seekers wise counsel, but he also displayed numerous miracles before them – so many in fact that all of these individuals submitted themselves and many thousands took his hand in initiation, thereby becoming Hajjī Bektash's followers. Also, the word **ijāzah** in this same stanza means “spiritual permission.” Having offered this explanation, let us take a look at another of <sup>c</sup>Alī Rasmī Baba's poetic works:

*Nothing's left of our selves; lovers of the Āl-i Ābā are we.  
Slaves of Muḥammad's family; lovers of Muṣṭafā are we.*

*Heart and soul, servants of Haydar, his dervishes are we.  
In this are we established; lovers of Murtazā are we.*

*In our rejection of the world darkness we flee;  
For this reason, lovers of Hasan Khulk ur-Riżā are we.*

*Our honor is cursing every Yazīd 100,000 times properly;  
For this reason, lovers of Shah Husayn of Karbalā are we.*

*Wearing a coarse crown, we take pride in our poverty;  
Lovers of the Pure Innocents and Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Abidīn are we.*

*Muhammad Bākir, mine of mercy, at night his light we see;  
Along with him, lovers of Ja<sup>c</sup>far, Kāzim, and Rizā are we.*

*To Ta<sup>c</sup>ī along with Nakī our confession we make promptly;  
It is for this, lovers of the standard-bearer <sup>c</sup>Askarī are we.*

*The Master of Time, Al-Mahdī's sacrifice are we;  
O Rasmī! Lovers of God's light – the Pure Innocents – are we.*

This poem should not need extensive explanation; only that the term **Pure Innocents** refers to the fourteen *Ma'sūm* (innocent) children of the Twelve Imāms, who are:

1. Muhammad Akbar, son of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī,
2. <sup>c</sup>Abdullah, son of Imām Ḥasan
3. <sup>c</sup>Abdullah, son of Imām Ḥusayn
4. Kāsim, son of Imām Ḥasan
5. Ḥusayn, son of Imām Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn
6. <sup>c</sup>Alī Aftarī, son of Imām Muhammad al-Bākir
7. Kāsim, son of Imām Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn
8. <sup>c</sup>Abdullah, son of Imām Ja<sup>c</sup>far aş-Şādik
9. Yahyā al-Hādī, son of Imām Ja<sup>c</sup>far aş-Şādik
10. Shālih, son of Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim
11. Tāyyib, son of Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim
12. Ja<sup>c</sup>far, son of Imām Muhammad at-Ta<sup>c</sup>ī
13. Ja<sup>c</sup>far, son of Imām Ḥasan al-<sup>c</sup>Askarī
14. Kāsim, son of Imām Ḥasan al-<sup>c</sup>Askarī

Each one of these children was murdered by the enemies of the Prophet's family. Accordingly, they are venerated as martyrs by all of those who champion the cause of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī. And with that we shall present one last nefes poem from <sup>c</sup>Alī Rasmī Baba:

*O Almighty God! The lovers' hearts awake,  
That from *ḥakīkat*'s fount a drink they might partake!*

*So that they pass beyond the curtain of duality,  
Dye them in the color of those who see one reality!*

*Lift them beyond care of faction and sect,  
So that the fetters of heedlessness they can deflect!*

*Whoever has attained union with his state,  
For us his state is made of a faith that's straight!*

*Existence is found in all things, O sweet Rasmī!  
Hakīk clearly appears in the human being who's saintly.*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of clarification.

## ASAD BABA

Asad Baba stands among our most famous Bektashi babas and poets. He was born in Istanbul in 1755. Having successfully completed his required studies, he took initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Mahmūd Baba, who in those days held the rank of khalīfa-baba (dede). Mahmūd Baba lived near the imperial capital of Istanbul.

At the start of the great tribulation that fell upon the Bektashis in 1826 by the command of Sultan Mahmud II, the constabularies went to Asad Baba's tekke and presented him with the imperial decree: Either remove your vestments (i.e. renounce Bektashism) or face execution. Asad Baba categorically rejected this detestable order without as much as a second thought. He answered the authorities with these famous words, which have endured to this day:

We will give our heads, but  
our secrets we will never!

Asad Baba offered up his head for his religious principles, and he was executed on the spot, martyred. To this day his words remain a cherished keepsake for all Bektashis – both clergy and laity – who set aside boundless adoration for Asad Baba, humbling themselves before his memory.

Asad Baba was a gifted poet and this nefes poem clearly shows the depth of his spiritual awareness:

*If you ask from where come faith and confession –  
 Faith and confession come from pre-eternity.  
 If you ask from where comes this way's direction –  
 This way's direction comes straight from 'Alī.*

*Abdal Mūsa, a saint of God beyond compare;  
 Next to Kaygusuz Sultān you'll find him there;  
 "Friend of the Shah, our chief!" the Forty declare;  
 He comes straight from Hajjī Bektash Veli.*

*A grand court spread out in my stroll last night;  
 There sat the Forty carrying out the rite;  
 The sacrifice made, the tīghband tied tight;  
 "This secret," they cried, "comes straight from pre-eternity."*

*The Khorasan Gate is a hallowed gate,  
 In all who go through it all fears will abate;  
 On Haydar's pōst there sits one who's great;  
 Taking his share, he comes straight from Kızıl Deli.*

*Dervish Asad sits forlorn, lovesick and weak,  
 Benediction and aid from the saints he seeks,  
 The tongue of the murshid brings advice when he speaks;  
 In Üsküdar, he comes straight from Merdimanlı.*

Let us now explain some of the finer points found within these lines:

**Tīghband** literally means “sword belt”; however here it means the verbal oath that a believer gives at the time of initiation into the Bektashi Order, swearing to be faithful to this promise, even if it requires sacrificing one's life if need be, which Asad Baba was actually obliged to do.

The **Khorāsān Gate** is the gate through which arrived the man from Khorāsān, i.e. Hajjī Bektash Veli. This gate symbolizes the holy path laid down by this man of God. The **one who's great** referred to in the fourth stanza – the one who sits on Imām 'Alī's pōst – is Asad Baba's own spiritual master, Maḥmūd Baba. **Merdimanlı** is the name of Maḥmūd Baba's clan. The rest of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation.

## SAYYID MUHAMMAD °ĀSIM BABA & HIS TEKKE

Without a doubt Sayyid Muhammad °Āsim Baba can be placed with all of the prominent Bektashi spiritual masters, writers and poets of history. He was a descendant of the Holy Prophet, hence his use of the title “sayyid”. °Āsim Baba was born in the town of Üsküdar on the Asian side of Istanbul and like the aforementioned Hāshim Baba, he hailed from the Bandırmalızāde clan.

°Āsim Baba was thoroughly equipped with the principles of Bektashi mysticism during his stay at the Pīrevi. In those days this mother tekke of the Bektashi Order was under the direction of Kara °Alī Dede, a spiritual master who hailed from the Thracian town of Dimetoka.

Having been thoroughly trained and elevated in spiritual rank, °Āsim Baba was sent to Albania in 1778. Carrying the rank of dede he reached Gjirokastër after a long journey, and there he spent the rest of his days teaching the principles and ethics of Bektashi spirituality to the people of the region.

In the beginning, however, °Āsim Baba suffered greatly at the hands of those who opposed the Bektashi Path; but he slowly won over his adversaries with his angelic personality and lofty intellect. After two years of living in a tent, °Āsim Baba was able to open a tekke in 1780, a tekke known today as the Teqeja e Zallit or the “Tekke of the Pebbles.”

We can safely consider °Āsim Baba’s tekke to be the first proper Bektashi tekke established in Albania since we have found no mention of any other tekkes functioning as tekkes in the truest sense of the word before his day. We know that Bektashi missionaries came earlier to Albania – like °Arshī Baba to Gjirokastër, °Alī Baba Khorasānī to Kruja and a number of others – but they were unable to establish working centers due to the circumstances of the day. They passed away soon after their arrival, leaving only their well-known turbehs as sacred shrines.

For sixteen years °Āsim Baba worked without rest to instill the principles of Bektashism in the people of Gjirokastër. He steadfastly carried out his mission until he departed from the world in 1796. When °Āsim Baba passed, his body was laid to rest in a distinctive turbeh that stands in front of his tekke. This is a shrine that continues to be visited with love and respect by pilgrims and well-wishers. On the surface of the turbeh’s walls are two large stone plaques, each bearing inscriptions in Ottoman Turkish. The first (which is over the window of the turbeh) indicates the date of

‘Āşim Baba’s passing via abjad hisāb. This date is the Hijrah year 1209, which corresponds to 1796 of the Western calendar. The other stone plaque (which is above the door) narrates ‘Āşim Baba’s genealogy going all the way back to Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm, the seventh of the Twelve Imāms.

In addition to being an expert spiritual guide, ‘Āşim Baba was also a gifted writer. He composed a book entitled *Yıldızname* in which he collected all the *wafkat* (talismans) showing the stars, or fates, of individuals according to ancient astrological techniques. The title of the book itself means “Book of Stars” or “Book of Fates.” ‘Āşim Baba also produced a small handwritten *divān* containing his mystically-inspired poetry. Unfortunately, both of these works remain in the library of the Teqeja e Zallit and we are unable to present our readers with passages from their illuminating pages.

In time ‘Āşim Baba’s tekke expanded, and babas of high intellectual caliber came to direct it in the years after his passing. This tekke remained an important cultural and educational center until recent days, possessing an exceptionally valuable library filled with countless classical Islamic religious texts written in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this library was augmented with scholarly works written in Albanian and in several European languages, such as Italian and French.

By 1944 nine well-known babas had administered the Teqeja e Zallit, whose names, and dates of holding the sheepskin pōst, are as follows:

1. ‘Āşim Baba: 1780 to 1796 (*16 years*)
2. Hasan Baba Turku: 1796 to 1798 (*2 years*)
3. Sulaymān Baba Gjirokastra: 1798 to 1806 (*8 years*)
4. ‘Alī Baba Gega: 1806 to 1830 (*24 years*)
5. Hajjī Yahyā Baba Kruja: 1830 to 1836 (*6 years*)
6. Ibrāhīm Baba Turku: 1836 to 1845 (*9 years*)
7. Husayn Baba Elbasani: 1845 to 1861 (*16 years*)
8. Hajjī ‘Alī Khākī Baba Elbasani: 1861 to 1907 (*46 years*)
9. Selīm Rūhī Baba Elbasani: 1907 to 1944 (*37 years*)

After ‘Āşim Baba’s passing, Hasan Baba (an ethnic Turk) was sent from the Pīrevi with the rank of dede, being ordained by the head of the

Bektashi Order in those days, Mehmet Nūrī Dede Baba. Hasan Baba went to visit Yanya (Ioannina) while living in Gjirokastër and it was there that he passed away. He was buried in Yanya, and his grave was marked by a turbeh that existed until recent times.

When Hasan Baba passed from the world in 1798, the Teqeja e Zallit came under the care of Sulaymān Baba, who was one of Hasan Baba's dervishes. Sulaymān Baba had roots in the Brisku clan of Gjirokastër. His immediate family had no other heirs, and so Sulaymān Baba inherited sixty *dönüm* of land from his father, land located near the village of Terihat, in the Dropolli region. Sulaymān Baba bequeathed this land to the tekke, and it was used to generate income for many years. It was later sold, and with the profit, an eighty *dönüm* field on the plain of Kollorcë – near Lazarat – was purchased in Sulaymān Baba's name. This land was owned by the Teqeja e Zallit until recent days.

Sulaymān Baba passed from this life in 1806, and he was buried toward the lower end of the maydān, beyond the garden. No turbeh was constructed over his grave, for he wished none to be built.

After Sulaymān Baba passed from this life, a dervish of his – ‘Alī Baba Gega – was ordained baba by the Pirevi and made master of the Teqeja e Zallit. ‘Alī Baba Gega was popularly known in and around the tekke as ‘Alī Baba Plaku (plaku meaning “The Elder”). ‘Alī Baba was a native of Gjirokastër, hailing from the Gega clan. This clan was one of the wealthier families of the day and when he was installed as head of the tekke ‘Alī Baba divided the parcels of property he inherited from his father with his brother Islam Gega. ‘Alī Baba handed over his share to the tekke. This property consisted of acres of pasture land and fields around Soreza, near the village of Kellez – which lay some five miles to the northeast of Gjirokastër. These assets were held by the tekke until communists took over Albania.

‘Alī Baba Plaku had a *mūsluk*, or stone water basin, built in the tekke to be a memento of his existence in this world. ‘Alī Baba carried out many services on behalf of Bektashism during his twenty-four years as head of the Teqeja e Zallit. He passed from the material realm in 1830, and a turbeh was built over his grave at the tekke's main gate.

The next baba, Hajjī Yahyā Baba, did not remain long as master of the Teqeja e Zallit – only six years in fact. Towards the end of his term, Yahyā Baba traveled to Kruja to visit some admirers, and there he found that a tekke had been built in his name from the ground up. Consequently,



The front entrance of the Teqeja e Zallit, with the turbehs guarding the interior gate.

he remained in Kruja. The pōst of the Teqeja e Zallit was assumed by one of Yahyā Baba's dervishes – Ibrāhīm Baba, who headed the tekke for nine years, after which he passed from this life. Ibrāhīm Baba lies buried alongside ʻAlī Baba Plaku. They are separated from each other by the large gate. The turbehs of these two babas were constructed at the behest of one of Gjirokastër's wealthy citizens, Ibrāhīm Sinua, who was a muhib of ʻAlī Baba Plaku.

When Ibrāhīm Baba passed away, the Pīrevi sent Husayn Baba of Elbasan to lead the Teqeja e Zallit. Husayn Baba was a member of the Duhanxhiu clan. He oversaw the tekke for sixteen years, and he built a room in it in his name. He also possessed a watermill that ground barakah close to the village of Nepravishta, near Libohova. This property was owned by the tekke until the communist period. When he traveled back to his native Elbasan, Husayn Baba was welcomed by his many devotees. As a result of this warm greeting, he was appointed to the sheepskin pōst that had been left vacant in Elbasan's tekke when Muṣṭafā Kashfī Baba passed away.

After this, ʻAlī Khākī Baba assumed the leadership of the Teqeja e Zallit. We shall devote a whole section to his detailed biography since it is quite amazing and inspirational. ʻAlī Khākī Baba was one of the greatest mystics, writers, and poets to be found among the Albanian people.

## HAJJİ ‘ALİ KHĀKĪ BABA

Hajjî ‘Alî Khâkî Baba is a man who stands shoulder to shoulder with all of the eminent Bektashi writers and poets throughout history. He was one of the most prominent clerics of his day, being noteworthy for both his intellect and the high prestige he enjoyed among the people. Anyone who may have heard of this great Bektashi will certainly be very interested in his life story.

One evening six months before Sultan Mahmud II outlawed the Bektashi Order, Baba Şâlih Elbasanlı (the spiritual head of the tekke in Köprülü<sup>51</sup>) gathered his dervishes together. “O my sons!” he said, “Our Pîr has revealed to me that a time is quickly approaching when we will be tormented. When this time arrives all of you must go as *musâfîrs* to the beys of Plasë [near Korça], for these men are our spiritual children, our *awlâd*. They will take care of you. In the meantime, this fâkîr [i.e. Baba Şâlih] will take Dervish Hasan and go stay with his cousin who lives in Elbasan until the time of trouble passes.”

Having given these instructions to his dervishes, Baba Şâlih set out for Elbasan with Dervish Hasan. After a journey of many miles, the two men arrived at the home Sulaymân Kara, who was Baba Şâlih’s cousin. After a few days’ rest, Baba Şâlih said to Sulaymân: “O my son! I’ve been here for several days, and I’ve yet to see any children in your home. Have you no little ones?”

“Eyyallah! Unfortunately no,” answered Sulaymân. “Even though I’ve been married for many years, God has not yet delighted my eyes with offspring.”

“Well then, this fâkîr shall ask God to give you and your wife a son.” Baba Şâlih replied; and he laughingly added, “Under the condition that when the boy grows up, he will be ours!”

“O nazarîm! Whatever kindness you can show, please do so!” Sulaymân reverently replied.

Baba Şâlih rose to his feet, made the appropriate prayers to God, and after nine months – in 1827 to be exact – a son was born to Sulaymân and his wife. Baba Şâlih was delighted when the birth was announced, and it was he who named the boy ‘Alî. Baba Şâlih utterly adored this baby, and whenever he caressed him he would whisper: “O our ‘Alî! O our ‘Alî!”

Baba Şâlih and Dervish Hasan (who would later be known as Selânikli Hajjî Hasan Dede) spent three and a half years in Sulaymân Kara's house. When the troubles stirred up by Sultan Mahmud II subsided, they learned that their tekke in Köprülü had been burned to the ground and could not be rebuilt. At that point the abovementioned Baba  Abdullah Melçani sent a letter to Baba Şâlih saying: "O erenler! Rather than continuing on at Sulaymân's house, come and grace us with your presence. Stay with us in our tekke, where we can both better serve the path of Hajjî Bektash Velî!"

Subsequently, Baba Şâlih and Dervish Hasan left for the tekke of Melçan, which was situated near the city of Korça. This brought about the unusual situation of two men holding the rank of dede being in the same tekke. Baba Şâlih was the elder of the two, and therefore Baba  Abdullah relinquished his sheepskin p st as dede and took on the responsibility of being the *rahbar* (guide) and assistant, even though both were of the same clerical rank.

During this time Baba Şâlih built a tekke near the village of Turan, which was not too far away from Melçan. Since he was the tekke's founder he would eventually be buried here according to the guidelines of the Path. After Baba Şâlih had moved to Turan, Baba  Abdullah returned to the position he held before: murshid of the Melçan Tekke.

Let us now return to the story of our little  Alî. The boy grew and grew, and by the time he was seven he began attending the maktab (primary school), where he engrossed himself in his studies with great zeal. When  Alî was ten years old, his sister Amatullah (Lahe for short) was born. During his years as a student, he gained a friend named Muştafa Balteza, who was also from Elbasan. The two developed a very deep relationship that only grew closer as the years went by. We should add here that it was for the sake of this friendship that, following the death of their parents,  Alî Baba gave his sister Lahe's hand in marriage to Muştafa's brother, Jam l Balteza. From this union a boy would be born, a baby who Baba Sel m Klosi of Mallakast r named Sel m. This baby boy grew up to become Sel m R h  Baba, about whom we shall later speak.

 Alî and Muştafa were inseparable, and when they finished their madrasah studies they began reading about the philosophies of the Islamic mystics in whatever books they could find. There soon came a point when

the two realized that books were simply not enough. “To better grasp the secrets contained within these books,” one companion said to the other, “we have to enter this mystical path. What do you think about becoming muhibs so that we can better understand the finer points of spirituality?” “Yes,” replied the other, “we must!”

With this goal set in their minds, ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā prepared for travel. They mounted their horses and set out on the road to Baba ‘Abdullah’s tekke in Melçan, at whose hand they intended to take initiation into the Bektashi Order.

In those days it took an average of three days to travel the road from Elbasan to Korça on horseback. ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā planned to sleep two days on the road and arrive at the tekke on the evening of the third. Amazingly, on the morning of the third day, Baba ‘Abdullah called his dervishes together and said: “O my sons! Two candles will come to us tonight from Elbasan as musāfirs; so let’s give them a warm reception. Make two ķurbāns and prepare dinner.”

The dervishes carried out their baba’s instructions, making the ķurbāns and preparing the food. The whole day passed, and there was no sign of the two musāfirs. However, just as the sofra was being laid out, two young men wearing the garb of Islamic scholars (*hodjas*) arrived at the tekke.

When Baba ‘Abdullah was informed about the arrival of the two young men, he received ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā with great affection. Both took Baba ‘Abdullah’s hand and were initiated into the Bektashi Order. Baba ‘Abdullah kept ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā at the tekke for three days with the intention of deepening the bonds of love. When these three days passed ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā took their leave and returned to Elbasan with boundless love for Baba ‘Abdullah in their hearts. As he was now their murshid, ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā visited Baba ‘Abdullah every year to carry out the annual rituals demanded by Bektashism’s guidelines.

Much time had passed in this way until ‘Alī and Muṣṭafā spoke these words to one another: “What will we gain out of this material world if we do not become dervishes?” And thus they decided to place their feet on the path of dervishhood.

“My great desire,” said ‘Alī, “is to become a dervish in the tekke of Hajjī Bektash.”

“As for me,” said Muṣṭafā, “I would like to become one at Shamīmī Baba’s tekke in Kruja.”

In order to realize their intentions, the two set out to their respective journeys. Muṣṭafā went to Kruja, where he became a dervish. Eventually, he was ordained a baba and sent to the Jafā’ī Baba Tekke in Elbasan. After that became known as Muṣṭafā Kafshī Baba. He carried out his sacred obligations in this tekke with boundless dedication until he passed from this world.

‘Alī, on the other hand, headed to the Pīrevi in faraway Anatolia. On the way, he stopped to visit his murshid before embarking on the long journey. Baba ‘Abdullah received ‘Alī warmly, saying: “O my dear son! We are very pleased with your coming, for this may be the last time we see you in this life.”

‘Alī’s eyes filled with tears when he heard these words. He realized that Baba ‘Abdullah’s time in this world was drawing to an end. ‘Alī then carried out his annual rites, staying at the tekke for two more days. When it was time to go, Baba ‘Abdullah blessed his journey according to Bektashi custom and then gave him a small book secured with a seal made of red wax.

“My dear son,” said Baba ‘Abdullah, “we are giving you this book so that you may remember this fakīr. Our only condition is that you do not open it now. Rather, you must wait until the time comes to unseal its cover.” ‘Alī took the book and swore not to open it until the time came, a time we shall speak about soon enough.

Saying a tear-filled farewell to his beloved murshid, ‘Alī set out on the long road to the sacred Pīrevi, where Turābī ‘Alī Dede (about whom we spoke earlier) sat as dedebaba. Coincidentally, one of the babas (a supervisor of sorts) at the Pīrevi was none other than the above-mentioned dervish of Baba Şālih – Dervish Hasan, who was by this time known as Selānikli Hajjī Hasan Baba.

When ‘Alī finally arrived at the Pīrevi, the dervishes attended to him in the waiting room. Hajjī Hasan Baba soon came to welcome the young man, and in the course of their introduction he asked ‘Alī these questions:

“Where are you from my dear son?” Hasan Baba asked.

“From Albania,” answered ‘Alī.

“Really? Whereabouts in Albania?” Hasan Baba responded.

“From the town of Elbasan,” answered ‘Alī.

“Whose son are you?” asked Hasan Baba, whose curiosity was increasing.

“I’m the son of Sulaymān Kara,” replied ‘Alī.

At once Hasan Baba remembered Baba Şālih, his long-departed murshid. In astonishment, he asked: “My dear son! Does your name happen to be ‘Alī?”

“Yes,” ‘Alī answered, “my name is indeed ‘Alī.”

Hasan Baba immediately rose to his feet, and with tears flowing from his eyes, he embraced the young man, crying out: “Our ‘Alī! Our ‘Alī! The breath (*nefes*) of Baba Şālih has arrived! It was he who said this child would be ours. Truly he has come, just as our baba said he would! Truly he has come!”

Filled with joy, Hasan Baba went to inform the dedebaba, Turābī Dede, of the event, explaining to him the story of Baba Şālih and ‘Alī at length. Eventually ‘Alī was presented to the dedebaba, before whom the young man gave the appropriate honors according to Bektashi custom.

‘Alī made his solemn vows at the hand of Turābī Dede and became a dervish. This was in the year 1854. Dervish ‘Alī served in the Pīrevi as the caretaker (*turbehdār*) of Hajjī Bektash Velī’s tomb. When the sheepskin pōst of the Teqeja e Zallit became vacant after Husayn Baba left in 1861, Turābī Dede made the decision to raise Dervish ‘Alī to the rank of baba and send him to take Husayn Baba’s place.

Turābī Dede called Dervish ‘Alī into his presence and revealed his intentions. At first Dervish ‘Alī wavered in accepting the proposal. When Turābī Dede asked why he was hesitant, Dervish ‘Alī replied:

O erenler! There are two reasons why this faķīr does not want to go. First, we have come here from the faraway land of the Ghegs out of love for you, a love that binds us so tightly that we do not wish to be parted from your side. Second, we have heard from our dervish comrades here who have come from Gjirokastër that the people of that town ask so many questions that it soon becomes an annoyance; questions like, ‘Which came first, the chicken or the egg?’

Turābī Dede smiled when he heard these words. “As for your first concern,” he replied, “don’t be upset my dear son, for wherever you go, I shall be with you. As for the second issue, when they ask you such silly questions

just open your mouth as if to answer and I will speak through you.” Given that Dervish ‘Alī had nothing more to say, Turābī Dede raised him to the rank of baba and sent him off to Gjirokastër. This was in the year 1861.

At this point, we might add that in addition to his intellect and other lofty qualities, ‘Alī Baba possessed a bold and austere character. He was a man who demanded the strict implementation of Bektashi guidelines and regulations in his tekke. The slightest bit of playing around with these protocols by a dervish or initiate would lead to immediate reprimand and possible expulsion. Thus, upon his arrival in Gjirokastër, ‘Alī Baba began to rigorously (and fully) implement all of Bektashism’s etiquettes and rules.

Now it a custom in those days among the faithful of Gjirokastër to make use of liquor during their gatherings in the tekke. One night shortly after ‘Alī Baba’s arrival, Alizot Bey – a prominent figure about town – and ten of his friends came to the tekke with food and drink. They began to carry out a muhabet in the kitchen, having the dervishes serve and cook. As the guests warmed up a little, they took to singing a tune called “Fatmeh, my flower!”

‘Alī Baba sat in his personal quarters with a few others as the merriment went on in the kitchen. When he heard the song “Fatmeh, my flower!” he assumed that it was a nefes poem dedicated to the noble Lady Fātimah, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad; but he was not sure, given that he was a newcomer to Gjirokastër and an outsider. So he asked the people sitting with him if this song was dedicated to Lady Fātimah, to which they embarrassingly replied: “No nazarım, it’s not a nefes poem. It’s a song about a girl named Fatmeh that folks around here sing in the streets.”

‘Alī Baba grew enraged when he heard this. “What!?” he roared. “How is it that we must listen to such a song in this tekke?” He grabbed his staff and immediately went to those who were singing. He swung at them with his staff, smashing their bottles, all the while exclaiming: “Muhabets like this and songs like this are not wanted in this tekke!”

The revelers quickly rose to their feet. Alizot Bey was dumbfounded. He yelled out: “What’s your problem!? We’ll do as we please here, for this tekke is ours! It’s as if they sent you to us directly from the land of the Ghegs!”

‘Alī Baba raised his staff. “Yes, this tekke might be yours,” he countered. “But know that we have not been sent directly from the land of the Ghegs. Moreover, know that we came with a staff. If you choose to remain in this tekke without the discipline of our path, this staff will

certainly fall upon your head!” Although the men wanted to strike ‘Alī Baba they restrained themselves, leaving the tekke shouting: “This Gheg baba is stark raving mad!”

Alizot Bey saw this confrontation as an affront to his honor, and he began to plot ‘Alī Baba’s murder in order to exact revenge. He told his friends to arm themselves and gather at the tekke to help carry out this foul deed. However, most of his friends were against such an extreme move, and they took countermeasures to prevent ‘Alī Baba’s death.

Early on the day of the planned attack, four or five elders came to the tekke to warn ‘Alī Baba not to venture outside. The baba knew nothing of what was going on, and when the dervishes announced the arrival of these faithful elders, he said: “Very well my dear sons! Let them come and spend some time with us.” Thus, the guests sat with ‘Alī Baba and together they made a muhabet.

After some time had passed, the crack of a gunshot was heard not too far in the distance. The shot wounded a certain Sinan Hormova from the Manalati neighborhood of Gjirokastër. When he heard the bang, ‘Alī Baba asked what on earth could be going on. “It’s nothing,” one of the elders nervously said. “Probably someone close by shooting at a hawk swooping down on his chickens.”

‘Alī Baba accepted the men’s explanation and continued with the conversation. However, after an hour or so there came from outside the sound of a throng of people quarreling with each other. Hearing the ruckus ‘Alī Baba exclaimed: “Hah! Is this also the work of a hawk? Something is definitely going on!”

He immediately stood up from the muhabet and grabbed his staff as if to go outside. The elders stood up too, saying: “Āmān, nazarım! Please don’t go outside! This hullabaloo is really nothing!”

It was then that they told ‘Alī Baba about Alizot Bey’s plot, adding: “There is no need to go outside nazarım. We have sent our people to chase away these rascals. Stay inside the tekke without worry!” Despite all of this ‘Alī Baba insisted on going out. However, the elders would not let him pass, and they kept him within the tekke’s compound.

When Alizot Bey’s co-conspirators saw how many people had gathered to defend ‘Alī Baba, they realized there was nothing they could do save to leave the tekke in humiliation.

It is interesting to note here a fascinating event: Turābī Dede made it a habit of gathering at three o'clock in the afternoon each day in the Pīrevi with his babas for coffee. A dervish would serve the coffee, and the babas would drink it, all the while conversing. However, on one particular day, Turābī Dede suddenly stopped talking halfway through a cup of coffee and he remained completely still as if in a trance. He neither spoke nor did he drink his coffee. He stayed like this for a few minutes until he returned to what was left of his coffee. When he had finished drinking, he held out his finjān to the dervish, saying: "Take this cup, my dear son." The dervish took it, gathered up the other finjāns and left the room. "A distressing situation has come upon 'Alī Baba in Gjirokastër," Turābī Dede told his companions, "but *Janāb-i Hakk* has protected him!"

The conversation eventually died down, and the babas left the room one by one. Hajjī Hasan Baba – who was present at the gathering – grew curious about Turābī Dede's trance and the words he said about 'Alī Baba, words that seemed to have come out of nowhere. He immediately wrote down on a piece of paper what was uttered, along with the time and date. He stuck the paper in his tāj, hoping to see what might later transpire.

When Turābī Dede passed from this life in 1870, all of the dedes gathered and chose Hajjī Hasan Baba to be the next grand leader of the Bektashi Order. Thus, Baba Şālih's dervish, Hasan, now became dedebaba.

Hajjī Hasan Dede wrote a letter to 'Alī Baba telling him of Turābī Dede's passing and how he had been chosen by the council of the dedes to take his place. Hajjī Hasan Dede also summoned 'Alī Baba to the Pīrevi, as the rituals for appointing new dedes and celibates (*mujarrads*) would soon be carried out. Therefore, 'Alī Baba made ready for the long trip from Albania to central Anatolia.

However, during these days that 'Alī Baba was helping to construct of the Melan Tekke and thus had very little money to spare for travel expenses. He called on one of Gjirokastër's merchants, an old man named Malo Mikon (who had been Baba 'Alī Plaku's muhib), told him of the situation and asked him for a loan.

"Of course," said Xha<sup>52</sup> Malo gladly. "Tomorrow I'll bring nazarım the money for his trip."

When Xha Malo left, 'Alī Baba drew up document acknowledging the debt, in which he noted down that he borrowed forty Turkish liras. He also

wrote that if it were God's decree that he should not return, his successor-baba was not to leave the debt hanging around his neck (i.e. it was that baba's obligation to pay it off).

The next day Xha Malo came with the liras wrapped in a handkerchief. After he handed these over, ‘Alī Baba brought out the document he drafted, saying: “Take this receipt, my son – for we never know what may happen between us and the matter of death!”

Xha Malo immediately tore up the document. “I have no need for such documents,” he said. “And I pray that death stays away from you for a long time. Nonetheless, if such a thing does come to pass, I declare before God that I release nazărım from any obligation to repay me.”

‘Alī Baba then set out for Anatolia. He took with him one of his dervishes – Dervish Haydar (who later became Baba Haydar of Kardhiq) – to accompany him on the long road to Hajjī Bektash Veli’s tekke.

Ceremonies were conducted in the Pırevi during which ‘Alī Baba was raised to the rank of dede and Dervish Haydar to that of mujarrad. After the rituals, one and all gathered for muhabet with Hajjī Hasan Dede.

During the gathering Hajjī Hasan Dede remembered the paper he placed in his tāj years before. He asked ‘Alī Baba if he knew what had happened in Gjirokastër on the date written on the paper. ‘Alī Baba was puzzled and he inquired as to why he was being asked this. “How do you know about this date?” he asked. “First tell us what happened,” Hajjī Hasan Dede replied, “and then we’ll tell you why we’re asking!”

‘Alī Baba then related in detail the story of the attempted assassination and the events that provoked it. When Hajjī Hasan Dede heard the whole story, he lifted the tāj from his head and took out the note that he had written down long ago. He then told ‘Alī Baba the story of the note, seeing that what was written on it corresponded to the exact time and date of the attempted assassination. “I now see that Turābī Dede kept his promise to me,” ‘Alī Baba said to Hajjī Hasan Dede, “that wherever I should find myself, he will be there with me, and whenever should I open my mouth, he will speak for me!”

As talk of this event came to a close, ‘Alī Baba took out of his bag the sealed book mentioned earlier in the story. “O erenler!” ‘Alī Baba said to Hajjī Hasan Dede. “Long ago when I visited Baba ‘Abdullah for the last time, he gave me this book, telling me not to open it until the time came. This fakīr has kept this book with him wherever he’s gone, and he has yet

to open it. Nazarim is now a witness before God that we have not opened it. This fakîr now hands it to you to open.”

“Certainly not!” answered Hacı Hasan Dede. “Baba ‘Abdullah left this book for you to open, and now is the time to do so.”

‘Alî Baba then broke the wax seal, opening the book for the first time. He found within it the rites of the four Bektashi ceremonies, i.e. the initiation rites for muhibs, dervishes, mujarrads, and dedes, all written by hand. The reason why Baba ‘Abdullah told ‘Alî Baba not to open it until the time came now became clear. At the time he was presented with the book ‘Alî Baba had only seen the initiation ceremony of a muhib, and since he had yet to go through the other ceremonies, he was not at liberty to see these.

‘Alî Baba then showed Hacı Hasan Dede the book. When Hacı Hasan Dede glanced at its pages, he began to weep, because he saw the handwriting of his long-departed murshid, Baba Şâlih, who had stayed with Baba ‘Abdullah in the Melçan Tekke all those years before.

‘Alî Baba returned to Gjirokastër after all of the rites and formalities had been carried out in the Pîrevi. His return also made sure that the Melan Tekke was built in a magnificent way. His help was so extensive in this endeavor that he is considered the second founder of this tekke.

At this point, we should inform our readers that after the attempted assassination, ‘Alî Baba categorically forbade the use of alcohol in his tekke. This prohibition lasted until he passed from the material world.

In the months after his return from the Pîrevi, ‘Alî Baba was able to gather the money to repay the loan he had taken out for his trip to Anatolia. He called for Xha Malo and handed the money over to him. However, Xha Malo refused to take it, saying: “Does nazarim not remember that I annulled this debt?” ‘Alî Baba reiterated to the old fellow that the money was a loan, not a gift. However, Xha Malo kept insisting that he would not take the money, and it was only through ‘Alî Baba’s persistence that he finally did.

“Very well,” said Xha Malo. “I will take this money from nazarim, but I will present it to ‘Âsim Baba lying in his turbeh. Such a thing nazarim cannot prevent!” Xha Malo got up, left ‘Alî Baba’s presence, went out, and entered ‘Âsim Baba’s turbeh. There he placed the money in a strongbox, leaving it as a donation for the tekke.

‘Alî Baba worked hard in his later years to spread the Bektashi Path, not only in Gjirokastër, where the majority of the people became Bektashis, but in

other regions as well – like Delvina (and its surrounding villages), Libohova, Nepravisht, Tepelenë, and Kurvelesh, all the way up to Përmet. People even came from Korça and Elbasan to receive initiation at his hand.

‘Alī Baba's influence reached as far as Vlora, where he counted among his initiates Baba Kāmil, Baba Kāmil's brother ‘Alī, and many muhibs from around Smokthina – like Sheri Agaj and others both common and elite. The number of spiritual members attached to ‘Alī Baba surpassed 2,000 souls! Furthermore, forty dervishes were initiated at his hand, and he ordained twelve babas:

1. Baba Husayn of Manastir (Bitola)
2. Baba Husayn of Juma-ı Bālā (Blagoevgrad)
3. Baba Haydar of Gjirokastër
4. Baba ‘Alī of Elbasan
5. Baba ‘Abdullah of Katerini
6. Baba ‘Alī of Turan-Tepelenë
7. Baba Ismā‘īl Gllaba of Berat
8. Baba Bahlūl of Therepeli
9. Baba Muṣṭafā of Memalia
10. Baba Salmān of Rabije
11. Baba Sayfullah of Melani/Nepravisht
12. Baba Selīm Elbasani of Gjirokastër

Until recently copies of the ordination decrees of all of these babas were stored in the Teqeja e Zallit's archives.

When the position of dedebaba became vacant with the passing of Hajjī Mehmet Baba – and before the coming of Fayzullah Dede – an acceptable candidate was sought out from among the dedes. All the prominent babas of the day, like Baba Alush of Frashër, Baba Bayrami of Dūrbalī Sultān, Baba Fetah of Backës, sent letters expressing their desire for ‘Alī Baba to become the new dedebaba. However, when the people of Gjirokastër came to know of this plan they implored ‘Alī Baba not to leave due to the boundless love that they felt for him.

From the early days of the Albanian nationalist movement (i.e. during the time of Abdyl Frashëri and the League of Prizren), the Ottoman

authorities sought to take action against those Bektashis participating in it. As a result Gjirokastër's three babas – ‘Alī Baba, Baba Haydar and Baba Zayn ul-‘Abidīn Gjoksin – were arrested and interred for some time in Yanya.

From the moment Baba Haydar passed away in Gjirokastër in 1904, his tekke was put under surveillance by local informants. His tekke was long known to be a distribution center for nationalist books and educational material. When the tekke was finally raided by the authorities, it was found full of Albanian-language books. Baba Sulaymān (who was then baba of the tekke), Baba Mehmet Kruja (who was then serving there as dervish) and all the other resident dervishes were arrested and imprisoned in Yanya.

The day after the raid on Baba Haydar's tekke the authorities came to inspect the Teqeja e Zallit. However, ‘Alī Baba was forewarned about the raid by the chief secretary of the prefecture, Nexhip Halimi, who was one of his muhibs. ‘Alī Baba subsequently ordered all of the officially banned books removed in the night and hidden in the village of Lazarat, where many faithful Bektashis lived. When the raid came the next day, the Ottoman authorities found nothing. One of our folksongs sings of this event:

*O Gjirokastër! You've come to let us down,  
Even though you're a clever, wealthy town.*

*At this instance your help was not around;  
For in you we found that many spies abound.*

*From Yanya town the soldiers came to here;  
From Yanya town the soldiers, bringing little cheer.*

*Two of our tekke's they sought to violate;  
Baba ‘Alī Kalenderi they sought to castigate.*

*Books were dumped out in your crowded square,  
To see such a thing brought woe and great despair.*

*It's good Baba Zeneli, Baba Haydar weren't here  
Or the fall of the axe you'd feel, I fear oh dear!*

‘Alī Baba traveled extensively during his lifetime, visiting all of the sacred sites of Arabia and Persia. He performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and thus earned the title of “Hajjī.” His tekke was also a gathering place for

Islamic scholars – muftīs, mudarris, and ķādīs – many of whom came to receive initiation at his hand. These men of learning included Naim Efendi Xhangua, Nazif Efendi Dobi, Huseyn Efendi Hoxha, Vesel Efendi Bejkua, Haxhi Lulua Efendi, Vesel Efendi Libohova, Kazim Efendi Kumbarua, and Dervish Libohova. All of these men, along with many other ķādīs whose names we cannot recall, were muhibs of <sup>o</sup>Alī Baba.

<sup>o</sup>Alī Baba also had muhibs who were powerful dignitaries, like Mālik Pasha and Neki Pasha of Libohova, Mehmet <sup>o</sup>Alī Pasha of Delvina, Omer Bey Zavalanin of Korça, Fuat Bey of Libohova and countless others beys and notables, like Yahya Agha Çiniu and his friends. The mayors of Gjirokastër, Delvina, and Kurvelesh were his muhibs as well.

<sup>o</sup>Alī Baba had many muhibs from the villages around Tepelenë, Luzat, Damës, and other places. Moreover, whole villages, like Borsh, Tatzat, Kalasë, Sasaj, Palavli, Kopaçez, Vergo, Fushëbardhë, Zhulat and others in the Gjirokastër region, from Luzat to Erind, were filled with his muhibs.

<sup>o</sup>Alī Baba's influence and prestige among the people afforded great service to the Albanian nation. <sup>o</sup>Alī Baba played a major role in resolving blood feuds, preventing the powerful from plundering the poor, and other works of this kind. Moreover, <sup>o</sup>Alī Baba contributed to bringing Muslims and Christians together in brotherhood. This work was noted on the day of his funeral when one of the notable Christian of Gjirokastër, Stefan Litua, said these words of mourning at the memorial service:

We all mourn the loss of this great man, for if it were not for his nurturing brotherly feelings between Christians and Muslims, none of us Christians would be able to live untroubled in this place...

<sup>o</sup>Alī Baba ranked among those Bektashi clerics who were exceptional writers and poets. Accounts of his travels to lands as far as Palestine were collected in a great handwritten tome – in Turkish – that was more than a thousand pages in length. This was entitled *Siyāhatnāmah* (Book of Travels). This book described in great detail all of the visits he undertook to various lands and cities. <sup>o</sup>Alī Baba also noted the conversations he had with all of the local personalities, the responses that he gave to their queries, as well as other things of this nature.

<sup>o</sup>Alī Baba wrote a 500-page manuscript – again in Turkish – entitled *Istilāhat-i Sufīyyah* (Sufi Phraseology). This work presented all of the words

and terms utilized in Islamic mystical speech as well as their definitions. <sup>°</sup>Alī Baba also left a dictionary of the Chagatai dialect of Turkish in two thick volumes. At the end of these, he gathered some words in Albanian and explained these, albeit in Albanian written with the Arabic script, for at that time there was no Albanian alphabet since our language was not then well established.

<sup>°</sup>Alī Baba produced two divāns – one in Arabic and one in Persian – filled with mystic nefes poems written in these languages. These two volumes were bound together into one volume. <sup>°</sup>Alī Baba did not compose any poetry in Albanian or Turkish. Regrettably, all of these works were left behind in Gjirokastër, and we are unable to present any of their content to our dear readers.

Towards the end of his life <sup>°</sup>Alī Baba recalled all of the friends he had throughout his life who had since passed away. He was saddened that they had all departed this life, one after the other, until all of his old companions were gone. He composed a bittersweet poem in Persian about this – a kind of elegy for himself – of which this fakīr remembers only two lines:

*For thee, O Khākī, not a friend is left save groans and tears;  
Praise God and be patient, as you come to your final years!*

<sup>°</sup>Alī Baba ended his Persian divān with a poem, of which we can again remember only the last two lines, and which when translated possess a lovely rhyming sound:

*O Khākī! 'Tis better to be a hundred years in jail,  
Than to speak with one whose mind's of no avail!*

## SELİM RŪHĪ BABA

Selīm Rūhī Baba (Baba Selīm) unquestionably ranks among the greatest Bektashi clergymen, scholars, and poets of the last century. He was born in the city of Elbasan in 1869, the child of <sup>°</sup>Alī Khākī Baba's sister Lahe, and Muṣṭafā Kafshī Baba's brother, Jamāl Balteza. He completed his primary studies in Elbasan, and then entered the city's madrasah, whose program he completed by the time he was sixteen.

When he completed his madrasah studies, Baba Selīm traveled to Gjirokastër in the company of his father Jamāl and ʻAlī Khākī Baba, and there he received his initiation into the Bektashi Order. This was in 1885. He never returned to Elbasan after that. In Gjirokastër, he attended special educational courses for two years, which equipped him with a lofty intellect. Soon enough he mastered the three classical languages of Islam: Arabic, Turkish and Persian. Upon the successful completion of his studies in 1887, Baba Selīm received an ijazātnāmah. Afterward, he made the solemn oath of initiation before ʻAlī Khākī Baba in 1888 and after that never separated from his master's side.

Three years later –in 1891 – ʻAlī Khākī Baba elevated Baba Selīm to the rank of dervish. Nevertheless, Baba Selīm persisted in his studies. New books were brought to the Teqeja e Zallit every year from Istanbul. Baba Selīm studied these works in the company of ʻAlī Khākī Baba, benefiting greatly from his tutoring. There were, in fact, few books or commentaries that Baba Selīm had not read. He not only studied books of a religious nature, but he also studied works of history, geography, literature, science, natural history, philosophy and other such topics. Thus he was conversant in a wide range of subjects. He can easily be considered the most cultured and elevated clergymen in the Albania of his day.

Anyone who had the chance to visit the Teqeja e Zallit in those days quickly came to treasure Baba Selīm's presence. The intellectuals of Gjirokastër, from whatever background, thoroughly enjoyed conversing with him. They made a custom of visiting with him on the weekly holiday, which in those days was Friday, the day of the Islamic congregational prayer. Scholars would sit with Baba Selīm without interruption for four or five hours, speaking about religion, culture, literature and other topics of the day. Those scholars who lived further away, in places such as Libohova, Delvina, Korça or other regions, would travel to the Teqeja e Zallit and sleep there several days in a row. They filled their time with enlightened discourse, and for weeks they dragged their feet in leaving Baba Selīm's magnetic presence.

Baba Selīm was fully equipped with mystical inspiration by his murshid, ʻAlī Khākī Baba, and his character was flawlessly honed, like a sharp ax that cuts with its two edges. People adored Baba Selīm because of

this, and after <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba had passed from this world they would say: “Alas! Baba <sup>c</sup>Alī has passed. However, we have Dervish Selīm, and it is he who soothed our pain when Baba <sup>c</sup>Alī walked to Hakk!”

Baba Selīm possessed an exceptionally warm personality and he was very gentle and lenient with people. He was certainly a sight to behold, a pleasure to see with his face all aglow! <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba, on the other hand, was serious and strict, and if a dervish or layperson overstepped the line he could be very stern, casting an unyielding glance upon them. Whenever this happened Baba Selīm, possessing such a tender disposition, would immediately go to <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba and beg him to forgive the offender. He would kiss <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba’s hand in the name of the person and ask for his pardon. Baba Selīm would plead so much that <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba would eventually soften and forgive the person in question.

Whether commoners, clergymen, or muhibs, people adored Baba Selīm on account of his tranquil character and perceptive abilities. Therefore, when <sup>c</sup>Alī Khākī Baba passed from this life in 1907, it was Baba Selīm who inherited his position as the tekke’s master. For thirty-seven years Baba Selīm performed his duties as head of the Teqeja e Zallit with dignity and extraordinary ability, just as <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba had done in his day. This accounts for the lament people sang when <sup>c</sup>Alī Baba passed from this life:

*Thursday twilight came, bringing Jum<sup>c</sup>ah dawn,  
The dervishes came together; to their master they were drawn.*

*<sup>c</sup>Alī Baba said to them with sweat upon his brow,  
“The time has come at last my sons, for I’m a traveler now.”*

*The dervishes cried out aloud; what were they all to do?  
“Leave us not, O Baba! For our lives we’d give for you!”*

*“No, my sons,” the Baba said, a smile upon his face,  
“To each a fate is written and none can take his place.”*

*“But turn to Baba Selīm, for that is my decree;  
And when the tears come to your eyes, know that he is me!”*

Through his position as head of the Teqeja e Zallit, Baba Selīm greatly aid the spread of Bektashism, adding countless muhibs to its ranks – not



Selim Ruhî Baba, 1869-1944

only Albanians but foreigners as well. Some ninety percent of the students who attended Gjirokastër's madrasah became his muhibs. Not only that, non-Albanians who happened to be in Gjirokastër on government business often visit the tekke; and many of these individuals received initiation into the Bektashi Order at his hand.

Baba Selîm's reputation spread so far outside of Albania that an Ottoman major named Şevkî Bey (who commanded a garrison in Macedonia), having heard of Baba Selîm's virtues, came to Gjirokastër in 1907 to receive initiation at his hand. Şevkî Bey was somewhat of a poet, and he devoted one of his poems to the merits of Baba Selîm's character. Here is the poem:

*Whoever might drink from the brimming cup of Baba Selîm,  
No matter how lowly and base, will be filled with great esteem.*

*In this cup he offers, I wonder, is there life unending?  
It's no different than Khîzr's fount; life forever vending.*

*How can I describe for you such qualities so glorious?  
For, by God, conveying these the tongue will find laborious!*

*All beauties divine in him become clear, O Şevki,  
To those who are his heart-charming locks' devotees!*<sup>53</sup>

Other foreigners who happened to visit Albania – journalists, writers, diplomats accredited with the Albanian state, and many other notable personalities – praised Baba Selīm in the newspapers and magazines of their homelands. Famed German scholar Franz Babinger wrote a detailed article for one of Vienna's major newspapers about a lunchtime visit he had with Baba Selīm in the Teqeja e Zallit. In the article, Babinger describes Baba Selīm's charming appearance as well as the beautiful poems found within his *divān*.

In 1908 Çerçiz Topulli and his çeta began operating in the mountains around Gjirokastër. Çerçiz had been one of 'Alī Baba's muhibs, and he would often visit the Teqeja e Zallit with his comrades during the night. Baba Selīm gave much aid to the nationalist cause, especially when an Albanian club was formed that same year with the help of some of 'Alī Baba's muhibs, such as Haxhi Shapllos, Shemsho Hajros, Ahmet Poshit and many other friends, especially the muhib, Hasan Xhiku.

On account of his nationalist sympathies and his lofty standing in the community, Baba Selīm endured many tribulations during the Greek occupation, which began in 1913. The Greek guerrilla bands (*andarts*) roaming the countryside openly targeted Baba Selīm for assassination, and when these bands approached the Teqeja e Zallit Baba Selīm gathered his dervishes and silently escaped through the back gate. Trekking through the fields, they managed to reach the relative safety of Gjirokastër. They remained in the town for three and a half years, living in the house of Baba Selīm's sister. However, Dervish Sulo Kuka – being a very old and unable to walk – chose to remain in the tekke along with a few of servants. When the Greeks overran the sanctuary, they beat the old dervish so severely that he lived only three days when he finally reached Gjirokastër.

The Greeks thoroughly plundered the tekke, effectively stripping it bare. For three and half years these foreign intruders used the building as a barracks and in doing so utterly desecrated it. They did not leave a door or window in place, as they chopped these up for firewood to use in the fireplaces found in the tekke's many rooms. They also stole all tekke's excellent livestock as well – the donated goats, chickens, all the plump cattle, the cows with calves, and the mules, horses and mares. These animals

numbered in the thousands. In short, the Greeks left nothing whatsoever to the Teqeja e Zallit.

After Georgios Christakis-Zografos declared his “Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus” (ARNE) in Gjirokastër on February 28, 1914, he wanted to send Baba Selim to a prison set up on the island of Ithaca, something he had done with many other patriotic Gjirokastrans. However, the Christians of the town intervened out of their affection for the Teqeja e Zallit and Baba Selim and as a result Baba Selim was left alone.

In February of 1914, the Greek government ordered its forces to feign withdrawal from the territory it occupied. Çerçiz Topulli’s çeta (which was hiding in the mountains of Picar and Shtepëz) believed that the Greek army was indeed pulling out and that the only forces that would remain in place were the halfhearted irregulars of their ARNE pawns. Therefore the çeta laid out a plan to attack Zografos’ militia and liberate Gjirokastër. However, Baba Selim sent Çerçiz a message through underground channels informing him that the withdrawal was only a ruse enacted by the Greek army (which was in fact not far off) to flush the Albanian resistance out of their mountain hideaways. If the çetas were heard attacking, the army would rush back and burn Gjirokastër to the ground.

Having been advised by Baba Selim to remain vigilant, Çerçiz made no attempt to attack the town. The baba’s words were confirmed a few months later when the Greek army once more entered Gjirokastër and dissolved the ARNE government.

In the meantime, devotees came at all hours of the day to sit with Baba Selim at his sister’s house, which became very much like a small tekke. Those who could not find much work because of the circumstances of the day – particularly the educated, former white-collar workers and gentlemen – continually sought solace in their visits.

On one particular Friday, Naim Efendi Xhangua and some others were on their way to the Pazar Mosque to offer *jum'a namāz*, the Friday congregational prayer. That day the Greek soldiers garrisoned in the town’s castle lined up along its ramparts. They grabbed rocks from the wall and to pass the time, took aim at anyone who went by on the road below, which happened to be the road that led to the mosque. Being blocked from attending prayer, Naim Efendi and his companions turned around and came

to the house where Baba Selīm was, which was not too far away. As they were received, Naim Efendi said to Baba Selīm:

O Baba! It wasn't our plan to visit you today, given that we were on our way to make jum'a namāz at the Pazar Mosque. But the Greek soldiers are throwing stones from the castle walls at our people and we are blocked from prayer. So we turned back and came here.

To this Baba Selīm replied:

Ah! You must now truly understand the words of the beloved Prophet Muḥammad: "Loving one's homeland is part of faith." These words fittingly apply to this very day, seeing as we cannot perform our basic religious duties before God while our homeland is in chains. This test should convince us that without a free country we will not be able to hold on to our faith, for these two things are bound to each other!

When the Greeks finally left Albania at the end of the First World War, the people immediately set about rebuilding the Teqeja e Zallit, being solely motivated by the love they held for Baba Selīm. Considerable help came from Albanian immigrants living in America, and this allowed the tekke to be maintained with dignity until the very end.

It is important to note here that during the restoration of the Teqeja e Zallit, hundreds of women came from Gjirokastër to supervise its cleaning. Over the course of many consecutive days, they came in the morning and left in the evening, leaving the tekke thoroughly scrubbed and whitewashed. Baba Selīm praised these ladies profusely for their service, and he incessantly prayed for God to reward them with all that is good.

When Šālih Niyāzī Dede fell martyred in Tirana on November 28, 1941, the entire body of Bektashi clergy pleaded with Baba Selīm to shoulder the position of dedebaba. However, Baba Selīm refused to leave his tekke. During the period of Italian occupation, Baba Selīm actively supported the nationalist cause when the struggle to liberate the fatherland began to intensify. He advised all the villages around Gjirokastër to form a liberation movement that was exclusively Albanian in complexion, eschewing all alien ideologies like communism and fascism. As one would expect, the communists railed against Baba Selīm's call, but there was nothing that they could do to stifle

him, for on the very day that they came to power in November of 1944 he evaded their grasp by passing from this world.

It is worth mentioning that when the Greco-Italian war broke out in October of 1940, the Italians began spreading propaganda throughout our lands in an attempt to recruit Albanian volunteers to liberate the region of Çamëria from the Greeks. However, Baba Selim understood what the Italians were up to, and he advised the faithful not heed their call. “How on earth is it going to be possible for us to liberate others,” he said, “while we ourselves are subjugated?” He knew that the call for volunteers was a ploy to seduce Albanians into accepting permanent Italian rule. Consequently, none of the faithful participated in this venture. When the Greeks captured Gjirokastër from the Italians in December of 1940 they learned of Baba Selim’s stance in regards to cooperation with the Italians; and though they locked up many collaborators, Baba Selim was left unmolested.

Baba Selim possessed a remarkable aptitude for composing *nefes* poems, and he produced three grand *divāns* over a period of twenty-five years, one in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. He wrote these in a handwriting so beautiful that all those blessed with the chance to see their pages were left amazed. A notably strong impression was left on foreign visitors, who every now and then mentioned Baba Selim in their writings.

All of Baba Selim’s poems were composed with the standard poetic formulas and stylistic conventions of the day. In his later years, he began writing Albanian *ghazals*, hoping to produce a fourth *divan* in this language. But alas! It was not to be. The chaotic upheavals that took place in the last generation arose, and he was unable to complete this work.

Baba Selim also wrote a lengthy book entitled *Rayā’ ul-Irshād* (Thoughts on Guidance), in which he explained Islamic mysticism in great detail, along with its foundations, its effects on the heart and other fascinating topics of this nature. He described within the book’s pages all of the ceremonies and rites of the Bektashi Path, expertly commenting upon them and disclosing their origins in the *Qur’ān*, the *ḥadīth ķudsī*, the words of the Prophet Muhammad and the teachings of prominent saints. Sadly, all of Baba Selim’s books, poems, and manuscripts – a priceless treasure indeed! – remain behind in Albania, and we do not have them available to impart any of their content to our readers.

When a foreign Orientalist inquired as to which stream of Islam Bektashism adhered to, Baba Selīm carefully explained our position with one of his lengthy poems, from which we can unfortunately only recall three stanzas:

*We trail behind Muḥammad  
In his words and in his deeds.  
We line up with his family,  
Of God's word we all take heed.*

*We wear the robe of intellect,  
For with it insight's found.  
On Imām Ja'far's blessed trail  
Our focus has no bounds.*

*Listen Selīm Rūhī!  
This fact you must highlight:  
That the one who seeks <sup>c</sup>Alī  
To the Pīr's hand must hold tight!*

To end this section, we will present the last two stanzas of an adoring poem that Baba Selīm dedicated to his spiritual master, <sup>c</sup>Alī Khākī Baba:

*Why didn't Turābī convey his love to Khākī  
To Khākī we devote our heartfelt humility.  
To say Rūhī is the lover, O soul, enlighten this endeavor,  
All his love is for <sup>c</sup>Alī - of this love he'll sing forever.*

## MEHMET <sup>c</sup>ALĪ HILMĪ DEDE

Mehmet <sup>c</sup>Alī Hilmī Dede ranks among the best known Bektashis masters of the late nineteenth century. He was born in Istanbul in the year 1842 near the mosque of Sultan Ahmed in a neighborhood known as Gündörməz. He was the son of a hodja named Nūrī Efendi. Both Mehmet <sup>c</sup>Alī Dede's father and mother (whose name was Āminah) were initiated into the Bektashi Order at the hand Ḥajjī Ḥasan Baba in the tekke of Merdivenköy, which is better known as the Şahkulu Tekke.

From the time he was a small child Mehmet ʻAlī paid regular visits to the Şahkulu Tekke in the company of his parents. Later, when he completed his primary education, he was initiated into the order by Hajjī Hasan Baba, and he was eventually ordained a dervish by Hasan Baba's deputy, Kesriyeli Hajjī ʻAlī Baba – who became pōstnişīn of the Şahkulu Tekkesi when Hajjī Hasan Baba passed from this world in 1857. When Kesriyeli Hajjī ʻAlī Baba died in 1864, Mehmet ʻAlī Dede was raised to the rank of baba and Turābī Dede (who was then sitting as dedebaba in the Pīrevi) issued a decree placing Mehmet ʻAlī Dede as the pōstnişīn of the Şahkulu Tekkesi. In 1870 Mehmet ʻAlī Dede underwent the ordination ceremony for dede. This was carried out by above-mentioned Selānikli Hajjī Hasan Dede, with Mehmet Yasārī Baba serving as rahbar.

When Hajjī Hasan Dede was exiled to the Hijaz in 1872, Mehmet ʻAlī Dede traveled to the Pīrevi and took over the position of dedebaba for a short time; and when he was obliged to leave he returned to his tekke in Istanbul, where he remained until he passed from this world in 1907.

Like many other Bektashi masters, Mehmet ʻAlī Dede enjoyed almost limitless poetic talent. He wrote many nefes, ghazals, rubā'īs and eulogies, all of which are contained in his divān, a tome nearly the size of Turābī Dede's divān. One of Mehmet ʻAlī Dede's deputies at the tekke of Merdivenköy, Ahmed Mehdi Baba, published this divān in 1909. At this point then, let us present examples of Mehmet ʻAlī Dede's poems, the first of which is this:

*So the Beloved's charm I can see and greet,  
My limbs, all of them, became an eye.  
So to wipe my face at his splendid feet,  
My outer and inner became a face.*

*Spirit and soul with love overflowed;  
My heart became for delight an abode;  
With zeal to me the Beloved was disclosed;  
My lengthy nights became daytime.*

*To reach the dominion of the friend,  
To arrive and the cherished comprehend;  
No valley deep, or high hill to ascend,  
My four sides became utterly level.*

*Mountains and grasslands from end to end,  
Upon them emerald garments descend,  
And for the gleeful, festivities portend;  
My day became Sacred Nevrüz.*

*Everything merged into a single letter  
That became both contained and container;  
It certainly was an amazing grammar!  
One dot became a thousand words.*

*No other contenders remained;  
My darling filled the earth unrestrained;  
The bow raised, the arrow aimed;  
Every direction became illuminated.*

*Make haste to the bazaar, O Hilmī!  
But your soul's the only currency.  
Love's a jewel that endures eternally;  
When did love become a thing easily gained?*

The meaning of this poem should be relatively clear. We only need to remind our readers that the fifth stanza refers to the words of the glorious ‘Alī that we have explained earlier:

What is in the Kur’ān is found in Sūrat ul-Fātiḥah. Everything in this sūrah is found in Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm. Everything in Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm is found in the letter bā. Everything contained within this letter is found in the dot; and I am that dot.

Therefore this stanza tells us that all knowledge – according to these words of the Imām – is gathered in the point of the first letter of Bismillah, or “In the Name of God.” As I detach myself from everything save God, Mehmet ‘Alī Dede says, this truth fills my soul with the mystical inspiration of the illustrious Imām ‘Alī. As we have said, the other verses should be clear and in no need of further explanation. Therefore, let us move on to another of Mehmet ‘Alī Dede’s nefes poems:

*In the Hanbāğ stands assembled the lovers' grand marquee,  
A rose patch of love, a dwelling for the Folk of Amity.*

*Come into the Pir's house and cook your essence there;  
In the saints' hearth burn with passion and feel no despair.*

*By the power of God, grace awoke and then was gained;  
On Judgment Day the lovers' candles were ascertained.*

*Give us a bit of love's wine, O cup-bearer of bliss!  
His consecrated feet let the drunk forever kiss.*

*The beauty of the Beloved is our sacred prayer place,  
But don't speak this secret – many ears has this worldly space.*

*Enter the believer's heart and prostrate in all directions.  
Of this house's walls – left, right – will you make distinctions?*

*O Hilmī! Be a dervish who to others appears dejected;  
Forget not that the friend is found inside the inn of the neglected.*

Let us now explain this poem:

**Hanbāğ** refers to the place in Hajjī Bektash's tekke (the Pīrevi) where the maydān is located. Mehmet Ȑalī Dede uses this word to tell us that the Pīrevi's compound is a focal point for all spiritual lovers, for it is here that transcendent passion is awakened. So come and cook yourself in the fire of love! The brilliance of love never fades, and on Judgment Day – a day when all accounts will be brought before God – the mystical light of love will continue to brightly blaze.

The **beauty of the Beloved** mentioned in the fifth stanza is forever the direction of prayer (i.e. kiblah) for God's lovers and all those who genuinely search for Him. It is towards the divine countenance that we must continuously pray. Remember nonetheless that this is a private matter that must be safeguarded from those who do not understand such realities. This is a secret not to be revealed.

The **believer's heart** in the sixth stanza becomes the House of God forever when it is cleansed of all worldly attachments. Therefore, it is towards this Ka'bah that true prostration (*sujūd*) is to be made. Every pure heart is the House of God, irrespective of the shape or form this heart might be located in, and this fact does not change.

The outwardly **dejected dervish** in the final stanza is that dervish whose heart pines over his love for God. Mehmet Ȑalī Dede is addressing himself in these lines, saying: "O Hilmī! You made yourself a dejected and



Mehmet ȐAli Hilmī Dede,  
1842-1907



broken-hearted dervish, because it is in such broken hearts that God is found.” Having provided this explanation, let us take a look at another of Mehmet ȐAli Dede’s poems, one in which he praises the great ȐAlī al-Murtaza:

*We’re with an unassuming band, Ḥaydar’s slaves are we,  
Valiant and brave, the Lion of God, Murtaza ȐAlī.*

*Heaven and earth they shake in awe when Lā fatā they see;  
Khaybar’s sturdy gates were smashed by no other ilā ȐAlī.*

*Dhū'l Fikār he wielded in his hand of sanctity;  
The seven realms it slashed, assailing ȐAntar forcefully.*

*The chief of each and every one is Sainthood’s Shah - ȐAlī,  
Firmly bound to him with love, like Kambar was, are we;*

*All those who say they love ȐAlī and do wholeheartedly  
For Ḥusayn they’d give their heart and head without a thought to flee.*

*While on the path to You, drunk on the wine of ecstasy,  
The wayfarer discovers Kawthar, a garden heavenly.*

*Life and death within the grasp of the highest saint both lie;  
And by his word the dead awake and from the makbar rise.*

*Paradise and hellfire stand by at his command;  
On Maḥshar divine justice will be doled out by his hand.*

*This is why we're blessed to trace our pledge's pedigree  
From our Payghambar on down the line through the Family of <sup>c</sup>Alī.  
Our murshid is Muḥammad, and our rahbar is <sup>c</sup>Alī;  
To our murshid and our rahbar our soul we give freely;  
So why is the heart distraught by woe recurrently?  
May you mediate for a wretched one like this abject Hilmi!*

Let us now explain this poem:

The term **Lā fata ilā <sup>c</sup>Alī** is part of the phrase that the Angel Gabriel said to Prophet Muhammad: “There is no hero but <sup>c</sup>Alī; there is no sword but Dhū'l Fiḳār.”

**Khaybar** refers to the fortified towns that once stood to the north of Madinah. In the seventh Hijri year, the exalted Muḥammad launched a campaign to seize these strongholds from the Jewish tribes, as these folk relentlessly stirred up the pagans to fight against the Muslims. These walled settlements sat on strategic heights – much like our lofty castles – and could not be easily taken.

The Muslims suffered heavy losses trying to storm these fortified positions over a period of many days. No matter how hard they tried, they could not break through Khaybar’s gates. Eventually, the Prophet told his companions: “Tomorrow I will give our battle flag to a man who loves God and His Messenger, and who is loved by God and His Messenger. Through him, God will give us victory over these towns.”

The next day the Prophet called forward the great <sup>c</sup>Alī and handed him the battle flag, along with command of the Muslim army. The assault commenced and with the power of his bare hands, Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī broke through one of Khaybar’s massive gates, allowing himself and his men to enter the castles. Victory was thus secured. This event was celebrated far and wide, so much so that countless bards sang of it in verse. In this way, the name of Khaybar became immortalized.

**‘Antar** was the name of a mighty pagan warrior who lived during the days of the Prophet. Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī battled him, subdued him and tied him up. **Kambar** is the name of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Murtaza’s faithful servant, who exceeded all others in love for his master.

**Kawthar** is a river (or pool) that exists in Paradise. The Prophet Muḥammad once said that the dispenser of its waters is the exalted <sup>c</sup>Alī.

Mehmet Ҫalı Dede uses Kawthar in this poem to represent the “water” of perfection, which likewise comes from the hand of İmām Ҫalı.

**Maƙbar** is a “grave” or “tomb”, although here its symbolism is tied to inspiration, or rather the lack thereof. This poem tells us that İmām Ҫalı revives dead hearts with his spiritual power. If we should so happen to find ourselves inspired by him, he will raise us to an upright position, even if we are seemingly buried in the grave of despair. İmām Ҫalı – proclaims Mehmet Ҫalı Dede – can purify us with the energy he radiates, so much so that we can escape the distresses of the **Mahshar**, Judgment Day.

**Payghambar** is a Persian word meaning “messenger” (i.e. Muhammad); **murshid** is (as we know) one’s spiritual master; and **rahbar** is one’s spiritual guide. Having offered this brief explanation, let us take a look at another of Mehmet Ҫalı Dede’s nefes poems:

*We’re people of taste; good-humored vagabonds, we Bektashis.  
We’re strangers to the zāhid’s ill-natured ways, we Bektashis.*

*We’re men stripped bare of worldly connections, we’re free.  
We’re dwellers of the tavern unabashed, we Bektashis.*

*We’re unmoved by this drinking party called the world;  
From the cup of ardor and love we’ve drunk, we Bektashis.*

*We’re owners of the prized cipher for Najaf’s Pearl is with us,  
Though to the fanatics we seem ruined, we Bektashis.*

*We’re an ancient falcon, flying through heavenly effusion;  
We’re a nesting place for the bird of blessing, we Bektashis.*

*We’re resolute in our vows; no wavering is there in us,  
For this vow, we’d give our heads to the Beloved, we Bektashis.*

*O Hilmī! Our soul we sacrificed before God’s majestic splendor,  
We’re moths incinerated in the candle of love, we Bektashis.*

This poem seems to need no explanation. Therefore, we will present one final nefes poem from Mehmet Ҫalı Dede:

*Loyal servants of Muṣṭafā we are, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.  
Ardent lovers of Murtazā we are, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

*Our heads a cannonball we made for the love of the martyred king;  
For Karbalā’ our lives we gave, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

*What distress is it to us if the enemy wounds our body?  
Smashed on the wine of pain we are, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

*Our breast a target we made for the zāhid's churlish barbs;  
Bearers of heartache and balā we are, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

*Our body burns in the blaze of love for the sake of the two Imāms;  
Happily this inferno we endure, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

*Five are the Folk of the bless'd Kisā, our crown of glory they are,  
Dervishes at submission's gate, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

*Hilmi Dede! Forget not that our master is Hajī Bektash-ī Veli;  
Slaves of the Clan of the Cloak we are, the Ḥusaynīs we are from.*

Let us now explain some of this poem's finer points:

A **zāhid** (as we have mentioned many times above) is a person who is obsessively attached to the outward form of religion; **balā** means “misfortune”; a **kisā**’ is a spacious woolen robe. Mehmet ‘Alī Hilmī Dede uses this word to allude to the event that transpired when the exalted Prophet summoned ‘Alī, Fātimah, Hasan and Husayn to his side. He enwrapped them in his **kisā**’ and prayed to God, saying:

*O God! This is my family. Please Lord,  
clean their hearts of any and all impurities.*

As soon as he finished praying this verse from the Holy Qur’ān was revealed from on high:

*Allah's wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you,  
O Family of the Household, and cleanse you with  
a thorough cleansing.*

《Sūrat al-Ahzāb 33:33》

## MEHMET YASĀRĪ BABA

Mehmet Yasārī Baba ranks among the exceptional Bektashi poets of the nineteenth century. He was also a widely recognized musician and a master of the *bağlama*. He was born near the Black Sea port of Batumi in the year

1803. He attended school in his youth, eventually entering into the madrasah. As he matured, the desire to traverse the path of mystical love entered into his heart and during the time when Turābī Dede was dedebaba, he set out for the illustrious Pīrevi.

Soon after arriving at the Pīrevi, Mehmet Yasārī received his initiation and thus entered the ranks of the Bektashis. This initiation filled him with boundless inspiration, and he subsequently took the additional oath to become a dervish. In due course, he was raised to the rank of baba, and ultimately dede (khalīfa-baba).

Furthermore, Mehmet Yasārī Baba served as the turbehdār of Hajjī Bektash Velī's tomb. During the administration of Hajjī Hasan Dede, he was also put in charge of the directors of the religious services (rahbars). Mehmet Yasārī Baba served as rahbar for Mehmet ʻAlī Hilmī Dede (and many others) when the later went through the ceremony of the dede.

Later in life Mehmet Yasārī Baba directed a tekke in Sinope, a town along the Black Sea in the region of his birth. He resided in this city until he passed from this world in 1880. His turbeh can still be found there. One of his muhibs – a man named Қadā'ī – inscribed a touching epitaph on his master's tombstone.

Mehmet Yasārī Baba possessed vast poetic talent and he composed many works that are still sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Here is one of his poems:

*God forbid that they as separate we should see;  
 ʻAlī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ʻAlī.  
 “ʻAlī's from me, I'm from he” did he not decree?  
 ʻAlī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ʻAlī.*

*In the 18,000 worlds, whatever is called to mind,  
 But for their sake, Hakk the universe designed.  
 To be heir Allah's Lion is certainly assigned:  
 ʻAlī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ʻAlī.*

*Murtaẓā ʻAlī's approving stamp is this,  
 In Imām Ḥasan's chronicle disclosed is this,  
 What the Martyred King passed down to us this:  
 ʻAlī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ʻAlī.*

*Director of the worlds is Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Abidin,  
In faith Muḥammad Bākir finds utmost esteem,  
From Imām Ja'far Sādik this information glean:  
‘Alī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ‘Alī.*

*Mūsā Kāzim's road is one that's straight,  
‘Alī Rizā rules at Khorāsān's wide gate,  
From Muḥammad Taqī's face moonlight radiates:  
‘Alī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ‘Alī.*

*Yasārī! From the Shah don't turn away,  
His refuge and support are not so far away,  
He's our namāz, our niyāz, he's the place we pray;  
‘Alī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ‘Alī.*

Let us now discuss some of the points raised in this poem:

The refrain **‘Alī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ‘Alī** is a paraphrase of a hadīth of the Prophet Muḥammad: “<sup>c</sup>Alī is from me, and I am from him,” as well as the hadith: “<sup>c</sup>Alī and I emanate from a single light.”

The **18,000 worlds** refer to a belief held by ancient astronomers that the universe consisted of eighteen thousand worlds similar in nature to our own. Mehmet Yasārī Baba ties this point to the hadīth ķudsī where God says: “Were it not for you, My beloved Muḥammad, I would not have created all of the worlds!” This is the subtext of the first two lines in the second stanza, where Yasārī Baba tells us that were it not for the love God holds for the great Muḥammad nothing in the universe would have been brought into existence.

**Heir** refers to the blessed words that the Prophet said to Imām ‘Alī: “You are my inheritor, O ‘Alī!” This means that ‘Alī inherited the spiritual path set down by Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. Since the other stanzas of the poem should be clear, there is no need for any further explanation. Let us turn then to another of Yasārī Baba’s poems:

*The secret of Reality, what an amazing state!  
Did you think it to be like the thought of mother's cooking?  
It's a prized jewel, a costly pearl, whose value we can't rate.  
Did you think that from the eye tears are all that's flowing?*

*There's one who, in submission, the threshold sees;  
 There's one who, in turning his attention, the Beloved sees;  
 There's one who, within the body, the secret soul sees;  
 Did you think yourself to be a money-changer?*

*O my Moon! Don't bring Yasārī more suffering;  
 Up to the Throne climbs the smoke of my crying;  
 If your heart, my Shah, is a crystal palace glowing,  
 Did you think mine to be a simple mill stone?*

The overall meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of detailed explanation. Nevertheless, to summarize: Mehmet Yasārī Baba is telling us that Reality (*haḳīḳat*) is heavily veiled, and we should not assume that it will be as familiar to us as our mother's cooking. To uncover and comprehend Reality we must have absolute trust in God and steadfastly keep to the spiritual path. If we can do this, we will invite God's love, and He will draw us near. When this happens will discover that He has been in us all along!

## SHAMSĪ BABA

Shamsī Baba was a Bektashi poet from the last half of the nineteenth century. He was born in the Turkish city of Izmir, and he ranks among the well-known babas of that region. Shamsī Baba was a very effective spiritual guide, inspiring many muhibs and dervishes. Baba Xhafer Sadik (who was born in Gjirokastër to the Baboçi family) once served as a dervish in Shamsī Baba's tekke. Baba Xhafer is well-known among Albanians, for he was installed as dedebaba in Tirana in 1944.

Shamsī Baba possessed obvious poetic talent, and his many poems continue to be sung throughout our tekkes. Here is one such work:

*Our dert, there's no doubt, is Muhammad ‘Alī;  
 With Hasan and Husayn we cried beli;  
 Zayn ul-Ābā sees our state clearly;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

*Muhammad ul-Bākir holds the Prophet's essence;  
 Ja'far us-Sādiq is Ahmād's secret brilliance;  
 Mūsā al-Kāzim is abjad's coalescence;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

*‘Alī ar-Riżā is Khorāsān's stately king;  
 ‘Round Muhammad ut-Taķī spins everything;  
 ‘Alī un-Naķī to us our arkān brings;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

*Hakk's grace we see in Hasan ḡAskārī,  
 Its perfection is found in Muḥammad Maḥdī,  
 Our Pīr is Khunkār Hajjī Bektash Veli;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

*For the Twelve Imāms we're sacrifice and slave,  
 The Innocent Fourteen and the King of the Brave,  
 Their religion and their faith believers save;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

*O brother! Be not fooled by black and white;  
 Don't be trapped by the snare of gloom and fright;  
 Don't enter passion – to the murshid hold tight;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

*Shamsī Baba's a poor slave, nothing else assume,  
 In the Kirklar's meeting sweet roses are in bloom,  
 Make lovers laugh, not weep in darkened gloom;  
 Let there be faith brother! Let doubt disappear!*

Let us now explain some points of this poem:

The word **Dert** here can mean “pain,” “suffering,” or “woe”; the word **belī** means “yes” in Persian. The third line in the second stanza refers to the **abjad** (calculation), a method said to have been first developed by Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim, whose turbeh is found near Baghdad.

The words **black and white** refer to the rumor-mongering, slander and backbiting that is quite rampant in this world. Shamsī Baba advises all wayfarers not to involve themselves in gossip and scandal-mongering, for such things will inevitably throw spiritual seekers into uncertainty.

The **roses** mentioned in the last verse symbolize mystical inspiration.

Since he received his inspiration from the Pîr and the Kirklar – Shamsî Baba tells us – he is now fit to guide those of us living in the material world. His inspired instructions are like roses whose scent saturates all seekers of God with their mystical fragrance.

## BABA ZAYN UL-<sup>c</sup>ABIDÎN LESKOVIKU

Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidîn Leskoviku ranks among the notable Bektashi poets of the nineteenth century. He was born and raised in the southern Albanian town of Leskovik. According to a poem of his in which he praises the great Dûrbalî Sultân, we learn that Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidîn was initiated into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Muâharram Maâzûnî Baba in the Dûrbalî Tekke.

Not long after making his dervish vows, Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidîn was raised to the rank of baba and directed by his murshid (Muâharram Maâzûnî Baba) to return to Leskovik. Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidîn established a tekke shortly after he arrived in his hometown. All of this information can be ascertained by examining an epitaph upon which is cryptically inscribed the date of his passing from the world. This epitaph was composed by the famous poet Edip Harâbî (about whom we shall speak below), and it could once be found over the door to Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidîn's turbeh:

*This sublime dergâh's founder, Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Abidîn Baba,  
With pure sophistication was so graced by Allah.*

*Divinely guided and endorsed, of this there is no doubt,  
He knew the secrets of God's word both inside and out.*

*Both a caliph and a man stripped of passing pleasure;  
He was surely the Prophet's oft-spoken of hidden treasure.*

*A master of divine knowledge, if it's said do not be shocked,  
For the mystery of Bismillah and of <sup>c</sup>Alî, he unlocked.*

*Graced by the secret of "Who knows" and the bâ's dot;  
He was, we say, the hidden secret of God forever sought.*

*In the Rûmi year Harâbî wrote this ornamented date;  
The speaking Kur'ân he was, the word of God most great.*

*The Forty and Balim Sultān from his date we can glean;  
Knowledge of God forever radiates from Baba Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Abidīn.*

Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidīn enjoyed an expansive poetic talent and he composed poems in both Turkish and Albanian. In one of his Turkish poems he describes the grand opening of his tekke in Leskovik, which took place in the year 1293 of the Hijrah Calendar (corresponding to the year 1889):

*Come, O soul, don't hang outside – a place of affection this is;  
For the destitute and hungry a place of enchantment this is!*

*With remembrance of the One, heart and khāniqāh polish;  
For of God, Muṣṭafā and Murtazā an observation post this is!*

*Khadijah and Fāṭimah, source of the believers' enlightenment;  
To secrets of the City of Knowledge a place of guidance this is!*

*Dwellers of this dergāh are servants of Sheppir and Shepper;  
Come to remember God; the tekke of Zayn ul-Ābā this is!*

*Bākır, Ja<sup>c</sup>far, Kāzim, and Rızā too, here are discernible;  
A place where Taķī and Naķī bring spiritual life this is!*

*<sup>c</sup>Askarī's soldiers the dervishes of this dergāh are;  
A place secured by the might of Muḥammad Mahdī this is!*

*O <sup>c</sup>Abidīn! This much-desired target in 1,293 came to be.  
Guided by Balim, a lodge of the Bektashi celibate this is!*

We trust this poem needs no explanation. Therefore, let us look at one of Baba <sup>c</sup>Abidīn's poems composed in Albanian in which he eulogizes Dūrbalī Sultān, Sayyid <sup>c</sup>Alī Sultān and his own spiritual master, Maḥzūnī Baba:

*O Dūrbalī! Lend me your aid,  
I am your kūl, one who's not strayed.  
Your Karam, Maḥzūnī, give to me please!  
O Nūrleri Nūrī my heart set at ease!*

*O my sultan, my Sayyid <sup>c</sup>Alī,  
Sanctified secret of Bektash Veli,  
Descendant of blessed Paygamar's line,  
O Rūm Serveri, my plea don't decline!*

*Your hand brings Karāmat profusely  
Pouring out like kūm moving swiftly.  
Such astounding jilwa you possess,  
O Rūm Serveri, allay my distress!*

*You moved the stones that blocked our way;  
“Great Haydar” you were found to say;  
The seas you made for us a road,  
O Rūm Serveri, help carry my load!*

*Your hand, O great and noble Shah,  
Embodies the holy ayah “Yadullah.”  
From our rāh every hindrance you move,  
O Rūm Serveri, my tender heart sooth!*

*With the vast kuwwat that you emit,  
Throughout the day we benefit.  
Profuse karāmat you possess,  
O Rūm Serveri with it do bless!*

*His magnificence lift up with praise,  
Speak, O ‘Abidīn, without delays;  
Some marhamat we are truly needing,  
O Rūm Serveri, you will find us pleading!*

This poem was composed at a time when the Albanian language had yet to be refashioned into the form we know today. Consequently, we find a significant amount of Arabic, Persian and Turkish loanwords in these lines that must be explained.

The word **kūl** means “servant”; **karam** means “munificence”; **Yā Nūrleri Nūrī** means “O Light of Lights”; **Paygamar** means “God’s Messenger,” that is to say the great Muhammad; **server** can be translated as “prince”, thus **Rūm Serveri** means “Prince of Rūm” (i.e. the Balkans); **karāmat** means “miracle”; **kūm** means “sand”; **jilwa**, in this case, means “splendor”; **ayah** is a Qur’ānic verse. **Yadullah** means the “Hand of God,” which here refers to this particular verse of the Qur’ān:

*Surely those who swear allegiance to  
you do but swear allegiance to God;  
the Hand of God is over their hands....*

《Sūrat al-Fātḥ 48:10》

God's hand being over their hands means that God's power is over their power. The meaning of **rāh** is "path"; **kuwwat** means "power"; and finally, **marhamat** means "compassion." Having provided this explanation, let us take a look at another of Baba 'Abidīn's Albanian-language poems, one in which he praises the Twelve Imāms and their manifestation in Hajjī Bektash Velī:

*With the muhur of nubūwwat,  
With the sword of wilāyat,  
With Sheppir and Shepper unforgot,  
Came dhāt-i pāk-i Khunkār.*

*With Hasan's wisdom arcane,  
With the jamāl of Imām Husayn,  
With the 'ibādat of Imām Zayn,  
Came dhāt-i pāk-i Khunkār*

*Like Bākir had displayed,  
Like Imām Ja'far prayed,  
With kamāl ever-praised,  
Came dhāt-i pāk-i Khunkār*

*Gazab left with Kāzimi,  
'Alī Rīzā, our Destegīri,  
The Ahl ul-Bayt we seek out really,  
In dhāt-i pāk-i Khunkār!*

*Jōmerd like Jawād-u Takī,  
'Alī Nakī dhāt-i pakī,  
'Askarī showed us his ḥifāti,  
In dhāt-i pāk-i Khunkār!*

*Mahdī Sāhib uz-Zamān,  
He himself is our sultan,  
With 'ashk cry 'Abidin, "Amān!"  
For dhāt-i pāk-i Khunkār!*

Let us now explain some of the points in this poem that might be unfamiliar to our readers, in addition to the vocabulary it utilizes: The word **muhur** is Persian for "seal" or "stamp"; **nubūwwat** means "prophethood" and **wilāyat**

“sainthood” and these are Arabic words. As we have explained earlier **Sheppir** and **Shepper** are the ancient Syriac forms of the names Hasan and Husayn. The word **dhāt** means “essence” in Arabic and **pāk** means “pure” in Persian. Therefore **dhāt-i pāk Khunkār** refers to that purified essence of Hajjī Bektash Velī, which came into this world bedecked with the qualities of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Hasan, Husayn and the rest of the Imāms.

**Jamāl** is Arabic for “beauty” or “splendor”; **ibādat** means “worship,” an act that personified Imām Zayn ul-‘Abidīn due to his incessant prostration in prayer. **Kamāl** means “completeness,” “maturity” or “perfection.” **Gazab** means “anger”, or “rage” in Arabic, while **kāzim** means one who drives away rage, a quality possessed by Imām Mūsā al-Kāzim.

**Destigīr** is a Persian word describing someone who lends a hand in time of need. Both **jōmerd** (Persian) and **jawad** (Arabic) mean “benevolent” and “generous.” **Sifāt** means “quality” or “attribute” in Arabic; while **Şāhib-i Zamān** means “Master of the Time” (i.e. Imām al-Mahdī).

## EDİB HARĀBĪ BABA

Edib Harābī Baba ranks among the most famous Bektashi poets of the last half of the nineteenth century. He was born in Istanbul in 1853. His given name was Ahmet Edib. When he began composing poetry he used the name Edib affixed to his moniker Harābī [the Turkish spelling of “Kharābī”], which means “Ruined One” in Arabic.

As is stated in one of his poems, Edib went to the Asian side of Istanbul at the age of seventeen to visit Mehmet ‘Alī Hilmī Dede’s tekke in the suburb of Merdivenköy. It was here that he received initiation into the Bektashi Order. This tekke greatly moved Edib Harābī’s heart, for it was a place that allowed him to expand spirituality – to the extent of eventually being raised to the rank of baba.

Harābī Baba dispensed his spiritual guidance from Istanbul, and many people became muhibs at his hand, among them the famed philosopher Rıza Tevfik – whose paternal lineage sprang from Dibér and whose life we shall discuss below. Rıza Tevfik became a great poet in his own right, producing a number of inspirational poems.

Harābī Baba was a very educated man. He was conversant in the multi-layered works of Ibn ‘Arabī and Rumi, in addition to those of other

great Islamic mystics. Harābī Baba possessed remarkable poetic talent and he often composed his verses spontaneously.

Harābī Baba passed from this world in 1917. Many Turkish scholars, including Prof. Sadettin Nuzhet Ergün, have declared Harābī Baba to be an amazing poet. He was a man who often spoke right to the point without timidity, in a language that was as piercing as it was extraordinary for the poets of his day.

Harābī Baba not only composed mystical poetry in the form of *nefes*, *ghazals*, and *rubā’ís*, he also wrote dramatic, satirical and elegiac poems, all of which eventually comprised his *divān*. The language he uses in these poems is both fragrant and enchanting, and his works are often filled with sarcastic cleverness. Such features will surely generate admiration in those who recite these lines. Harābī Baba’s elegance can be easily grasped in the examples we will provide below.

Here is a poem in which Harābī Baba presents the date of his birth as well as the date in which he received initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Mehmet Əlī Hilmī Dede:

*My father and mother the pretext,  
The agitation of two seas meeting.  
In one thousand two hundred sixty-nine  
I came into this world fleeting.*

*Barzakh I escaped – I washed my hands of it;  
At the age of seventeen I sought my heart’s profit;  
By Mehmet Hilmī Dede’s sublimely holy writ  
I came, thank God, to illumination beaming.*

*My name was first Edib – Harābī I became;  
Dust beneath the saintly feet I then became;  
A sacred book from Hakk I forevermore became;  
May love fill those taken by its reading!*

This poem should be relatively clear, though it should be noted that the second line of the first stanza refers to the Kur’ānic verse:

*It is He Who has let free the two bodies of flowing water:  
One palatable and sweet and the other salt and bitter; yet  
has He made a barrier between them,  
a partition that is forbidden to be passed.*

﴿Surat ul-Furqān 25:53﴾

The exoteric explanation of this verse can be found in numerous *Kur’ānic* commentaries, which basically state that God created two seas – one of salt water and the other of fresh – which meet at a divinely-decreed boundary where the two types of waters will not mix with each other.<sup>54</sup> The remainder of this poem should be understandable.

Let us look at one of *Harābī* Baba’s poems in which he praises the great Bektashi saint, *Balīm Sultān*:

*In no way can it close, O you who dissociate,  
This vast maydān of Pir Balīm Sultān.  
Boldly unto Doomsday its light shall penetrate –  
This mystic epoch of Pir Balīm Sultān.*

*Slaves on the road to God, dust they are,  
Aware of the secrets of Lawlāka’s Shah they are,  
Men of virtue, pure and chaste they are,  
These dervishes of Pir Balīm Sultān.*

*With God’s aid this moment we acquired;  
Of this vague secret, with knowledge we’re inspired;  
It’s not the lot of every man to seek this goal desired –  
The arkān of Pir Balīm Sultān.*

*God’s secrets can surely stump the mind;  
We’re aware of these ... but we tell not what we find,  
For such things are not told to the unrefined –  
These hidden mysteries of Pir Balīm Sultān.*

*Muṣṭafā Muḥammad and master Haydar,  
Shepper and Sheppir, Fāṭimah the Star,  
The prophets and the saints, all that there are,  
Sing songs of praise for Pir Balīm Sultān.*

*The zāhid’s scorn does not make us grieve;  
God’s saints guard us, in this we believe;  
O Harābī! Fear not, for all that you need  
Is the endless care of Pir Balīm Sultān.*

The meaning of this poem should be relatively clear, although we should say that in the second stanza reference is made to this *ḥadīth ķudsī*,



Edib Harābī Baba,  
1853-1917

“If not for you [O Muḥammad] I would not have created creation.” We have discussed this matter many times above, so there is no need to open a discussion of it here. **Lawlāka** is an Arabic word meaning “If not for you” and it is directly related to this ḥadīth. Having offered this clarification, let us examine another of Harābī Baba’s nefes poems:

*When <sup>c</sup>Alī beheld the bright prophetic light,  
In Muḥammad was placed the faith of <sup>c</sup>Alī.  
'Tis for this reason that God, exalted in might,  
Bestowed sainthood upon the noble <sup>c</sup>Alī.*

*Without prophethood, sainthood cannot be;  
And prophethood is opened by sainthood's holy key;  
Reject this hallowed fact and truth you will not see.  
Those who've know this not, remain in misery.*

*Aḥmad is a messenger sent by God's command;  
In Aḥmad's holy shadow saintly <sup>c</sup>Alī Ḥaydar stands;  
Both brought into being by God Most High, Most Grand.  
Each and every saint with his tongue gave this decree.*

*Everything is *Hakk*, know this without a doubt;  
<sup>c</sup>Alī's surely *Hakk*, yet by *Hakk* he's brought about.*

*"He's Absolute Creator," some people may well shout,  
But whoso says such things speaks futile fantasy.*

*Prophet and Saint as one stand in awe of the Real;  
They arrived to the point where *Hakk* is revealed;  
Within, O *Harābī*, you'll find *Hakk* is concealed;  
Displayed through you may its beauty be!*

Let us examine these verses further:

In the first stanza, *Harābī* Baba tells us that God directly conferred prophethood (*nubūwwah*) upon His beloved Muḥammad and sainthood (*wilāyah*) on the exalted *‘Alī*. He also tells us that prophethood and sainthood are inextricably bound to each other and cannot be separated. According to our spiritual teachings, a wayfarer must reach the level of perfection before he can enter the station of sainthood, and in the past God selected his prophets from those men who had first attained sainthood. Therefore, this poem states that without the station sainthood there could have been no prophets, for it was from the ranks of the saints that the prophets emerged. Conversely, without prophets, there could have been no saints, given that saints must be connected to a prophet from whom they can receive God's revelation. It is through revelation that people acquire faith, and being endowed with faith, they are presented with the possibility of reaching perfection, thereby become saints. Therefore, without belief in the Prophet Muḥammad, no one can truly become a saint.

In the fourth stanza, *Harābī* Baba expresses a concept held by nearly all Islamic mystics, that of *waḥdat ul-wujūd*. Although we have discussed this concept in detail, we shall nevertheless reiterate it here. Given that everything in existence is dependent on God, nothing truly possesses an independent essence. The ultimate essence belongs to God, and everything else is but a mirror of this boundless reality. Therefore, it can be said that everything is in a sense divine; but these creations are not the absolute Creator, who alone is God. *Harābī* Baba tells us that all those who think otherwise and attribute the state of absolute godhood to the exalted *‘Alī* are simply being childish and such folk have no understanding of spiritual philosophy whatsoever. God – declares the last stanza – can be found in *Harābī*'s heart, because God dwells in all purified hearts. Having given this explanation, let us take a look at another of *Harābī* Baba's poems:

*Worship carried out with self-righteous piety  
Is an offence against the One who covers sin.  
Such a prayer ousts one from the Community  
And engulfs the Prophet's way in chagrin.*

*Without ḥarākat none can be a believer;  
Of prophetic light they'll not be a receiver.  
The prophetic truth they'll not soon discover,  
Bowing up and down while facing a wall.*

*God has lowered a curtain over their eyes;  
"No," you say, "God is in the earth and skies."  
Let's prove it! Come and see wherein Hakk lies,  
Let's make prostration towards the visage!*

*Hush, O Harābī! What sort of man are you?  
You say things they might misconstrue;  
Refrain from this, or perhaps you'll run askew  
And go against Haydar-ı Karrar and Khunkār!*

Let us now explain this poem:

In the first stanza, Harābī Baba tells us that we should not worship God merely to gain Paradise after our deaths. For those who have been granted spiritual awareness, such prayers are the prayers of hypocrites since they are performed solely to obtain something from God. In fact, were it not to gain some sort of compensation for their worship, most people probably wouldn't pray at all!

A spiritual wayfarer, however, must worship with full sincerity, praying solely out of the love he has for God. This love springs from the gratitude one feels for being created and then bestowed with many blessings. This should be the reason (and the only reason) for our prostration before God.

Ideally, all worship must be performed with *ḥuzūr*. As we have mentioned above, *ḥuzūr* means praying with such focus that all other thoughts save God are removed from our minds. We should go so far in this focus that we envision God right in front of us. Did not Imām ʻAlī once say: "I would not worship a God I could not see"?

Harābī Baba then tells us that when a prayer fails to meet these conditions it can justifiably be considered fake, for God and His Messenger do not accept such worship. The wayfarer can learn the essentials of genuine

prayer – the poem states – by stepping foot on the ḥaḍīṭ, the mystic path. Those who are too engrossed with exoteric religion, spending their time preoccupied with empty ritual, will be unable to find true faith. Let us now have a look at one last poem by Harābī Baba:

*Whoever traverses the mystic way,  
Hazrat-i Sattār he'll come to know.  
Whoever gives bay'at to the guide, yea,  
Ahmad-i Mukhtār he'll come to know.*

*Whoever surrendered and gave up his head,  
Whoever renounced the evil that's spread,  
Whoever discerned what the rahbar had said,  
Haydar-i Karrar he'll come to know.*

*Don't hang back! From forgetfulness awake;  
The kiblah of the Face do not forsake;  
Into your hand the murshid's skirt take,  
Then the skirt of the Khunkār you'll come to know.*

*Listen a little to these words and take heed,  
To find Ḥaqq, coyness and niyāz you'll need.  
If the zāhid with namāz his ego feeds,  
The kiblah of a mere wall he'll come to know.*

*Many are those who can't comprehend;  
They're unaware of the things that lie within.  
But whoever has on the Night Journey been,  
The Face of the Friend he'll come to know.*

*He who his promised pledge maintains,  
An example of goodness his face enframes;  
Whosoever constant in his word remains,  
The given affirmation he'll come to know.*

*Whoever knows as a human how to behave,  
And to God's Messenger has become a slave;  
He's buried the ego with dust from the grave;  
Both the gallows and the hung he'll come to know.*

*Who's fully absorbed in traveling the Way,  
If he's able to regulate all that he says,  
And the penchants of the loins he can allay,  
The bound rope girdle he'll come to know.*

*Whoever has faith in the speech of Harābī,  
 Whoever fulfills the command and decree,  
 Whoever gains knowledge and Hakk comes to see,  
 Behold! These secrets he'll come to know.*

Let us now deal with those points in this poem that may need some explaining: **Hazrat-i Sattār** is one of God's attributes, meaning "Concealer of sins." Harābī Baba tells us that whosoever is bound in love to his murshid and has given **bay'at** (the initiatory oath) is, in essence, grasping the hand of the original spiritual master: The exalted Prophet Muḥammad, who passed his spiritual knowledge on to the glorious ʻAlī – as we have previously discussed. Consequently, whosoever obeys his murshid will come to know the station of Imām ʻAlī, the first and foremost master of the mystic path.

In the subsequent verses, Harābī Baba tells us: "Go and embrace that murshid who knows the mystic station of Hajjī Bektash Veli. He will show you the spiritual path of the Khunkār. He will acquaint you with the Pīr's way and guide you along it." Everything is manifest through that true murshid who comprehends the visage of God. Anyone who worships on his own, without the illumination of a spiritual master, will see nothing other than walls when he bows and prostrates in the mosque.

For the wayfarer, this spiritual path – says Harābī Baba – is like the miraculous **Night Journey** (Isrā' wa'l-Mi'rāj) of the Prophet, during which he beheld the majesty of God's countenance. We believe that the other points in this poem should be clear to our readers.

In conclusion, we will say that in addition to the ones we have presented here, Harābī Baba produced many other poems – some perhaps even more charming and striking. However, we do not possess the space to reproduce all of these.

## FILOZOF RIZA TEVFIK

Filozof Rıza Tevfik ranks among the most famous of our Bektashi poets and writers, and he happens to be of partial Albanian descent. Both his name and his deeds attained high distinction around the world. He was the son of Hodja Mehmet Tevfik, a man who hailed from Upper Dibér (tr. Debre) and was of the Bölkükbaşı clan. Hodja Mehmet was a learned man,

having finished his secondary education at the Fatih Medrese in Istanbul. He later graduated from Istanbul University's faculty of administration. Hodja Mehmet studied philosophy on his own. This allowed him to become acquainted with the thinking of the ancient Greeks, so much so that he gave private lessons to several notables of his day, like Əlî Rıza Pasha, Rashid Pasha, and many others.

While he was living in the town of Jisr-i Mustafapasha (present-day Svilengrad, Bulgaria), Hodja Mehmet Tevfik married a Circassian refugee named Münire Hanım. Here Rıza Tevfik was born in 1868. He mentions his ancestry in this stanza:

*My father's from Albania,  
In Debre he came to be.  
My mother's from Circassia,  
What memories gave they to me!*

The biography of Rıza Tevfik has since spread far and wide, and people from many lands have written about him – which is not surprising given that this great man became well-known after having wandered nearly the entire globe. After his death in 1949 Turkish scholars have been very interested in Rıza Tevfik, and they have written books about his life and works. One of these academics, Hilmi Yücebaş, published a 230-page book in 1958 on Rıza Tevfik's philosophy entitled *Filozof Rıza Tevfik: Hayati-Hatırları-Şiirleri*, from which we have taken this lengthy segment discussing his biography:

Rıza Tevfik's father – a provincial sub-prefect in the city of Edirne – was named Mehmet Tevfik. At a young age, Rıza was placed in a school run by the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Afterwards, he studied at the famed Galatasaray Lisesi. Because of his unruly behavior, Rıza had to change schools several times. In the end, he entered medical school, although he was expelled two or three times. Nevertheless, Rıza insisted on continuing his studies until he graduated as a physician. He held a position for a while as a medical doctor for the imperial customs office. Afterwards, he became a member of Istanbul's Council of Physicians.

During the time of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, Rıza Tevfik drew attention to himself with his poems, critiques, and

writings, and he joined the New Cultural Organization that had formed in Istanbul. He wrote articles for the magazine *Ma'lumat* and he was elected as a deputy for Edirne when the parliament was established for the first time in Turkey. Rıza Tevfik was an early associate of the Committee of Union and Progress. However, he later came into conflict with the leaders of this group because of political differences and was consequently jailed. Disenchanted, he dropped out of politics altogether and decided to devote himself to solely cultural and literary composition.

Nevertheless, Rıza Tevfik could not keep himself above the clamor and tumult of politics, and he participated as minister of education in the cabinet of Damat Ferid Pasha. He later became chairman of the State Council, and he was a special envoy to the Paris Peace Conference after World War I.

Rıza Tevfik became a professor of philosophy at Istanbul University after the war. During the days of the War of Independence his students grew to despise him because of his opposition to the nationalist movement, and as a result, he was forced to resign from his teaching position. Moreover, when the national liberation movement triumphed under Kemal Atatürk, Rıza Tevfik fled Turkey and remained in exile for twenty-two years, being barred entry into the country by the new regime.

When Rıza Tevfik returned to Turkey from exile in 1943 (having been granted amnesty), he was quite old. He settled down and began to write poetry and cultural essays for various newspapers and magazines in Istanbul. In 1948 the newspaper *Yeni Sabah* published his reminiscences under the title "Let me also speak a little." Rıza Tevfik's literary works are:

- His poems were collected into a volume entitled *Serāb-ı Ömriüm*, which was published for the first time in Cyprus in 1934 and for a second time in Istanbul in 1949.
- *Abdülhak Hāmid ve Mülāhazāt-ı Felsefiyesi*, which was printed in 1913.
- *Felsefe Dersleri*, printed in 1914.
- *Mufassal Kāmūs-ı Felsefe*, 2 thick volumes, printed in 1914.
- *Rubā'iyāt-ı Ömer Hayyam*, translated from Persian into Turkish in collaboration with Professor Hüseyin Daniş, and printed in 1922.

Aside from these works, there are countless poems and essays of cultural value that have been published in many the literary magazines and journals of our country.

Filozof Rıza Tevfik was acquainted with eight different languages, both ancient and modern. From the standpoint of self-awareness, he found Bektashism suitable to his spiritual disposition and he received initiation into its path. He continued on this mystic way until he obtained the rank of baba. Those of his poems written as nefes have long remained vivid in the memory of Bektashis, who still recite them with great zeal.

This virtuous man, this Rıza Tevfik – a man never given to deceit and belittling, a man never stretching out his hand to anyone, a man never giving value to the material world, a man never compromising his principles – passed away from this fleeting world on Friday, the 30th of December, 1949. On that day, this brilliant and priceless being obtained God's grace and mercy, and he was allowed to enter into the comfort of Paradise. May his memory remain unforgotten! I would like to close Rıza Tevfik's biography with a little poem written in his honor:

*O Rıza! Lay your head in worship and listen!  
Let the stones speak about your grief.  
Let me too speak of this tale, so listen.  
This splendid past is gone, taken by a thief.*

(October 16, 1956. Istanbul)

Filozof Rıza Tevfik attained the mystical awareness offered by the Bektashi Path through his murshid, Edip Harābī Baba. He explains his experience in this poem:

*Quite idle was I in the Realm of Unity;  
Heedless, into this vexing world I entered.  
At Alastu's feast, I drank with great impunity;  
On my own accord, into troubles I entered.  
  
I had no contrary manner at all;  
It wasn't haphazard, though great was my fall;  
I had no business in this poultry market sprawl.  
Finding no space, into brawls with folk I entered.  
  
I spent my breath vying with everyone;  
On my own, I gathered a flock, one by one.*

*I fell into chitchat, a teacher I'd become.  
By God, what a fruitless matter I entered!*

*I obeyed Satan's hints, yet in Hakk I believed.  
By training our state, I thought it could be achieved.  
They said, "This world's heaven!" This too I conceived.  
An inescapable fantasy I entered.*

*What gain had I made, of what use was I?  
I found many foes; but a friend I sought nearby.  
I groped all about; I examined earth and sky.  
I was tossed into prison, yet the palace I entered.*

*In my heart, I beheld an abundant desire,  
My breast became a target for cursed Yazid's ire,  
My hand was grasped firmly by one to admire;  
At that point into God's holy path I entered.*

*I came to the convent where all lovers gather;  
Harābī by fate in this place I encounter;  
Celestial water are his words, and he's the cup-bearer;  
Now, into the utmost paradise I entered.*

*I've found, O Riza, the one whom I've sought.  
I've entered into love, and leave I'll it not.  
Before the Beloved, erased I've been brought.  
Endless purity and pleasure I entered.*

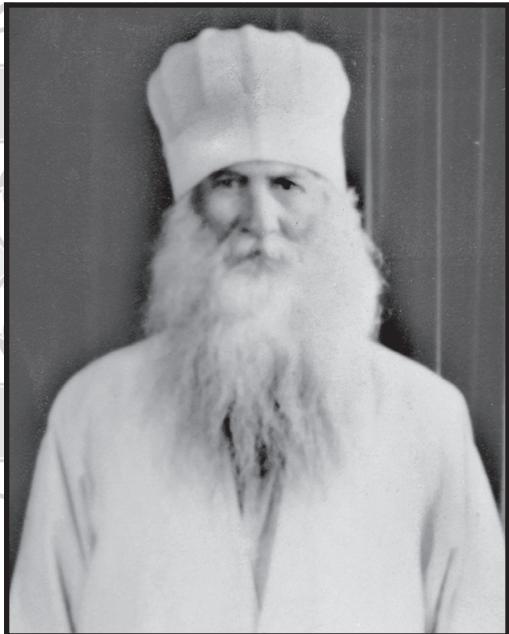
Let us now explain this poem:

In the first verse Riza Tevfik tells us that when he was in the **Realm of Oneness** (i.e. the state before birth), he knew nothing about the condition of the material world. When he came into it – without knowing what it demanded – he soon found out that he had entered into a place of troubles and afflictions. We should understand through these lines that no matter how comfortable we may try to make it, we will never be able to physically escape the tribulations, worries, and pains of the material world.

Knowing nothing about the customs and ways of the material world, Riza Tevfik then tells us that it all seemed to him like a noisy **poultry market**, where people give and take, trading this and that with one another, and so on. Before entering this “market”, he was in a state of tranquility, unattached from such responsibilities; but now he has been forced to deal with the clamor and mayhem of life.



Filozof Rıza Tevfik,  
1869-1949



Throughout the course of the poem Rıza Tevfik tells us how, being imprisoned in the material world, he spent his life in pain and how he finally discovered a means of escape by way of Harābī Baba. By taking his murshid's hand, Rıza Tevfik was able to gain sublime contentment once more by stripping away his attachment to the material world. Having presented this explanation, let us take a look at another of his poems:

*Come on dervish! Don't walk in the wilderness;  
Trust me! Everything you seek is in you.  
Don't vex yourself with irritations endless;  
If the Ka'bah's your goal, Ar-Rahmān's in you...*

*Roaming the desert, at the mirage don't look;  
As you say "Allah! Allah!" to the sky don't look;  
If it's Hakk you truly seek, gaze not into a book.  
If you can read it, the whole Kur'ān is in you...*

*You split one hair into forty with your learning.  
Who is it that you seek with all your searching?  
In the dream it was only you you were seeing;  
The One who built this empty dome is in you...*

*Don't say knowledge is splitting a hair into forty;  
Don't say it's good for him but horrid for me;  
Don't say that is true, but with this I won't agree!  
One of them is without a source; the lie is in you...*

*Don't give distinct meanings to faith and faithlessness;  
Don't come to doubt and certainty a muddled mess;  
If you're wise, realize the secret manifest!  
Your misgivings are faithlessness; faith is in you...*

*Enter the heart's city and take a stroll there.  
What are sun and atom? Can they compare?  
It's you who's capable of good and bad; so take care!  
If you lean towards evil, Satan is in you...*

*If you say, "May *Hakk* be seen in its perfection!"  
Leave the ego first, then look at your reflection;  
Let your tongue shout "*Ana'l-Hakk*" without objection;  
Don't give ear to idle talk; knowledge is in you...*

*To begin with, take the *nafs* out of the way;  
From dyeing yourself white or black stay away;  
Within the heart, the Maker's light's on display.  
Don't wander in darkness; God is in you...*

*I've heard word that you're a fatherless child,  
Born in paradise but then kicked into the wild.  
Excess you desire, yet by it you're beguiled;  
How is this God's fault? Rebellion is in you...*

*Seeking elsewhere for your pain an actual remedy,  
Did you give being to ant and snake willingly?  
If you left, O drifter, the tranquil gardens heavenly,  
The serpent that deceived Mother Eve is in you...*

*If you're ordinary, though your fame is lofty,  
If you're a pagan praying to all you see,  
If on the wine of love you're completely tipsy,  
Come to your senses, lover, the Beloved is in you...*

*"*Hakk*," the fool says gazing at manifestations;  
He lights a lamp in every corner's location;  
This flood of events courses without cessation;  
What endures forever is in you...*

*Life's radiating source is found within you;  
The breaths of all who come and go are too.  
Don't be dazed in wonder, for this cosmos you view  
Is but a single drop; the ocean is in you...*

*Within your essence is the essence of every being;  
What views yourself as many is narrow seeing;  
What rules this domain is the word you're speaking;  
Your body is a throne; the Sultan is in you...*

*It's not possible Riza for you to deny the Real;  
The face of the Beloved has been to you revealed;  
The secret of secrets you now find unconcealed;  
The bliss of the world's Creator is in you...*

Let us now explain this poem:

Both the focus and spirit of this poem are very much interconnected with the spiritual principles that we have explained throughout this book. In the first stanza, Rıza Tevfik declares: “O dervish! You do not need to travel high and low to find Truth; you already have everything within you. Right and wrong, integrity and iniquity, are all within you. In fact, God Almighty has His focal point right in your heart. He may be veiled, but His abode – the true Ka‘bah – is there!”

In the second stanza, Rıza Tevfik tells us: “You wander all over looking for Truth. You lift your head to up to the sky calling out ‘Allah! Allah!’ and you recite various holy books in an effort to find God. You do this all the while not knowing that He is within you.” In fact, Rıza Tevfik expresses this mystical truth in different ways throughout the length of this poem.

The **fatherless child** Rıza Tevfik mentions in the ninth stanza is Adam, the first human being. The event that occurred in paradise is the well-known story of the serpent’s entering the garden and lying to Adam, causing him to eat from the forbidden tree and then to be exiled. Having given this explanation let us examine another of Rıza Tevfik’s poems:

*Wait dervish! Let me ask you a cryptic question:  
Did you see the smoke of presence on Mount Sinai?  
Blood drips from the wound; let me bring medication.  
The flames of “Thou wilt not see Me!” did you see with your eyes?*

*"There is the face of God" are words without measure;  
Without goblet, "Ana'l-Hakk" is an intoxicating pleasure;  
With your muddled thoughts on the Hidden Treasure  
Did you see an imperfect Mi'rāj on this mystic path?*

*When you heard the call and ran to Sinai,  
And to the Beloved yourself you sought to tie,  
Despite disorder's guile the secret you still came by,  
Did you see the friend without a bit of perception?*

*He who hasn't dared drink pre-eternity's wine  
"Show me!" will be met with "No!" every time;  
The curtain was raised on the Mi'rāj night sublime;  
Did you see the goal of those who have arrived?*

*Was anything conveyed while you read the book?  
Or from a talk whose words to heart you took?  
Did you push away the veil and have a look?  
Did you see the mysteries arrayed in front of you?*

*In the mirror of "Whoever knows himself" gaze!  
See where traits and deeds, a sign of "But the Real" stays.  
If you're a knower such luster you can appraise;  
Where are you? Did you see such faith within you?*

*Many years of travel, darling, have passed us by;  
You've absorbed a book that contains no lie;  
"Dervish" and "kalandar" to yourself can you apply?  
Did you see Riza as a guide, a sultan?*

Let us now explain this poem:

The first stanza alludes to an event that occurred in the life of Moses, an event that we have explained earlier. Moses ascended Mount Sinai (*Jabal at-Tūr*) to hear the words of God and receive heavenly commandments. When he reached the designated spot, Moses heard only a voice, as his eyes were unable to see God, who was the source of the voice. As *Kur'ān* commentators have explained, the blazing bush from where the voice emerged was much adorned with angels and other heavenly delights – in short, everything invisible to the eyes of common folk. Moses was so intoxicated by the sight of such supernatural splendor that he thought he was in paradise. He cried

out to God, begging: “My Lord! Show Thyself to me so that I may gaze upon Thee.” However, God replied:

*...Thou wilt not see Me,  
but gaze upon the mountain...*

﴿Sūrat al-‘A'rāf 7:143﴾

When Moses cast his gaze upon the mountain, he saw it quake and crumble to dust and smoke, as it was utterly obliterated. Moses lost consciousness on account of the awesomeness of this spectacle. Given that this event occurred on a Friday, this day has become an auspicious day for making ƙurbans, animal sacrifices. When he came to, Moses began praying to God, seeking forgiveness for his imprudent request. God forgave him and bestowed upon him the prophetic mission.<sup>55</sup>

The words **Tūr, smoke** and **flames** all relate to this event as well as the above-mentioned verse: “You shall not see me.” The second stanza of the poem points to another Ƙur’ānic verse, which is:

*Unto God belong the East and the West,  
and wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of God.*

﴿Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:115﴾

The words **I am God** refer to yet another verse in the Ƙur’ān. These words were revealed to Moses as he walked towards what he thought was a fire burning from afar, seeking to take a little of it to warm his family on their journey to Egypt – a story we have explained earlier in this book. Nevertheless, here is the full verse:

*Indeed, I am God!  
There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and  
establish prayer for My remembrance.*

﴿Sūrah Tā-Hā 20:14﴾

The **Hidden Treasure**, as we have explained many times as well, is taken from the ḥadīth ƙudsī:

*I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known.  
Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known.*

Rıza Tevfik tells us in this verse that if the wayfarer is not perceptive enough to grasp the meaning of “Unto God belong the East and the West”

or “Indeed, I am God! So worship me,” and if there is uncertainty in regards to knowing the “Hidden Treasure,” the mystic journey will be incomplete, even if the wayfarer were to sail through the heavens on a *Mi’rāj* comparable Prophet Muḥammad’s supernatural journey. He will be unable to reach the most sought-after goal of beholding God. Therefore, he must put an end to these deficiencies so he can arrive at the threshold of the Beloved.

This is why Moses – declares the third stanza – cried out when he stood on Mountain Sinai: “O God! Let me see you!” However, he was not fully prepared for such a sight, and God refused to reveal His divine splendor. God answered this plea with these words: “Thou wilt not see Me, but...” as we have explained above. Moses grew bewildered and disconsolate until he erased his shortcomings. When this work was achieved, spiritual illumination filled his heart and his request was granted.

This also helps to explain the fourth stanza, where Rıza Tevfik tells us: “If you are not intoxicated and dissolved in love of God at the outset of your journey, you can beg God with all of your prayers to reveal Himself, but you will continue to get the response of ‘Thou wilt not see Me!’”

The last verse of this stanza refers to the Prophet Muḥammad, who in erasing any shortcomings he might have once possessed, was able to lift the veil during the ‘*Isrā’ wa’l-Mi’rāj*. On this astounding night, he beheld the countenance of God, as he once narrated: “I saw my Lord on the Night of the *Mi’rāj*.”

The meaning of the word **anything** at the start of the fifth stanza is divine inspiration, which at an intensified level was bestowed upon the messengers of God (*rusul*) when they were sent to their communities with revealed scripture. Other divinely-chosen individuals, the prophets (*anbiyā’*), were given righteous words issuing from their mouths to teach faith and virtue to people.

The meaning of the line **Did you push away the veil and have a look** in the fifth stanza refers to the perfected lover dissolving in the divine, completely rending the veil that separates him from the Beloved. Those of us wayfarers who are unable to reach perfection will obviously be unable see God, at least in this lifetime.

In the following stanza the phrase **Whoever knows himself** refers to the Prophet Muḥammad’s famous words: “Whosoever knows himself has

known his Lord.” Therefore the meaning of the line is that if we seek to tread this difficult path, we must at some point come to know who we are, for it is in our own mirror that we will find God, His attributes, and His doings. As soon as we do this, we will attain enlightenment and awareness of the divine, as stated by the Prophet Muḥammad. The rest of the verses in this poem should be clear and in no need of further explanation.

Here is another poem from Rıza Tevfik, one in which he describes a muhabet headed long ago by his murshid, Harābī Baba, as well as the loving devotion he still carries for his departed master guide:

*We miss the times that have gone by, which we lived happily;  
Our drifting heart, so restless now, is filled with misery.  
We haven't told a single soul about our hidden pain,  
For the legend of our sorrow takes too long to explain.*

*Before the Age of Mourning to this rose patch was hurled,  
We said to one another, “Let's cheer up this tattered world!”  
The deeply loved, the intimates of lovers foolhardy,  
Had been invited to the feast of love and mirth and glee.*

*We skillfully awakened all the souls that lay at rest;  
We caused the Sea of Oneness to churn and toss and crest.  
We lit love's holy candle and we made it burn so bright;  
Hearts they fluttered like crazed moths bedazzled by the light.*

*To the belov'd I handed willingly my soul, a gift in hand,  
And I led into the maydān fair the sacrosanct kurbān.  
Into this present era came a beauty bright and fair.  
He raised his veil and showed his face, a moon without compare!*

*The sparkle of his beauty gave the moon its brilliant shine;  
And from his moon, a ray of light filled up my glass of wine.  
Shouts of pleasure mixed with sounds of harp and violin;  
The cries of “Ever-living!” gave the soul adrenaline.*

*Hearts came out and prostrated in love to one another;  
Mesmerized, I found myself with an angel-looking wonder.  
His conduct seemed so cavalier, his nature free and wild;  
His disposition positive, his thoughts made one beguiled.*

*The heart inclines to fast entwine as soon as it's set free;  
 The instant that we met, we turned into fond devotees.  
 As inebriation opened up, I gazed into his eyes.  
 What's this wondrous thing, O Lord, wherein such marvel lies?*

*When all the saints came in as one and held a drinking party,  
 Our rightful share we found outright in a swig that was so hearty.  
 Within his rosebud mouth there stayed a solitary drop;  
 His fiery lips of rosy wine inspired without stop.*

*We recollected thoughtfully an age that had long passed;  
 This place of ruin showered us with joy that's unsurpassed.  
 From hand to hand we passed a goblet filled with rosy wine;  
 The sākī came and gave to us a glass of drink divine!*

*"This too shall pass!" we cried out loud; "Yā Hū!" we'd take a drink;  
 When the saz began to cry and wail, in agony we'd sink.  
 While altered into drips and drops, like seas we tossed and churned;  
 In yearning for the visage fair our souls in passion burned.*

*We saved a day in this here world that was so free of care;  
 We've brought illumination to the eye filled with despair.  
 We didn't open to the Friend – we spoke in subtlety;  
 Soon there came into our sight love's boundless mystery.*

*Know, O Riza, that this crown brings wisdom to your head;  
 Once more you've hung an ornament at talent's banquet-spread.  
 Your praise was written in the record from the very start.  
 In the lovers' feast, your honored name is mentioned from the heart.*

This poem should be clear and in no need of explanation, save that the first verse of the last stanza refers to a Persian proverb: “Wisdom is a golden crown (*tāj*). Indeed! Place it on your head and go wherever you will!” Additionally, the word **sākī** means “cup-bearer.” Having presented this explanation, let us take a look at a poem by Riza Tevfik in which he advises religious fanatics to abandon their ritualistic zealotry:

*Come, O zāhid! Let go the Kur'ān from your embrace;  
 You haven't taken a bit of guidance from this book.  
 With wax has the great Creator sealed it in its place.  
 There's not a thing from its pages that you took!*

*In Man the hidden mystery was expressed;  
To the material word, he brought life manifest.  
Yet to prostrate to Adam did curs'd Shayṭān protest;  
Try your best to take some profit from his story!*

*In Adam's image God the Merciful appeared,  
In his beauty, the Kur'ān's mystery appeared,  
The manifested might of His sacred words appeared.  
If you're going to worship, at least worship Ḥakk!*

*God is not found in a house; He's utter mystery.  
Who prostrates to four walls does so foolishly;  
The purpose of the Hajj is to make the heart ready;  
Hey! You too, O senseless one, prepare the heart!*

*Don't drain yourself, O Riza, in some distant place;  
Don't stay on the road with a zeal that's misplaced;  
Over sandy wilderness, in vain you have paced;  
Veer off a bit into the region of the heart!*

Let us now explain this poem:

In the first stanza, Rıza Tevfik tells us that God's presence cannot be found merely through reading books, even if those books contain sacred scripture. We must find God within ourselves (or in our murshid) by scrubbing our hearts clean with righteousness. Therefore, awaken, O confused one! Don't remain slumbering while you read all of your books. Rather enter within and behold the mysteries of God!

The second and third stanzas of the poem refer to this event mentioned in the Kur'ān:

*And when We said unto the angels:  
Prostrate yourselves before Adam,  
they fell prostrate, all save Iblis.  
He demurred through pride,  
and so became a disbeliever.*

﴿Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:34﴾

The lines in the second stanza are likewise based on a verse from the Kur'ān, where God says:

*And when thy Lord said unto the angels:  
Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth*  
﴿Surat al-Baqarah 2:30﴾

The phrase **His sacred words** in the third stanza alludes to this particular Kur'ānic verse, which says:

*And He taught Adam the names of all things...*  
﴿Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:31﴾

In the fourth stanza, Rıza Tevfik tells us that God abides in a pure heart – as stated in the hadīth ķudsī we have presented many times above. So let us rise up and purify our hearts so that they might become thrones of God! In the heart is where the Real, Haqq, is to be found. He cannot be contained by the walls of buildings.

In conclusion, we would like to say that Filozof Rıza Tevfik was a remarkable literary master and an intellectual giant. His works have attained immortality, and we can say without hesitation that these works have not only served the Bektashi Path, but they have also benefited the whole of humankind!

## ADAM WAJHĪ BABA

Adam Wajhī Baba certainly deserves to be placed high among the distinguished Bektashi mystic masters and poets of the nineteenth century. He was born in 1842 to an Albanian family living in the town of Gjakova. He entered his local primary school at an early age, and when this stage of his education ended he enrolled in the town's madrasah. Adam Wajhī's father died during his childhood years, leaving him an orphan to be cared for only by his mother.

As a young man, Adam Wajhī Baba often visited the local Bektashi tekke. In those days this tekke was headed by Prizrenlı Adam Baba (d. 1875). As a result of his frequent visits, the desire to become a Bektashi entered into the young man's heart and in 1860, at the age of nineteen, he received initiation into the order at the hand of this baba.

In time Adam Wajhī's spiritual devotion to the Bektashi Path increased

to the point that he made the intention to abandon the world altogether and become a dervish. To achieve his desire he journeyed to Melçan, where he served that tekke's murshid (yet another Baba Adam!) for two years. But because of Baba Adam's poor health, Adam Wajhī was told to go to Baba Alush in Frashēr, who would administer the sacred vows of dervishhood. Having lived for a while in the Frashēr Tekke, Adam Wajhī was dressed in the vestments of a Bektashi dervish. Given that he was a skilled and astute dervish, Baba Alush kept Adam Wajhī close to his side, assigning him to the day to day management of the tekke.

In 1872 Baba Alush received an invitation to come to the Pīrevi after Selanikli Hasan Baba became dedebaba. Baba Alush asked Adam Wajhī and other two dervishes to accompany him on the long journey from Albania to central Anatolia. It was on this occasion that Adam Wajhī took the vows of celibacy (*mujarridlik*) in the illuminated sanctuary of the Pīrevi.

When the group returned to the Frashēr Tekke, Adam Wajhī received permission to undertake pilgrimages to Makkah, Madinah, Najaf, Karbalā', Palestine, Persia and India. When he was in Makkah he completed the obligatory Hajj, and thus gained title "ḥajjī".

In 1877 Baba Alush raised Adam Wajhī to the rank of baba. After his ordination, Adam Wajhī Baba was sent to open a tekke in the city of Prizren. This was a time when the patriotic sentiments of the Albanian people began to stir throughout the land, and in addition to his religious duties, Adam Wajhī Baba energized the people's sense of nationhood. As a result, he prepared the ground for the legendary gathering known as the League of Prizren, which was held in 1878 under the direction of Abdyl Frashēri.

Adam Wajhī Baba participated in every religious and nationalist endeavor that took place in Kosova in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, in 1921 he represented the Bektashi Community at the founding of an Islamic organization called the Jamā'at-i Islamīyyah. When the sheepskin pōst of Gjakova's tekke was left vacant in 1922, Adam Wajhī Baba left Prizren and took on the responsibility of guiding this tekke until 1927, the year he passed from this life.

Adam Wajhī Baba was an intellectually gifted man who mastered with remarkable proficiency the three classical languages of Islam: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. His reputation was known far and wide and during

the days of Fayżullah Dede Baba (i.e. right before the First World War) he was summoned to the Pīrevi; however, he was unable to make the long trip from Kosova.

Adam Wajhī Baba possessed noteworthy poetic skill and he composed many expressive works overflowing with Bektashi mysticism. We can glean the depth of his inspiration from the examples we will reproduce below. Here is one of his poems:

*To us has been unveiled the face of the divine,  
"Yes! We bear witness!" from the start we declared.  
With struggle and training the self we've refined.  
"We seek a place of refuge in our Lord," we declared.*

*All the Divine Names and qualities are known,  
All the Divine Mysteries to this world are shown,  
In the Perfect Man these truths find their throne,  
For the secret of this light, praise we declared.*

*In flawless form the Perfect Man came into sight,  
From East to West the world is covered with his light;  
"Prostrate to Adam" the command came forthright;  
The promise was made in the oath we declared.*

*All the messengers and prophets we affirmed,  
Their concluding seal we confirmed,  
To the hands of God's saints we held firm;  
"Muhammad, 'Alī are one," we declared.*

*Without a doubt 'Alī is the secret of sainthood;  
Certainly Fātimah bears the light of prophethood.  
The twelve ordained Imāms, rightful caliphs good;  
"In Hajjī Bektash Veli they're manifest," we declared.*

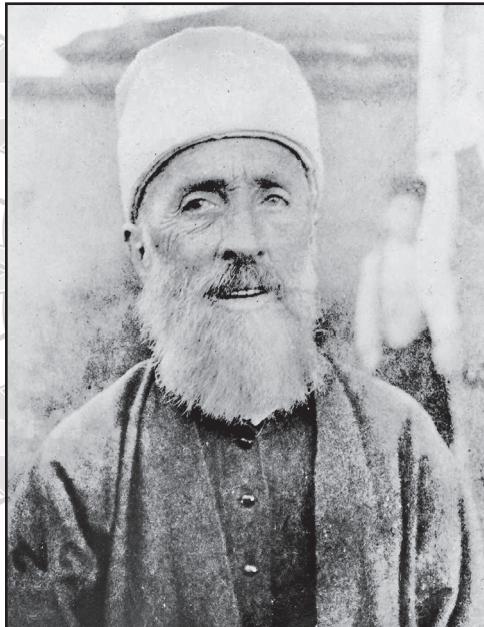
*In the murshid, Wajhī, see God's face,  
Absorb all knowledge of time and place;  
What before time we were called to embrace,  
"Yes, we have affirmed," we declared.*

Let us now examine this nefes poem:

It should be obvious to our attentive reader that the Bektashi mysticism



Hajjī Adam Wajhī Baba,  
1842-1927



we have examined throughout this book completely saturates this poem. The first stanza refers to the creation of human souls at the beginning of time and their infusion with God's spirit. As they behold the countenance of their Creator, God asks them: "Am I not your Lord?" To which they respond: "Indeed! We testify that Thou art our Lord."

Adam Wajhī Baba then tells us that God made known to Adam (i.e. humanity) the names of all things, in addition to His divine attributes, such as those reported above. It is about this pre-eternal affirmation that the remaining stanzas of this poem speak. Having presented this explanation, let us take a look at another poem by Adam Wajhī Baba:

*In pre-eternity's lofty maydān I submitted;  
The light of beauty's face I beheld ... eyvallah!  
Into the sea of four elements I was transmitted;  
In the best of forms myself I beheld ... eyvallah!*

*To the fiery love of the darling's visage I came;  
To the candle of his splendor as a moth I came;  
Intoxicated with the passion of union I came;  
The last drop from your goblet I drank ... eyvallah!*

*By way of Muḥammad Ḥaḍīr compassion arrived;  
 Those services I performed, Ḥaḍīr did not deny;  
 When my soul found peace with the Beloved at my side  
 Never-ending life was revealed... eyvallah!*

*Like a lost nightingale every moment I cry;  
 Niyāz I make so the glance will not pass by;  
 My eloquence your flawless inspiration let fly;  
 An expounder of your speech I became ... eyvallah!*

*Of my being's existence a sacrifice I made,  
 The edict given, at Ḥaḍīr's doorstep it's been laid;  
 Your servitude, O Wajhī, is the price to be paid;  
 Into the murshid's presence I've entered ... eyvallah!*

Let us now explain this poem:

The central theme of this poem is similar to the one before it, so we trust that it is fathomable and in no need of detailed clarification. However, let us explain the phrase **Eyvallah** – a phrase customarily used by Bektashis. It means: “Yes, by God! So be it!” The prefix “ey”, taken as such, means “yes,” while “vallah” means “by God.”

## ΤĀLIB FRASHĒRI

Τālib Frashēri was a writer who hailed from the family of legendary Albanian patriots. He gained initiation into the Bektashi Order in the famous tekke once found in the village of Frashēr.

Τālib Frashēri was a man endowed with deep spiritual and nationalist sentiments. During his lifetime he translated into Albanian Fuzūlī’s *Hadīkatus- Su‘ada* (about which we have spoken above). This was well before the publication of Naim’s *Qerbelaja*. In those days the alphabet used for Albanian had yet to be fixed by the Congress of Manastir; therefore Τālib employed Arabic letters to write Albanian translation.

While we do not have any further details regarding Τālib Frashēri’s biography, we do know that he lived during the first half of the nineteen century. In addition to his abilities as a writer, Τālib Frashēri had a talent for composing poetry. He wrote many poems in the Albanian language, including this one in which he laments the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn:

*For the riżā of Hakk, the Real, for whom he made kurbān,  
The entrails and the viscera which were brought to virān.*

*For the sparkle of this dunya, no badal was at hand.  
On the Field of Karbalā – ‘twas there he took a stand.*

*The battlefield was chosen by Janāb-i Mannān;  
There he made his final stand in a heart-rending maydān.*

*How our King was set upon in that wilderness maydān.  
No one has the ķuwvat to recite such a bayān;*

*Save Fużūlī in his wisdom – none has topped him yet,  
For one day Kondisi ‘Alī, and gave him ishārat.*

*From Ghafūr on high came down to us this sacrosanct ayāt:  
“O, dear Husayn! With sabr be and not in ķasāwwat!”*

*And you, O Ṭālib, cry out! In derdmend bewail.  
Call on ‘Alī’s son Husayn; he’ll save you without fail!*

This poem contains many foreign words that were commonly used in the Albanian language of Ṭālib Frashëri’s day but which have since fallen into disuse. Therefore, we will provide the definitions of these words here:

**Riżā** means “grace”; **Hakk** means the “Real,” which is none other than God; **kurbān** is a “sacrifice.” The **entrails** and **viscera** are things that lie within the material body. **Virān** means “destroyed” or “in ruins,” and Ṭalib Frashëri is telling us that if we truly seek God’s pleasure must forgo (or “destroy”) our attraction to worldly pleasure for the sake of the greater pleasure, which is God’s eternal presence. **Dunya** is the Arabic word for the material world, which is where we exist at present.

The word **badal** in the second stanza means “substitute.” Ṭālib Frashëri says that the troubles of the world cannot be substituted or exchanged – they are part of life. These tribulations are represented by the **Field of Karbalā**, a place that epitomizes all suffering and misfortune.

**Janāb** is a term of reverence, “Your Majesty” if you will, while **Mannān** is one of the names of God, a name denoting His compassion and munificence. **Maydān** means “field” or “open space.” Its meaning in these lines is a place that has been divinely predetermined. The word **ķuwvat** means “power” in Arabic and **bayān** means “oration.”

In the fifth stanza, Ṭālib Frashëri mentions the great Fużūlī, who as we

explained earlier, was a mystic poet famous for his moving account of the Battle of Karbalā' presented in his work *Hadīkat us-Su'ada*.

**Kondisi** means “alighted” in Turkish; **ishārat** is an Arabic word meaning a “sign” or “indication.” In these verses, Ṭālib declares that being able to truly relate the epic tragedy of Karbalā' and Imām Ḥusayn's suffering lies beyond any human being's capability – save for that of Fuzūlī, who perchance received the guidance and inspiration for his work from the great Imām ‘Alī.

**Ghafūr** is a name of God, meaning the “All-Forgiving”; **ayāt** are the verses of the Qur'ān; **ṣabr** means “patience” or “steadfastness”; **kasāwat** is Arabic for “sorrow” or “grief”; and **derdmend** means “unfortunate” or “miserable.”

## HAJJĪ AD'HAM BEY, “SHAHĪDĪ”

Hajjī Ad'ham Bey was a nineteenth-century Bektashi poet who hailed from Tirana. We do not know a great deal about his life, except that one of the benevolent acts he left as a legacy was building the famous mosque in Tirana that bears his name.

Hajjī Ad'ham's heart was filled with love for the Bektashi Path by his murshid, Ḥusayn Baba of Krujë, and this love for his spiritual master is evident in his poems. Hajjī Ad'ham possessed great lyrical talent, and he wrote many poems in the Turkish language. These works were collected in a divān, a copy of which was found in ‘Āsim Baba's tekke in Gjirokastër. Two of Hajjī Ad'ham's poems can be found in Sadettin Nuzhet Ergün's *Bektaşî Şairleri*. In his poems, Hajjī Ad'ham Bey uses the pen-name “Shahīdī,” which means “Witness.” Here is one of his poems:

*The lofty pīrs and sacred saints have this principle ordained,  
Whosoever keeps the secret secret - bravo, well done!  
Their heads they'd gladly sacrifice before its ascertained;  
Whosoever keeps the secret secret - bravo, well done!*

*Sister, brother heed these words! Within this maydān here  
There is no doubt that you might see that is Hakk very near;  
Within the perfect man behold God's beauty, oh so clear!  
Whosoever keeps the secret secret – bravo, well done!*

*"My head is bound to this here way," decreed Imām ḡAlī;  
 This way as sharp as Dhū'l Fikār it is most certainly;  
 Can madmen ascertain of the gnostics' hidden mystery?  
 Whosoever keeps the secret secret – bravo, well done!*

*Come and join with the Real if yourself you've figured out,  
 Or stay far from this maydān, go on and exit out!  
 To the lofty throne not every bird can fly, there is no doubt;  
 Whosoever keeps the secret secret – bravo, well done!*

*We have seen the splendid face of God oh very clearly;  
 From His foes we flee, and to His friends we're bound sincerely;  
 Before you leak the secret you'll give up your head, Shahīdī!  
 Whosoever keeps the secret secret – bravo, well done!*

This poem is firmly grounded in all the essentials and principles of Bektashi mysticism that we have previously explained. Therefore, there it should no need clarification. Therefore, let us take a look at another of Shahīdī's poems:

*Who gives up the world before coming to the world is a Bektashi;  
 Who surrenders his head willingly at love's Karbalā' is a Bektashi.*

*To whom the secrets of the Dot are demonstrated clearly  
 And learns from "Who knows" and knows himself is a Bektashi.*

*Who, for the love of Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, Prince of Eternity,  
 Takes "pride in poverty" and dons the cloak of privation is a Bektashi.*

*The one who seeks vengeance from the vile and wicked Khārijī  
 And unsheathes the King's sharp Dhū'l-fikār is a Bektashi.*

*He who engulfs himself in an ocean of tears inconsolably  
 And imbibes poison while lamenting Shah Hasan is a Bektashi.*

*Who out of zeal the martyred King of Karbalā' yearns to see  
 And gives his head and blood for the maydān of love is a Bektashi.*

*Who treads behind Imām ḡAbidīn and Bākir wholeheartedly  
 And lays down his head in the way of Imām Ṣādīk is a Bektashi.*

*Kāzīm and Shah Rīzā have come, along with Takī and Nakī;  
 Who speaks of these nightingales in the garden of love is a Bektashi.*



The Ad'ham Bey Mosque, Tirana, Albania.

*Who is, without pretension, a warrior for Hasan al-<sup>c</sup>Askari,  
And awaits Imām Mahdī at these end of times is a Bektashi.*

*Who becomes aware of “Die before dying” and its lauded mystery  
And then, O Shahīdī, dies before dying, is a true Bektashi.*

Let us now explain this poem:

The **secrets of the Dot** mentioned in first stanza refers to the aforementioned saying of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī:

What is in the Қur’ān is found in Sūrat ul-Fātiḥa. Everything in this sūrah is found in Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm. Everything in Bismillah ir-Rahmān ir-Rahīm is found in the letter *bā*. Everything contained within this letter is found in the dot; and I am that dot.

This particular verse Shahīdī tells us that every wayfarer must continually strive to grasp the secret contained within the dot of the letter *bā*, which is the secret of Imām <sup>c</sup>Alī.

The phrase **Who knows** is taken from a saying of the Prophet Muḥammad, which we have previously explained: “Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord.” **Pride in poverty** refers to another saying of the

Prophet Muḥammad: “Poverty is my pride, and I rejoice in it!” We have also explained the meaning of this type of poverty earlier in our book, so there is no need to repeat it here.

A **Khārijī** is a member of that band of Imām ʻAlī’s supporters who betrayed him and then fought against him. The phrase **Die before dying** refers to another saying of the Prophet Muḥammad: “Die before you die.” This means that we must strive to extinguish all worldly desires and concerns before physical death comes to us – which it certainly will one day or another! We believe that the other symbolic elements found within the poem should be clear to our readers by now.

## BABA MELEK SHËMBËRDHENJI

Baba Melek was a Bektashi poet born in the Skrapar region of Albania during the nineteenth century. In his younger days, the allure of the Bektashi Path led him to the Kaygusuz Tekke in Cairo, where he took the solemn vows of dervishhood.

Unfortunately, we do not possess many details at the moment about Baba Melek’s biography. However, we know that when the nationalist movement began to spread in the years after the League of Prizren, Baba Melek (who was then a dervish in Cairo) was sent by the Albanian émigré community to circulate literature printed in Egypt back in the homeland. Baba Melek traveled from Egypt to Albania and carried out this mission with marked success. He journeyed throughout the land, distributing Albanian-language books to the people. In one of his poems, he mentions being hotly pursued at times by the secret police, who had him under constant surveillance. Baba Melek worked tirelessly for the Albanian cause, and because of this he never returned to Cairo.

Baba Melek eventually became baba of the Shëmbërdhenj Tekke, where he remained until he passed from this life. His tekke was burned down by the Greeks during the time that Albania fell under foreign occupation during the First World War. Baba Melek – like many other Albanians – was forced to flee the area. This painful uprooting triggered in Baba Melek a love of the fatherland that emerged in many of his poems. In fact, he wrote many beautiful poems in the Albanian language that are both spiritual and patriotic in nature.

Baba Melek's poetic talent can be seen in the examples presented below. With his skills amply fortified with refinement and sophistication, his poems abound in expressive beauty. Here is one of his poems in which he describes being tracked by spies and the secret police during the final days of Ottoman rule over Albania:

*Committed I remain, though the wily follow me;  
They may roast me in a fire, in my heart my land will be.*

*They might chop me into pieces, but my soul they cannot take;  
For the homeland any sacrifice audaciously I'll make.*

*In dying for the homeland, what great honor that would be;  
May these wily ones be slain like swine if we cannot be free!*

*O Albanian brothers! Know my death might be a waste  
Unless from slumber you awake and these wily ones you face.*

*Who needs to have a life that's long? Better go when roosters crow  
And emancipate our motherland, with freedom make it glow.*

*Put down your wooden shepherd's staff, grab your sword and gun,  
Strike and beat from every side, 'til our foe is on the run.*

*Take our freedom in your hand, let's not stay locked in sleep;  
For the dead cannot remove the chains that make Albania weep.*

*To give one's life for motherland the brave won't bat an eye;  
For our fathers bind us to this land with a tight and mighty tie.*

*And then those cunning villains and their faces black with shame  
Will be pushed into the briars and in a pit they shall remain.*

*Night and day let's work as one for freedom found so blessed;  
To push away these cursed ones who our motherland distress.*

*Whatever it takes, O Melek, if need be sword or gun,  
True freedom we'll obtain this time; into a snare we will not run!*

Since this poem stands in no need of explanation let us turn to another of Baba Melek's works, one in which he expresses his longing for the homeland as he endures exile:

*My heart explodes like lightning flashing in a raging storm;  
Emitting flames with every groan, my lungs are rendered torn.*

*Drop by drop my heart leaks blood, it falls out to the ground.  
It cries out for the motherland – it makes no other sound.*

*The love of this here motherland, it fills my mind with ache;  
The one who keeps me from her may a bolt of lightning take!*

*Yet have no fear my precious heart, just turn yourself to God.  
In Albania you'll be one day, be strong and onward trod.*

*Our sweet Albania we'll win since it's decreed on high;  
There's nowhere else for us to go, it's here we'll live and die.*

*This blessed language that we speak, a heavenly reward;  
A sophisticated flower that's embroidered by the Lord.*

*I'm troubled by great restlessness, like oil on fire burns;  
With visions of my birthplace, in sleep I toss and turn.*

*My eyes are like a rainbow that's filled with emerald haze.  
O dear God please keep me not inside a blinding daze!*

*These eyes might now be casting tears, but that day shall not be late  
When the world from east to west will see Albania as great!*

*O woe is me! I surely pray to see that great event;  
To recognize that tears and sighs in vain have not been spent.*

*Your heart is safe, O Melek, for as long as God's with you.  
Albania shan't be broken, nor dashed nor torn in two!*

The lines of this poem should be straightforward and in no need of explanation. Therefore, let us read another patriotic poem composed by Baba Melek:

*For Albanians Albania! What else could it be?  
From the onset it has been like this and will eternally.*

*What God gave to our ancestors the treacherous have sought,  
A land filled with Albanians, for our dead a burial plot.*

*Our foes they burn with envy; our Albania they desire;  
They've sparked a fire with their greed – may it be their funeral pyre!*

*What you liked you took and thereby made our homeland small;  
Our walls and borders overthrown – may a curse upon you fall!*

*Leave us, O you damned ones! For our backs you've nearly broke,  
Much have we endured of you, like oxen under yoke.*

*Of the thoughts you keep inside, we have become aware,  
Recalling all we've given up, you eat just like a bear.*

*Like greedy ghouls you've stolen from us each and every thing.  
You've even tried to steal from us the tongue in which we sing.*

*It's God who made us who we are, our fate is in His hands  
So Albania, it shall live on, no matter our foes' plans.*

*Never would it please God that our language disappears,  
By His awesome power let its foes be thrown in endless fear!*

*O Melek, they've beguiled us! Seeking to our tongue throw down,  
Yet to our language we've returned, their plots may God confound!*

This poem is likewise in no need of explanation. Therefore let us now turn to Baba Melek's poems that are more spiritual in nature:

*From where did all this life commence?  
With God, the great and true.  
By way of lofty eminence,  
Love, love, love!*

*How came to be the sky and earth?  
How placed were Sun and Moon?  
How did the ground to plants give birth?  
Love, love, love!*

*What put the water in the clouds,  
Which falls to earth as rain?  
With what was cosmic life endowed?  
Love, love, love!*

*God made the rivers and seas,  
And then made Adam and Eve.  
He taught the names of all we see.  
Love, love, love!*

*Adam was placed in paradise;  
His every need supplied.  
With a mistake he paid a price,  
Love, love, love!*

*The Tree pulled him to take a bite;  
Adam was stained with guilt.  
What gave him children, his delight?*

*Love, love, love!*

*God quelled the blaze for Abraham.  
The winged Gabriel came.  
And switched Ishmael with a ram,  
Love, love, love!*

*Who crushed the wicked ones of Lot?  
Who sent a tiny bug,  
And with it Nimrod low was brought?  
Love, love, love!*

*Twelve sons to Jacob were presented,  
Given to him by God.  
But was Joseph was oft-lamented.  
Love, love, love!*

*Prophet Job endured great pain;  
These pains they had no end.  
Worms possessed his body and veins,  
Love, love, love!*

*Moses went out one sunny day  
And climbed a mountain high.  
He saw a light and heard it say:  
Love, love, love!*

*Who drowned the Pharaoh high and proud  
Beneath the Red Sea's waves?  
Who rested Nimrod in a shroud?  
Love, love, love!*

*Wise Zachariah in old age  
Asked God to grant a son.  
Who gave to him dear John the Sage?  
Love, love, love!*

*Holy Mary was given too  
A son, but with no father.  
The work of God they both pursued.  
Love, love, love!*

*Muhammad came and truth declared;  
By 'Alī he was joined.  
With one and all the Kur'ān was shared.  
Love, love, love!*

*Who gave warm April violets sweet,  
Who made the nightingale?  
Who made the rose's scent-filled treat?  
Love, love, love!*

*The love one has for motherland  
From birth until the grave,  
Grasp tightly in your very hand,  
Love, love, love!*

*Without the sigh of love, O Melek,  
How can you know God?  
With this the homeland do bedeck:  
Love, love, love!*

Let us now explain the major points brought up in this poem:

Lot was a prophet of old, a messenger sent by God to guide his people. His paternal uncle was illustrious Abraham. In Lot's day, there was a town in the land of Canaan called Sodom. The people of this place – known as the Sodomites – ultimately became Lot's adversaries. Contrary to Lot's divinely inspired guidance the townsfolk conducted themselves in an utterly irreligious manner, taking great delight in unnatural acts. The Sodomites eventually caused Lot to be filled with despair; to the point that he asked God to rain down upon them a fitting chastisement. By God's command, an unyielding tempest appeared, and the Sodomites were no more. Lot left the ruins of that town and traveled to the region of the Hijaz, where he passed from this life at the age of eighty.

**Nimrod** is the name of a tyrannical Mesopotamian king who is said to have lived around 2,640 BCE. Because of his idolatrous beliefs, Nimrod not only defied Abraham's call to monotheism but he had the prophet cast into a huge fire to incinerate him. However, by God's protective might, Abraham emerged from the blaze without as much as a hair singed on his head. Yet Nimrod still refused to believe, even when faced with this great miracle. As a reprimand for his insufferable egotism, God caused him to be afflicted with mosquitoes, which pestered him until he died.

**Jacob** is the name of another Israelite prophet, one who is said to have been born in 2,206 BCE. Jacob sired twelve sons, one of whom was named **Joseph**. Jacob had such great love for this particular child that when Joseph

was carried off in slavery to Egypt Jacob cried so much that he went temporarily blind.

**Job** likewise ranks among the Israelite prophets of old. He is said to have been born in Palestine 1,800 years before Christ. When he was charged with prophethood, Job could gather only seven people to believe in the One God.

Job was a wealthy man who had plenty of livestock and vast stretches of land. He also had ten robust sons. And though he found himself in optimistic material circumstances he never forgot to thank God for these many blessings, and he prayed without fail. Satan maintained that Job only prayed because everything in his life flourished, and he would certainly lose faith if these blessings were removed. Therefore, to teach Satan a lesson, God tested Job by overturning all of his worldly comforts; but economic ruin did not interfere with Job's positive spiritual outlook. Then all of Job's sons died, one after the other; but he endured his grief with patience and did not relinquish his prayer. Ultimately, the only thing left to Job – his health – was taken away. Even this also did not undermine his devotion, and he continued to worship his Lord.

As Job's illness steadily grew worse, family and friends abandoned him, and he found no one to help ease his pain. He eventually collapsed and became infested with maggots. The larvae pierced his body, boring hole after hole into his flesh. Nonetheless, Job endured this ordeal with great fortitude, and he continued reciting his litanies without fail. When the maggots came to seize his tongue Job's only worry was that he would be unable to recite out loud his normal supplications. At this point, he made a prayer to God:

O God! I have been able to endure every burden and affliction because I have refuge in prayer and divine remembrance. But now these maggots have come to my tongue. I fear that I will not be able to take consolation in the recitation of Your holy name. O Lord! Have pity on me! Do not keep me from Your remembrance. It is the only solace I have left to me in this life!

We have already explained the meaning of the **light** that Moses saw on the path, so there is no need for us to repeat the story here.

The issue of the **Pharaoh** drowning in the Red Sea is (in brief) this: The Pharaoh was the despotic ruler of Egypt who conceitedly proclaimed: "I am

God!” It was because of his pretentiousness that he came into conflict with Moses. Born in the Egyptian city Memphis in the year 1705 BCE, Moses was originally one of the Israelites, a people who originated from the descendants of Abraham. When Moses began to promulgate God’s message, the Pharaoh not only refused to accept it, he employed all of his royal power to eradicate it for fear that his claim to divinity would be undermined. Realizing that his people were in danger, Moses gathered the faithful together and departed Egypt with the Pharaoh and his army in hot pursuit.

When the band of believers reached the Red Sea, Moses begged God to open a way of escape; and by a miracle, the waters retreated and a passageway formed on the seabed. The Pharaoh, however, arrived just as Moses and the believers reached the opposite shore. He charged headlong with his army in hot pursuit on to the astounding pathway. When he and his soldiers had reached midway, the sea resumed its natural position, drowning them all. As a result, Moses and the faithful were saved from capture.

**Zechariah** is another Israelite prophet. Despite his old age, Zechariah was granted a son by the grace of God. This son, **John** the Baptist, would be his successor in prophethood.

The rest of the poem should be clear and in no need of explanation. Therefore let us turn to a poem of Baba Melek’s in which he heaps praise upon the great Prophet Muḥammad:

*Intimate of God he was ere heaven was created,  
Save for blessed Muṣṭafā, all for life awaited.*

*Before the Sun and Moon, Muḥammad was held dear.  
Like waves are with their foam, the Lord had placed him near.*

*To decorate the universe God sent him to the world  
With ‘Alī as his viceroy, ‘round him prophets praised and whirled.*

*Muḥammad is a messenger, who’s sent by God’s decree;  
His guiding light filled all the lands, from mountain to the sea.*

*Gabriel unveiled himself and brought God’s revelations.  
To Muḥammad was displayed the secrets hidden from the nations.*

*Since he was taught by God Almighty, all goodness he conveyed;  
A gift he brought in the Qur’ān, his name will never fade!*

*He rent the veil of darkness, like the sun brings day from night,  
The eyes of Man he opened, thereby sparking a great light.*

*124,000 messengers to earth they came and passed;  
Muhammad was their seal – “As for me, I am the last.”*

*No further prophet is to come to fill the world with light,  
The door of this forever closed by the greatest Hashimite.*

*Muhammad was a light before the universe was wrought,  
And personally by God on High all goodness he was taught.*

*With his soul illuminated, God had sent him to mankind;  
Bestowed with every blessing, for God never left his mind.*

*The messenger Muhammad kept his word with care;  
In one of his most blessed acts left ‘Ali as his heir.*

*His awe-inspiring virtues number more than all the trees;  
Were they to be related, they’d fill the universe with ease.*

*A pure sea is Muhammad, he’s untainted by the crude;  
Throughout the course of his great life no worry he accrued.*

*Through God’s unending kindness he was sent the Shah of Man,  
And his mission reached fulfillment by revealing the Kur’ān.*

*Glad tidings in the afterlife for those who hold him dear,  
For radiating goodness, God will always hold them near.*

*The splendor of Muhammad, it there lies in God’s control;  
His love, O Melek, hugs us like the bosom holds the soul.*

The significance of poem should be relatively straightforward and in no need of clarification. Therefore let us look at another of Baba Melek’s poems, one in which he lauds the Prophet’s family, the Ahl ul-Bayt:

*From the start I seek out favor, crying “Muhammad ‘Alī!”  
Don’t let me stand here weeping, Hajjī Bektash-i Veli!*

*‘Alī is God’s hero, he needs not our lacking praise;  
His path of truth and wisdom all the galaxies amaze.*

*How many flowers sing of ‘Alī’s wisdom and his glory,  
Who’re commanded by our Lord on high to tell us of his story?*

*From the heavens came this sentence: “There’s no hero but ‘Alī!”  
Who, even with a speedy horse, no enemy can flee.*

*Decreed to us Almighty God, “There is no other sword,  
“But ‘Alī’s mighty Dhū'l-Fikar” – a heavenly reward.”*

*God commanded this to be and gave to him this might:  
A elevated mission to direct mankind to Right.*

*Never mind the faithless, for in darkness we are not;  
We are with those tutored by the light the Kur’ān brought.*

*This light was passed successively, from one on down the line;  
Through Muḥammad and his daughter God established this here vine.*

*Fāṭimah and ‘Alī, from them this bright light appeared,  
In Hasan and our sweet Husayn, a sun and moon revered.*

*The joining of these oceans caused two roses to be seen;  
So beautiful together, one was red, the other green.*

*Though he visited the Prophet with glad tidings preordained,  
The angel said his roses would suffer grief and pain.*

*The other nine, O Melek, of Muḥammad one and all.  
These Twelve endured such anguish that it’s painful to recall.*

This poem should likewise be clear and in no need of explanation, except that the words **red** and **green** represent Imam Hasan’s murder by poisoning and Imam Husayn’s martyrdom in battle. Let us now look at a poem by Baba Melek that praises the great ‘Alī al-Murtazā:

*There’s no thought to my existence;  
Of this world I’ve found I’m free!  
This brings to me no anguish  
That’s why I venerate ‘Alī!*

*Madinah pours its morning light,  
It drapes him gracefully;  
Praised through generations,  
That’s why I venerate ‘Alī!*

*The brilliant Sun conversed with words  
To no other man save he;  
This event was written down,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*Who while lying in the cradle  
Tore the hydra easily?  
With Muḥammad for his cousin,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*On the blessed Prophet's shoulders  
Stood our Ḥaydar steadily.  
Of this, we know there is no doubt,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*Born within the House of God,  
Inside its walls he came to be.  
Such a fact astounds the mind,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*The hero Antar's head he took;  
Khaybar's gates broke easily,  
As if they were a string of thread,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*To Fāṭimah he gave his hand,  
He's a hero certainly.  
No ocean's waves can hold him back,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*From God on high there came this praise:  
"There's no hero but <sup>c</sup>Alī."  
From heaven came this roaring cry,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

*"Our bodies one, our flesh is one,"  
Said our Prophet sincerely.  
"Our blood is one, our soul is one,"  
He told Ḥaydar <sup>c</sup>Alī.*

*So why do I love dear Murtazā?  
Did Muṣṭafā you hear clearly?  
Brothers they are, O Melek,  
That's why I venerate <sup>c</sup>Alī!*

Let us now explain some of the finer points of this poem:

The **Sun conversed with words** mentioned in the third stanza refers to a miracle performed by the Prophet Muḥammad. One day he said to Imām ʻAlī: “O ʻAlī! Everything has been created through God’s power. Therefore speak to the Sun that it may respond to you.” Imām ʻAlī addressed the Sun and said: “Peace be upon you, O he who submits to the will of God!” After the great ʻAlī spoke these words a voice came down on the Sun’s rays saying: “And upon you be peace, O Prince of the Believers!” When the voice ceased speaking, Imām ʻAlī prostrated himself, thanking God for this astounding miracle.<sup>56</sup>

The **hydra** in the fourth stanza refers to a popular narration passed down through the generations regarding one of the miracles Imām ʻAlī performed as a baby. A terrible serpent once slithered into his cradle, and the infant ʻAlī killed it with his bare hands by the power God had given him.

The matter of the **Prophet’s shoulders** mentioned in the fifth stanza refers to an event that took place when Imām ʻAlī was seven years old. He once went with the Prophet to visit the Kaʻbah, which was then filled with the idols that the pagan Arabs had placed along its walls. ʻAlī began to break these statuettes one by one. However, some of these were up high and out of reach. The Prophet Muḥammad bent down and took ʻAlī upon his shoulders, allowing him to smash the remaining idols.

The **House of God** refers to the Kaʻbah, which the Prophet regularly visited along with his clan, the Bani Hāshim. One day he went on such a visit and with him came Fātimah, the daughter of Asad – who was nine months pregnant with ʻAlī. As the group performed its devotions before the Kaʻbah, Fātimah began to experience labor pains and did not know what to do. The Prophet understood what was going on and said, “O Fātimah! If you cannot bear the pain enter the Kaʻbah so that God might answer your prayers and cause your situation to quickly pass.” So she entered into the sacred shrine and there her baby was born.

The bastion of **Khaybar** in the seventh stanza and the famous hero **Antar** have been explained in our discussion of one of Mehmet ʻAlī Hilmī Dede’s poems. Therefore, there is no need to repeat the meaning of these two words here.

The **praise** mentioned in the ninth stanza refers to the divine declaration

that the Angel Gabriel brought to the Prophet Muḥammad: “There is no hero but ‘Alī; there is no sword but Dhū’l Fiḳār.” This event took place during the Battle of Uhud when Imām ‘Alī demonstrated great bravery in rescuing the Prophet from a hazardous situation.

**Our body one, our flesh is one**, etc. in the tenth stanza refers to the Prophet Muḥammad’s well-known saying: “O ‘Alī! My flesh is your flesh, my blood is your blood, and my body is your body.” The other lines in this poem should be quite clear.

Let us now look at one of Baba Melek’s poems that extol the virtues of the Twelve Imāms:

*O my heart so filled with ache! If our masters you will know,  
For Muḥammad Muṣṭafā go and set yourself aglow.*

*If night and day you turn your face with fervor towards ‘Alī,  
Focused will your mind become; through your eyes he will see.*

*Take the path of dear Hasan if its mercy that you need;  
To Imām ‘Alī’s oldest son present your case and plead.*

*Don’t complain about your pain, know Husayn had suffered worse;  
Bravely face your troubles, from this path do not disperse.*

*As a child immersed in grief, Imām Zayn ul-‘Abidīn;  
For even then, while still so young, his tears flowed like a stream.*

*To understand the language of the birds and beasts and men,  
Know Muḥammad Bākir is the one to seek your refuge in.*

*Like a setting sun comes back again, the friend remains the same;  
One by one, on down the line, till Imām Ja’far came.*

*A single mystic sun that radiates enthusiasm;  
Uncorrupted Fāṭimah and her descendant Imām Kāzīm.*

*In every face that you behold, there you’ll see their sign;  
Imām ‘Alī Rizā is a friend of the divine.*

*All the blooming flowers give adornment to this life;  
Muḥammad Takī bares a truth, and truth cuts like a knife.*

*Imām ‘Alī Nakī bequeaths knowledge that is sweet;  
Those who seek his backing will forever be complete.*

*Imām Hasan ‘Askarī, a brilliant light afire;  
Khadījah and Muṣṭafā’s glow will lift you from the mire.*

*The Mahdī, who's Muḥammad, Melek, seek to venerate;  
God, His Prophet and 'Alī you must never separate!*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation.

## ŞĀLIH NIYĀZĪ DEDE

Şālih Niyāzī Dede was born into a well-known Albanian family from the town of Stara Kolonjës. He was born in the second half of the nineteenth century to Dervish Cufa and his wife, Shemsiye. Unfortunately, we do not have the exact date of his birth,<sup>57</sup> but we do know that after he had completed his elementary education, he moved to Anatolia. Being raised in a Bektashi family, Şālih Niyāzī Dede made regular visits in his youth to the Pīrevi, where in little time he was granted initiation into the order at the hand of Fayzullah Dede (d. 1913), who was then head of all Bektashis.

As he grew older Şālih Niyāzī Dede increased the frequency of his visits to the Pīrevi, since he had fallen wholly in love with the Bektashi Path. It did not take long for him to make the decision to dedicate his entire life to the way of Ḥajjī Bektash Velī. He gave his solemn vows in the hallowed Pīrevi and became fully engaged in serving the tekke and expanding his study of Islamic mysticism, which allowed him to become fully equipped with the spiritual insight that Bektashism engenders.

Şālih Niyāzī Dede was raised to the rank of baba in 1908, again at the hand of Feyzullah Dede. After his ordination he was sent on a mission to Albania to collect financial aid for the legal battle that had broken out at the Pīrevi between the dedebaba and members of the Çelebi family, who claimed physical descent from Ḥajjī Bektashi. Once he successfully carried out his mission Şālih Niyāzī Dede returned to the Pīrevi.

Due to the exceptional worthiness of his character, Şālih Niyāzī was soon asked to become a member of the high council of dedes. When Fayzullah Dede passed from this world in 1913, the dedes appointed Şālih Niyāzī Dede to be the dedebaba of the Bektashi Order. This remarkable man successfully carried out this task until 1925, when all of the tekkes within the borders of the new Turkish Republic (including those belonging to the Bektashis) were locked shut by the government.

The Third Bektashi Congress was held at the Turan Tekke (near the city of Korça) in 1929 and a council of dedes – who were chosen by the babas of Albania – agreed to move the seat of the dedebaba (i.e. *kryegjyshata*) from the Pîrevi to Albania on account of the Turkish Republic’s closure of all Sufi lodges. By the protocols drawn up by the congress, the council of dedes asked Şâlih Niyâzî Dede to continue as dedebaba. Şâlih Niyâzî Dede traveled from Turkey to Albania in late 1930, and in 1931 he was officially installed as dedebaba on the expansive property in Tirana that was purchased by the Bektashi community.

Şâlih Niyâzî Dede commendably carried out his duties as head of our mystic order and before long he opened a maydân on the aforementioned property. This maydân became a place where scores of people received initiation and became muhibs. Numerous dervishes took their vows of celibacy here and many babas raised to the rank of dede – like Baba Mehmet Kruja, Baba Ja‘far Pérmeti, Baba Murâd Frashëri, Baba Sâ‘id Leskoviku, Baba Zulfo Turani, Sîrrî Baba of Cairo and many others. This new “mother-tekke” in Tirana did much to propagate the spiritual and moral guidance offered by the Bektashi Path. Many of Tirana’s dignitaries and notable families came to take initiation at the hand of Şâlih Niyâzî Dede.

Reverence for the dedebaba increased so much that the Albanian government donated 1,000 gold Napoleons to assist in the construction of a magnificent new building on the Tirana property. Through this assistance, and the aid that came from Bektashi tekkes throughout the land, construction on the mother-tekke in Tirana commenced with great intensity. The building was finally opened in early 1941, during the days of the Italian occupation of Albania.

Şâlih Niyâzî Dede sat as dedebaba in the new headquarters of the Bektashi Order until that fateful day in late November 1941, the date on which he and his aid, Dervish ‘Azîz, were martyred. Both were victims of a secret and well-organized terrorist plot – the origins of which have yet to be uncovered.

Even though Şâlih Niyâzî Dede was slain as he safeguarded his sacred principles, his works remain alive and unforgotten in the hearts and minds of Bektashis and their sympathizers everywhere.

It is imperative that we point out Şâlih Niyâzî Dede’s talent for writing nefes poetry, wherein he used his pen-name “Niyâzî” or “Supplicant”:



Sâlih Niyâzî Dede, 1876-1941

*I entered the path, I searched and called out:  
"Help me Muḥammad! Save me ʻAlī!"  
I called on my Shah to rid all my doubt:  
Help me Muḥammad! Save me ʻAlī!*

*All mystery's found in Muḥammad ʻAlī.  
Their pathway leads right to Reality.  
Hasan Ḥusayn left a deep legacy.  
Help me Muḥammad! Save me ʻAlī!*

*Karbalā's Shah walks the path that we tread;  
For Zaynal Ābā we lay down our head;  
In Muḥammad al-Bākir's footprints we read:  
"Help me Muḥammad! Save me ʻAlī!"*

*"You defend me, so I defend you,"  
As Khunkār did say to push us on through,  
By Ja'far us-Sādiq our tongue says anew:  
"Help me Muḥammad! Save me ʻAlī!"*

*Mūsā al-Kāzim lights up our way,  
Taķī and Naķī we trust...what to say?*

*Forever we choose to cry night and day:  
"Help me Muhammad! Save me 'Alī!"*

*This light of this line is Al-<sup>c</sup>Askarī;  
And follows the twelfth, Muḥammad Mahdi;  
To our Pīr calls Niyāzī, "O my Velī!  
"Help me Muḥammad! Save me 'Alī!"*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation.

## BABA AHMAD TURĀNĪ

Baba Ahmād Turānī ranks among the celebrated babas of recent times. He was born in the village of Turan (near Tepelenë) in the latter half of the nineteenth century. When he reached adulthood, he traveled to the Haydarīye Tekke (near Gjirokastër),<sup>58</sup> where he served for a number of years. Soon enough he received initiation into the Bektashi Path, and eventually he gave his solemn vows in the aforementioned tekke at the hand of Baba Haydar (who was from the village of Kardhiq). Baba Ahmād then donned the vestments of dervishhood.

Baba Ahmād spent many years in the Haydarīye Tekke before making pilgrimages to the Pīrevi and other holy sites. When he returned from his sacred travels, he took up residence in Turan Tekke, which was then under the guidance of Baba 'Alī Turānī. Baba Ahmād served this tekke with great devotion, winning not only the admiration Baba 'Alī but that of the public as well. When Baba 'Alī passed from this world, Baba Ahmād was elevated to the rank of baba by Baba Ahmād Koshtani of Tepelenë. He was then charged with administering the Turan Tekke. Baba Ahmād worked without rest for his tekke and as a result, its fame as a Bektashi spiritual center spread throughout the land.

In 1910 Baba Ahmād Turānī traveled to the Pīrevi with Baba Sulaymān of Gjirokastër. Here they both were raised to the rank of dede by the aforementioned Hajjī Fayzullah Dede baba, who was then sitting on Hajjī Bektash Velī's sacred sheepskin pōst.

In 1914 Baba Ahmād's tekke in Turan was burned to the ground (along with many other tekkes) by the invading Greeks. Baba Ahmād only survived

this catastrophe by escaping to the city of Vlora with all of his dervishes. Many villages in the region of Kurvelesh were set ablaze by the aggressors, and its residents were forced to flee with the dervishes. Despite the difficult circumstances, Baba Ahmet demonstrated boundless generosity during this humanitarian crisis by helping all of the unfortunate refugees trying to survive scattered among Vlora's olive groves. In one instance he obtained a huge ķazān and with it cooked food for everyone, regardless of their social or economic status.

On account of his charitable work Baba Ahmet earned the boundless gratitude of the Albanian people and to return this appreciation he took part in the Vlora War (1920),<sup>59</sup> when the men of his region assembled and placed themselves under the control of the National Defense Committee. All of those Bektashi clergymen who had earlier sought refuge in the city – both babas and dervishes – followed Baba Ahmet's instructions. Among these clergymen was Baba Jaçfar Përmeti, who in those days was a dervish. Baba Jaçfar participated in the struggle for Tepelenë, Dorzë, and many other places.

After Albania's independence was restored Baba Ahmet returned to his tekke in the village of Turan, and with the help of the people – particularly those Albanians living in America – his tekke was rebuilt and made even lovelier than before.

Given that many of the babas and dedes who headed the tekkes in the regions of Frashër, Koshtan, and Prishta were martyred in the horrific upheavals of the First World War, Baba Ahmet played a significant role in reinforcing the influence of the Bektashi Path by ordaining new babas for all of those tekkes that had to be rebuilt due to their being burnt by rebels and Greeks. These babas included Baba Hasan Memalijaj, Baba Jaçfar Përmeti, Baba Sâ'id Leskoviku, Baba 'Alî Tomorri, Baba Ahmet Kruja, Baba Muştafâ Elbasani, Baba Kamber Prishta, Baba Hayro Martaneshi, Baba Seydi Bllaca and many other babas from the tekkes scattered throughout the Tepelenë region.

In brief, Baba Ahmet bequeathed the Turan Tekke a splendid reputation, making it one of the most talked about tekkes in Albania. It continued to flourish until 1928, the year in which Baba Ahmet passed from this world. In addition to his remarkable skills as a spiritual master, Baba Ahmet possessed a talent for composing mystic poetry, an example of which is this:

*As I was standing lost in thought  
There came to me lament;  
With sentiment, with memories,  
Such thoughts gave me torment.*

*Right then I gave a mighty shout,  
“Aman! Imām Ḥusayn!”  
And God to me bequeathed success  
And saved me from my pain.*

*Has this poor one an ounce of strength  
To draw close to the Door?  
I seek to cleanse my faults and sins,  
Your favor I implore!*

*O holy House of Murtazā  
Please keep me in your care!  
And for the sake of Karbalā.  
Let not my soul despair!*

*This humble Ahmad of Turan  
Seeks in both worlds success.  
Give us help Shāh-i Mardān!  
May God forever bless!*

*By love my eyes with tears are filled,  
I call the Pir who knows.  
That for the sake of God he'll come  
And stand against our foes.*

The meaning of this poem should be relatively straightforward and in no need of explanation.

## A POEM FROM AHMAD SIRRI BABA

To keep the promise that we made earlier in our book we shall present the following poem by Ahmad Sirri Baba, who as we know was the last murshid of the Bektashi tekke of Cairo, Egypt:

*We can't praise <sup>c</sup>Ali suitably; only God can do such things.  
We can't speak of his qualities; for these are God's to sing.*

*They came together to this world, Muḥammad with <sup>c</sup>Ali;  
From pre-eternity they came to enlighten you and me.*

*One the Sun, the other Moon – but as distinct do not them see.  
Two bodies with a single soul bring gnosis mystically.*

*<sup>c</sup>Ali's sons by Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and then Ḥusayn,  
From East to West they are renowned – from birth God loved the twain.*

*In sequence then there came the next, Zayn ul-<sup>c</sup>Abidīn;  
Muḥammad Bākir followed with illuminating sheen.*

*Imām Ja<sup>c</sup>far Sādīk truth and goodness he proclaimed;  
By his enemies was poisoned – then Mūsā Kāzīm came.*

*The path of God was beautified by Rīzā and Takī –  
Then by God Almighty's plan they were bolstered by Nakī.*

*Then emerged as a light to life, Imām Ḥasan <sup>c</sup>Askarī;  
In the end, concealed by God, we have Imām Mahdī.*

*Know, O Sirri, that our love for them is fully sealed;  
We sacrifice our soul for them, for through them God's revealed!*

Like many of the poems we have reviewed in our book, this one should be in no need of explanation.

## **BABA IBRĀHĪM & THE HAJJĪ BABA TEKKE OF QESARAKĒ**

Baba Ibrāhīm hailed from the line of famous babas who were murshids of the Hajjī Baba Tekke of Qesarakē in the district of Kolonjē. Hajjī Baba is known throughout the region for the miracles performed at his hand. He thoroughly infused the people of the Kolonjē with Bektashi morals and ethics, and these folk came to hold great faith in him on account of his incredible virtue, even going so far as to build a splendid tekke for him. When Hajjī Baba left this fleeting life, the responsibility for running this tekke was given to Baba Yahyā, then to Baba Salmān, then to Baba Shukrī, then to Baba

Sha'bān and finally to Baba Ibrāhīm (widely known as Baba Braho), about whom we shall now speak.

Like many other Bektashi clergymen, Baba Ibrāhīm's heart held great patriotic sentiment, which compelled him to work for the nationalist cause. Baba Ibrāhīm assisted in distributing of Albanian-language books in the company of patriots like Petro Nini Luarasi, Naum Trebicka, and others. He also aided in the formation of Riza Velçisht's çeta, and he was in liaison with Sali Butka's çeta. When Bajo Topolli escaped from Manastır [Bitola] to the village of Butka, Sali led Bajo to Baba Ibrāhīm's tekke in Qesarakë. At that point, a number of Baba Ibrāhīm's devotees took him south to Gjirokastër, where he raised a çeta with his famous younger brother, Çerçiz Topolli.

During those days the Ottoman administration (with the help of Ālay Pasha) introduced harsh measures to quell the nationalists. Government soldiers first went to Qesarakë, where they interrogated Baba Ibrāhīm, locking him up along with other patriots. When the Greeks overran the Kolonjë region in 1913, they too arrested Baba Ibrāhīm on account of his patriotic activities. He remained in their custody until he was freed by Sali Butka and his çeta. When the Greeks once more seized Kolonjë in 1914 – this time in overwhelming force – Baba Ibrāhīm escaped with the residents of his tekke. The building was burned to the ground by the invaders. The Greeks found only Baba Ibrāhīm's elderly mother living in the tekke. They executed her without mercy.

Baba Ibrāhīm enjoyed notable talent for composing verse and he produced many nefes poems thoroughly bathed in Bektashi mysticism. In one of his more patriotic poems, entitled *Dimri* (Winter), he compares the Ottoman rule of his day to wintertime and the then ruler of the empire – Sultan 'Abdul-Hamīd II – to a “pig-nosed” (i.e. obstinate) man:

*Winter, O vile winter! Why besiege us with this cold?  
By alacrity, by sneakiness, our blood you so enfold.*

*Why do you embrace us, freeze us with your icy frost?  
And with a storm that's pitiless our secrets you exhaust.*

*You darken plains and mountains, leaving neither grass nor leaf;  
With heaps of snow you've only brought us never-ending grief!*

*You cut the paths on which we walk, there's no place left to speak;  
It's like the clouds have swallowed us, you make our life so bleak.*

*Go away, O February! May you pass us by with speed!  
You've not the right to steal from us, your stay you much exceed.*

*Go away, for love God, and leave these snowcapped lands;  
For summer months are coming with old flintlocks in their hands.*

*Go away so summer'll come; take hold, O summer air!  
With rifles in our steady hands, our broad fustans we'll wear.*

*Heed my words and go away! No friend of yours will stay,  
For you will find our summer brave, his feet will kick away.*

*So, O summer! O dear summer! Come stay with us a bit;  
Hurry up and rush to us, as all honor you transmit.*

*Heed the call, O Ibrāhīm, as fiercely as an eagle!  
So the pig-nosed one we'll see no more – that one who thinks he's regal!*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation, except that we should understand that **summer** is a time of freedom for the fatherland. Therefore, let us look at one of Baba Ibrāhīm's poems in which lauds Hajjī Baba Qesarakë. Baba Ibrāhīm also describes his ordination as baba at the hand of Baba ȐAbidīn in the Frashër Tekke:

*From pre-eternity we've submitted and surrendered  
To our murshid Hajjī Baba!  
At his blessed feet we fall, full reverence we render;  
Lit by the glow of Hajjī Baba!*

*We came to goodness when we arrived in the maydān,  
We beheld all the stations as described in the arkān,  
We gave a holy pledge, and from wickedness we ran  
As the road drew near to Hajjī Baba!*

*Miracles we witnessed from Hajjī Baba's hand.  
How many lifeless hearts were raised at his command?  
The mystic path he opened, now faith we understand.  
We turn our gaze to Hajjī Baba!*

*A dervish I once was, though I'm Baba Ibrāhīm,  
Till there came a sacred word from Baba ȐAbidīn,  
Teaching came to us from Frashër's fountain clean.  
But my eyes are set on Hajjī Baba!*

This poem should likewise need no explanation.

## BAŞRĪ BABA

Başrī Baba ranks as one of the well-known Bektashi poets who lived in the first half of the twentieth century. He was born in Üsküdar in 1874. He completed his secondary education in Istanbul, after which he engaged in commerce for quite some time. Başrī Baba took initiation in several Sufi orders, such as the Kādirī, Rifaī, Ushakī, and so on. However, he ultimately became a Bektashi, receiving initiation at the hand of Husnī Baba of Istanbul. Başrī Baba passed from this life in 1949.

Başrī Baba was a master of Bektashi mystical poetry. We hope that his expressive skill can be seen in the examples we present here:

*Forsaking the censorious, to the maydān I came.*

*The candles awoke, to the ikrār I came;*

*Denial and unbelief I cast off, to faith I came.*

*My signs were read, to the asrār I came.*

*At that moment I tasted separation and gathering;*

*In my essence I found the meeting of every meeting;*

*In my heart I found Hakk hearing and speaking;*

*To the Speaking Kur'ān, Haydar-i Karār, I came.*

*The Kur'ān I was said to be; of this I became aware,*

*I cried for my past sins, committed without a care,*

*I girded my loins and the saints' words help me prepare;*

*To the Sultān of the Pirs, the Khunkār I came.*

*In the form of 'Alī the essence manifested;*

*In his splendor, I saw all divine traits invested;*

*At that instant Başrī drank – the water of life ingested;*

*I rubbed my face in the dust, to awareness I came.*

Let us now explain some of the finer points of this poem:

The word **ikrār** is the affirmation of Bektashi beliefs in order to undertake the spiritual undertaking.” **Asrār** is the plural of the Arabic word *sirr*, which means “secret.” Therefore, the asrār are the “secrets.”

The **meeting of everything** in the second stanza refers to the concept of *wahdat ul-wujūd*, the doctrine that inspires us to see creation as the glorious manifestation of a single omnipotent essence. In mystic terminology, this

“multitude of oneness” is known as the *maḳām-i kathrat*, or the “station of gathering,” the *maḳām-i jam’*. True *tawḥīd* (oneness) ensues when we purge ourselves of everything other than God. When this is completed, only He remains. This is similar to how butter emerges when the milk is removed. In the language of the Islamic mystics, the multiplicity of created things is called the “station of separateness,” the *maḳām-i fark*.

**Haydar-i Karar** means “Impetuous Lion” and it is a sobriquet of Imām ʻAlī. This name expresses one of his lofty qualities, and it was given to him on account of his ability to battle the enemies of faith over and over again with never-ending courage and persistence.

The line where Baṣrī Baba mentions his **past sins** in the third stanza refers to Adam’s sin of going against the command of God by eating from the forbidden tree. Adam lamented his transgression for a long time until divine mercy descended upon him. In this verse Baṣrī Baba also implies his own sins, saying that these are much regretted; that is until he was allowed into the spiritual path by a murshid whose spiritual chain of transmission led back to Hajjī Bektash Velī. Through this noble man of God, Baṣrī Baba finds a connection to Imām ʻAlī al-Murtazā, the leader of all mystics. Having given this explanation, let us take a look at another nefes poem written by Baṣrī Baba

*God becomes visible in the clothes of the slave;  
Don’t search for it anywhere else, O dear!  
What’s outside is created; within Hakk’s engraved.  
So let me make these hidden mysteries clear!*

*From the names, attributes and essence He sought to exist,  
Then from His own existence, He made Himself exist;  
“To Adam He taught the names” of everything that exists;  
As the Speaking Kur’ān, Adam appeared.*

*Adam is the open and concealed, the first and last;  
Every hidden mystery, within him you’ll find cast;  
The moment’s always this moment, be it future or the past;  
Now, as before, “everything shall disappear!”*

*Who walks as a student on this thorny path of blame  
On the horizons and in himself the Beloved will exclaim;  
At these horizons every mystic way takes aim;  
Union with Hakk has formed this path’s pīrs.*



Başrī Baba, 1874-1949



*Extinguish your ego through *fanā' fillah*,  
 Render your self naught through *bağā' billah*,  
 Outwardly and inwardly you're the slave of Allah;  
 At last Başrī stands amazed at what's clear!*

Let us now examine these lines:

Recalling the spiritual principles discussed throughout this book, we can easily see Başrī Baba telling us in the first stanza that everything in the universe is a manifestation (or reflection) of its Creator, who is none other than God.

The second stanza points to the well-known divine saying (*ḥadīth ķudsī*): “I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the Creation that I might be known....” God, therefore, created the universe along with the first human being, Adam, to whom He taught the names of all things. Afterwards, God commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam, an incident that we have explained earlier in our book.

God then dressed Adam with His own lofty qualities and attributes, as is revealed in this verse of the *Kur'ān*:

*I have fashioned him and  
 breathed into him of My spirit...  
 (Sūrah Șād 38:72)*

Once all of these events came to pass God sent Adam to Earth as His vicegerent (*khalfatullahi fi'l-arz*), an event likewise described in the Kur'ān. Adam was thus commanded to represent God, in both attributes and deeds, in this material universe.

In the succeeding stanzas Baṣrī Baba tells us that when the wayfarer is stripped and cleaned of everything save God, he will come to see the Hakk (the Real) in himself, a topic that we have repeatedly discussed throughout our book. Having given this explanation, let us take a look at another of Baṣrī Baba's poems:

*We are listed as free in the record divine.*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*Our target, thank God, we'll most certainly find.*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*Our arkān belongs to the Real.*

*Our secrets we'll never reveal.*

*Our servanthood's not an ordeal.*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*God's beauty we saw with our eyes,*

*In His splendor perfection lies,*

*Unity is our effort's prize,*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*Owning neither hope nor fear,*

*Our refuge is a baba dear,*

*The murshid's wisdom we revere,*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*In our ego we saw there a stain,*

*We rendered these up to be slain,*

*The Hidden King does us sustain,*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*From the saint's hand they took their share,*

*Mind and body they forswear,*

*"We've testified!" they declare,*

*Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

*From Unity's goblet we sipped,*

*Knowledge of shape and form equipped,*

*O Başrī! From distress we're stripped,  
Graceful, refined we Bektashis!*

The essence of this poem should be reasonably clear. We should, however, point out that the testimony mentioned in the sixth stanza refers to the soul's uttering in pre-eternity (azal): "Yes God! We believe and obey!" or in Arabic "Kālu balā." This is an event mentioned in the Qur'ān:

*And when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam,  
from their backs, their descendants, and made them bear witness  
against their own souls: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes!  
We bear witness.' Lest you should say on the day of resurrection:  
'Surely we were heedless of this.'*

﴿Sūrat al-‘A’rāf 7:172﴾

In the last stanza of this poem Başrī Baba exclaims: "From distress we're stripped." What he means to say is that he has liberated himself from the endless worries that are found in the material world.

## SALMĀN JAMĀLĪ BABA

(*Also known as Baba Xhemali Turku*)

Salmān Jamālī Baba was born in the city of Istanbul in 1875, and it was there that he received his primary education. When he reached adulthood, he received initiation into the Bektashi Order in the famed Şehitlik Tekke at the hand of Nāfīc Baba. It was in this tekke that Salmān Baba was later ordained a dervish. In time he traveled to the Pīrevi and took the additional vow of celibacy.

In 1913 Salmān Baba was raised to the rank of baba, again at the hand of his murshid, Nāfīc Baba, who was a khalīfah of the above-mentioned Turābī ‘Alī Dede. Salmān Baba was then sent to oversee the Bektashi tekke that once stood in the Kāzīmīyyah neighborhood of Baghdad. There he remained until the tekke was destroyed during the tumult of the First World War.

In 1927 Salmān Baba moved to Albania, where he established a tekke in the city of Elbasan. He remained this tekke's spiritual guide until he passed from this life in 1953.

Salmān Baba possessed a very cultured personality, and he enjoyed a talent for composing nefes poetry. In his poems, he uses the pen name “Salmān Jamālī.” We can discover Salmān Baba’s poems scattered in numerous collections of Bektashi poetry. Here is one of his works:

*Insert yourself into a hive of bees, go on,  
If you say, “I’ll take honey and lick my finger.”  
Find the delight and desire of love, go on,  
If you say, “In the nest of union I’ll linger.”*

*The Lord brought this peculiar world into being;  
It’s the great mirror set for man’s perceiving.  
On this road you’ll need to be one of those serving,  
If you say, “I’ll take grace from the saints.”*

*I’m Salmān Jamālī for the beauty of love,  
Forever I’ve yearned for the perfection of love.  
You need to reach for the union of love  
If you say, “I’ll dive into the ocean of love.”*

With all that we have read so far, this poem should be understandable and in no need of explanation. Therefore, let us have a look at another of Salmān Jamālī Baba’s poems:

*In this worldly rose garden our hearts you’ll not see,  
We’re nightingales in the garden of Paradise!  
We’re never sated by the fare of Reality,  
We’re ever drunk on love, for us it’s no vice!*

*“Find yourself in yourself” is what my Pīr told me,  
If over the ruse of these two worlds you seek mastery.  
The perfected guides’ advice we perceive attentively,  
We’re wholly deaf to the hypocrites’ advice!*

*For the love of Haydar, Salmān Jamālī I am,  
For the love of holy Kanbar, a slave to the Imām,  
For the love of the prince behind whom we stand,  
We’re those who follow ‘Alī, to be concise!*

This poem should be equally clear and in no need of explanation; therefore, let us look at one last nefes poem by Salmān Jamālī Baba:

*The goal of perfection's Mi'rāj is the maydān of 'Alī.  
For the seeker the road to God is the epoch of 'Alī.*

*O heart! This is more than enough truth to prove Reality,  
For that which arrives at the goal is the faith of 'Alī.*

*My heart I surrendered, the ikrār I uttered sincerely;  
This primordial pledge of my faith is the proof of 'Alī.*

*If you've become forever drunk, O dervish, love may it be!  
Drink up the last drop with ardor from the goblet of 'Alī.*

*Come and explore the mystic Ka'bah, O humble Jamālī;  
The wisdom of "Am I not?" is in the Salmān of 'Alī.*

This poem should likewise be clear and in no need of explanation.

## BABA 'ALĪ TOMORI

Baba 'Alī Tomori was a Bektashi scholar and poet who lived in relatively recent times. He was born in 1893 in the village of Shalës, which lay several miles from the town of Tepelenë. When he finished his elementary education, he went off to high school in Yanina. Afterwards, he received initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Baba Sha'bān in the tekke of Prishta, and it was here that he ultimately gave his solemn vows and donned the dervish vestments.

When the Greek aggressors saw fit to put countless tekkes to the torch, Baba 'Alī – along with Baba Sha'bān, Baba Ahmād Koshtanin, and a dervish – fled Albania to Cairo's famed tekke, which was then under the direction of Lutfī Baba. The group remained there for some time until the tumultuous days of rebels and Greeks had passed. Baba Sha'bān departed the material realm during their stay and was buried in the vast cave of Kaygusuz Sultān. Baba 'Alī and his companions shortly thereafter returned to Albania.

Baba ‘Alī took up residence in Prishta’s tekke, which is why he often signed his writings “Varfē [Dervish] Ali Prishta.” He was a very active and skilled man. He had a solid grasp of the Turkish language, and he knew some Arabic, which he studied as a sacred language during his days in secondary school. He also knew a bit of French, which he also studied in secondary school. Needless to say, Baba ‘Alī was a master of Albanian and he possessed a great talent for verse and oratory in his native tongue.

Baba ‘Alī played a major role in organizing The First Bektashi Congress, and he contributed significantly to its discussions and deliberations. This gathering was held at the Prishta Tekke in 1921. A decree was issued at this time promoting Baba Kamber Prishta to the position of director of this tekke, owing to the passing of Baba Husayn. This order was issued by Baba Ahmād Turānī, who was attending the conference. It should be noted that Baba ‘Alī began publishing a journal called *Reforma* around this time.

After this congress, Baba Ahmād Turānī raised “Varfē” ‘Alī to the rank of baba and sent him to direct the small tekke that sat on the slopes of sacred Mount Tomorr. This tekke had been established earlier by Dervish Ilyās. Henceforth, Baba ‘Alī became known as Baba ‘Alī “Tomorri.” However, when writing his poetry, he would use the pen name “Turābī,” which means “One from the dust” in Arabic.

Throughout his life, Baba ‘Alī was involved in every type of positive movement, be it religious or patriotic. In 1926 he helped to organize The Second Bektashi Congress that was held at Baba Suleyman’s tekke near Gjirokastēr. Baba ‘Alī also played an active role in the organization of The Third Bektashi Congress held in the Turan Tekke near Korça in 1929. It was during this gathering that Baba ‘Alī drafted the administrative regulations of the Bektashi Community, regulations that had been followed until recent times.

Baba ‘Alī possessed a broadminded temperament and he stood against extremism and fanaticism of every kind. In fact, spoke out against such sentiments in many of his writings and poems. Baba ‘Alī tirelessly worked to generate understanding between Albanian’s Christians and Bektashis with the intention of strengthening national unity.

In 1944 His Holiness Selīm Rūhī Baba passed from this life and in 1946 the communist government sent Baba ‘Alī to head Gjirokastēr’s Teqeja e Zallit. It was not long thereafter, however, that the very same

government accused Baba ‘Alī of being a spy for the British. He was dragged before a “people’s court” late in 1947 and sentenced to death. He was hung on January 14, 1948.

Baba ‘Alī Tomorri was a prolific writer and among his many books are these titles:

- *Histori e Bektashizmës* (The History of Bektashism), published in Tirana in 1929.
- *Literatura e Bektashinjvet* (The Literature of the Bektashis), a 32-page book containing a number of Bektashi poems translated into Albanian.
- *Bektashinjtë e Shqiperisë* (Bektashis in Albania), a small book in prose and verse, printed in Korça in 1921.
- *Nefese dhe Gazele bektashiane* (Bektashi nefes and ghazels).

In addition to these works Baba ‘Alī wrote many articles and poems that were published in newspapers and magazines throughout Albania.

Having presented this brief biography, it would be fitting for us to present samples of Baba ‘Alī’s poetry, the first entitled *Dosti i im*, “My beloved”:

*On him I lock my eyes;  
A most splendid face I espy.  
My heart broke in pieces, I cry:  
My dōst! My beloved!*

*This wretched world means not a thing.  
Like a nightingale on the wing  
I alight in a rose bush, and I sing:  
My dōst! My beloved!*

*Pouring over rocks like a raging stream,  
Winding over hill and dale so green,  
I call as I arise in a garden serene:  
My dōst! My beloved!*

*Like a dove that flew out of the blue.  
From the two worlds I push through,  
Crying words that bring tears anew:  
My dōst! My beloved!*



Baba 'Ali Tomorri, 1893-1948

*With him now I've come together.  
Heart and oath I've made a white feather.  
Body and soul moves toward him forever;  
My dōst! My beloved!*

*In a temple or in an old saloon,  
In my home or a grave lit by the moon,  
I'll cry at the Ka'bah, or in Hellfire's gloom:  
My dōst! My beloved!*

*Poor Turābī wanders here and there.  
Glance and gaze, his eyes still stare.  
Throughout the cosmos he'll forever declare:  
My dōst! My beloved!*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation. Therefore, here is another of Baba 'Alī's poems, one entitled *Inspirata pēr jetēn e pasosur*, "Inspiration for Eternal Life":

*The day you came into this world  
You've looked around for me.  
You've cried, you've wailed, you've shouted out.  
Your tears could fill a sea.*

*Your being born was not so bad,  
But you remembered not  
That one day you will find the grave,  
And tears you'll shed a lot!*

*Around the globe you wandered much,  
And still, I wasn't seen.  
You questioned everyone you met;  
No answers could you glean.*

*Yet you still kept close your ego.  
Its directives you obeyed,  
Until you came to understand  
The perfect path we'd laid.*

*The moment you beheld me,  
And you saw that I was near,  
The doubts and fears within you,  
They never reappeared.*

*With me you entered unity.  
My presence you could feel.  
The vessel of the intellect  
Was trampled under heel.*

*Now listen well to this advice,  
And do not run away:  
All those who have no clue of me  
Away from them do stay!*

*Sakāhum's wine, come take a drink!  
Your hue it will revive.  
Remain with Me along the path  
As long as you're alive.*

*O Turābī, listen up!  
For you must be consistent.  
From the one you claim is your beloved  
You must never be too distant!*

*To you I showed the greatest thing:  
A life that does not end,  
That ecstasy and happiness  
Lay buried deep within!*

This poem should not need any explanation, except that the word **Saḳāhum** relates to this verse from the Қur'ān:

... and their Lord will give them  
a purifying drink.  
﴿Sūrat al-Insān 76:21﴾

We have explained the meaning of this sacred verse in earlier sections. Saḳāhum literally means “and will give them to drink.” At this point let us look at another of Baba ‘Alī’s poems, one entitled *Dēshmor’i Qerbelasē*, “The Martyr of Karbalā”:

*Son of Fāṭimah, our Lady Batūl,  
A rose from the House of Rasūl,  
From Madinah his travail began,  
Setting out on the path to Janān.*

*They begged him not to leave;  
That Karbalā’ his life would thieve.  
But takdīr he would not prevent  
Where Shah-i Mardān’s life was rent.*

*Journeying from the mystic Kāf  
To the level Plain of Taftaf,  
Hūrr Riyāḥī blocked his road.  
Yet what Pahlivāni light there flowed!*

*Blessed Hūrr refused to let him by,  
As tears overflowed his eyes.  
He kissed the Imām’s feet and hands,  
Begging him to leave that scorched maydān.*

*This Nūr-i Fāṭimat uz-Zahrā  
On the bloody maydān of jafā  
Courageously did not concede,  
And thus the fawk ul-insānī fell shahīd.*

*Behold his conduct so expressive,  
An example of one so impressive  
As he departed the realm of fānī.  
So moisten thy eyes, O Turābī!*

This poem contains a number of foreign words that will need to be explained: **Batūl** means “undefiled” and it a title of Lady Fātimah, the Prophet’s daughter; The **House of Rasūl** refers to the household of the Prophet Muḥammad, i.e. the Ahl ul-Bayt; **janān** means “heart” or “soul”, which symbolizes Baba ‘Alī’s beloved: God. **Takdīr** means “fate”; **Shah-i Mardān** means “King of Men,” i.e. the exalted Imām ‘Alī, as we have previously explained. **Kāf** refers to the mysterious mountain of ancient Persian tradition believed to be the farthest point on the earth, and the **Plain of Taftaf** is an old name for the Plain of Karbalā’.

**Hūrr al-Riyāḥī** is the name of a commander in Yazīd’s army. Hūrr intercepted Imām Husayn near Karbalā’ and tried to persuade him to return to Makkah. However, the Imām refused to consider Hūrr’s counsel. Hūrr then relinquished his command and went over to Imām Husayn’s side. As the battle commenced, Hūrr became the first of Imām Husayn’s men to fall martyred.

**Pahlivān** means “hero” or “champion”; **maydān** in this instance means “battlefield”; **Nūr-i Fātimat uz-Zahrā** means “Light of Fātimah uz-Zahrā”, Fātimah being the mother of Imam Husayn; **jafā** means “suffering”; **fawk ul-insānī** is made of two conjoined Arabic words: *fawk*, which means “above”, and *insānī*, which refers to human beings. The two together can be understood to mean “superhuman.” **Fānī** means “transitory.” Baba ‘Alī uses this term to describe the material world, because it is impermanent and transitory. The other verses should be clear to our readers.

Here is another of Baba ‘Alī’s poems, one in which he mentions a number of famous Bektashi missionaries. The title of this poem is *Shenjtorët e Shqipërisë*, “The Saints of Albania”:

*In this lovely rose garden that God so warmly tends,  
A nightingale sings his happy song until the moonlight ends.*

*This old land is in God’s hands; he’s never let us down.  
All the saints forever may they close to us be found!*

*Hajji Baba Qesarakë; Durballi’s tomb’s not far.  
All good fortune issues from the many saints there are.*

*Don’t you fret, O wealthy land, for Sari Saltik’s here;  
God is surely with those folk who keep his true ones dear.*

*How many saints are in your grasp, O sweet Albania?  
Shah Nasībī in high Frashēr, Shamīmī in Kruja.*

*Gjirokastēr! Formed you are from Muḥammad Ḥalī's tribe;  
‘Āsim Baba's in your fields, your walls ‘Arshī imbibe.*

*In Kosova there's Sersem Ḥalī, Gül Baba in Budapest;  
In Vlora Town Kuzum Baba, in Berat Ḥalī Baba rests.*

*Koshtan contains our ancient ones, Jafātī near Elbasan,  
Demirhan in Tepelenë, Abdullah in Melçan.*

*In Skrapar's verdant hills there is an angel with a flower;  
He's Baba Ṭāhir Prishta, a saint filled with God's power.*

*Atop the sacred peaks let's go, the Ahl-i Bayt adore!  
Ziyārat to ‘Abbās Ḥalī upon old Mount Tomorr.*

*This striking flower garden filled with overflowing prayer;  
Do your best to keep it safe; don't lose these blossoms fair.*

*Turābī go and seek out the blessed candle of our land:  
He's Sālih Dede, kryegjysh, who makes sacred Tiran'.*

Since this poem needs no explanation, we shall look at one last poem from Baba Ḥalī, one entitled *Vjershëtorët Bektashinj*, or “The Bektashi Poets”, in which he praises many famous Bektashis:

*From Baghdad came Fużūlī, the Ḥadiķa he composed;  
A nightingale who's from on high; his light our souls enclosed.*

*The luminous Virānī, with Ḥalī upon his tongue,  
And sweet-scented Nasīmī, from these men we'll never run.*

*Turābī Ḥalī Dede left us poems that move the soul,  
In Turkish they come down to us; our faith they do extol.*

*The pen of Pīr Sultān Abdal churned out poems that are so rare,  
And like a long-past dreamer gave us many works so fair.*

*Khaṭātī and Bosnevī are both great comforts in affliction.  
They left the world lovely poems so filled with benediction.*

*Tabrīzī Shams, his anguish caused his soul to fill with light;  
His pain produced such discourse that it set the world aright.*

*Hilmî of old Istanbul, let's not forget him too!  
For when his blessed poems are sung all goodness they renew.*

*Among the other languages that set this patch aglow,  
Our poets left in our own tongue a mark that you should know:*

*An Albanian Hadîka was the work of Tâlib Bey;  
Shâhîn and Nâimi the motherland did not betray.*

*Who hoisted up our honor like Muâharram Maâzûnî?  
From north to south Albania his verses let us see.*

*An angel from the Ghegs we find 'Abdullah Melçani,  
His fame has not subsided with his poems so 'Alawî.*

*In Leskovik there grew a rose named Baba 'Abidîn,  
And from his maydân came a light that lets our path be seen.*

*Ah! Melek Baba Skrapari, he's an ocean of delight,  
He's sunshine on the mountains with his poems so very bright.*

*These stand above all others, O Turâbî of Tomorr!  
Sing their songs while on the yôl – they're worthy to adore.*

This poem needs no explanation, save that the Arabic word **'Alawî** is an adjective of relation or pertinence to Imâm **'Alî**; the Turkish word **yôl** means “way” or “path”.

## BEKTASHI WOMEN POETS

During the 19th and 20th centuries, we find clear examples of Bektashi women expressing their spiritual devotion through poetry. We shall examine the biographies of some of these ladies below, along with samples of their poetry.

It would be appropriate to note here that upon receiving initiation into the Bektashi Order, a woman receives the title **bâjî**, a term of respect and endearment meaning “elder sister.” In Bektashi parlance this term denotes a lady who has submitted herself to the way of **Hajjî Bektash Veli**.

## KULTHŪM BĀJĪ

Kulthūm Bājī is one of the best-known lady poets of our Path. She was originally from Trikala (Tr. Tırhala), a town in northwestern Thessaly, being born there in 1843 into a notable local family. After leaving Trikala for Istanbul with her husband, Kulthūm Bājī received initiation into the Bektashi Order in Nūrī Baba's tekke, which was once found in the suburb of Çamlıca.

Kulthūm Bājī left this life in 1928. Sadly we do not possess any other details about her biography. Nonetheless, through reading her poems we can see that she enjoyed lyrical skill and talent. Here is one of her nefes poems in which she praises the exalted <sup>o</sup>Alī:

*O brilliant moon! Your splendor  
Into a sea of light has caused me to descend.  
Your parting has brought wounds so tender,  
In a meeting of strangers they made me the friend.*

*The Merciful was there made manifest,  
O Beloved, in your fair visage blessed.  
Your face is my Kur'ān, I truly attest;  
Praise God! This I came to comprehend.*

*"You're the soul in my body," I said.  
"You're the guest within my heart," you said.  
"You're the Prince of this Age," I said.  
You said, "Serenity is My job to upend!"*

*From you I will never separate,  
For my very soul you penetrate,  
Even if my flesh they come decimate;  
For there, below the curtain, you and I blend.*

*To every moment life my breath brings;  
O Mary's son! You have done such things.  
From me a most ancient jewel springs,  
And that's why my wealth of secrets I defend.*

*My tongue spoke of the feast of oneness,  
As well as the pearl of astuteness;  
By the sweet wine of union I possess,  
Both sobriety and drunkenness I transcend.*

*The heart with desire has been filled,  
Bring me wine, O Cup-bearer skilled!  
Let my boundless fortune be fulfilled,  
Because with grief and pain I must contend.*

*This realm you've made is both cold and hot,  
But for Kulthūm a nuisance this is not;  
The litany that brings peace long-sought  
Is ‘Alī, whose rule over all virtue extends.*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of detailed explanation. However, we should note that the second verse refers to Imām ‘Alī, the wellspring of Islamic mysticism. ‘Alī embodies in both speech and character the loftiest of divine attributes and the commands conveyed in the Qur’ān, the Word of God.

## ZAHRĀ BĀJĪ

Zahrā Bājī was a native of the imperial city of Istanbul, where she was born in 1870. She received initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of the aforementioned Mehmet ‘Alī Hilmī Dede, head of the Merdivenköy Tekke. The date of her passing from the world (as well as other details of her biography) is unknown to us at this time. However, we do know that Zahrā Bājī was a poet of considerable talent. Here is one of her more famous poems, one in which she upholds the qualities of womanhood, lambasting any man who believes these qualities to be a weakness:

*O Muḥammad! We're lacking they say,  
From where did they get such drivel?  
Do they stand against the Ahl ul-Bayt's way?  
In the light, their claims will surely shrivel.*

*Our mother is Eve; do you say she's not a sister?  
Khadījat ul-Kubrā; do you say she's not a sister?  
Fāṭimat uz-Zahrā; do you say she's not a sister?  
There's praise for them found in the Qur'ān!*

*The purified wives; are such women deficient?  
Believe this and you'll never know the Omniscient;*

*Ah men! Should we expect them to be beneficent?  
Who was it, pray tell, that gave birth to all the prophets?*

*God never created something that wasn't meant.  
We'll never accept being mere embellishment.  
Our sisters raised all the saints who to this world were sent.  
Go ahead! Prove me otherwise!*

*Would there'd be no world here without you?  
Ponder on Mother Mary for a moment or two.  
Without a father she bore Jesus; but that you knew.  
There are no dissemblers among the sisters!*

*O men! We are braver than you excessively  
Because we show respect to you willingly.  
Since as one we go down this road progressively  
Don't make such empty claims!*

*Just because we don't reside in your clothes,  
Behind you we're not, so don't presuppose.  
We don't regard as brave, as anyone knows,  
Those who maintain we're idiots!*

*Did Ahmād-i Mukhtār come from a faulty one?  
Was Ḥaydar-i Karār a dimwit's son?  
Would you dare say your mother's outdone?  
Her prayers surely do affect you!*

*O, men! Listen well to Zahrā's oration!  
The saints attest to our high station.  
Did our bodies not provide gestation  
To the spiritual masters who guide you?*

This poem should have no need of clarification.

## SAKĪNA BĀJĪ

Sakīna Bājī was a Bektashi poet who lived during the second half of the nineteenth century. Born in 1842 in the village of Seyit Gazi (near Eskişehir), she was the daughter of the poet ‘Alī Rizā Hādī. Sakīna Bājī received her initiation into the Bektashi Order at the Sultān Shujāc Tekke that was once found the region. Here we shall present one of her poems in which lauds

Imām Ḥalī. It is said that she composed this poem when she was ninety-five years old:

*They've laid out this path from pre-eternity,  
The master of this way, Muḥammad Ḥalī.  
If you ask who my guide is, it's Pīr Bektash Veli;  
Is there a saint like Ḥalī anywhere to be found?*

*Drinking from the goblet, the murshids come together;  
Pearls and jewels their sanctified tongues scatter;  
The failings of the sinner they can surely shatter;  
Is there such a faultless slave anywhere to be found?*

*Each mystic master sits in his proper place;  
The sum of Ḥalī's mystery, who can embrace?  
We stood at the gallows – for us it's no disgrace;  
Is the place of Mansūr anywhere to be found?*

*From the cup the Forty drank from let's drink too;  
In our hearts worry and care let's not pursue.  
Khadijah and Fāṭimah soon came into view;  
Is there a meeting like this anywhere to be found?*

*This assembly is superior to all things;  
Brothers are the slaves of Ḥalī in this gathering;  
Above us the Hand of Power is hovering;  
Is a more blessed hand anywhere to be found?*

*The path of the saints is a hidden mystery;  
You'll find here what you seek, whatever it may be;  
Those gathered within, their hearts find unity;  
Is there a gloomy heart anywhere to be found?*

*The Three and the Five threw open the door,  
Musk and fine amber they gave to adore;  
The right they discerned from the wrong they abhor;  
Is there space here for the sinner anywhere to be found?*

*Can the wounds of the fallen be ever repaired?  
Is there a heart where room for a lamp's prepared?  
To cure this a thousand Luqmāns would be impaired;  
Is there a soul asking for relief anywhere to be found?*

*I've been smashed on this wine you had me sip;  
While you had your chance away you let me slip;*

*The days have passed like so on this ninety-five year trip;  
Is there a day like this among the passing days anywhere to be found?*

*Lady Sakīna declares: If to this truth you can arrive,  
If you can see by opening up your soul's eyes,  
If the words I say you can come to realize,  
Is there a greater repute than this anywhere to be found?*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation.

## ĀMINAH BEYZA BĀJĪ

Āminah Bājī was born in the city of Izmir in 1872. Her ancestral roots stretch back to a well-known family that was originally from the town of Zeytinciler. Āminah Bājī was initiated into the Bektashi Order at the hand of ‘Abdullah Baba (former master of the tekke of Mora Yenişehir<sup>60</sup>). Later in life, she moved to Üsküdar, a suburb of Istanbul. At the time of this writing, we do not know if she remains alive or if she has departed from this fleeting world.<sup>61</sup> We do know, however, that this noble Bektashi lady possessed a great talent for writing poems, one of which is this:

*This day I reached my Pir.  
His good graces I draw near.  
In a sea of love I disappear.*

*Support, O my shāh, ‘Alī!  
Help, Khunkār Bektash Velī!*

*To Muḥammad my neck I bend.  
In ‘Alī do all my efforts end.  
The Twelve Imāms, I'm their friend.*

*Support, O my shāh, ‘Alī!  
Help, Khunkār Bektash Velī!*

*“Lady Khadījah, O Fāṭimah!” I call.  
From your train don't let me fall.  
Pardon my failings and sins above all.*

*Support, O my shāh, ‘Alī!  
Help, Khunkār Bektash Velī!*

*I sipped a drink from the Pir's hand.  
My soul and mind came to expand.  
Upon the path of God's saints I stand.*

*Support, O my shāh, <sup>c</sup>Alī!  
Help, Khunkār Bektash Veli!*

*The saint's path is gleaming and bright.  
<sup>c</sup>Abdullah, my murshid, is made of pure light,  
The very same that Moses held in sight.*

*Support, O my shāh, <sup>c</sup>Alī!  
Help, Khunkār Bektash Veli!*

*My shāh is the grandest of the grand.  
His servant Āminah is at his command.  
Kawthar's chalice is held in his hand.*

*Support, O my shāh, <sup>c</sup>Alī!  
Help, Khunkār Bektash Veli!*

This poem should need no clarification, given all of our previous discussions and explanations. The mystic imagery, allusions and terms used in it should be familiar to our readers by now.

## <sup>c</sup>ĀRİFAH BĀJĪ

<sup>c</sup>Ārifah Bājī was born in the town of Rakova (tr. Rahva), Bulgaria, in the year 1868. She was the daughter of the <sup>c</sup>Ārif Agha, a local merchant. When she was ten years old (that is in 1878), her family was dislodged from Rakova due to the chaos stirred up by the Russo-Turkish War. They found refuge in Istanbul (together with her cousin Çivizade Mustafa Efendi) and permanently settled there.

<sup>c</sup>Ārifah Bājī lived in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul until 1932. She received initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Hāfiẓ Baba in the Karyağdi Dergāh, which is located in the Eyüb Sultan neighborhood of Istanbul. <sup>c</sup>Ārifah Bājī possessed a remarkable talent for composing poetry. Here is one of her poems in which praises her murshid, Hāfiẓ Baba:

*To the Karyağdı Dergâh we made ziyârat.  
The perfect beauty of Hâfiż Baba we beheld.  
We sat with such lovely souls in muḥabbat;  
The perfect beauty of Hâfiż Baba we beheld.*

*At that moment a lofty maydân spread out.  
The arkân laid open, the gülbanks we gave shout.  
Seeing his grace, in our hearts love took sprout;  
The perfect beauty of Hâfiż Baba we beheld.*

*We plunged into a state of fixed intoxication,  
Plurality left our hearts – this pointed to his station.  
We forgot ourselves, so immersed in adoration;  
The perfect beauty of Hâfiż Baba we beheld.*

*O ḡâfirah! Come lift the veil from your eyes  
So the splendor of Hâkk can be seen without disguise.  
By knowing the murshid this will in your soul arise;  
The perfect beauty of Hâfiż Baba we beheld.*

The lines of this poem should be clear and in no need of clarification.

## İKBÂL BÂJÎ

İkbâl Bâjî was originally from Istanbul, where she was born in 1860. She was the spouse of the distinguished musician Dervish Tevfik (d. 1889). İkbâl Bâjî received her initiation into the Bektashi Order at the hand of Nûrî Baba (about whom we have spoken of earlier) in the tekke that was once found in Çamlıca. We know little else about her life other than that she passed away during her husband's lifetime. İkbâl Bâjî was a woman of exceptional expressive talent. Here is one of her poems in which she mentions her murshid, Nûrî Baba:

*To the heavens turn your face,  
Prayer and moment interlace,  
With niyâz the Real embrace  
So relief from troubles may come!*

*All your old records put away;  
With other than God do not stay;  
See the Real, don't run astray  
So to your heart insight may come!*

*Let's turn our being into dust;  
Let's leave the ego in disgust;  
Let our hearts become devoid of rust  
So the Beloved of lovers may come!*

*To this two-faced world do not aspire;  
Keep yourself from vain desire;  
Nūrī Baba lift me from this mire  
So benevolence and grace may come!*

*Hand over everything that you own;  
Your confession don't postpone;  
From all your wrongdoings atone  
So into your heart faith may come!*

*Nūrī Baba's our sovereign shāh;  
He keeps unbolted our dergāh;  
Every guest there stands in awe  
So lovers to our side may come!*

*Our path leads to the Real;  
All our effort this reveals;  
To my Nūrī Baba we appeal  
So the cup-bearer and his drink may come!*

*O Ikbāl! Unfasten your sight;  
Strive to fill yourself with light;  
Turn to the Shāh and tell him of your plight  
So ease to all your works may come!*

The subject matter of this poem should be straightforward. The mystical principles that we have explained throughout this book can be applied to understand this entire poem.

## MUNĪRAH BĀJĪ

Another of our famous Bektashi women poets is Munīrah Bājī. She was born in Istanbul in 1852, and she lived in this city her entire life. She

too was initiated into the Bektashi Path by the hand of Nūrī Baba at his tekke in Çamlıca. Munīrah Bājī passed to the next life in 1912 during the tumult of the First Balkan War. She composed numerous nefes poems, one of which is this:

*The arkān awakens me from my sleep,  
At the self-righteous I smile, they weep,  
A devoted slave, a bent neck I keep;  
Haydarī I am! Haydarī!*

*I'm servant to the People of the Way,  
The arkān I grasp as my mainstay,  
The child of 1,001 saints, I've no dismay;  
Haydarī I am! Haydarī!*

*If I enter the fire, I will not burn,  
If I be a lamp, by my light you'll learn,  
From my dear murshid I dare not turn;  
Haydarī I am! Haydarī!*

*Of two fathers I've been born,  
Let whoever will, mock me with scorn,  
For by fear and dread I'm not worn;  
Haydarī I am! Haydarī!*

*Munīrah serves the Shāh attentively,  
She's an avowed servant of Kızıl Deli,  
Her heart is filled by love's entry;  
Haydarī I am! Haydarī!*

Let us now provide some clarification for this poem:

In the opening verses, Munīrah Bājī declares: “Standing before the maydān ceremony we stand neck-bound, becoming a sacrifice as it were. We feel no despair if detractors disparage us. We depart from them, making not a sound – for we are connected to Ḥaydar-i Karār, the ‘Unyielding Lion,’ who is none other than the exalted ‘Alī.’” Thus the word **Haydarī**, which denotes someone connected to Ḥaydar (i.e. Imām ‘Alī). In other words, Munīrah Bājī tells us: “We follow the mystic fraternity that came down to us from Imām ‘Alī, and those adversaries who have been stubbornly flinging stones at us all their lives have no effect on our efforts.”

The **1,001** refers to the number of grades and qualities that the wayfarer must equip himself with to attain perfection. These grades and qualities – says Mūnīrah Bājī – are attained when our spiritual principles are upheld through the stripping away of materialism, including the ego’s longings. We could be thrust into the fire, and yet we would remain unscathed because we possess nothing, seeing as we are completely melted in God’s splendor. We could flicker like the wick of an oil lamp that illuminates the world, completely burning up; and yet this would not affect us because we are stripped of any material concern. We forever shine bright, for we have gained everlasting life.

The **two fathers** mentioned in the fourth stanza refer to our biological father, who causes us to be born into the material world, and our spiritual father (i.e. baba), who causes us to be born into the spiritual world, and who continues to guide us after this second birth. The other parts of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation.



Many other Bektashi ladies have written captivating poetry comparable to the nefes poems we have presented here. Nevertheless, the size of our book does not permit us to present any further examples, and it is for this reason that we have presented only a small sample in the preceding pages.

## BABA ŞALIH MATOHASANAJ

We have recently come across a bit of information about our dear Baba Şalih, who came from the village of Matohasanaj near Tepelenë. We do not possess much regarding his biography, but we know that he was born in this village during the last half of the nineteenth century.

In the days of his youth, Baba Şalih was so filled with a spiritual yearning that he abandoned any thought of the world, dedicating himself instead to the Path of Hajjī Bektash Velī. However, Baba Şalih did not turn all of his attention to spiritual matters; he was also involved in social issues – particularly patriotic issues – as we shall read below.

Baba Şalih devoted his energy to educating the children of his village, where he established a school with funds from his tekke’s endowments.

Prominent teachers, such as Fehmi Efendi Çami and Arslan Murati taught in this school. All the dignitaries of the Lopsi region studied in Baba Şâlih's school – men like Veis Arifi, Ismail Kasua, Zeynel Fetahu, Mersin Meçja, Veisi Ali, Hasan Dulja, Husain Muharemi, Qazim Mema, Ihsan Pashua, Koci Sadiku, Riza Fega and many others.

With Baba Şâlih at its helm during the days of the League of Prizren, the tekke of Matohasanaj became a school where the Albanian language was clandestinely taught. This school greatly benefited the local notables, since they were able to study our native tongue. Baba Şâlih sacrificed much to promote the Albanian language. He oversaw the distribution of the books that were made available through the “Society for the Printing of Albanian Literature” that had been established in Istanbul. These books were sent from Istanbul to Tripoli (Libya), where the governor, Rexheb Pasha Mati – a staunch patriot – had Baba Şâlih transport to Albania for distribution. Baba Şâlih carried out this noble and patriotic deed many times over many years.

However, in 1902 Baba Şâlih's activities were uncovered by the Ottoman authorities. He was immediately arrested by gendarmes in the region of Kudhësi (near Vlora) and subsequently given a lengthy prison sentence. Baba Şâlih was an energetic man, and since there was little to do in prison, he began to translate Fużūlī's *Hadīkat us-Su'adā* into Albanian, a classic work that we have mentioned earlier in our book.

Like all of the aforementioned Bektashi poets, Baba Şâlih possessed a talent for composing verse. In this poem he explains the unfortunate episode of his arrest, which happened in the year mentioned above:

*I find myself no more than dust – my tears, dear God, please see!  
My tongue calls out from dawn to dusk, Alīmad-i Mukhtār, O 'Alī!*

*“O Husayn!” my heart laments. “O Hajjī Bektash Veli!”  
I write this poem to curb my angst so our tongue might ever be.*

*I put my pen to paper to make Albanian hearts celebrate.  
But outside of Vlor', in Kudhës town; three-hundred ten plus eight,*

*As the Turks reckon their long years came Mu'awiya plain as day,  
His spies played on our darkest fears and stole my plans away.*

*The Turks discerned that it was our tongue I sought to spread,  
So two by two their horsemen came and I lay in a prison bed!*

*O poor Şâlih! Don't sit still, take Fużūli and his prose,  
And that work of his in foreign tongues to Albanian transpose!*

The meaning of this poem should be clear and in no need of explanation. Therefore, let us look at another of Baba Şâlih's poems:

*Help me, O my God! For this entreaty I make:  
For this permeating heartache a cure I beg from you!*

*O Muḥammad! O ʻAlī don't let me cry in vain;  
For this permeating heartache a cure I beg from you!*

*For the sake of Imām Ḥasan and his brother Al-Ḥusayn  
Give me your blessed hand so I will not fall again.*

*If your heart holds any love for fourth Imām, who's Zayn,  
For this permeating heartache a cure I beg from you!*

*For the sake of Imām Bakīr, may he be sanctified,  
For the sake of Jaʻfar Sādīk, may he be glorified,*

*For the sake Mūsā Kāzīm, the one who's purified,  
For this permeating heartache a cure I beg from you!*

*For the munificence of Takī and his son Imām Naṣīr,  
For the overflowing honor of Ḥasan al-ʻAskarī,*

*Behold the living virtue of Muḥammad al-Mahdī,  
For this permeating heartache a cure I beg from you!*

*Continue on, O Şâlih, with what you know is right,  
For Hajjī Bektashi Veli work with all your might,*

*Pray in your own tongue and keep the goal in sight:  
For this permeating heartache a cure I beg from you!*

The meaning of this work should be equally straightforward and in no need of clarification.



## A Few Words to Conclude

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With this book, we have attempted to give our readers a broad introduction to both the Bektashi Order and its source: Islamic mysticism. Having reached this final point it should now be clear that the fundamentals of Bektashi spirituality presented in the second half of our book are reflected in the principles explained in the first.

In the first part of our book, we provided our readers with a survey of Islamic mysticism, starting with its emergence in the first and second Hijrī centuries. We discussed how this stream of mysticism was understood, absorbed and expressed over the ensuing centuries. We also spotlighted the foremost advocates of Islamic mysticism – from the beginning down through the centuries. We learned that after much suffering and sacrifice, after handing over many martyrs to the fanaticism manifested in various eras, the mystics were eventually able to practice their spiritual pursuits unimpeded. It was at this point that they began organizing themselves into various tarīkats (orders) according to the inspirations and principles of their teachings. We then provided information on a number of these tarīkats.

In the second part of our book, we explained how the Bektashi Path emerged in the thirteenth and fourteen centuries with the coming of the mystic saint Hajjī Bektash Velī. We also discussed how the order was given structure in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Balīm Sultān. We explained in detail the main points of Bektashi philosophy, its moral codes, guidelines, requirements, regulations, and pathways, as well as its views on divine love and the theory of *wahdat al-wujūd*.

In the final section of our book, we presented numerous examples of Bektashi poetry as well as brief biographies of their authors. We spoke throughout about the notion of mystical love as it was expressed

from the days of Hajjī Bektash Velī down to recent times. As for those Bektashi poets of Albanian extraction – especially those from among our clergymen – we offered samples from those poems that we currently have on hand.

Nonetheless, many noteworthy babas are not mentioned within the pages of this book, men whose poems are greatly valued by our people. Regrettably, we had no access to these poems during the time of writing. Thus, it was impossible for us to present, for instance, the works of the radiant spiritual masters of Elbasan's tekke: Ibrāhīm Jafaī Baba, Muṣṭafā Kafshī Baba, ‘Alī Baba, and Muṣṭafā Ḥakkī Baba, all of whom were highly cultured individuals who played prominent roles in the story of Bektashism in Albania. From Kruja's tekke, we can mention Hajjī Ḥusayn Baba, Hajjī Yahyā Baba, Baba Hajjī, Baba Mehmeti and many others, who in addition to their religious duties, were active in numerous patriotic endeavors, often being arrested for such undertakings. Furthermore, we have the erudite and refined clergymen of Frashër's famed tekke who came after Tāhir Baba Nasībī, like Baba Alush, Baba ‘Abidīn, Baba Shemia, Baba Muṣṭafā, and others. This particular tekke was the cradle of Albanian nationalism – especially in the days of Baba Alush. In fact, were not for Baba Alush, the principles that Abdyl Frashëri presented at the League of Prizren might not have been realized, and the distribution of the Albanian-language books that inspired our people with patriotic feelings might not have been carried out.

We can count among these remarkable men the cherished spiritual master of the Backë Tekke: Baba Fatah. We also have the worthy babas of Prishta, like Baba Tāhir, Baba Sha‘bān, Baba Ḥusayn and, especially, the remarkable Baba Kamber of recent times. Baba Kamber worked hard for the Bektashi Path, and he contributed a great deal to the Albanian nation until death came to him in 1946 as he languished in a communist prison. It is bittersweet to recall all of these names, given that we do not have on hand any of their poetry and are thus unable to present samples of their works to our readers.

All of these babas inspired our people with such unassailable moral principles and spiritual outlook that Albania was practically stripped

of heinous qualities, like the fondness for blood feuds and vendettas. In their place, these babas fortified our nation with the virtues of love and compassion for all. On account of these men, the underpinnings of enmity between our people began to dissolve, and ideals of union and brotherhood came to the forefront – especially between Muslims and Christians, who together constitute the Albanian nation.

We must also mention the important babas of Tepelenë, like Husayn Baba *‘Ajamī* and Baba Muṣṭafā, as well as Baba Ḥasan of the Memaliaj Tekke, *‘Alī* Baba of the Turan Tekke, Baba Șadıq, Baba Muḥarram, the well-known Ahmad Baba Koshtani, and Baba Kaso of Koshtan’s old tekke. Without a doubt, each of these men possessed their own nefes poems. But alas! We are unable to make any presentation of these works here.

We should briefly mention Baba Kāsim and the tekke of Kastoria, Hāfiẓ Baba of the Kuç Tekke in the Devoll district – who was martyred during the Greek invasion in 1914 – and the famous babas of the tekke that was once found in Konitsa: Baba Turābī, Baba Ḥaydar, and others. We do not have on hand a single nefes poem from any of these distinguished spiritual guides.

Moreover, we have the masters of the Haydarīyyah Tekke [Teqe i Shtufit], which lay on the northern outskirts of Gjirokastër. These include Baba Ḥaydar Plaku, the old Baba Selim, Baba Ḥaydar Kardhiqi, and especially the much-loved Baba Suleiman, who together with Baba Zenel Gjoksin, played a crucial role in Albania’s struggle for freedom. Both were investigated, arrested and exiled many times by the Ottoman authorities. These men likewise have their own poems, which we, unfortunately, cannot access.

Before we close this section, it would benefit us to mention Baba Hamza, who was an extraordinary example of a spiritual guide. Baba Hamza possessed an extensive classical education and an excellent command of the three principal languages of Islamic scholarship: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. He was born in the town of Gjakova in 1882. He received his primary education in his hometown, and as a young man, he desired to enter the mystic path. Therefore he traveled to Prizren, where he received initiation at the hand of Hajjī Adam Baba. Upon taking his



Hamza Baba, 1882-1952

vows, Baba Hamza chose to relinquish the world completely. So at the age of twenty-two, he traveled to the Pîrevi with the intention to become a celibate dervish. He received his ordination from Fayzullah Dede, who was the head of the Bektashi Order in those days.

Having attained this honor, Baba Hamza served the Pîrevi for several years. Following his tenure, he took his leave and made pilgrimages to Najaf and Karbalâ'. He also journeyed to the land of Khorâsân, where he visited the tomb of the eighth Imâm, 'Alî ar-Riża – which is in the city of Mashhad. There he entered a seminary, where he stayed for three years, further advancing his knowledge of Islam. This sojourn also allowed him to master the Persian language.

When Baba Hamza finally returned to Albanian lands, he was appointed murshid of the tekke that once stood in the Macedonian town of Štip after its longtime master, Shukrî Baba, passed away. This event took place around 1912. Baba Hamza served this tekke for thirty-eight years. Afterwards, he left for the Gjakova Tekke since its sheepskin pôst had become vacant. He remained there until 1952, the year he departed from this life.

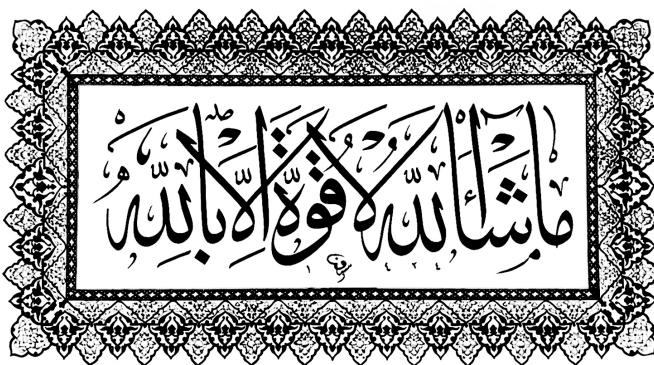
Baba Hamza was an accomplished writer and he composed many beautiful nefes poems. Among these is a lengthy poem (*kasīdah*) written in Persian. In the lines of this poem Baba Hamza artistically expresses the Bektashi approach to mystical devotion and spiritual love. Regrettably, we have none of Baba Hamza's manuscripts on hand, which would have allowed us to present examples of his talent to our readers. We pray for an occasion to arise in the future that will enable us to present his exceptional works, as well as those of other Bektashi mystics of his caliber.



We hereby conclude this book for you, dear reader,  
and we end it with this request:

We ask that you please excuse any deficiencies or shortcomings  
that may be found within its pages. All of us know that nothing  
is flawless save God Almighty, whose bidding we have at all  
times sought to carry out.

Amin!



*God has willed it, and there is no power except by God!*

## GLOSSARY

Due to the large number of foreign terms utilized by Baba Rexheb throughout the text the translator has seen fit to provide this work with a glossary. Whenever necessary alternate spellings of the word have been given, as well as the word's origins: *alb.* Albanian, *ar.* Arabic, *pers.* Persian, *tr.* Turkish.

### **Abā**

*ar.* A type of long cloak or overcoat without a neck band, open in front, made of coarse cloth, and worn by many Sufis.

### **Abdāl**

*ar.* Literally “replacement”; a high-level saint. According to Sufi teachings, there are forty abdals on earth at any given time. When one passes away, a mystic from the lower ranks rises up to take his place.

### **Ābdest**

*pers.* Ablutions typically done before for prayer, and also before carrying out any other ritual form of worship.

### **‘Abīd**

*ar.* Pietists; those individuals who possessed the will and determination to forgo material comfort and give themselves totally over to the worship of God for fear of the Hellfire.

### **Abjad hisāb**

*ar.* A method of calculation whereby each letter of the Arabic alphabet is given a numerical equivalent. According to tradition, it was developed by Imām Mūsā al-Kāzīm.

### **Adab (edeb,edep)**

*ar.* Refined manners, proper conduct, courtesy, and respect, self-discipline.

### **Ahl ul-Bayt (Ehli Beyt,Ehli Bejt)**

*ar.* “People of the House”; The Prophet Muhammad’s family, namely his daughter Fātīmah, his son-in-law and cousin, ‘Alī, and their two sons, Hasan and Husayn. In the broader sense, it also includes the Twelve Imāms.

### **Ahl ul-bid‘ah**

*ar.* People of unacceptable religious innovation

### **Ahl ul-Sunnah wa'l-jamā‘ah**

*ar.* Literally, “People of the prophetic tradition.” Sunnism, the predominant sect of Islam followed by approximately 85% of the world’s Muslims.

### **‘Ālam ul-barzakh**

*ar.* The transitional worlds between this life and the next.

### **‘Alīd (Alevi, Alevinē)**

Having descent or chain of spiritual transmission from Imām ‘Alī.

### **Alīfī tāj**

*ar.* The dervish cap made of two tarks, or seams, worn by Hajjī Bektash Velī.

### **Aman**

*ar.* “Please,” “For goodness sake.”

### **Amānah (emanet)**

*ar.* A trust or deposit.

### **Ana'l-Haqq**

*ar.* “I am the Real.” The famous utterance made by Al-Hallāj.

### **Anāsir**

*ar.* The four elements of earth, air, fire and water.

### **‘Arif**

*ar.* A gnostic, knower; one who possesses spiritual awareness. (pl. *‘arifīn*)

### **Asçı baba**

*tr.* The head cook of a tekke.

**Aşk olsun**

*tr.* “Let there be love!” A phrase quite often used by Bektashis.

**“Āşik (aşık)**

*ar.* Lover; a person who is attached to (or sympathizes with) the Bektashi Order but who has not yet been initiated.

**“Ashk ilāhī**

*ar.* Divine love.

**Ashurah (Aşure, Dita e ashures)**

*ar.* The 10th of Muharram, commemorated by Bektashis as the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imām Husayn.

**Āsitāne (kryegjyshata)**

*pers.* Threshold; the mother-tekke of a Sufi order.

**Awlād (evlad, evlat)**

*ar.* Child, son; a term used by Bektashi murshids for their disciples.

**Awliyā’ullah (evliya, evlija)**

*ar.* “Friends of God,” saints; those who have reached perfection and intimacy with God.

**Award (evrad)**

*ar.* A litany of supplications recited daily that a murshid prescribes to his students.

**“Awwām**

*ar.* The common folk, those who have no understanding of mystical matters; opp to *khawāṣ*

**Azal (ezel)**

*ar.* The timeless pre- eternity.

**Baba**

*pers.* Father; the Bektashi term for a murshid; the head of a tekke.

**Bağlama**

*tr.* A stringed instrument especially popular in Anatolia. It is sometimes

referred to as a saz.

**Bājī (bacı, baxhi)**

*pers.* Elder sister; the Bektashi honorific given to female initiates.

**Baḳā’ billah**

*ar.* The spiritual state of “Permanence in God”. Having reached the station of *fanā’ fillah* (q.v.) the wayfarer is sent back to his existence by God to guide others. In the state of *baḳā’ billah* the individual is part of the world, but unconcerned with its pleasures and woes.

**Balā**

*ar.* “Indeed,” “certainly.” See Kur’ān 7:172.

**Balā’**

*ar.* Calamity, disaster.

**Barakah (bereket)**

*ar.* Divine blessings bestowed on an individual; also use for wheat.

**Bāṭin**

*ar.* The inward or esoteric; opp. of *zāhir*.

**Bid’ah (bidat)**

*ar.* A matter which according to Islamic law is without precedent and is in opposition to the Kur’ān and Sunnah.

**Burhān**

*ar.* Evidence, proof.

**Çeta (cheta, çete)**

*alb.* A band of guerilla fighters; brigands.

**Chirāgh (çırağ, çiragu)**

*pers.* A candle or lamp. The light of the chirāgh symbolizes the light of guidance.

**Dār**

*pers.* Gallows, gibbet; a spot in the maydān that has ritual importance.

**Davul**

*tr.* A large drum.

**Dawr** (devir)

*ar.* The transcendent cyclical journey of the soul from God to the material realm and back to God.

**Dawriyyah**

*ar.* A poem that describes the *dawr* (q.v.) of the soul.

**Dede** (gjysh)

*tr.* “Grandfather”; in the Bektashi Order it is the clerical grade above baba and is often synonymous with khalīfah-baba.

**Dede Baba** (kryegjysh)

*tr.* “Great-grandfather”; the highest ranking cleric in the Bektashi Order. The seat of the Dede Baba was the Pirevi (q.v.) until it was closed in 1925.

**Def**

*ar.* A large tambourine-like drum, often used by Sufis during their rituals.

**Dergāh**

*pers.* A dervish convent; tekke (q.v.).

**Dermān**

*pers.* Remedy, cure.

**Dert** (derd)

*pers.* Pain, anguish, malaise.

**Dhawk** (zevk)

*ar.* “Taste”; the blissful delight of the various states of spirituality.

**Dhikr** (zikir)

*ar.* Devotional acts in which short phrases or prayers are repeatedly recited silently or aloud.

**Dhikrullah** (zikrullah)

*ar.* The “Remembrance of God”, a state that the mystics of Islam seek to achieve at all times.

**Divān**

*pers.* A collection of poems by an author

that are arranged alphabetically.

**Dönüm**

*tr.* A measure of land, traditionally the amount of land that could be plowed in a day.

**Dōst**

*pers.* Friend, lover; God in mystic parlance.

**Dümbek** (darbuka)

*tr.* A drum that has a ceramic goblet shaped body.

**Erenler**

*tr.* Those who have attained God; a term of address among dervishes.

**Eyvallah** (aywallah, ejvalla)

*ar.* “Yes, by God!” A phrase very often used by Bektashis to express consent and acceptance of the current situation.

**Fakīh**

*ar.* An expert in Islamic jurisprudence (*fikh*).

**Fakīr**

*ar.* A person who is poor or lowly. Bektashi dervishes customarily use the word “fakīr” in place of “I” or “me”. (pl. *fukarā’*)

**Faqr**

*ar.* Poverty or destitution. In Sufi parlance, “poverty” means having no attachment to worldly needs or concerns.

**Fanā’ fillah**

*ar.* The mystical state of “Annihilation in God” where the ego is entirely extinguished.

**Fāni**

*ar.* Transitory, perishing.

**Farman** (ferman)

*pers.* An order or decree issued by a ruler.

**Farz**

*ar.* An obligatory act of worship.

**Fatwā** (fetva)

*ar.* A ruling on a legal matter furnished by a muftī, a ranking expert in the Sharī‘ah (q.v.).

**Fikh**

*ar.* Islamic jurisprudence, the Sharī‘ah.

**Finjān** (fincan, filxhan)

*ar.* A coffee cup

**Fuķahā’**

*ar.* Experts in Islamic law (sing. *fakīh*).

**Ghazal**

*ar.* A lyric poem that follows a specific pattern.

**Gurūh-i nājī** (gürüh-i naci)

*pers.* The “Saved Sect”, those who have found God.

**Gjysh**

see *dede*.

**Hadīth**

*ar.* A record of a saying or action of the Prophet Muhammad. The body of ḥadīth is used as a basis for Islamic law and customary practice.

**Hadīth ķudsī**

*ar.* A ḥadīth in which God is quoted but which is not part of the Kur’ān.

**Hafız**

*ar.* A person who has memorized the entire Kur’ān. (pl. *huffāz*)

**Hajjī** (hacı, haxhi)

*ar.* A title given to a person who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Hakk**

*ar.* Unconditioned Reality, absolute Truth i.e. God Almighty.

**Ḩaķīkat**

*ar.* Truth, reality.

**Ḩaķīkat-i muhammadīyyah**

*ar.* The “Muhammadan Reality”, the underlying and all-encompassing foundation of everything in the vast expanse of the cosmos.

**Ḩaķīķī**

*ar.* True, real, genuine.

**Ḩāl**

*ar.* One’s spiritual state or condition.

**Ḩalāl**

*ar.* Permissible or lawful according to Islamic law. opp. of *harām*.

**Hanbağ**

*tr.* One of the gardens attached to the Pirevi.

**Ḩarām**

*ar.* Forbidden or unlawful according to Islamic law. opp. of *halāl*.

**Hijrah**

*ar.* The migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Madinah. This event marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

**Ḩikmah** (hikmet)

*ar.* Wisdom, philosophy.

**Ḩikmat ilāhī**

*ar.* Divine wisdom.

**Hodja** (hoca, hoxha)

*pers.* The prayer leader in a mosque; a teacher of exoteric Islam.

**Hulūl**

*ar.* Divine entering, penetration or indwelling. This doctrine is seen as heresy by normative Islam.

**Huzn** (hüzün)*ar.* Sadness, sorrow, grief.**Huzūr***ar.* Presence.**Ijāzatnāmah** (icazetname)*pers.* A license or diploma.**İlhām***ar.* Spiritual inspiration, stimulation.**‘Ilm-i bātin***ar.* Esoteric knowledge.**‘Ilm ul-kalām***ar.* Islamic scholastic theology**‘Ilm-i laduni***ar.* Knowledge of Divine providence.**‘Ilm ul-yakīn***ar.* Knowledge of Certainty.**‘Ilm-i zāhir***ar.* Exoteric knowledge; the knowledge of Islam available to the common folk.**İnsān-i kāmil***ar.* The “perfected human”; the highest spiritual station a person can reach in this life.**Irfān***ar.* Spiritual gnosis.**‘Isrā’ wa’l-Mi’rāj**

(Miraç Kandili, Natēn e Miraxhit)

*ar.* The miraculous Night Journey that the Prophet Muḥammad took during a single night around the year 621.**Istidlāl***ar.* Deduction, inferring, reasoning.**İtтиhād***ar.* The spiritual union of a saint’s soul with the Divine.**Jān** (can, xhan)*pers.* Literally “Soul”; beloved, dear one; a title of a person who has been initiated into the Bektashi Order.**Janāb-i Haķık** (Cenab-ı hakk)*ar.* “The Majestic Real,” i.e. God.**Jum‘a namāz**

(Cuma namazı, namazi i xhumase)

*ar.-pers.* A congregational prayer held every Friday at midday in a mosque.**Ka‘bah***ar.* A cube shaped structure in Mecca to which believers turn in prayer, and the focus of certain rituals forming part of the Hajj.**Kādi***ar.* A judge of Islamic law, the Sharī‘ah.**Kāfir***ar.* An unbeliever or atheist.**Kālū balā***ar.* Literally “They said: ‘Yes.’” See Kur‘an 7:172.**Kanā‘at***ar.* Contentment or satisfaction with one’s material condition.**Kānūn-i Evliyā‘***ar.* The longstanding sacred guidelines of the Bektashi Order originally implemented by Bâhim Sultân.**Kashf** (keşif)*ar.* The unveiling or discovery of spiritual mysteries.**Kathrat** (kesret)*ar.* The multiplicity of creation.**Kazan***tr.* A large cauldron.

**Kemer**

*pers.* A girdle of woven woolen cloth tied around the waist. Imam ʻAlī first tied a kemer around the waists of his seventeen faithful followers who are known as the “Kemer-wearers” (kemerbestigān).

**Khalīfah (halife)**

*ar.* Caliph; a murshid’s successor.

**Khalīfah-baba**

*ar.* A Bektashi cleric with the rank of dede (q.v.).

**Khalwah (halvet)**

*ar.* Seclusion intended to bring about spiritual advancement.

**Khatim ul-anbiyā'**

*ar.* The “Seal of the Prophets”; Muhammad, the last of God’s messengers.

**Khawāṣ (havvas)**

*ar.* God’s elect, elite.

**Khayr**

*ar.* Goodness.

**Khidmāh (hizmet)**

*ar.* Service, duty.

**Khirķah (hırka)**

*ar.* A robe worn by a Bektashi dervish that covers the body from the neck to the ankle.

**Khunkār (Hünkar)**

*pers.* Sovereign, monarch.

**Kiblah**

*ar.* The direction of the Kaabah that Muslims face when performing their obligatory prayers.

**Kibr**

*ar.* Arrogance, conceit, haughtiness.

**Kızılbaş**

*tr.* Followers of a radical Shi‘ite sect quite active in 16th century Anatolia.

**Kudum**

*tr.* A small double drum often used to accompany Sufi music and rituals.

**Kufr**

*ar.* Unbelief.

**Kurbān**

*ar.* A sacrifice, usually a ram.

**Kutb**

*ar.* Literally “axis” or “pole”; a term used to describe the “perfected human,” the *Insān-i Kāmil* (q.v.), the highest ranking saint of a given time.

**Lā ilāha ill Allah**

*ar.* “There is no deity save God,” the central declaration of belief in the Islamic faith.

**Madhhāb (mezheb)**

*ar.* One of the four schools of thought within Sunni Islamic jurisprudence.

**Madrasah (medrese)**

*ar.* A specific type of religious school or college for the study of the Islamic religion, although secular subjects are often taught as well.

**Mahabbah**

*ar.* Love, affection. The origin of the word muhabet (q.v.).

**Makām (mekam)**

*ar.* The tomb of a saint or a shrine dedicated to a saint.

**Maktab (mektep)**

*ar.* A traditional primary school.

**Malāmah**

*ar.* A state of reproach and blame.

**Mangūsh** (mengûş)

*pers.* An earring that is worn by all celebrate Bektashi dervishes.

**Mantiğ**

*ar.* Logic, reasoning.

**Ma‘rifat** (marifet)

*ar.* Intuitive spiritual knowledge or awareness.

**Māsiwā**

*ar.* Everything other than God.

**Ma‘şūm**

*ar.* Innocent, guiltless, blameless.

**Mātam**

*ar.* “Lamentation”; the period during the first ten days of the month of Muharram when Bektashis fast to honor the tragedy that took place on the plains of Karbalā’.

**Maydān** (meydan, mejdan)

*ar.* An open space, arena, plaza. In Bektashi terminology it is a space within the tekke where religious rites are carried out. Traditionally, only initiates were allowed to enter the maydān.

**Minbar**

*ar.* The pulpit in a mosque from which the hodja (q.v.) delivers the sermon during Friday Prayer.

**Mudarris**

*ar.* A high ranking professor of the Islamic faith.

**Muhabet**

*ar.* In Bektashi parlance a gathering of the faithful where spiritual discourse and pleasant conversation take place, usually in the company of a baba.

**Muhib**

*ar.* A lover; and initiated member of the Bektashi Order.

**Mujāhada** (mücahede)

*ar.* Striving against the ego in order to progress spiritually.

**Mujarrad** (müccerrit, muxherit)

*ar.* A Bektashi dervish who has taken the vow of celibacy.

**Murshid** (murşit)

*ar.* A spiritual guide or teacher.

**Musāfir**

*ar.* A guest, visitor.

**Mutakallimūn**

*ar.* The experts of Islamic theology.

**Nafila** (nafile)

*ar.* Super-obligatory acts of worship.

**Nafs**

*ar.* The self, ego.

**Namāz**

*pers.* The obligatory ritual prayers of Islam that are to largely performed five times a day. Known in Arabic as salah.

**Naşīhat**

*ar.* Advice, counsel.

**Nazarim**

*ar.-tr.* “My Esteemed”; a word used by Bektashis when addressing one another, especially an individual of a higher clerical rank.

**Nazīra**

*ar.* A poem composed to resemble the poems of another author in both style and content.

**Nefes**

*ar.* Breath; a poem or hymn written by a Bektashi.

**Ney**

*ar.* A reed flute, customarily used by Mevlevi dervishes during their ritual whirling.

**Nukta-i sawda** (or suwayda)

*ar.* The “black point” located in the middle of the heart where the human potency is located.

**Nûr muhammadîyyah**

*ar.* The “Muhammadan Light”; the primordial light from which all was created. Synonymous with the *Hakîkat-i muhammadîyyah* (q.v.).

**Perhîz**

*pers.* Abstinence from worldly delights.

**Pîr**

*pers.* The founding saint of a Sufi order.

**Pîr-î Thânî**

*ar.-pers.* “The Second Pîr,” i.e. Balîm Sultân.

**Pîrevî**

*pers.-tr.* The “Pîr’s Home,” the tekke of Hajjî Bektâsh Velî in Central Anatolia.

**Pôst**

*pers.* A sheepskin upon which a dervish sits during his worship; also used to describe the official post of the murshid of a particular tekke.

**Pôstnîşîn** (postnişin)

*pers.* “The one who sits on the pôst”; the baba of a tekke.

**Rahbar**

*pers.* The assistant murshid of a tekke.

**Rîza lokması**

*tr.* “Blessed morsels”; the words and instructions of the murshid.

**Rîzâ**

*ar.* Resignation, acquiescence.

**Rubâ’î**

*ar.* A poem, or verse of a poem, consisting of four lines; a quatrain.

**Rubûbiyyah**

*ar.* Relating to God’s lordship.

**Sab’ ul-mathânî**

*ar.* The oft-repeated opening seven verses of the Qur’ân. i.e. Sûrat al-Fâtihah.

**Sahw ba’d al-mahw**

*ar.* “Returning after annihilation”; the return of the mystic to the world after he has been extinguished in the divine.

**Sâlik**

*ar.* Wayfarer, traveler.

**Samâ’î**

*ar.* The dancing or whirling sometimes performed by mystics while in an ecstatic state.

**Sanjak**

*tr.* A ritual flag or banner that is presented to Bektashi babas upon ordination.

**Sayyid**

*ar.* A physical descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

**Saz**

*tr.* A long-necked stringed instrument related to the bağlama (q.v.).

**Shâfi’î**

*ar.* An intercessor before God.

**Şâh-i awliyâ’** (Şah-i evliya)

*ar.-pers.* “The Sovereign of the Saints,” i.e. İmâm ‘Alî.

**Şahîd ul-Hâkîk**

*ar.* A martyr for the Real.

**Şarîrah** (Şeriat)

*ar.* Islamic ritual and social law derived from the Qur’ân and the example of the Prophet.

**Silsilah**

*ar.* The chain of spiritual transmission

connecting a saint to Imām ʻAlī and the Prophet Muḥammad.

**Sirr**

*ar.* Divine mysteries and secrets (plural *asrar*).

**Sofra**

*ar.* Literally “tablecloth”. Among Bektashis a sofra is a ritual meal held in the presence of a baba.

**Souk**

*ar.* A marketplace, bazaar.

**Sufi**

*ar.* A practitioner of taṣawwuf, or proper mysticism.

**Sukr**

*ar.* A state of mystical intoxication or drunkenness.

**Sulūk**

*ar.* The spiritual journey a Bektashi devotee undertakes after having received consecration through initiation.

**Sunnah**

*ar.* The practice of the Prophet Muḥammad, typically recorded in the ḥadīth (q.v.).

**Sūrah**

*ar.* A chapter of the Qur’ān.

**Tāj** (tac,taxh)

*ar.* Literally “crown”; The sacred headgear of a dervish. The size and symbolism of the tāj often vary among the different Sufi orders.

**Tafakkur** (tefekur)

*ar.* Spiritual reflection, meditation.

**Tajallī** (tecelli)

*ar.* An emanation or manifestation of God’s grace.

**Tālib**

*ar.* A student-seeker, a candidate for initiation into the Bektashi Order.

**Tarīkat**

*ar.* An Islamic mystical order or brotherhood.

**Taṣawwuf**

*ar.* Islamic mysticism; Sufism.

**Taslīk**

*ar.* The instruction the murshid gives to the wayfarer.

**Taslīm**

*ar.* Surrendering, submitting oneself to the will of God.

**Tawāf**

*ar.* The ritual circumambulation of the Ka‘bah in Mecca.

**Tawbah**

*ar.* Repentance, contrition.

**Tawḥīd** (tevhit)

*ar.* Monotheism; a causing to become one.

**Tekke**

*ar.-tur.* A dervish lodge, or monastery.

**Tīghband** (tiğbend)

*pers.* Literally “sword belt.” In Bektashism, it is a cord that is wrapped around the waste of the person upon their initiation into the order. The tīghband contains three knots which represent (among other things) the binding of the tongue, the hand, and the loins.

**Turbeh** (türbe,tyrbe)

*ar.* The tomb or mausoleum of a saint.

**Turbehdār**

*pers.* The caretaker of a saint’s turbeh.

**Ubūdiyyah**

*ar.* The state of humanity's servitude before God.

**Ulamā**

*ar.* Those learned in Islamic law and theology.

**Ūlū ul-ṣazm**

*ar.* The great prophets who were bestowed with divinely revealed scripture.

**Varfē**

*alb.* Literally "poor one"; a dervish.

**Waṣṭat**

*ar.* Talismans used to ward off negative energies.

**Wahdatīyyah** (vahdeniyet)

*ar.* God's oneness.

**Wahdat**

*ar.* Oneness, singleness.

**Wahdat ul-muṭlak**

*ar.* Non-delimited oneness, a theory that more or less corresponds to the concept of pantheism.

**Wahdat ush-shuhūd**

*ar.* The "unity of appearance" or apparentism. This doctrine states that any perceived oneness between God and creation occurs only in the mind of the wayfarer; it has no objective counterpart in the material domain.

**Wahdat ul-wujūd**

*ar.* The "unity of existence"; the concept of divine existential unity of God and creation, and therefore Man; a theory that corresponds to panentheism.

**Wahīy**

*ar.* Direct revelation from God.

**Wajd** (vecd)

*ar.* A state of spiritual ecstasy or rapture.

**Wakilullahi fi'l arz**

*ar.* God's earthly representative agent on Earth.

**Wālī**

*ar.* A protecting friend; a saint of God.

**Wujūd** (vücut, vuxhut)

*ar.* Existence or being.

**Xha**

*alb.* A term of affection used for older males, meaning "uncle."

**Yaķīn**

*ar.* The certitude gained when the wayfarer directly experiences the mystical states.

**Zāhid**

*ar.* A renunciant; a piously self-denying ascetic; in Sufi parlance, a zāhid is someone obsessed with the outer form of religion – often hypocritically so. (pl. zuhhād)

**Zāhir**

*ar.* The literal or apparent meanings of sacred texts; opp. of *bāṭin*.

**Zindik**

*ar.* A heretic, unbeliever.

**Zuhd**

*ar.* Pious asceticism. One who practices zuhd is known as a *zāhid* (q.v.).



## NOTES

With the exception of those notes marked [tr.] these are Baba Rexheb's original notes.

1. These definitions are taken from *Al-Ta‘ārif lī madhhabi Ahl ut-Taṣawwūf* by Abū Bakr Kalābādhī.
2. From ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī's *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, 126.
3. See Ömer Rıza Doğrul's *İslāmiyetin Gelişirdiği Tasavvuf* (İstanbul: Ahmet Halit Kitabevi, 1948), 70.
4. Ibid., 72-73.
5. From Farīd ud-Dīn ‘Attār's *Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā*', Vol. I, 274.
6. See Sami Frashëri's *Kamūs al-‘Alām*.
7. Doğrul, 74-75.
8. Frashëri, Vol. III, page 228.
9. Doğrul, 48.
10. See “Taṣawwuf” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Arabic text).
11. Al-Ḥallāj bases this thesis on the divine words (ḥadīth қudsī): *Lawlāka lawlāka mā khalākat ul-aflāka*, which means, “Were it not for you (O Muḥammad), I would not have created the universe.”
12. Doğrul, 85-85.
13. From Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Al-Munkidh min al-Dalāl*, 82-83.
14. Ibid., 78-80.
15. Ibid., p. 83.
16. From Al-Ghazālī's *Kimiya-ye sa‘ādat*, 18-19. [English adapted from Henry Homes' 1873 translation – tr.].
17. Doğrul, 98-99.

18. Frashëri, Vol. IV, 2,703.
19. Ibid., 2,704.
20. From Shahāb ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's *Kitab Hikmat al-ishraq*, 16-19.
21. Ibid., 24.
22. Doğrul, 104-105.
23. From Ibn Arabī's *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. II, 604.
24. – *Fusus al-Hikam*, 139.
25. – *Tarjuman al-Ashwāk*, 39-40.
26. See Al-Alusi's *Jillā ul-‘Aynayn*, 51.
27. Frashëri, Vol. III, 1,825.
28. In Baba's text *Bahjat ul-Asrār* is listed as one of the great shaykh's works, when it is in fact a biographical work on him written by Nūr ad-Dīn Abū'l-Hasan ʻAlī ibn Jarīr. [tr.]
29. Doğrul, 115.
30. See Ziya Şakir's *Bektaşı Nefesleri*, 25.
31. From Ķundūzī's *Yanabī al-mawaddah*, 106.
32. Kur'an 7:143
33. He was the cousin of the Prophet Muhammed, and brother of Imām ʻAlī. He fell at the Battle of Mut'a, having lost both of his arms. The Archangel Gabriel informed the Prophet that his lost arms were replaced by wings, with which he flew to Paradise. [tr.]
34. Anas ibn Mālik was one of the most intimate companions of the Prophet . He is said to have lived a very long time. [tr.]
35. Kur'an 5:35
36. Kur'an 15:39-40
37. Kur'an 2:152
38. Kur'an 21:107
39. Kur'an 89:27-30

40. Translation taken from Gary Leiser and Robert Dankoff's *Early mystics in Turkish literature*. Routledge, 2006. 366-367. [tr.]

41. This town now lies within Greek territory and is known as Didymóteichon. The Kızıl Deli tekke is some 25 miles to the west of this town. [tr.]

42. A town in what is now Iranian Azerbaijan. [tr.]

43. *Ar-Risālat al-Aḥmadīyyah fī Tārīkh aṭ-Ṭarīqat al-‘Alīyyat ul-Baktāshīyyah*

44. See Sadreddin Nüzhet Ergün's *Bektaşı Şairleri*. Vol. I, 140.

45. From Abdülbâki Gölpinarlı's *Nesimi Usuli Ruhi: Hayati, sanati, şiirleri*, (İstanbul, Varlık Yayinevi, 1953), 5.

46. Ankaravî's commentary on Hâfiz-i Shîrazi.

47. Ergun, 353.

48. See İsmail Ferruh Efendi's translation of Kâshîfi's, *Tefsir-i mevakib tercüme-i tefsir-i Mevahib*, Vol. I. 37.

49. Baba Seit passed away in 1974, four years after the publication of this book and the Dûrbalî Tekke quickly fell into ruin. [tr.]

50. Killed by the communists in the wake of the Second World War. [tr.]

51. Modern-day Veles, Macedonia. [tr.]

52. A respectful title used when addressing an older man by name. [tr.]

53. Taken from Turgut Koca's book *Şevki: hayat ve şiirleri*. İstanbul, 1967.

54. İsmail Ferruh Efendi, 395.

55. Ibid., Vol. I, 282-283.

56. Kundūzī, 140.

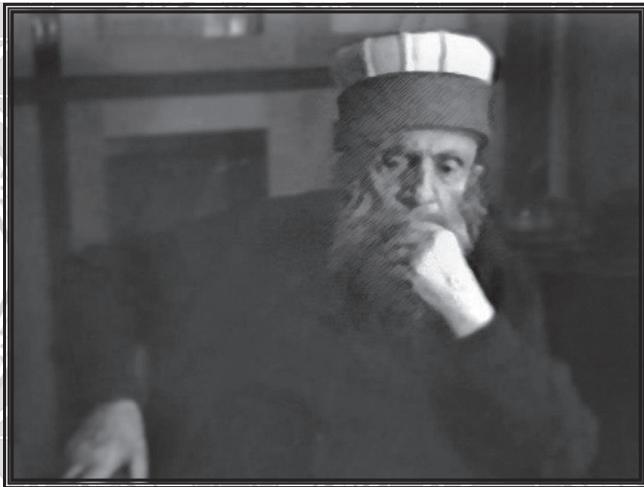
57. His birth year was 1876. [tr.]

58. Better known as the Teqja e Shtufit, found on the northern outskirts of the city. [tr.]

59. The Vlora War was fought between Albania and Italy. [tr.]

60. Mora Yenişehirî is the modern city of Nafplion in Greece. [tr.]

61. She passed away in Ankara in 1942. [tr.]



Baba Rexheb in his study



*Hü Döst!*

*While on the Road I dared to tread  
There came a saintly man.  
He pointed out the way for me,  
And took my friendless hand.*

*Who is that one, I asked myself  
To which a voice did answer:  
'A hero you have found indeed!  
A Saint, a Shaykh, a Master!*

*In Allah's Month he came to be,  
With Sultan on the throne.  
But soon that would be toppled down  
For winds of change had blown.*

*His uncle took him by the hand  
And showed him to the Way  
The Shah of Khorasan did smile  
Upon that gracious day.*

*For years he noted down the words,  
The tekke true attended.  
All those who sought the source of Peace,  
Their broken ways were mended.*

*Then came one day a bloody red wind  
And proclaimed itself a god.  
A hundred heroes met their fate  
With a simple wink and nod.*

*That man of God from Gjirokastër  
Refused to change his name  
And with permission from his murshid  
He left them to their game.*

*In Musa's land he found himself  
A servant to a Secret.  
And increased he on the dervish path  
With taj and haidariyyah.*

*A sister's call had beckoned him  
To leave the hallowed cave.  
And from the Nile he did move west  
Where bigger plans We'd laid.*

*His heart he made with brick and stone  
And lovers gathered round.  
The Path of Hajji Bektash  
In America was found."*

*To my surprise, I saw myself  
In a place where none dared stand  
And gathered round me were the twelve  
In candle-lit meydan.*

*That man of God from Gjirokastër  
Who took my weary hand  
Pressed to my lips the drink of life  
And Twelve did form a band.*

*The Kirkbudak soon did ignite  
And dem began to flow  
For all the pain of this dear life  
I couldn't let it go.*

*Look! O Rexheb Ferdi  
Your glance has set me free!  
For this poor wretched Delil found  
That your hand held the key!*

-Fakir Delil