

SUFISM TODAY SERIES
SELF KNOWLEDGE

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

commentaries on sufic songs

The first in a series of original writings, translations, and discourses on sufism from the illumined intellects of our time, **Self-Knowledge** contains commentaries by Shaykh al-Akbar ibn al-'Arabi, Shaykh ibn Ata-'Allah al-Iskandari, and Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir as-Sufi on the famous *qasida* of Ghawth Abu Madyan, plus two commentaries by Sidi Fudul ibn Muhammad al-Hawari as-Sufi of Fez on songs by Sayyidi 'Ali Wafa and Sayyidi Muhammad ibn al-Habib.

Madinah Press



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translation from the Arabic by 'A'isha 'Abd ar-Rahman at-Tarjumana



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cover: Sidi Fudul ibn Muhammad al-Huwari as-Sufi of Fez
Photograph by Abd al-Adheem Sanders

Paper Edition 2005

by **MADINAH PRESS**
Capetown, South Africa

Distributed by :
Madinah Distributor (000866370-K)
4, Jalan Pawang, Off Jalan Keramat Hujung
54000 Kuala Lumpur
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ISBN 0 9504446 7 7 paper

Printed by :
Al-Diniah, No. 1, Jalan P. U. 1/1, (C. N. 0106 D)

Qasida of the Shaykh of Shaykhs, Abu Madyan Shu'ayb al-Maghribi

It is to guide the wayfarers to the pleasure of the Lord of the worlds.

The pleasure of life is only in the company of the *Fuqara'*
they are the Sultans, the masters, and the princes.

Therefore, keep their company and have *adab* in their assemblies.
Leave your portion behind you whenever they send you forward.

Seize the moment and always be present with them.
Know that *rida* is bestowed on those who are present.

Cling to silence unless you are questioned.
Then say, 'I have no knowledge,' and be concealed by ignorance.

Do not look at fault unless you see a clear fault appear in you,
but it is concealed.

Lower your head and ask forgiveness without cause.
Stand apologising in just treatment.

If a fault appears from you, then apologise
and lift the face of your apology for what has flowed in you from you.

Say, 'Your insignificant slave is more entitled to your pardon.
Act kindly in forgiveness and adhere to gentleness, O Fuqara'!

They are not entitled to condescension, and it is their practice.
Fear neither overtaking nor harm from them.

Always be generous in singing the praises of the brothers
in the senses and the meaning. Lower the eye if someone slips.

Watch the Shaykh carefully in his states,
perhaps a trace of his approval will be seen on you.

Advance seriousness and leap to serve him. Perhaps he will be pleased,
and beware lest you become irritated.

The pleasure of the Creator is in his pleasure and his obedience —
He will be pleased with you. Beware of the one who leaves it.

Know that the Path of the People is study,
and the state of the one who claims it today is as you see.

When will I see them and where will I see them?
When will my ear hear some news of them?

Who is mine, and where will my like compete with them
in wells about which I do not recognise impurity?

I love them and treat them gently and I offer them my heart's blood —
especially a party of them.

A people of noble qualities —
Wherever they sit, a fragrance remains in the place after them.

Tasawwuf is guided by their character in the Paths.
Excellent harmony is theirs that delights my eye.

They are the people of my love and my lovers
who are among those who trail the coat-tails of might in magnificence.

May I be reunited with them in Allah,
and my wrong actions forgiven and pardoned in Him.

Then blessings be upon the Chosen, Sayyiduna Muhammad,
the best of those who fulfilled and who vowed.

Takhmis of the Qasida of Sayyida Abu Madyan
by Shaykh al-Akbar Muhyi'din ibn al-'Arabi

O you who seek the pleasures of this world as an end! If you want all good to be seen in you, then listen to the news of the advisor who is trusty: *The pleasure of life is only in the company of the Fuqara' – they are the Sultans, the masters, and the princes.*

A people who approve of little in the way of their clothes and food. This world does not occur to their thoughts. Their breasts are empty of their whisperings. *Therefore, keep their company and have adab in their assemblies. Leave your portion behind you whenever they send you forward.*

Travel their Path if you would follow them, and abandon your claims and beware of reverting to them in what they desire. Intend their profit. *Seize the moment and always be present with them. Know that rida is bestowed on those who are present.*

Be agreeable with them, you will be elevated by them and arrive. If they affirm you, then stand. If they obliterate you, then vanish. If they make you hungry, then be hungry. If they feed you, then eat. *Cling to silence unless you are questioned. Then say, 'I have no knowledge.' and be concealed by ignorance.*

Do not criticise the faults of people, even if it appears manifest in existence. Look with the eye of perfection, and do not blame anyone. *Do not look at fault unless you see a clear fault appear in you, but it is concealed.*

By that, you will obtain what you hope for from *adab*, and abase the *nafs* to them greatly without doubt. All of that is abasement in the place of *adab*. *Lower your head and ask forgiveness without cause. Stand apologising in just treatment.*

If you desire a small *Buraq* from them for the Path, then watch out for all that they hate of your actions constantly. Keep yourself constantly in good deeds. *If a fault appears from you, then apologise and lift the face of your apology for what has flowed in you from you.*

Flatter them and say, 'Treat with your peace by the ointment of your forgiveness the disease of your wound – I am offensive, give me your pure good counsel.' *Say: 'Your insignificant slave is more entitled to your pardon. Act kindly in forgiveness and adhere to gentleness, O Fuqara'!*

Do not fear them if their *himma* does wrong, it is more resplendent and great that their tribe should destroy you. They are not tyrants whose authority will injure you. *They are more entitled to condescension, and it is their practice. Fear neither overtaking nor harm from them.*

If you want them, then travel the path of guidance. Strive in that which they demand of you in the light of your day. Beware of saying, 'Tomorrow.' *Always be generous in singing the praises of the brothers in the senses and the meaning. Lower the eye if someone slips.*

Tell them the Truth, and do not use uncleanness because they are the people of truthfulness, the leaders and masters. Forgive every one of them who wrongs you. *Watch the Shaykh carefully in his states, perhaps a trace of his approval will be seen on you.*

Ask him for his supplication, and you will receive his supplication and by that, you will obtain what you hope for by his *baraka*. Make your opinion good and recognise the truth and right of his esteem (*hurma*). *Advance seriousness and leap to serve him. Perhaps he will be pleased, and beware lest you become irritated.*

Memorise his directions and increase his guardianship and his service if he calls you instantly without delay. Lower your voice with intimate conversation to his obedience. *The pleasure of the Creator is in his pleasure and his obedience. – He will be pleased with you. Beware of the one who leaves it.*

people who worship for the reward and some who worship for the hope of drawing near. He, Allah's mercy be upon him, designated the mount because the rider of the mount is in a high place, and the one with himma has a high place.

Then he said:

'So struggle seriously and travel quickly on the journey

and do not be stopped by the contemplation of created beings so as to be veiled from the place of safety.'

The Shaykh means that the Wayfarer must guard his limbs on the journey and wayfaring. He must guard and preserve them from falling into grave wrong actions and conflicts. Whenever they are inclined to go off the Path he must restrain them and hold them back because he sees that Allah, glory be to Him, watches him and knows his Secret and his secret conversation, 'And He is nearer to him than his jugular vein.' Then, oh murid, if you are glorious in your journey, turning to your Lord with heart and spirit, be careful. Do not turn to what appears to you of flashes and miracles and breaks-in-the-chain-of-events, for that will cut you off from your journey and will hinder you from obtaining your goal and desire. He indicates that by this statement: 'so struggle seriously.'

So, oh murid, if you wish the means to be easy for you, and the gates to be opened to you, be annihilated to your action, your power and your force, and see directly the good action of Allah on you and His granting success to you, and being generous to you. Give thanks with a powerless gratitude and give praise with an inadequate praise: as it says in another qasida of the Master: 'Be a pure slave to Him and you will be free from other-than-Allah.' When what pleases Him issues from you, and you mention His blessing on you and what He opens to you, then say: 'praise belongs to Allah who guided us to this and we would not have been guided had not Allah guided us.' This is the meaning of the word of the Shaykh:

'Rather contemplate Ihsan and be sincere in gratitude to Him,

and get up at dawn and submit and hand over the trouble to Him.'

Here he mentioned to you practical gratitude with his statement: 'get up at dawn.' So the Messenger, Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, stood until his feet were swollen. So it was said to him: 'Do you bother yourself with this while Allah has forgiven your wrong actions, past and recent?' He replied: 'Am I not a thankful slave?'

Lastly the Master tells of the mighty intermediary and the most glorious refuge, with his words:

'And bless the Qutb of existence and his company

with a blessing that will spread out the Secret from us and communicate it.'

So the Messenger, blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, is the intermediary in every blessing and cause and in every good thing that comes to us. He said: 'Whoever extends kindness to you, recompense him: if you cannot, then pray for him.' We are unable to offer thanks for what he has held out to us, so we can only turn to Allah, glory be to Him, and ask Him to recompense the Messenger for us and to bless him in the way that he deserves, and so we say: 'Oh Allah, bless our Master Muhammad and the people of our Master Muhammad as you blessed our Master Ibrahim and bestow baraka on Muhammad as you bestowed baraka on our Master Ibrahim and the people of our Master Ibrahim, in the two worlds. Truly you are the Praiseworthy, the Glorious. Blessings on the Prophets and the Messengers and on all the salihin of Allah, and the end of our prayer is — Praise belongs to Allah the Lord of the worlds.'

This was written on the morning of 24th Sha'ban, 1392 (i.e. 3rd October, 1972) in Fez.

Peace.