

THE SECRET GARDEN

THE SECRET GARDEN

BY

SHAYKH SA'D AD-DEEN MAHMUD SHABISTARI

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To my teacher Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi

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The Secret Garden

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS WORK IS important in that it contains all the principles of the science of tasawwuf in a concise form. Further it is the first translation freed of the centuries-old baggage of christian and orientalist vocabulary which has often obscured the teachings of Islam. Thus, instead of the 'mystic' statements of a 'Sufi Doctor', we have Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari's lucid exposition of the *deen* of Islam. He demonstrates in his analysis of the lower self how a man or woman can gain access to his or her reality: the step by step description of the method of purification leads to a spirituality and light which issues from the normal actions of everyday life, in other words a spirituality which is not 'ascetic' but rather the product of right living. As the Shaykh himself comments within the text his 'work is the fruit of experience – not mere information heard from others' and again 'An action that comes from the secret of one's spiritual states is much better than an action based on a knowledge one has heard, yet not experienced' and yet again 'Realize ... how actions proceed from different spiritual states and what the relationship is between informative and experiential knowledge'. In the words of another great Sufi, Shaykh ad-Darqawi it is the science of how to live the spirituality of the really great, those 'whose candles do not go out when the wind starts to blow'.

Significant too is that Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari lived in the Mughal capital of Tabriz from where issued the great flowering of the last period of Islam in which the balanced *shariat* – rather than the mongrel European law [applicable to the realm of 'real life' and trade] cum 'religious' additions [regarding births and deaths, and family law] – was still the norm.

Extensive use has been made of the commentary *Mufatih al-A'jaaz fi*

Sharhi Gulshani Raz of Shaykh Muhammad Lahiji in this work of translation from the Persian original.

This work shall only be understood by those unversed in 'critical analysis' – for as the Shakyh says at the end of the *Secret Garden*: 'Examine the knowledges arrived at by intellect and the knowledges of Islamic tradition – examine them in a clear order and with precision. Do not look with the eye of negation and criticism for then the flowers will turn to thorns before your eyes'.

N.B. Despite one leading encyclopaedic classification of Shabistari, al-Ghazali, al-Hallaj, Junayd, Attar, Jami, Ansari, Shibli, Abdalqadir al-Gilani, Sa'di, Maruf Kharkhi, Rumi and Shams at-Tabrizi, for example, as 'Iranian sufis' they were in fact all Persian speaking and lived prior to the Safavid conversion of Iran to another religion.

THE SECRET GARDEN

INTRODUCTION

In the name of the One Who taught man to reflect and Who lit up the lamp of his heart with the light of the spirit.

By His overflowing both the seen and the unseen worlds were illuminated – by His abundant generosity the earth of Adam was transformed into a garden.

His power made both the worlds appear in the blink of an eye with the command of the *kaf* (ك) and the *nun* (ن).¹

When the *qaf* (ق) of His power² breathed life into the pen, thousands of pictures were drawn on the empty tablet of pre-creation.

By that breath appeared the two worlds and by the same breath the spirit of Adam was manifested.

Intellect and discrimination were given to Adam so that he might recognize the source of all things.

When he saw himself as a separate individual he reflected upon his identity, asking: “What am I?”

He made a journey from separation to gatheredness and from there returned again to the world.

1 the Arabic letters forming the word for the command: “Be!” (كُنْ) which occurs in the Quran.

2 the Arabic word for power – *qudra* (قُدْرَةٌ) – begins with the letter *qaf* (ق).

He recognized the world as an illusory, relative matter just as the number one becomes multiplied in all subsequent numbers but remains one.

The world of creation and its management came into being in one breath and at that very moment of its appearance disappeared again.

But here it is not a question of coming and disappearing since disappearance, if you reflect, only means reappearance.

All things are returning to their source – both the hidden and the manifest become one thing.

Allah, the most Sublime, who creates and destroys the two worlds with one breath, is permanent, existing beyond endless time.

In this respect the world of creation and its management are one thing – what is gathered in oneness becomes many in separation and many are gathered in oneness.

This picture of other-than-Him is from an illusion in you – this illusion is like a single spark which appears as a circle of fire when it is whirled around.

Everything from the beginning to the end is pointed in the same direction and all the world's creation is moving along this single path.

The prophets are like caravan leaders, guides and masters of the travellers on this road.

Our master Muhammad, peace be upon him, in the matter of prophecy of both the first and the last became the chief from amongst them.

Ahad (أَحَدٌ) became manifest in the *mim* (م) of Ahmad (أَحْمَدُ)³ and with the completion of this cycle the first emanation became as the last.

3 the name of Allah, *Ahad* (meaning the one), becomes manifest in Ahmad (which is one of the names of Muhammad) by means of the *mim* (م) (the letter “m”) which differentiates the two names.

Ash-Shabistari

There is a difference of only a *mim* (م) between Ahmad (أَحْمَدُ) and Ahad (أَحَدٌ), but within that one *mim* the whole world is immersed.

He was the seal of the end of this path and in him was continued the message, “I call to Allah”.

His heart-ravishing station is annihilation with sobriety and the beauty of his spirit’s perfection is a light to the gathering of the *awliya*.

He went ahead and the hearts of all followed behind grasping his cloak for guidance, and with it sealing a pact of allegiance.

The *awliya* of this path, both before the master Muhammad and after him, have given indications of their inner experiences.

When they became aware of the parameters of the self, they described the gnostic traveller who acquires knowledge, and Allah, the source of knowledge.

One from the ocean of gatheredness said: “I am the Real”; another spoke about intimacy, distance, and the progress of the boat of the separate self on the ocean of gatheredness.

One who had mastered outer knowledge of the *shariat* gave indications from the safety of its dry land and shore.

One brought up a jewel of knowledge and became a target of the envious, another left it be and it remained protected in its shell.

Another spoke openly about the world of separation and then about the gathered whole. One began to explain the nature of before-endless-time and the creational event.

One described the meaning of the curl, the mole and the down, and made clear the meaning of the wine, the lights, and the beautiful Beloved.

One warned about the nature of his own existence and illusions of the mind; one sinks into idol worship and wears the christian priest’s belt.