

THE TRAVELER

Sadık Yalsızuçanlar

a novel

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In gratitude
to Ayşe Şasa and Emine Dolmacı,
who taught me the real meaning of friendship;
to Mahmut Erol Kılıç,
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and
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from whom I read and heard
the story of the Sheikh Who Pursued the Kibrit-i Ahmer;
and
to Seyyit Erkal
from whom I learned the path and the states of the Traveler.

*“Let the deaf listen to the mute;
for only the soul can understand the unsaid and the unheard.”*

Yunus Emre

1.

When the Traveler entered the room, the Philosopher rose and gave him a hearty welcome. Eager to show his friendship and affection, he hugged the Traveler, a young man of nineteen. Renowned throughout Andalusia, the Philosopher was an eminent scholar and a close friend of the Traveler's father. The upper floor of his two-story, stone house in the western quarter of the city was packed with books. He and the Traveler now stood in the middle of a room on the second floor, crowded with countless works in Greek and others translated from Greek to Arabic. "Welcome," said the Philosopher, embracing the Traveler warmly. The Traveler returned the old man's greeting before sitting on the divan. He was dressed like a poor Bedouin, clothed in a long, loose robe with a gold-colored band buttoned up to his chest, light camel-leather shoes with flat heels, and a beige turban that covered almost one-third of his chestnut-colored hair which fell in waves to his shoulders. Although his turban was wrapped like a slave's, the shadow on his wide, round forehead, his pointed nose, and the purple circles under his eyes were conspicuous.

The Traveler gazed at the Philosopher, Andalusia's most prominent thinker. Silence filled the room. The Philosopher was also studying the Traveler's face—a face that emanated confidence and love. In contrast to the Philosopher's aged features, the young man's were free of wrinkles. He was at the dawn of life, and could have been the Philosopher's son. His face glowed like an ember. The Philosopher sat opposite this youth whose fame overshadowed even his own. The silence drew everything into its essence. It was as if there were three beings in the room: the Philosopher, the Traveler, and the Silence. The Philosopher perceived the Traveler and the Silence as separate and distinct entities. Gradually, this feeling dissolved, and he could only sense the Traveler's presence. He felt that he had evaporated too. All that existed in the room was the Traveler. The Philosopher searched the young man's face and green eyes that resembled the sea. The Traveler's pupils widened and his broad forehead began to shine. The young man's brow absorbed the Philosopher's gaze, and the old man soon felt that the Traveler consisted of nothing but his forehead.

Taking a deep breath, the Traveler broke the silence. "Yes," he said. The Philosopher sighed in relief. "Yes," he repeated, as his heart filled with joy. He had waited many years for the Traveler's visit, yearning to hear this word. Now, with his wish fulfilled, he was both content and elated. The burden of expectation had been cast from his shoulders, and he felt as light as a bird. The Traveler's "yes" was an approval of everything he had ever written or said. For the Philosopher, it was the most beautiful word in the world. He penetrated to the

core of this utterance and grasped its meaning. The Traveler had given homage to the Philosopher's thoughts, showering him with unspeakable happiness. Yet, the young man was again buried in thought. Several minutes of silence passed, and then the Traveler stated in a more resolute yet mysterious tone, "No."

The Philosopher was stunned. Bewildered, he asked desperately, "What is your conclusion from divine inspiration and illumination? Can you be more direct?"

Without hesitation, the Traveler replied in the same enigmatic manner, "Yes and no. These two words are all I have learned from my experiences until today."

The Philosopher was in agony. "These two words are what divine inspiration has revealed to me," the Traveler continued. "With "yes" and "no," heads separate from their necks, and souls fly from their bodies."

Pale and quivering, the Philosopher whispered, "All power belongs to God."

The Traveler asked permission to leave. The Philosopher bade him farewell at the door and watched him disappear from sight down the street. This was the last time the old man saw him. He sent many messages asking to meet, but never received a reply. The Traveler, however, saw the old man again.

One day, he felt a desire to speak with the Philosopher and returned to his home. God's divine gift allowed him to behold the scholar in a moment of ecstasy, although there was a thin veil between them. The Traveler saw the Philosopher from behind this veil of compassion, and the old man took no notice of the Traveler's existence. He was lost in thought. Looking him straight in the eye, the Traveler said softly, "Your attention and thoughts cannot bring you to where I am."

This was five hundred and ninety-five years after the Prophet emigrated to Medina. The Traveler's next encounter with the Philosopher was on the day of the old man's funeral.

The Traveler learned of the Philosopher's death when he was in the middle of a conversation with two friends at the *madrassa*.¹ The scholar's remains were to be sent to his tomb in Cordova, and the Traveler went to watch the funeral procession with his two companions, the sultan's son and a poet. The Philosopher's fame was widespread, and many onlookers crowded the streets of the city. The Traveler and his friends went to the terrace of a building to view the cortege. The Philosopher's coffin was tied to one side of a pack animal, and a large chest filled with his books hung from the other. As the Traveler watched in silence, the poet remarked, "Do you see how the master is being weighed? He is on one side; his works are on the other."

¹ *Madrassa*: a theological school for Muslims.

“Yes, I see,” responded the sultan’s son, as if the question had been directed at him.

The Traveler reflected on the poet’s words; he would remember them forever. For him, this was an observation to contemplate and to keep in mind. Turning to the poet, he smiled: “A human being is weighed with his accomplishments.”

“Yes,” said the sultan’s son.

The Traveler recalled the “yes” he had once uttered to the Philosopher. In the street below, lined with stone buildings, the crowd opened as the funeral procession pressed forward. The cortege would soon reach the Jewish quarter. The Traveler’s gaze remained fixed on the coffin and chest of books until they faded in the distance. Then he stood up. The cathedral on the horizon caught his eye. “They have passed by,” he said. “On one side his works, on the other his lifeless body. I wonder—have his hopes been realized?”

2.

The Traveler asked his friends’ leave and started for home. He was still pondering his question as he entered the Jewish quarter. He could tell whether his own hopes had been realized, but he was uncertain of his convictions. He had arrived in Cordova when he was thirteen. This city on the banks of the Guadalquivir had been famous for moroccan leather, but now most of its inhabitants produced jewelry and gold and silver filigree work. Large plots of land occupied by solitary houses were parceled out for stock farming on the outskirts of the city. The farmers who tended the surrounding grain fields and olive groves had built numerous churches and *masjids*² for their worship. The Traveler recalled the time he had ridden up the road circling up the mountain from the Mudejar-style castle. His mount had taken him to a room in a village where a Kadiri *dhikr*³ was taking place after the sunset prayer.

The hypnotic voices echoing “Hay! Hay!” after chanting the *qasidahs* in Moorish accent, which included the Jalali and the Jamali names of God,⁴ flooded through the ornate stone windows of the large room illuminated by a faint yellow light, drowning out the occasional howl of an animal and gentle rustle of the breeze outside. The Traveler had stopped to listen. The “Hay” and “Hu” after the *tehlil*⁵ poured from their mouths as if their breath had been washed with a name of God and transformed into the sound that meant “He.”

² *Masjid*: small mosque.

³ *Dhikr*: repeating, silently or aloud, the word Allah (“God” in Arabic), the ninety-nine names of God, or formulas which praise God.

⁴ The 99 Names of God can be divided into two categories: the Names of Majesty (*jalal*) and the Names of Beauty (*jamal*).

⁵ *Tehlil*: “*La ilaha illa Allah*” which means “There is no god but God.”

That sound emanated from their hearts. It continued “Hu! Hu!” or “Hay! Hay!”—once in a while culminating with the declaration “There is no god but God.”

The Traveler had contemplated the value of living in this simple village pulsating with life. Could one’s hopes come true there? Then he had turned away and slowly retraced his path to the Jewish quarter.

Cordova had many mills, which for the Traveler symbolized the earthly world. Whenever his father had gone to grind wheat or corn, he had taken his son with him. The Traveler spent many hours listening to the sound of the water and the grinding stone. As long as the miller did not engage in small talk, these hours remained valuable moments of meditation. The grain entered one side and came out the other as flour. The grinding stone rotated without pause, and the water flowed unceasingly. It was the consummate symbol of time. The water flowed over the stones and rocks, as if caressing each and every thing in the world, and the Traveler felt enriched, regardless of being immersed or not in a certain moment, or of being conscious of that moment and losing himself in it at the same time. Glancing once at the whitened face of the miller holding his hand under the wooden groove from which the flour issued, to check the powder’s fineness, the Traveler remarked, “Here, everything turns to the dust of destiny.”

The miller looked up and smiled. Reaching out, he poured some flour into the young man’s palm. “Take it,” was all he said.

The water that moved the grinding stone came from the great river bordering the city on the east. Mills lined its banks. Part of its water was diverted to canals which crisscrossed the city. One of these channels passed through the courtyard of an old cathedral now used as a mosque. It was composed of nineteen naves in the east-west direction crowned by double-vaulted arches supported by hundreds of columns. A semi-closed section for the choir, which had a Baroque air, stood at the center. Prayer-goers and dervishes gathered there in a circle to converse before and after worship. A synagogue, in the same style, stood at the center of the narrow streets, whitewashed houses, and flower-bedecked patios of the Jewish quarter. Vineyards blanketed the hills below the Andalusian mountains to the south, and olives grew in the river basins. North of the Guadalquivir, in the Sierra Morena, uninhabited open fields extended as far as the eye could see. Now and then, miners enlivened this lonely place, yet it was the most isolated area in the proximity of the city. Holm oaks with small and hard leaves, as well as mushrooms, could be seen here and there, but the touch of human hands had transformed the vegetation, turning the land into a barren plain covered with thyme, rosemary, and briars.

To the east, plants that favored brine, such as chicory and thorn apple, clung to the salty rocks. As for the oak groves, they were the favorite haunts of dervishes. Below the tundra-like meadows covered with pines and brush flowed the Guadalquivir. This marvel of nature was bounded by the Sierra Morena and Betica Mountains, and it set a limit to the other side of the land. The grain and olives cultivated on the large farms were irrigated by its water; these productive *cortijos* were more than sufficient for the farmers and laborers who worked the estates side by side. The underground resources of the purple-blue Sierra Morena range in the distance had yet to be fully discovered. Farther east, on the southern coastline, the land became gradually drier. The region beyond Adra received almost no rainfall. However, the west coast was different. The hilly terrace of the Penibetic range starting from the Mediterranean was cut by deep passes connecting the coast to the inner plateau, creating a protected, sunny region. Blessed with abundant water, this was the Iberian Peninsula's most fertile basin. The red-colored earth washed down from the mountains over centuries had nourished this region, sustaining it as an undiscovered treasure.

Elderly people, like Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna,⁶ nurtured the land. The Traveler's mother had entrusted him to Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna when he was nine, and he remained with her for many years. Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna was ninety-five years old when they first met, yet her beauty and freshness had made him shy. Despite her age, Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna's cheeks were still rosy. Judging by her pretty face alone, she could have been a girl of fourteen or fifteen. Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna had a unique relationship with the Creator, and many disciples served her. Nevertheless, the Traveler was her favorite, and she often said, "He is different. I have never seen one like him. When he steps into my house, he enters with all his presence. When he steps out of my house, he departs with all his being. He never leaves behind anything that belongs to him."

One day Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna commented, "I wonder about those who say they love God but cannot find peace with Him. He is what His mortals see. The eyes of a man behold Him in every eye. He does not vanish, even for a moment. Yet, such people weep continually—I can't understand this. If they love Him, how can they cry? Aren't they ashamed? The lover is closest to God because he sees Him all the time. So why and for whom is he crying?" She then turned to the Traveler and asked, "What do you think?"

"The words belong to you, mother," replied the Traveler.

⁶ Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna: a gnostic and a lady of Seville whom Ibn Arabi served for several years.

Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna smiled. “Dear one,” she said, “He bestowed the Fatihah upon me, giving this *surah*⁷ to my service. I swear it never leaves me.”

When the Traveler heard this, he realized that the old woman had reached a lofty level.

On another day, while eating dried figs and drinking cranberry juice in the main hall of Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna’s house, they heard a knock on the door. The Traveler opened it, and a young woman rushed in weeping. “My son,” she cried, even before he was able to speak, “my husband is a merchant. He is in Suzune and has fallen in love with a young girl. I have heard he wants to marry her. Help me, please!”

The Traveler was bewildered. “What do you want exactly?” he asked.

“I want my husband back,” wept the woman.

The Traveler went to Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna. “Mother,” he said, “a distraught woman has come. She begs your assistance.”

“What does she want?”

“Her husband to come home.”

“All right,” Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna replied. “Bring her to me. She can rest assured that her husband will return. I will send the Fatihah to bring him back.”

The old woman began to pray, and the Traveler joined her. As they recited the Fatihah, the *surah* began to take on shape and appearance, and the Traveler recognized Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna’s high standing. When it was fully formed, the *surah* stood up. “Go to Suzune and bring back this woman’s husband,” Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna commanded. “Don’t let go of him until he is here. Release him when he is near his home so that he will be reunited with his family immediately.”

The *surah* departed on its errand, and Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna told the woman, “Go home, girl. Your man will be there even before you arrive.”

Now and then, Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna played the tambourine to entertain herself. At such times, the Traveler would speak with her intimately. “I feel spiritually captivated when I play the tambourine,” she would say. “God takes interest in me, includes me in His circle of friends, loves me, and binds me to Himself. Who am I that He selects me as one of His favorites? I swear by my Possessor’s power that many envy me. Whenever I approach something trustfully, I always run into trouble because I become lost in thought and oblivious of His presence.” Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna often said such things.

The Traveler served the old woman for four years. At the end of the first year of his service, he built her a reed hut where she lived until she passed away. His birth mother had

⁷ *Surah*: one of the 114 chapters of the Quran.

entrusted the Traveler to Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna, and the old woman frequently declared, “I am your spiritual mother—the light of your real mother.”

At the end of the fourth year, when the Traveler’s birth mother came to take him away, he kissed Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna’s hand and said, “I have learned what a traveler must know until he reaches the first stop on his journey. I hope your Master exalts and rewards you for what you have taught me. Wish me luck.”

“May the Lord be with you,” said the old woman, kissing his forehead. “Already, at the beginning of your path, you have learned everything I have learned up to the end of my life.” Then, turning to the Traveler’s mother, she exclaimed, “O light! This child is my son and your father. Treat him well and obey him—for obeying one’s mother and father is like submitting to the Lord.”

3.

When the Traveler returned to Cordova, the fire of love rushing to burn his heart met him there. He accepted it as a mystery of destiny and embraced it. Fleeing from love was impossible. Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna had taught him this. When love’s first ache pierced his heart, he was on his way to Damascus. There, he saw a halo spread over his entire being, which gradually deepened and expanded inside of him. Although it was difficult to carry, the Traveler realized that the only cure was to surrender as Mussena had advised. He had fallen in love; yet, he did not know to whom. The first lines of poetry that he wrote about the love aflame in his heart reflected bewilderment and excitement.

“I have fallen in love with such a being that I have no idea where His love originates,”

he was saying.

“Nor do I know who the one saying says he does not know.

Surrounded by thoughts, I am entirely confused.

I am amazed. I am in awe.

After circumambulating the Kaaba twenty times, I noticed,

And expressed the love my mystery embraced.

I neither knew whom I loved, nor did I know His name.”

The sorrow of his first love had pulled the Traveler into the valley of anxiety. After dwelling there a while, uneasiness pushed him to set out for another valley—a foreign land. He did not know who was placing the weight on his chest. Until the cover lifted, the Traveler asked everyone about this being’s face, which resembled a cloud shining at night in the light of the full moon. “Who is he?” the Traveler inquired.

“The heart,” they replied naively, but with sincere intent.

The Traveler said in love, “God is supreme. The night I spent with Him even surpassed the Night of Power.”⁸

Upon his arrival at Damascus, the Traveler felt spiritually gratified. It was indefinable, lasting enchantment formed in his imagination during an enduring divine moment. “My love,” he declared, “I utter these words compelled by my ardor for you; I express the words of one who says to his lover, ‘Tell me.’”

The Traveler had been confused when he went to Damascus. He had met no one whose love resembled his. Whom did he love? The Creator, or someone like himself? His ears did not catch a word about that lover. He asked himself whether someone, long before, had uttered such a word. “I journeyed to His cities in the east and in the west to find my lover,” he said. “But I realized there was only one lover, whom I had to follow like a shadow. God, I cried, my heart overflows with love! Look at me! I do not know what to do. Then, at that moment, the messenger of the lover called out, ‘Poor thing, you have fallen into the sea of ignorance. Come, hear my words. Learn the mysteries of wisdom. I am the possessor of boundless knowledge and capable of every virtue. If you join me and learn, an exquisite square will appear before you. Clearly, his name is like that of God—the name of my lover formed in His image, in total harmony with the separation and reunion you will experience. This is your lover’s name in addition to the triple square that unites everything in itself, even if you are not cognizant of it. Tripling the square means a temple, and it means the holy book. Its beauty is such that it offers proof of my destitution. It is my temple, and for the existence of my being. The temple has two beings: my Lord, and my essence, for both goodness and self-sacrifice. The first of it is a letter of seven parts, which exceeds all other letters.’”

In this state, the Traveler recognized that He had inspired him with these lines. He cried, “The hawk of homes!”—a name he had never heard except in this spiritual condition. He asked its meaning, and was instilled with the explanation that it was “the one whose home is protected.” In the section about love in his work *Meccan Revelations*, he spoke of this extensively. “I kept You in my house so that my form would appear,” he related. “I think of

⁸ The Night of Power: the 27th of Ramadan when the Holy Quran was revealed.

You—You who becomes visible in me. My eyes have seen no one as spiritually mature as I am. No one has looked upon this being as You have. Concerning possibilities, no other is as perfect as You are. You have shown us infinite evidence, and in whatever state of maturity, it is You who is always mentioned. Every appearance is from You alone. I believe this with all my heart, and had it been possible in this universe to have one more perfect than You, then perhaps my existence would have been imperfect. No other being more perfect than I am has ever entered this world because You are manifest in the form of my being.”

On another day, he said, “Run, hurry, hasten to recapture what has passed from your life. Run; make haste to take Him along as your nourishment for your journey. Call with love, O the last wish of my heart; mystery and meaning are passionate about your message! My Lord, I cannot look at You enough when I see You—You who has created existence. If non-existence and the denial of everything that resembled You did not exist, and if everything that came from your sight burned in fire, I would wish for nothing more but to see You. I would not read anything that did not mention You. I would not look into any face that did not reflect You. I would not take any road that did not lead to You. I long for you, O matchless, peerless Lover. I desire above all that your power have dominion over me. Everything is from You; have you not told me that my delay in worship is because you can see my fate. Who can escape his fate?”

On the way back from Damascus, the fire in his heart grew, enveloping his entire being. He glowed with inner fire. Every object he glanced at said, “Do not try me anymore.”

When the Traveler reached home, his father recognized his son’s state and told him a story from his past. One day in the forest, the Traveler’s father had seen a hunter pursuing a female turtledove. The bird’s mate appeared, and at that moment, the hunter shot his prey. Frantically, the male turtledove flew upwards, spinning round at the same time. The bird ascended so high that it disappeared from sight. Then, it reappeared as a spot in the sky, growing larger by the second. From a height beyond which it could ascend no more, it had shut its wings, plunging down with sorrowful cries until it lay smashed and broken on the ground.

4.

Andalusia has been envisioned as a mild Mediterranean region, inspiring and alluring like Italy. Yet, except for a few coastal cities, it was a dark, harsh land, with formidable mountains and stark, empty plains stretching to the horizon without a single tree. It had all the

characteristics of wild and melancholic Africa. The scarcity of vegetation and absence of birds amplified the silence. Eagles and vultures soared above the sharp rocks rising from the plains, and scattered flocks of timid birds flew amongst the scrub; the thousands of small birds found in other lands frequented only a few regions of Andalusia and its towns. Inland, the Traveler often passed through endless wheat fields rolling in waves as far as the eye could see, green some months of the year, brown and dry at others. He would look for the hand that had sown them, but only spot a distant village with a watchtower on a steep hill circled by the ruins of a castle that had once offered protection from the Moors. The villagers still joined in common defense against wandering brigands. Even though the land was barren and desolate, its people were rich in character and pride. The quiet emptiness of Andalusia aroused something akin to sublimity in the soul. The plains around Castile and the channel were like a boundless ocean. When the Traveler scanned this vastness, he would often notice a flock of sheep spread across a hillside, their lonely shepherd with his spear-like staff standing still and silent nearby.

This land and the traditions of its people, even the manner in which they walked, were influenced by the Arabs. The insecurity of the land was such that most of the inhabitants carried a weapon at his waist. The shepherds and herdsmen on the plains always carried small and curved daggers, and it was unthinkable for a villager to travel to a neighboring town without being armed. The dangers of the road were many. Besides nature's harshness, a divine warning could happen anytime. One could meet trains of wagons or pack animals that resembled the caravans of the East, especially on the desert-like barren plains. Once, the Traveler had left Cordova without a weapon. As he passed through the city gate, a guard warned him about going out unarmed, but the Traveler replied that he would recite the holy name of God. He walked into the open country, eventually stopping at a fountain to relieve his thirst. A poor Bedouin approached him as he drank. The man greeted the Traveler and filled his leather flask before sitting down next to him. A weeping willow shaded the two from the blistering sun scorching the ground beyond its shadow. Shimmering waves of heat danced like flames across the parched earth. The Traveler noticed a shadow of grief across the face of the man beside him. It appeared as if he had become detached from the universe—he had the look of a hopeless man. “Who are you? What do you do? From where are you coming, and where do you go?” the Traveler inquired.

Without glancing up from a small stick in his hand, the man replied, “I am the true word.”

“The true word?” the Traveler repeated.

“Yes,” said the man, lapsing into silence. Then, breaking the stick in his hand, he said, “I lived in a city once . . . in Seville. However, lies and falsehoods were so many that I had to leave. Now the desert is my home.”

After saying these few words, the man got up and left. He soon disappeared from sight. The Traveler thought he was in a dream. He stood up, looked around, and walked in the same direction in which the Word of Truth had vanished. To solve its mystery, the Traveler had to go to where the Word of Truth had emerged. Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna had taught him this. Along the way, he met many trains of men and animals. These wanderers loaded all their belongings onto camels and spent their lives on the road, as if they carried their homes on their backs and believed that life in this world consisted of sitting a few hours in the shade of a tree. As they moved, they chanted to the sound of their camels’ hooves. They relied on the endurance of their animals, and advanced with their eyes fixed on the mountains rising from where the plains seemed to end. Accompanying these people, the Traveler imagined the battles fought during the conquest of Seville. He gazed at the lofty mountains and the tiny villages and walled towns, with their crumbling towers perched like eagle’s nests on the cliffs, and he felt his mortality.

When the Traveler crossed these highlands, he often dismounted and led his horse by the reins down the steep paths which resembled broken staircases. Sometimes the road would hug the side of a precipice with nothing to protect travelers from falling into the chasm below. At times, the debris left by winter floods obstructed the way through the narrow valleys. Circling a bend, the roar of an angry herd of wild bulls might cause the Traveler to jump with fear, and in the meadows, he would often encounter other strange, untamed animals that had never seen a human before. The Traveler ate little to preserve his supplies and abstain from eating the fruits and berries God had granted for the nourishment of these beasts. He quenched his thirst at lonely springs and rested at their edge to relieve his weariness.

After traversing many mountains and plains, he finally arrived in Mecca on a holy Friday, exactly one year after he had left Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthanna. Here he met a group of scholars and virtuous men of letters. Among them was Sheikh Mekinuddin, who remained secluded much of the time to appraise his past and future, as well as his older sister Fahrunnisa, the most venerable female savant in the Hijaz. The sheikh was a scientist, a guide, an imam, and a spiritual leader. He belonged to the *maqam*⁹ of Abraham, and had always lived in Mecca. Under his tutelage, the Traveler read the hadiths. The sheikh was an authority

⁹ *Maqam*: one's spiritual station or developmental level that is seen as the outcome of one's effort to transform oneself.

on matters of morality, and his followers were as brilliant as the mythical gardens resembling Eden. Their affection for the sheikh knew no bounds.

With her vast knowledge, Fahrunnisa was a model for women and scholars to emulate. She also taught the Traveler how to interpret hadiths. When he first went to her, she said, “You, whose life is spent on a journey, I have come to the end of my path. My life is nearly over. The lessons about hadiths and their method of transmission will not last long. Until my eyes close to this world, I want nothing more than to pass my time in prayer. Death surrounds me, and from this time forth, I will not spend a single observing this world. My advice to you is that regret is futile. Let your eyes open when you are young. The time a person is fated to die is concealed, and life is short. For a human being, nothing is more priceless than striving for eternal bliss in this world.”

“We have the same aim,” replied the Traveler.

Fahrunnisa then gave permission to her brother to write on her behalf a certificate of authorization for teaching hadiths. He prepared the paper and gave it to the Traveler, granting him the authority to interpret all the words of the Prophet.

The sheikh had an unmarried daughter of matchless beauty. She captivated all who saw her, leaving her surroundings scented with the fragrance of lilacs and lavender and glowing with light like that of the moon. Her name was Harmony, but she was better known for her beauty as “the Eye of the Sun.” Although not of equal rank to her father in wisdom, she was proficient in many sciences and a devout believer. One of the foremost personages in Mecca, as well as Medina, she had been raised in this well guarded city protected from all danger. In outward appearance, she resembled an Iraqi. When she spoke at length, she delved into the smallest details, leaving nothing obscure; when she spoke little, she was concise and eloquent, winning her listeners’ admiration. Even the most skilled orators became silent in her presence. She was generous, faithful, and courageous, putting all her trust in God when confronted with her destiny. Few in Mecca served Him the way she did. The height of her devotion and asceticism was such that she did not pass even a single moment without being fully conscious of her actions. She was aware of every breath she took, every drop of water she drank, and every word she spoke. Her devotion to Him guided her spiritual life. If those who were weak, ill-natured, ill-thinking, and unchaste, who destroyed themselves by being overwhelmed by their egos and were quickly tempted by evil, did not exist, the Traveler could have explained singly all the beauties and virtues God had bestowed upon Harmony when He created her. She resembled clouds heavy with rainwater and a rose of the deepest crimson; she was the bright sun, beloved of all scholars. She smelled like the most fragrant blossoms, and

she was the flowerbed of all people of letters. She was a rose garden. Her delicate mouth was similar to an inkpot never opened. She was a pearl on a necklace. She had no equal in her generation. The greatest joy of her parents, she was the most virtuous member of her community. She resided in Mecca's Ciyad district, and her home was the most loved and revered place in the neighborhood. It was a center of the heart's wisdom. Tihama radiated light through her, and the flowers in her garden budded and bloomed for they were in her presence. Lovely beyond compare, these blossoms emitted the sweetest fragrances when they witnessed her beauty and finesse.

The Traveler spent long hours in Harmony's presence, and many months taking lessons from her father and aunt, which is why his book of poems, *Interpreter of Desires*, was filled with many authentic images, strung like pearls on a precious necklace. Yet, in spite of his great devotion and exquisite words, he could not express even one-thousandth of his love for her, the emotion in his heart and mind, the profoundness of her inner self, and the purity and innocence of her chastity. She was the Traveler's sole passion and aspiration. His poems reflected no more than a single drop of his longing, and he exposed all the desire and yearning locked inside of him. Recalling every moment spent with her, he relived them once again, his devotion leaving an imprint on his soul. Every name mentioned in his book was an allusion to her. Every house he described was her home. Every interpretation of desire was a consequence of the rain that fell on his heart from the same image. In this second stage, the Traveler had begun to penetrate to the natural order of things. He had arrived at this point by observing the names given to objects and following the path they showed. The days he did not know whom he loved were over. On the other hand, he still did not realize that every image he described was the ordinary appearance of an object. He would obtain this knowledge by going to the hill where the two seas did not unite and by saying, "I will not cross to the other side until I acquire all knowledge about the realm of the unknown". He began his poems, "I take shelter in your glory." Then continued, "It is Him who tells us about the truth and teaches it to us. We cannot know more than what He teaches. With this book, I wished for reality, kindness, and beauty. I wrote these poems in Mecca during the month of Ramadan and the two holy months before Ramadan. I recounted the mysteries that infiltrated perfection. When I visited the Kaaba, I passed into an extraordinary state."

Three letters appeared before the Traveler when he sat cross-legged in front of the Kaaba, with his eyes fixed on its cloth covering. At first, he saw three letters: K, U, and N. In fact, these were two letters only, *qaf* and *nun*. In the same way, the universe that could be seen clearly had two directions: an inner and an outer direction. The outer part was seen through

the letter *nun*, and the inner was seen through the letter *qaf*. Thus, the place where the letter *qaf* went when breath was exhaled meant entry to the unknown world. The exit point of this letter enabled human beings to enter the invisible world. *Qaf* was the last letter pronounced between the tongue and the throat. On the other hand, *nun* was pronounced with the upper part of the tongue. The aspect of the word *kun*, which looked at the unknown world, was alluded to by the letter *waw*, between *qaf* and *nun*. This letter—the symbol of visibility—was at the same time a letter of causality. Coming into being, or the genesis, originated from it. *Waw* was pronounced by the lips. The protruding lip symbolized the exit of breath from the being. In this manner, the principle of being alive in the existing being was a direct result of the spirit. Actions took place because of the soul that gave life to the body. The soul was lost in the cage of the body, just as *waw* was lost between *qaf* and *nun*. *Waw* was short, and it became silent. It was seen through a veil. Its presence was concealed, but its effect and results were revealed.

The Traveler thought love was the existence of the lover. Therefore, the lover did not hear anyone else's words except the Lover's, and his eyes did not see anyone but the Lover. His heart was sealed, and no one except the Lover could enter. "Your image is in my eyes, your words are on my tongue, and you have taken your place in my heart; so why do you disappear and get lost?" He heard with his Lover, saw his Lover, and talked to his Lover. This image that was revealed to the Traveler resembled the way the angel of revelation showed itself to the Prophet in a certain form. This image that occurred in his eyes caused the Traveler to perceive the Lover in front of him, making it impossible for him to stop looking at the Lover's image. His Lover spoke to the Traveler, and the Traveler listened to his Lover, understanding all that he was told. For days, he ate nothing. Whenever he sat at a table full of food, his Lover sat across from him and whispered, "Are you going to eat when you are watching me?" The Traveler would then stop eating; yet he did not feel hunger. He had such passion for his Lover that he was sustained by his love. His sight was fixed on his Lover, and though he ate nothing, he gained weight, nourished by his Lover. He lived through his Lover, feeling neither hunger nor thirst.

5.

Once, the Traveler was with some dervishes in a lodge in Damascus. All were moved to tears as he spoke except for one young man who laughed. The Traveler stopped talking and looked at the youth, who became silent. "Why are you laughing?" asked the Traveler.

“All these people pray to God because they are afraid of going to hell,” replied the youth. “They think that being saved from the fire is the greatest happiness. But I neither desire heaven nor fear hell. I ask nothing in return for my love.”

Others in the group then asked, “But what will you do if God casts you from his presence?”

“If I did not find reunion in this love,” said the young man, “I would set my house and all my possessions on fire. Here, where sorrow resides, and which resembles hell, I would wake my household, family, and everyone else with my agitation and tears. O those who say God has equals, come and shed tears for me! I am a desperate mortal, yet I have fallen in love with God. If my claim were not true, I would be punished with the most terrible torments.”

6.

One day, while the Traveler was circumambulating the Kaaba, he saw a man with his face buried in a piece of cloth, weeping. “Except for You,” sobbed the man, “I have never told anyone my woes. I only confide in You—You alone. I am devoted to You. I cannot understand how they can stay away from You, even though they are aware of Your presence. You granted me the pleasure of union, and spread my love to the depths of my heart.”

Addressing himself, the man continued, “God gave you time, but you did not cease to sin. He veiled your faults with His name Settar, but you felt no shame. He experienced beseeching Himself through you, yet you were not distressed. What will happen to you? When you are in His presence and He deprives you of the value of prayer, what are you going to do? Why, dear fellow, are you acting like this? He has burned your heart with the fire of separation. What else can he do? Do you know anything more painful and harsh than disconnection?”

The Traveler approached, but to his surprise, it was not a man but a woman who was weeping.

7.

As he was returning to his one-room house in Mecca whose walls and ceiling were made of sun-dried bricks, he saw a man squatting on a corner. The man was crying, as if covered with darkness cast upon him by the world. The Traveler asked the man about his

problem, but he gave no reply. “God have mercy upon you,” said the Traveler again. “Why are you crying?”

The man did not utter a word.

“Do you know what He considers the clearest sign of one who loves Him?” the Traveler asked, sitting down beside him.

“Dear friend,” the man sobbed, “love is such a high abode that one cannot define it.”

“Tell me more,” said the Traveler.

“God has engraved Himself in the hearts of His believers so that they can see the greatness of His *Jelal* with the heavenly light in their hearts,” the man wept, overcome with emotion. “Their bodies remain in this world while their souls are veiled, and their minds soar to the heavens. They wander among the angels and witness this truth in person. Feeling love for God alone, and being free of both desire for heaven and fear of hell, they serve Him.”

“No doubt,” the Traveler said. “This must be the knowledge of people who have acquired perfection. Knowing the Creator through genuine knowledge is a unique skill. People with insight are like you: outside they look ordinary, inside they glow.”

8.

The Traveler always returned to the Kaaba. No matter where he wandered, he ended up at the central core. No matter what mountain he climbed or plain he crossed, he was connected to that tranquil spot under the black cover. It was constantly in his sight and drew his attention. Since that passion whose direction is obscure had fallen into his heart, he had revolved around the same image. One day, while circumambulating, he suddenly felt odd and began to tremble. Familiar with this state, he distanced himself from the crowd and began to spin around on the sand. At that moment, a torrent of inspiration poured over him. He was both speaking and listening at the same time. If one had been near him, he would have heard his words:

*If I knew, if I could only know
which heart they possess, do they know?
If my heart could know, if it knew
on which journeys they set off, how they crossed the mountains.
Do you see them safe and sound?
Lovers were astonished; they were transported with joy.*

They were burned by love; they have lost their way.

The Traveler reached such ecstasy that he was only able to collect himself when a soft hand gently touched his shoulder from behind. He turned, and to his surprise, a beautiful young Greek girl was standing there. He had never seen a maiden so delicate, gentle, and graceful.

“What were you saying?” she asked.

“Oh,” he replied, “If I knew, if I could only know, which heart they possess. Do they know?”

“Amazing!” The girl exclaimed. “You have obviously reached perfection, yet you say such strange words. If someone has something, doesn’t he know what it is? Doesn’t one have something after getting to know that thing? Does the desire to know something necessitate pondering upon its non-existence? The right thing is to tell the truth and describe it in an orderly manner. How can a man like you say such things?”

“My heart,” the Traveler sighed, “if I knew . . . if I could only know on which journeys they set off . . . how they crossed the mountains.”

“The paths between the heart and the inside of the heart prevent one from knowing this,” the girl said. “How can a man like you wish for something impossible to reach? The right thing to do is to tell the truth as it is.” Then she added, “What did you say next?”

“What do you see when you look at them?” inquired the Traveler. “Are they safe and sound, or have they perished and been destroyed?”

“Leave them aside,” insisted the girl. “They are protected and unharmed, moving ahead on their own path. But you should ask yourself whether you are safe and sound or destroyed?”

“The lovers were astonished,” the Traveler continued. “They were transported with joy; they were burned by love; they have lost their way.”

“How strange!” the girl cried. “How can a person in love be astonished? How can he lose his way? How is it possible? The only thing that interests a lover is love. Love turns a man’s world upside down, pulling him from the river in which he has always bathed, driving him to wander under a different sky, and spurring him to climb another mountain. Love causes his soul to flutter in terror. Love kills a man, so how can he, dead from love, be astonished? Love kills a man, but how can he find his way after he has died? The right thing to do is to tell the truth, to explain it in an appropriate way.”

When the young girl finished speaking, the Traveler asked her name. “Joyful Tidings” she replied.

“You are my life’s light,” he said, and they separated. He did not see her again. She would never touch his shoulder with her soft hand while he spun; the Traveler had left the constellation of love to go to the constellation of compassion.

9.

Seven days after setting off on a journey to the heavens of compassion, the Traveler arrived in Damascus at the end of the month of Muharram.¹⁰ One night, he dreamed of God’s Prophet. In a real world of dreams, the Prophet was holding a book in his hand. “Take this book,” he directed. “Let all humanity hear about it. Let them know, so that each and every human being benefits from its wisdom.”

“What is it called?” asked the Traveler.

“The essence of all wisdom,” the Prophet replied.

The Traveler thought it right to submit to God and His Prophet and follow the orders of those who were at a rank to give commands. He fulfilled his task, conveying the book to humankind exactly as the Prophet had directed. His intent was pure, and he pursued an immaculate goal. He prayed that God make him one of his believers whom Satan would not vex, and he spread the word of the book while performing all of his other duties. He prayed for salvation from his apprehensions about his desires of the flesh, what his hands wrote, what his mouth said, and what his heart contained. He asked that the knowledge which came from the realm of the divine through God’s great power be revealed to him, providing help and inspiration so that he could transfer his wisdom in the right way. He knew that his book would be distant from the dark clouds of the ego, and that it would be formed without the inclusion of evil. He put into words what had been inspired in him and said, “I am neither an envoy nor a prophet but a sole heir of the Holy Prophet and the guardian of the hereafter.”

When the Traveler began writing his book, he had already arrived at a new state—that of compassion. He wrote: *Despite the differences among human kind because of various religions and separate paths, thanks be to God, who instills wisdom from the sacred source of the divine realm into the hearts of words.*

This was the first station of the state of compassion. The Traveler than left Damascus to return to Cordova, where he would write the last chapter of his book.

¹⁰ The month of Muharram: the first month of the Islamic calendar.

10.

To tell about the compassion that spread with this name, the Traveler transformed his will into a quill. Then his will dipped the Quill into the ink of knowledge and wrote everything that had happened and would happen into that protected grand notebook. He also wrote everything that he desired to happen. When he wished for something, it occurred through his proven and prudent power, his endless treasure, and his mysterious wisdom.

After waking shortly before dawn on the morning of the night he wrote about the final interval of the essence of the mysteries, the Traveler got up and went outside. He was living in a wooden hut with two rooms, and he went out and breathed in the scent of the earth lightly watered with dew. All objects were hazy in the dim light, yet he could see the light inside them. Everything had its own special light. When he gazed upon an object, he could read the writing inscribed on it. He smelled the earth and realized that his mind had become vacant. Neither a word nor a letter was in his memory. He had to learn the names of all things again. He looked at the first word written by the Quill: Muhammad. "Muhammad," he repeated several times. This word emitted the scent of the earth. He smelled it and said again, "Muhammad." An everlasting smell encompassed him. "This is the scent of eternity," he said to himself.

The Traveler whispered the same word again. Yet, his lips pronounced another word: "Adam." He said it a few times. This word also smelled of the earth. Repeating it, he sensed that it smelled of blood too. "This is the smell of blood that sticks to the earth," said the Traveler. He uttered "Adam" one more time, and the word separated into two. From one part appeared an altar, and from the other, an ear of wheat. The Traveler bent down and picked up the wheat only to realize that his hand was full of a sticky red fluid. He heard a voice that said, "Blood."

"Blood," the Traveler repeated. Another new word. He threw the word away and it fell to the ground, staining it crimson. The Traveler scooped up a handful of soil. It radiated light. He threw it toward the sky, and the words "cloud," "star," "moon," and "sun" poured out. The Traveler looked at the sun, but saw nothing because of the fire and light. He looked at the light inside things and saw the sun. He looked at the moon and saw divine radiance. He looked at the stars, all of which he knew. Each had its own name. Then he looked at the Earth and saw himself. After that, he turned his eyes to the Quill. "I want to create a universe that belongs to you," said the Quill.

Then the Traveler saw the hand holding the Quill. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am Omnipotence,” the Quill replied.

The Traveler paused and looked at the words the Quill was writing. He was creating his mind from scratch. He memorized each word written by the Quill. The Omnipotent Hand holding the Quill was his right hand. Both his both hands were right hands. The first word the Quill wrote was “Muhammad.” Then it wrote “water.” It wrote the word without the presence of the veil of glory. Then it wrote “but.” All was what it wrote. The Quill continued with the sentence “Only I exist, and nothing exists next to me.” As the Quill wrote, His uniqueness continued to exist. It wrote, and things increased, but they remained invisible without His light. The Quill wrote a word free of incomplete attributes, and The Traveler looked at it. Short and broken, it consisted of the letters *ha* and *waw*. The Traveler joined the letters and read “*Hu*.” When pronounced it, he heard the sound of water, which cold and frozen, resembled a circular white substance that was spinning. With the power entrusted to it, the Quill wrote in the water about material things and beings that showed signs. Then it wrote the word for “the highest heaven”—“*al-Rahman*,” one of the ninety names of God, which meant “the Gracious.” He placed “*al-Rahman*” onto the highest heaven. When the Traveler looked at Him, he was able to see all things at once.

After that, the Quill wrote “pulpit,” followed by “*Jalal*.” He looked at the water, and making it feel ashamed, he caused all of its parts to dissolve. The Traveler had not included the words “earth” and “sky.” A breath from *Hu* blew on the water, it rippled with the word’s power, and the breath was reflected on its surface. Praising God, the Breath spoke. When it fell upon the shores of the word “Earth,” it swayed, and the Traveler’s gaze quivered. “I am Ahmad,” he called out, and feeling ashamed, the water quickly receded, wishing to return to its center. It left foam on the shore exposed by its retreat, which was the water’s complete and pure essence that contained most objects. With the foam, the Quill wrote another word, from the essence: “the Earth.” It was a laudable, circular word, grand and extensive in height and width. When the Earth split in two, the friction created fire, from which the Quill wrote “smoke.” The high heavens were written inside the smoke. The skies split, and the Quill wrote “divine light” on each level. The last word the Quill wrote was “station.”

11.

As dawn broke, the Traveler returned home and fell asleep. He dreamed of God creating Adam and his two sons with His hands. God fashioned Adam’s body; then He

divided it into two. The first part was concerned with the completion of Adam's finite being. The second was related to the approval of his infinite attribute. God established the place of the being as the spot of the sphere of existence and concealed His presence. He enlightened his subjects about this, saying, "He created the skies without a visible pillar." When the human being passed to his real life abode, to the place where souls awaited for *barzakh*,¹¹ the vault of heaven shook and split, spewing forth scarlet flames of fire that flowed like hot oil. When the happy ending occurred as the majesty and glory of Omnipotence became manifest between existence and nonexistence, and the unhappy ending occurred through the eyes of defiance and deviation from the truth, the truths of contented and discontented people were revealed through the viewpoint of harmony and enlightenment, and the glad soul raced rushed to be able to come into existence as soon as possible, while imposition, resistance and obstinacy were born from grief. God then created truths equal to the number of the names of His own truth. He also created angels who submitted to Him, equaling the number of His creatures. He gave each reality a name of His own. For the mystery of each truth, He created an angel that served and obeyed Him. After that, He extracted suns from the first Nothingness. The poles were the lights of these suns, which wandered in the heavens of divine levels. Then He created the stars, which were the heavenly lights of the superiors and which rotated in the heavens in the state of the extraordinary. Finally, He established four pillars for four principles. With these, he protected humans and jinns in these two realms. They obstructed the rotation of the Earth, which became tranquil. Then He decorated the Earth with flowers and beautiful plants. It became fruitful, and abundance burst forth. This remarkable beauty became evident to the beings created. They smelled the fragrances of roses and geraniums. Their mouths filled with delicious food. He then sent the seven *abdals*¹² to be the sultans of the seven climates. Each *abdal* was responsible for a country, and He selected two leaders for the two poles.

12.

Christ was one of the two leaders.

One night, the Traveler visited the cemetery in Seville. The sky was clear, and the stars appeared close above his head. Directed by the stars Hunnes and Kunnes, the Traveler entered the cemetery. He looked at the horizon where they had risen, and he had a revelation.

¹¹ *Barzakh*: interval, connecting stage; intermediate state of the soul after death and before the final judgment.

¹² *Abdal*: the first degree in dervish orders.

The Traveler thought that in order to step onto the path, he had to give away all his belongings, becoming as naked as he had been at the time of birth. Later, he defined this revelation as ecstasy.

The Traveler remained at the cemetery until dawn, when Christ appeared to him as if from a star. The Traveler had been looking at the heavens and noticed a shooting star. Its brightness illuminated his face, and he felt the radiance flow into his head and heart. At that moment, a person with a saintly face appeared, saying, “Don’t be afraid, my friend.”

The Traveler realized that this was Christ.

“I am the Messiah,” said Christ, “and I will pray that you stay on the path of religion both in this world and the next. You should renounce this world and its pleasures to devote yourself completely to God, rubbing yourself clean of everything.”

“What exactly do you mean,” the Traveler asked.

“Seclude yourself from everything worldly,” Christ replied, and then he disappeared from sight.

The Traveler remained in the cemetery until the break of day. When morning came, he went to his father and declared, “I must get rid of everything I own.”

His father told him that it could be accomplished easily since he had no wife or children. After this consultation, the Traveler abandoned all his belongings, just as one who dies separates from his family and property. He left his possessions to his father, and he did not ask about them again. From that day forth, the Traveler never owned anything—not even the clothes on his back. He wore only what was lent to him. Whenever he acquired something, he immediately gave it away. His only heartfelt desire was to be a real servant of God.

One day, the Traveler heard a warning: “As long as a single being has the right to request something from you, you will not succeed.”

“Not even God can ask me for something,” the Traveler replied. “I have completely rubbed myself out of existence.”

The Traveler was then asked how this could be possible, to which he answered simply, “One can only ask something from those in denial, not from those who acknowledge. You can only request something from those who claim rights and belongings, not from those who say they have nothing.”

A few days later in Seville, the Traveler was rewarded with a dream under the guidance of God’s Prophets. While Christ directed him towards asceticism, just as in his earlier vision, Moses told him that he would discover the secret mysteries. Muhammad

advised the Traveler to follow each step, saying, “Cling to me tightly, and you shall be protected.”

At this time, the Traveler did not have his full share of wisdom, and his friends steered him towards reading works of analogy. He was unfamiliar with all manifest knowledge. In his dream, he saw himself surrounded by armed bandits on a boundless plain. There was no place to hide. Then he noticed a small mound on which God’s Prophet stood. The Prophet walked toward the Traveler, embraced him, and told him to hold on strongly. “Don’t you let go of me,” he ordered.

The Traveler looked for the bandits who had been about to attack him, but they had disappeared. From that moment on, he began to strive earnestly for manifest knowledge.

When he awoke, the Traveler declared, “When my Lord called me and I accepted His invitation, I recognized it as an opportunity to recall His order ‘the plant of a good land will be good.’ I continued to chant His name for a while; then commotion broke out. This confusion is well known to the masters. Each traveler has undoubtedly faced it. When confusion takes hold, two possibilities exist: you must either go back to your initial state of servitude or confusion prevails and the veil does not disappear. The first is the state of human beings whom God protects; the second is the state of other people—those who will never attain truth. When confusion seized me, I saw God in a dream. He said to me, ‘He is the one who sends the winds as the harbingers of His Mercy.’ I understood this as a warning and replied, ‘With this I am told about my first discovery, through which God granted me enlightenment through the patronage of Christ, Moses, and Muhammad.’”

13.

Only seven years remained in the twelfth century when the Traveler arrived at the Green Isle Port in Gibraltar. Ships were gliding through the waters of the strait, and waves pounded the shore. The traffic on the sea was unceasing. The Traveler gazed across the strait and whispered, “I will not cross until I acquire all the information in God’s treasure.” Then he became silent. Having perfected his discovery, he turned towards Him in mature mindfulness. Silence parted the doors of the hidden treasure. After the Traveler acquired the mysteries, he crossed the sea and went to the spot where the wall of the two orphans had been repaired.

14.

In a dream, the Traveler saw an angel approaching him with a beam of light torn from the sun. “What is this?” he asked.

“The al-Shura *surah*,” replied the angel.

The Traveler swallowed the *surah* of light and felt as if a feather had trickled from his chest to his throat and then to his mouth. It was an animal that had a head, tongue, eyes, and lips. Its head grew until it completely enveloped the eastern and western horizons. Then it shrank, returning to the Traveler’s chest. At that moment, he realized that his word would invest the East and the West.

15.

In the morning, at home, where nothing belonged to him, the Traveler professed God’s unity by chanting “*la ilaha illa Allah*” until he was drained of strength. It was almost noon when he finished. Outside, the rain had not stopped, and water dripped from the ceiling of the wooden house. The Traveler thought of the Prophet. Once, the Prophet had gone out during a heavy rain, gazed at the sky a while, and gotten soaking wet. When people asked why he had done this, he replied, “His devotion to his Lord is new, and his obeisance is young.”

As the Traveler recalled the Prophet’s words, he gazed at a small wood that was visible from the eastern window of his home. He listened to the *dhikr* of the trees. Then he went outside and walked in the pouring rain towards the wood. “Water is also a prophet,” he whispered. He was contented with these words. “The water is a prophet.”

The Traveler listened to the news the water told, and he was soon wet to the skin. This was the first time he had done something like this; such torrents were rare in this region. He entered the wood, and as he walked among the giant pines and aged chestnuts, his feet sank deeply into the leaves that lay thickly on the ground. The rain was beating down through the tangled branches, yet the Traveler thought to himself, *This is not a downpour but an uplift*. He reached out to catch some drops of rain. The droplets were tiny and transparent, scattering when they touched his skin. He tried to view them separately. An angel had brought each drop, and the Traveler knew that if he made an effort to distinguish the angels, they would reveal themselves. He entered a drop and realized there was an entire world inside. It resembled the interior of a prism. Everything was illuminated, and despite obstacles, the light dispersed into many different colors. The Traveler noticed blue, yellow, red, violet, and indigo. The colors contained small signs indicating that the rain was an envoy, and he examined them. He was inside a drop. Its interior resembled a bell jar illuminated by a

lantern. He looked at the source of the light through the colors, but there were no colors. The light brought them from a single source. After walking inside the droplet for a while, the Traveler realized that the rain had stopped.

He left the drop and stood beside a pine tree, from which a thick branch had broken during the storm. The huge trunk was swollen with rainwater, but its base was drier. The Traveler bent down and moved some small bits of bark and needles so that he could see the soil. The ground was damp. Suddenly, a horrible odor struck him. "God, what is this!" he exclaimed. The pungent smell was almost unbearable, as he continued to scratch the ground. Finally, a small, strange object appeared, which was emitting the odor. Perplexed, the Traveler picked it up, and despite the foul smell that burned his throat, he put it near his chest and left the wood.

He went to the lodge of his second teacher in Seville. The sheikh was surrounded by his disciples. Many were in a state of ecstasy, and a conversation was in progress. The sheikh was explaining the dot concept in a barely audible voice that touched the soul. "The dot is the essence of everything," he declared.

The Traveler entered the lodge and sat on the threshold. The repulsive smell of the object he was holding filled the room, burning throats and distracting the sheikh. "Brother, what is that?" asked one of the older disciples, pointing at the object in the Traveler's hand.

"I don't know," the Traveler replied. "I found it in the woods."

"But why are you carrying it?" the disciple continued, looking at the sheikh. "Why did you bring it here?"

Coughing to remove the tartness in his throat, the sheikh told the Traveler that he owed the group an explanation, but the Traveler remained silent.

Another elderly disciple said, "Master, I think this is part of his spiritual effort."

"Let us ask him," replied the sheikh. His eyes were fixed on the Traveler.

"You are wrong, my friend," the Traveler said to the second disciple. "Contrary to your assumption, this is neither an effort nor a struggle. I found this object in the woods and thought that if God did not hesitate to create such a foul-smelling thing, why should I hesitate to carry it?"

16.

The sheikh had been explaining the concept of the dot, but had forgotten where he had stopped. "Start from *surah* al-Fatihah, Master," said the Traveler.

The old man smiled. “Let us begin again,” he said. “The Fatihah contains the Holy Quran in its entirety,” he continued, reminding his listeners of the Prophet’s words. “This *surah* is in the *besmele*—the formula *bismi Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim*, In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate. The *besmele* is in the letter *ba*, ‘B,’ and the letter *ba* is in the distinguishing dot. I am that dot.’ This saying of the Prophet was transmitted to us through oral tradition, having echoed in the ears of select individuals over generations. Many have struggled to comprehend its mystery, and many others have spent sleepless nights trying to solve that mystery. This effort inspired me, and I looked into my heart in order to inhale the mystery’s beautiful fragrance. To go to the source of the saying, I began taking spiritual steps. My journey ended on a steep mountain. I found the mystery at the summit, extracted it, and brought it down to noble, wise men. They received it joyfully, saying that only an honorable angel could present such a mystery. Indeed, discovering the secret of the dot required more power than that of a mere mortal like me. I told them it was like a stone thrown from a catapult, without knowing who hurled it. Only through God’s will would it be possible to recognize who threw the stone. I implied that the stone was not hurled by the one who had thrown it, but by God. This was the secret of the mystery, and only those who were in a similar state of mind could understand it.”

The old man fell silent and looked out of the small window, or *taka*, which was at a height from the ground equal to the knee level of a standing man. The sheikh was gazing at a road on a hill, which disappeared at the point where it crossed to the other side of the slope. Seeing the opposite side required much effort, he thought to himself. An inner voice told him not to worry in vain since finding the answer was impossible through exertion. What then? The same voice declared that searching would not lead to its discovery. Then it said that on the other hand, those who find answers are those who search.

During the old man’s silence, his disciples sat patiently and respectfully. Patience was the secret. Everyone knew this. In order to learn it, one had to frequent the lodge for months. Keeping his eyes fixed on the point where the road crossed the hill, the sheikh whispered, “When I say ‘one’ referring to a person, do not visualize another person. I use this word because this style of expression requires it. If you visualize someone else when I speak, you will not feel what I am trying to show you. I am giving you good news. You must cling to it so that you can dive into the sea of truth and cross to the other side, the absolute, without becoming dependent. This is passage from the level of thought to that of naming and remembrance. You cannot achieve it without realizing the mystery of the dot. Once you achieve it, you will experience unbelievable pleasure.”

The old man fell silent again. No sound could be heard in that hall with walls of sun-dried bricks and an earthen floor. Time had stopped. The sizzling of time that penetrated the hearts of humanity had disappeared. Only the sound of breathing could be heard, and even this dissolved in the silence after a while, leaving a pure sense of emptiness. The old man's voice, which gradually became deeper and less audible, echoed in the void. "When I refer to the dot, I mean the Being that is the only thing mortal eyes can see. When I refer to *alif*¹³, "A," I mean the Being without whom nothing exists. The Being is one—the single, unique one. The number one is the first number for counting, but His oneness is uncountable; He is unique. If I mention *ba*, "B," know that I mean that great manifestation which is the Great Spirit. The other letters come after these one by one; yet, these three components form the heart of my words. Whoever makes an effort to do good is the first to receive its results. Such people come closest to God in His bountiful paradise. These letters are *alif* and *ba*, which, in the world of letters, represent the *besmele*—the first word, because if we add the letter *ta* to the former letters, we get *Abt*, one of the names of God in Hebrew. With that word, Christ had prayed to his Lord and said, 'I am going to your Father and to my Father.' Here, the word father means God. He had referred to God in this manner to present Him to human beings in a way they could understand. Father is the word *baba*. Look at it. It is formed as *ba-alif-ba-alif*—two distinguishing dots and two unities. There is no duality in oneness. Saying 'He is one,' is in a way saying that He has an equal. Is there more than one God that you must state 'He is one?'"

Despite his aged body, worn out by merciless time, the sheikh spoke with surprising clarity. The Traveler was impressed by his strong reasoning. He looked at the old man's wrinkled face. Usually, he would not have done this, but now, he felt as if a hand held his face and lifted it to look at the sheikh's. He perceived a heavenly light, a divine light that revealed itself, while illuminating that aged face. The Traveler recognized that the old man's weary mind had acquired the functions of a heart. Unaware of the Traveler's gaze, the sheikh resumed his discourse. "The dot," he continued, "was a buried secret before it revealed itself in the form of the *alif*. Before it loaded many mysteries hidden in its essence on various letters, those letters existed in the dot in a barely perceptible way. However, if you understand the truth, you will see that the dot is nothing but ink, and that which is intended to be expressed by the dot is the ink itself."

At this point, the Traveler realized that the old man, who had fallen silent again, was suffering under the weight of what he was explaining. He noticed the sheikh looking at him

¹³ *Alif*: the letter A in the Arabic alphabet, which has the numerical value of 1.

with a rare smile. The old man seemed to have transformed into a single drop in the boundless sea of love. Nodding slightly, he hinted that it was the Traveler's turn to speak. In a relaxed tone that surprised all those gathered there, the Traveler began to talk, trying to imitate the sheikh's tone. "Someone who had attained miracles said that letters are signs of the ink. All letters are painted with ink. The color of the letters is the ink's paint. Yet, the paint of the letters is an illusion. Their content is in the heart of the ink. They appear with the permission of the ink, which determines the letters' destiny. It is the only thing that exists. Listen well because the quandary is concealed here. The ink and the letters are not the same. Do not say letters are ink—this is madness. When there were no letters, ink existed. After letters disappear, ink will remain. All letters will vanish; only the surface of the ink will remain forever. Don't be fooled by the appearance of the letters. They are mere shadows. Don't forget that when you look at them it is the ink you see. A letter can neither add to nor subtract from the ink. Wherever there is a letter, it exists with the ink from which it was written."

When the sheikh finished his speech, his disciples took deep breaths. The old man was still staring at the road. His gaze was deeper than if he was trying to look through something. The Traveler bent his head silently. The disciples did not utter a sound. This silence had a distinctive quality, which enabled one to hear the words in the old man's heart. The sheikh pointed to the closed book on the small stand next to him and said, "All words are inside the dot, and all books are concealed in a sentence. The sentence is concealed in the word, and the word is concealed in the letter. The absence of the letter brings the absence of the word; the absence of the word brings the absence of the sentence; and the absence of the sentence brings the absence of the book. Whether in oral or written form, the word always needs the letter. The word is the letter's bloom. All is hidden in the dot—the mother of all books."

Silence descended over the hall once again. The old man was still gazing at the road, as if he were reading something or talking to someone. His eyes were fixed on a single point. Turning right and left at various bends, the road wound its way up the slope, eventually reaching the summit. The sheikh began to speak again. "The dot is unique. It is, no doubt, the One who hears and sees everything. Contrary to all other implications, the dot cannot be defined. It is beyond the quality of dimension which defines letters. The senses cannot perceive it by sight or sound like they can discern letters. Similarity is the same in perfection due to the ink's unity. Even though it is possible to compare one letter with another, this does not contradict the superiority of the color, and the ink is the same in all letters. Each letter resembles another: *ta* resembles *ba*, and *tha* resembles *ta*. When you want to pronounce a letter, you can find a sound for it. However, there is no sound for the dot. You can find

separation, unity, multiplicity, precedence, succession, width, length, and height in letters; yet, these characteristics cannot explain a single aspect of the dot. All letters are contained in the essence of the dot. The dot explodes and eternal letters gush forth.”

After pausing briefly, the old man continued, as if reading the questions in his listener's minds. “The first describable appearance of the dot is the *alif*. The *alif* takes a perfect form that can be duplicated in some fashion. Each letter also has various characteristics besides its own truth.”

The sheikh stopped again. The peace of having seen questions in various minds enveloped him. “Do not forget that the *alif* does not appear from the dot,” he said. “On the contrary, it is the part of the dot that exceeds itself. Therefore, just as the first *alif* was not written by a quill, it also does not depend on the quill. It appeared because of the force in the dot’s center. The moment something spilled out of the dot, it acquired the name *alif*. Just as *alif*’s existence does not depend on the dot, it does not need the other letters. It is not responsible for its actions, but the others will be held accountable.”

A disciple sitting near the door could not contain himself. “Allah!” he sighed.

His eyes still fixed on the road, the sheikh took a deep breath and said, "God is Peerless and One."

17.

One day the Traveler went to the Guadalquivir. He had been feeling strange. Throughout his life, he had always regarded the people he saw, met, listened and talked to as his superiors. Since the beginning of his journey, he had been troubled with cravings of the flesh. Then he adopted the words of God’s Prophet, who had a beautiful face that was food for the spirit, as well as pleasure and comfort for the soul: “I shall not exonerate the *nafs*,¹⁴ for the *nafs* leads one to evil.”

One by one, the Traveler slowly began unfastening the bonds of his body. During his journey, he had accepted the notion of considering others as better than himself. Wandering along the edge of the Guadalquivir and gazing at its phosphorescence, he contemplated that existence consisted solely of the apparition of Divine names. Suddenly, he saw a light. It appeared while he was thinking that in each moment of life, something is refreshed, replaced or renewed, just as a river flows over things gently and silently through time. The Traveler gazed at the light, which transformed into a face and ascended into the air. “Look carefully,”

¹⁴ *Nafs*: according to Sufism, the animal self.

said the light. “Those bubbles, the phosphorescence, and the undulating waters are the river itself, but when one looks at them, they appear to be completely different. Sometimes the wind blows over the water, making it rough. The phosphorescence flickers. It is visible and then invisible, according to the light of the sun. You can compare the river, a metaphor of life, to the manifestation of worldly life. Beings come unto this world, reflect the Divine names like a mirror, appear, and then disappear. Life resembles a flash of lightning: it occurs and ends in an instant. Beyond the ephemeral, there is the spark of a Divine name, shining like a sun. You must look at it. You must turn your face to that light.”

As the Traveler walked along the riverbank, he noticed an old weeping willow swollen with water. He had started to approach it, walking across the pebbles at the river’s edge, when he saw a black man gulping wine from an earthen jug while joking shamelessly with a prostitute. The Traveler stopped to observe them. Watching the black man put the jug to his lips, the Traveler thought, *If all people on Earth are my superiors, then I must be better than this black man. I have never drunk what God has forbidden, and I have never been with a prostitute.*

A scream shattered his concentration. A rowboat was sinking on the river, and those on board were crying for help. The black man plunged into the water, saving four of five people on the boat. Then he turned and shouted to the Traveler standing bewildered and helpless on the shore, “If you are my superior, then save the last person yourself.”

18.

The Traveler could not rescue the last passenger on the boat, which was left to the black man, who cast his jug on the rocks, parted with the prostitute, and became the Traveler’s friend. The Traveler called him Abdullah, a name which the black man accepted happily. The water of the river had woken the drunkard, and he went home with the Traveler, who lent him dry clothes. Abdullah had lost his family in a fire, and had no one in Cordova. He had no home and lived alone. The Traveler first called him a drifter who carried his home on his back, but then he said, “You, like all others, are God’s servant. Therefore, let your name be Abdullah.”

The light of the Traveler’s heart had already begun to shine in the heart of the black man, who said, “Even if you reject me, I shall not leave you.” From that day until the end of his life, he followed in the Traveler’s footsteps.

19.

The Traveler and Abdullah lived together until they had built a house of reeds for the black man. Abdullah's respect for the Traveler grew with time. Perhaps because he continually discovered new aspects of the Traveler, he bonded with him and began to acquire good manners. The Traveler did not try to teach Abdullah; the latter learned by observation. The Traveler knew that observation was more effective than active teaching; however, he did not make a special effort to set an example for Abdullah. Just like the Guadalquivir, the Traveler followed his own course silently, and Abdullah learned about the path, the journey, and the first steps by watching the Traveler.

One evening at the Traveler's home, Traveler invited Abdullah to share a meal. Then, after the day's final prayer, the Traveler began to chant the names of God during meditation. Abdullah sat on the threshold, watching him intently. "Allah, Allah," the Traveler intoned, turning his head from right to left and then toward his heart. This continued for some time, and when the Traveler finished, Abdullah realized that he wanted to accompany him. He sat down next to the Traveler and said, "I want to ask something." Then he dropped his gaze from the Traveler's gentle eyes and looked at the ground. "Master," he continued, "why don't you chant the entire sentence 'there is no god but God' rather than just repeating 'God' alone?"

The Traveler smiled and took Abdullah's hand. He remained silent for a while, and then said, "Breath is not in my hands but in the hands of God. I am afraid of dying in the terrifying loneliness of negation when saying *la*.¹⁵

20.

The Traveler was in the marketplace of Seville when he learned that the sheikh who had taught him this notion had passed away. The sage, one of the most advanced in knowledge of God, had also been one of the most modest. To deepen his meditation by observation, the Traveler often frequented places where peasants sold fruits and vegetables. While wandering in the marketplace that day, he felt anxious and stopped to listen to his heart. Then he went to a nearby *masjid*. One of the sheikh's students was crying in the courtyard and informed the Traveler of his master's death. "We came from Him and we shall return to Him," whispered the Traveler. Then he entered the *masjid* and prayed for a long

¹⁵ *Kelime-iTevhid* (Unity of Divinity), namely "Ney" as a wordless human breath first echoes and then absorbs the words to the hearts and the souls, is "*La ilaha illa Allah*" in Arabic, which means "There is no god but God." "*La*" is the Arabic word for "no."

time. As he was performing the ritual prayer, the sheikh's face appeared before him. The Traveler looked at the sage with admiration, and the tears trickling down his face made his clothes wet. "When I first saw you," he said to the apparition, "you were sitting in the lodge with your disciples. You said to me, 'Let us elaborate on an issue we mentioned before.' You said that you had always wondered about a particular phrase in my first notebook: *until the one that has never existed disappeared and the one who always exists stays*. You asked what I meant by that? I remained silent, waiting for one of my friends to respond, but nobody said anything. You looked directly at me, and even though I knew the answer, I was shy. You understood my hesitation and did not insist on a reply. I cannot give you one now either. You probably know that this is not because I lack sensitivity in putting the truth into words. It is just because some things are better explained by remaining silent, and some secrets must not be disclosed. You must remember the time you spoke about love, and a bird flew in through the window of the lodge. You continued your discourse. The bird perched on your knee, yet you kept on speaking as if nothing strange was happening. The bird was listening even more attentively than we were. Finally, you mentioned the Divine Mystery. You said, 'Whoever wants Me, looks for Me; whoever looks for Me, finds Me; whoever finds Me, likes Me; whoever likes Me, loves Me; and I love the one who loves Me. I kill the one I love. I take on the sins of the one I kill. That undertaking is Me, Myself.' Upon hearing these words, the bird hopped to the floor, beat the ground with its beak until blood gushed from its mouth, and died instantly.

"You had said that a mystery is something that cannot be revealed or something that should not be disclosed. A revealed mystery is no longer a mystery, but something known and ordinary. God is the mystery of all mysteries. All mysteries are in His presence, and now and then, he shares some of them with human beings. God never discloses a mystery to someone who would reveal it. Let me tell you something I experienced related to the disclosure of mysteries. It was a lesson from God. God revealed one of His mysteries to me in Morocco in the five-hundred-ninety-fourth anniversary of the Hijra.¹⁶ I told everyone about it because I did not know it was a secret that should not to be revealed. God reproached me severely. At first, I could not answer and remained silent, but then I could not keep from saying, 'Your Power is capable of pulling that mystery out of the chests of those I revealed it to.' I had told eighteen people about it. 'All right,' He replied, 'I shall do that.'

¹⁶ *Hijra*: also called the Hegira. The flight or migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622, which marks the beginning of Islam and the Muslim calendar.

“Later, in a dream, He told me that he had pulled the secret out of the chests of those who knew it. When I awoke in the morning, I took my companion Abdullah and visited each of the eighteen people. They remembered nothing. They asked me certain things about the subject, but I was cautious. I realized this was similar to something Zunnun had once experienced. A young man used to attend Zunnun’s meetings, but stopped coming for a while. When he began to attend again, Zunnun noticed that his appearance had changed completely. He was terribly pale and just skin and bones, as if he had spent long hours in prayer and contemplation. ‘Young man,’ Zunnun asked, ‘what has God bestowed upon you that you are so intense in your worship?’

“‘Master,’ the young man answered, ‘have you met anyone He had chosen from His people to give the key of His treasures in addition to granting one other mystery? Would it be right for that person to reveal the mystery God granted?’ Verses then poured from the young man’s lips:

They gave him a secret, and he revealed it consciously.

*Then they no longer gave him secrets
and left him all alone.*

*He was not happy around them,
forlorn and alone in some corner, and they were not even friends with him,
for they cannot be friends with the ones who reveal their secrets
because their love is away from such deeds.*

“After reciting this poem, the young man continued, ‘It is not right for the lover to reveal the secret of the one he loves. On the contrary, he must be alert about his lover’s wishes. He can reveal a secret only if his lover so desires.’”

21.

The Traveler also related the preceding account to another master whose lodge he often visited. One day, around this time too, he met Holy Hizir in Seville.¹⁷ It was a milestone in the Traveler’s life. He was about to pass to the third stage of his journey. Considering that he experienced five levels before he died, it was the halfway point on his spiritual path. The

¹⁷ Hizir: the nickname of the Prophet Ilyas, who is said to live eternally. It is believed that he immediately helps the people who are in distress or trouble.

Traveler believed that human beings are compelled to move forward constantly. Sensing that something remarkable would happen that day, he went to the lodge at the northern end of the city. Everything appeared normal. The smell of the curd and flour soup boiling in its huge copper pot filled the street. As usual, the sheikh's wife and the wives of his elder disciples were preparing the meal. The secret of this delicious soup, seasoned with spices from China, supposedly depended on cooking it for the sake of God and in his presence. Oak wood fueled the fire, and the water and ingredients were ordinary, but the Traveler had never eaten a more appetizing meal anywhere else. In his heart, he sensed that he would encounter a surprise that day, yet he was unable to comprehend what it might be.

The lodge sheltered many of the city's poor. The feeble, forlorn, and destitute gathered in the courtyard at midday for the noon meal. The sheikh stocked many small loaves of rye bread, which got tastier as they became stale, and enough soup was prepared to feed more than the frequenters of the lodge. The sheikh took spiritual pleasure in secretly watching from a corner the poor, homeless people who sat in circles on reed mats in the courtyard eating the steaming soup from small copper bowls. Once, he told the Traveler that this offered as much joy as contemplation after prayer. "My son," he declared, "feeding the poor gives one greater peace of mind than meditation. Do not forget that we leave this world as naked as when we first entered it. A dervish is one who succeeds in living in the same way as his mother brought him into the world. The most effective way to achieve this is by renouncing all that you own on behalf of others. One who does not lead a humble life or share his livelihood with others cannot please God by prayer alone. Sharing refines a man."

The Traveler went to the section of the lodge that served as a *masjid*, performed the ritual prayer, and begged for forgiveness. As usual, the sheikh was alone in his small space. While praying, the Traveler thought of Hizir. Suddenly, a new universe appeared in front of him, and he entered a state of deepened consciousness. He saw Hizir as a soldier sent by his commander to fetch water for the troops. Hizir discovered the water of immortality, which allowed one to live for hundreds of years, yet he did not realize its properties. The Traveler saw himself in the same vision, meeting Hizir in Seville. He received a single lesson from him, which taught him that he must acquiesce to the sheikhs who served as his guides and not argue with them. Abruptly, the Traveler regained consciousness. *Let's hope for the best*, he thought, going to the spot where the sheikh was seated. "May God make it favorable," he said, asking permission to sit down.

The Traveler and the sheikh did not speak for some time. Finally, the sage broke the silence. "Tell me what you are thinking," he said.

“Master,” responded the Traveler shyly, “what do you think about the person who said the Prophet would come again on the last day?”

“I think he is the son of Abbas of Fez,” said the sheikh.

“But Master, there is no news that he will come to this land.”

“Is there news that he won’t come?”

“I believe he will appear in Khorasan,” said the Traveler.

The sheikh was silent. The Traveler had never met the person the sheikh had mentioned, but he knew his cousin. He did not accept the things the sheikh told him about this individual in private because the Traveler had foreknowledge about that person. Yet, later, he would change his mind. Nevertheless, his attitude distressed him. Since the Traveler was still only halfway along his path, he could not understand this, took his leave, and started for home. Near the entrance to the grain market, a stranger greeted him warmly. The Traveler was taken aback; the stranger was the same man he had seen earlier in his dream. “Accept his thoughts about the person who will come on the last day,” said the stranger. “Do not oppose him again. This is the most important rule a man on the journey of special skills should abide by.”

After saying this, the stranger disappeared, and the Traveler immediately returned to the lodge. The sheikh in the same spot, the meditation chamber, and he smiled when he saw the Traveler. “Each time we contradict one another,” he scolded, “do I have to ask the help of Holy Hizir so that you will believe me?”

“Master,” asked the Traveler, “was it Holy Hizir who counseled me?”

“Yes,” replied the sheikh. “Praise be to God who taught me this lesson.”

22.

After this event, the Traveler went to Murcia, Granada, and Almería. Abdullah, whom he had met at the Guadalquivir, accompanied him. He stayed for three months at the *madrassa* of the renowned sage Ar-Rahman, who had written a treatise on the resurrection of the dead. On the evening he wrote about the immortality of Christ at the end of his book, he dreamed that al-Rahman told him Christ had died but would descend from the sky on the last day. The Traveler objected, and they argued fervently. Later that night, after performing the evening prayer, the Traveler fell asleep while meditating. He dreamed of two people dressed in green. One held Christ’s lifeless body in his arms. The other held the living Christ. When

the Traveler awoke, he told Abdullah what he had seen and wondered how to interpret it. “Master,” said Abdullah, “God knows the truth, but I think your dream shows that Christ died physically but his soul is immortal.”

“I think it indicates that we must depart from here,” replied the Traveler.

The following morning, they took leave of the sage and went to Granada. There, the Traveler discovered that hypocrisy began when the state of Sufism was achieved. The Traveler thought that walking on the path of mysticism allowed one to see and hear things which could not be perceived by ordinary human beings. When Abdullah hinted that he did not understand, the Traveler said, “You are right. A Sufi must converse in a way appropriate to the situation, state, or comprehension of people and conceal what is in his heart. I know very well the price of disclosing mysteries. Those who hasten to inform others about what they see with the eyes of their heart lose their lives. Many heads have been torn from their necks for saying they are God. Sufis who take the risk of paying this price become spiritual martyrs.”

“Then . . .” Abdullah interjected, but the Traveler continued to speak. “Yes,” he said, “the only thing left to do is to be hypocritical. A dervish must not say the things in his heart that can damage the shell of a holy book. What is born into a dervish’s heart cannot tear off the veil of things forbidden by God. The person who attains the truth is not allowed to tell people something he does not believe.”

The Traveler and Abdullah had many experiences in Almería. One Friday evening, for instance, after the Traveler fell asleep in his room at the lodge where they were staying, he felt that he became a being of divine light. When Abdullah opened the door, the Traveler awoke. The black man was carrying a plate of fresh passion fruit and two bowls of milk. The Traveler invited him in, patted his shoulder gently, and said “God has sent you to me like rain.”

Abdullah was surprised and wondered what was on his companion’s mind. After each spiritual experience, he was elevated to a new level of thought. “Sometimes you spoil me,” he said.

The Traveler looked at his devoted friend’s honest face. It seemed that there was a translucent glass globe under his dark skin. “Yes, it is true that I spoil you,” he replied. “You deserve that pleasure. You understand the value of truth even more than I do. That is the greatest gift God has given you.”

While eating the fruit and drinking milk, the Traveler and Abdullah chatted. The former remarked, “God declared ‘We send rain upon the Earth, make the fruits grow, and make the dead come alive. This is advice you should follow.’ Thus, there is no difference

between the two events, indicating that the body resurrected on the last day is not the same body that decays. The fruit that sprouts from the earth does not decay either.”

Abdullah listened in silence, and when the Traveler paused, he remarked, “During my days spent with wine and women, I used to remember every now and then that my father had mentioned whoever says there is no god but God goes to heaven.”

Seeing that his friend wanted an explanation, the Traveler answered, “That expression is used to hint at paradise adorned with mansions near which crystal rivers flow and beautiful *houris* in layers of chiffon stroll. If you take away this description, which is just a cover, the truth behind it becomes apparent: the belongings of prisoners of war are confiscated and the captives are enslaved. Those who say the words that glorify God’s uniqueness are rescued from slavery and achieve security and well-being. The image of paradise symbolizes this reunion. If you lift another veil covering this expression, further truth is revealed: anyone who commits to the expression of God’s oneness and uses it to shield his life, property, and family will be released from all fears and doubts and reach spiritual heaven. Delving deeper into the meaning of this saying reveals another thought: one who knows that God is present and that there is no other deity except Him is released from his responsibilities and goes to heaven. When we go a step further, we can see that a person who recognizes himself through these words and their meaning surmounts the restrictions of his nature, is secure from darkness and hell, and enters a heavenly world. Whether in this world or the hereafter, the station that a human being reaches by eliminating his own perceptions and by devoting his entire self to God is heaven. This word has another meaning too: every abject and base condition is hell, every lofty and noble condition is heaven. One who states that there is no other to worship but God, gives up his bond with and worship of the ego and any malevolent emotions that provoke him. Eventually abandoning them entirely, he rises to God’s presence. This is the transition from the discernible world to the indiscernible world. In this way, one leaves behind what is perceived by the senses and reaches what is concealed beyond the senses. This is what heaven is. The Holy Quran has esoteric and exoteric sides. Its esoteric meaning is at seven levels. You see it from the level where you are, and you interpret this saying according to what you see when you look at the Holy Quran.”

The Traveler paused, and Abdullah caught his breath. His friend’s words had entranced him. This was the first time he had heard him speak so long in such detail. The Traveler was staring out the window. The full moon illuminated their surroundings, and its dark blue light fell on Abdullah’s dark skin, curly hair, and neck. For a moment, he appeared to be an angel, and the Traveler thought he could share his deepest secret with him. “One

night,” he said, “I was sitting in my prayer lodge with my back against the wall. Suddenly, I felt that my soul was writhing in my body. I heard a noise like the sound of sparks from burning wood and saw the color crimson. Then I came back to my senses. Wood was burning in the fireplace. The flames were dancing about, reaching up the chimney. I listened carefully to the sound, which resembled the noise that had come from my body, and realized that my state was but a reflection of this sound. As a result of the unity of the being, I was Him, and He was me. His image had become my appearance, and my appearance had become His image. The way I had twisted was the movement of the flames, and the color I had seen was that of the fire. I remembered Abu Bakr, who gained the Prophet’s friendship through his loyalty. He had said, ‘I always see God after whatever I see.’ One sunless, gloomy day while I was sitting at home waiting for the afternoon prayer, this thought crossed my mind. Then the call to prayer began, and I heard the *muezzin* saying it is only God who can know the unknown. Sometimes I sense a power moving within me, and I feel that I am walking. I sense this through both touch and hearing. ‘Who can lessen God’s mercy upon his people?’ This means that no one can prevent God from telling human kind what is virtuous though a prophet or a saint if He wishes to.”

Bathed in the light of the moon, Abdullah listened in silence, as if enchanted. The words pouring from the Traveler’s mouth seemed to flow involuntarily. “When the Earth was in a state between sleep and wakefulness, it told me certain things, including ‘Whoever conforms to my wishes grows distant from God.’ One day in the state of awareness between dreams and sleep, my soul revealed itself and surrounded my entire being. It glowed like the sun. I lost myself in ecstasy at the sight of this eternal light. I heard a voice saying that there is a difference between this world and the hereafter that resembles the difference between youth and old age. Who knows, perhaps this thought had appeared in my heart. Sometimes one suddenly feels young, and sometimes, in a different state of mind, he feels that he has suddenly grown old. Sometimes this realm is called the world, and at other times, the hereafter. I woke up screaming the name of God. On another night, I went outside and felt as if I were reaching into the sky and touching two stars. I noticed that the objects which seem to be the parts of the sky are not separate from it. The colors on a peacock’s wings are not different entities than the peacock, but its details. Yet, a color or a glitter in one detail is not present in another detail. Similarly, the stars are parts of the sky, and they are colorful and bright. This situation is not contrary to reason.”

“My dear friend,” the Traveler asked, “is there more milk? My throat is dry.”

“Yes, there is,” replied Abdullah, jumping up to fetch it.

When Abdullah left the room, the Traveler approached the window. The moon had painted the dark sky and earth deep blue. He opened the window, and a cool breeze caressed his face. He breathed deeply. The leaves of the old olive tree in the courtyard of the dervish lodge glowed in the moonlight. Their silvery brightness reminded the Traveler of the Quranic verse that begins with an oath to the fig and the olive. Then the door opened, Abdullah entered, and the Traveler slipped out of his thoughts.

Sitting down next to the Traveler, Abdullah handed him a bowl of milk, this time sweetened with honey. "Milk is knowledge," remarked the Traveler. "A person who sees himself drinking milk in a dream is vested with knowledge."

With a look of gratitude, Abdullah said, "I owe my life to you. You showed me the light reflected in my eyes. I no longer feel like an orphan. I can see that God never leaves anyone forlorn."

The Traveler did not seem to be listening. He was staring into the empty space, far away.

"Master," said the black man, "may I ask what is on your mind?"

"I am thinking about the man who will reveal his secret and pay for it with his life," the Traveler replied.

"Who is that?" Abdullah asked.

"The martyr who saw me in his dream on the night he read my book which related how I had banished Satan to another land, and who, wishing to be like the wise sages, took a butterfly burned by the candle flame and breathed life into it."

Abdullah remained silent. He realized that the Traveler was deep in thought.

23.

The Traveler saw Holy Hizir again at the harbor in Tunis on the same evening he wrote a letter refusing an invitation of the sultan in Anatolia. While reading the sultan's message, the Traveler had resolved that human beings are asleep and wake up at death. His reply to the ruler, which he later included in the fourth volume of the *Meccan Revelations*, stated:

This is the letter of advice and request we wrote to Sultan Galib Keykavus, the ruler of Rumelia and Grecia, in reply to his letter of the year six hundred and nine.

May God make Sultan Galib Biemrullah Izzeddin's justice everlasting. An administration lacking in justice engenders unhappiness among the populace. Those who rule must not oppress their subjects; on the contrary, they should consider themselves servants striving to fulfill the orders of the populace. The Sultan insists on inviting us to his court, yet we belong to small dervish lodges and khanakahs, not palaces. The Sultan defines the sovereignty of property with the word "beka," yet we say, "Have you had a day that did not turn into the night?" We pray for the Sultan's justice. As far as time allowed, I prepared recommendations for him, and I hope he will consider them. The Sultan should not forget he is just the shadow of God that has fallen upon the public. The growth of his power and wealth should not lead him to conceit and arrogance. The most miserable man is the one who overestimates himself. It is the Sultan's duty to protect those who have been wronged from the tyrant. He should never forget that even if a human being conceals something in himself, God will reveal it to all sooner or later. The world is but a dream, and the material property that belongs to it is a dream within a dream, which is known as groundless fear. I hope the Sultan strives to honor those who believe in and surrender to God's omnipotence. I will present my ideas about governance in a separate treatise.

After the Traveler finished his letter, he returned to Tunisia where he planned to write his book *Divine Sayings*, which he would complete in seven days. After disembarking from the ship, he performed the ritual prayer in a nearby *masjid*. Darkness had descended when he returned to the port, and the lights of lanterns were dancing on the sea. A crescent moon was in the sky above, but the stars had not yet appeared. The Traveler climbed onto the deck of a ship that had cast anchor. The glimmer of the moon reflected in the water caught his eye, and he compared it with the signs inside of him. He recalled a verse from Rumi, who had illuminated Rumelia: "Everything is in you."

"Yes, my sultan," whispered the Traveler. "Everything is in our souls. All that we see can fit in one corner of our inner selves. We multiply it. The ocean of diversity is full of our waters of doubt. We will unify them and make them one. When we learn about the order of the sheikhs, we are freed from multiplicity."

As these thoughts crossed his mind, the stars became clear in the night sky. The Traveler viewed them as the homes of angels, and he felt that each had a soul. Sublime souls who managed to stay clean chose a star to be their home after death. They ascended to that star to wait until judgment day. "They have long left," he cried. "Now, whose colors will add color to us?"

The Traveler gazed in wonder at the boundless sea stretching into the night. God had created everything in the proper place, in proportion, and uniquely. This pure beauty owed its existence solely to Him. The Traveler shuddered. A man in a white robe was walking across the water towards him. He had white hair and a long beard, which became clearer as he approached. The Traveler's heart began to beat rapidly. The man greeted him and then said something that the Traveler could not understand. He noticed that the man's feet were dry. After speaking a while, the stranger turned away and started walking towards the city of Menara on a distant hill, repeating the names of God aloud. Soon, he disappeared from sight. The sound of his voice calling out to God touched the heart of the Traveler, who reached a state of ecstasy. On the following day in the city, near the entrance to the Candyseller's Inn, one of the Traveler's acquaintances asked, "What were you talking about with Hizir on the boat?"

24.

It was the Traveler's eighth day in Tunisia, and he missed Abdullah. He dreamed that he and his friend were in the same room of the small dervish lodge where they had last met. The Traveler told Abdullah what had occurred on the day he wrote the seventh chapter of *Divine Sayings*. "Today," he recounted, "I went to a dilapidated *masjid* to perform the midday prayer. When it was over, I must have been overcome by melancholy. I remembered my mother on her deathbed. She was very ill and suffering greatly, but she tried to hide her pain from my father and me. She meditated and prayed constantly, and once, while in pain and reciting the all-healing name of God, she went into a trance. "You will recover," my father said to her.

Without lifting her gaze, she replied, "When a person's eyes turn toward the ground, he or she can never sit up again."

These were my mother's last words. She passed away while praying just before dawn. While reflecting on these memories, I noticed people talking in the courtyard of the *masjid*. I did not understand their language, but assumed they were Christians from the crosses around their necks. When they entered the *masjid* and walked towards me, I stood up and greeted them. They spoke to me in Hebrew. As we spoke, some traveling dervishes entered the *masjid*. One of the non-Muslims asked about them. "They are those whose souls are untouched by sorrow," I replied

“Are they?” he asked doubtfully, and with a touch of disdain. The dervishes’ poor appearance must have misled him.

“The person enriched inside,” I answered, “does not need to decorate his outer appearance.”

As the dervishes began to pray, one of them picked up a prayer rug and placed it in the air a few feet above the floor. Climbing on to it, he performed the ritual prayer in midair. I noticed that he resembled the man who had come to me on the quay. After finishing the prayer, he greeted us, saying to the Christian, “I did that for you.” Then he left with his companions, and I returned to the dervish lodge.”

The Traveler awoke from his dream. He missed Abdullah very much.

25.

When the Traveler returned to Damascus, he visited the al-Ghazzali Madrasa. He greatly admired Ghazzali,¹⁸ and each time he came to the city, he went to this school. There, he met with many of his fellow-sufferers. That evening the teacher asked the Traveler to present the daily lesson. The Traveler was shy but he could not refuse and asked about the topic. “Whatever you choose to teach,” the listeners answered, and he began to speak about the chain of existence.

“The Divine Being is in the center,” explained the Traveler. “He is the Mystery of the Mysteries and, at the same time, the unknown of the unknown. The oneness of God follows—the principle of oneness, which is then followed by unity. That is unity in multiplicity. The names and attributes of God come next. When He orders “Be!,” the model of your wish is created. The next circle consists of beings similar to us. Existence is the open field of purification where human beings must get on; in other words, it is the overcoming of one’s self. This must not take place in secret. To know is to be able stand at the center of truth. The truth in this is the disclosure of the being. A being consists of groundless inner fears and dreams outside. If a being consists of itself, than it is truly a being. Can a being who depends on another be anything except fantasy? In other words, we think that this universe is an independent truth that formed on its own and is something other than absolute truth. Yet, this is not the case. We should know that each one of us is also a dream, just as every object we perceive outside of ourselves and define as something other than us is a dream. God can only

¹⁸ Ghazzali: Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, the great Muslim thinker, known for his battle against the attack of Greek philosophy in the world of Islam.

be known when the opposites are united. He has neither a predecessor nor a successor; he has neither a past nor a future. He is both the inside and the outside. He is the inside that appears as the outside and the outside that appears as the inside. Since He is not preceded, he cannot be succeeded. No one other than Himself can see Him. No one has a veil between God and himself. He is the Self-Evident who reveals Himself to Himself. He is the Spiritual Essence who makes Himself a veil to Himself. When the outer self says, "I", the inner self declares it false. When the inner self says, "I", the outer self declares it false. This is the same for each set of opposites. He is the One and Only Speaker in every situation, and He is the same as the One who listens to Him. This is based on the Prophet's words ' . . . and what their selves told them . . . ' It is apparent here that 'self' is both the speaker and the one who hears what he speaks, as well as the one who knows what he speaks. Regarding this, God is one even if He takes on different directions. It is impossible for anyone not to be aware of this truth because everyone is an image of God."

One of the students brought some peppermint tea sweetened with honey, and the Traveler paused. "Sir, is the sense of wonder the first step of discovering this secret?" another student asked impatiently.

The Traveler sipped his tea. "Wonder appears when the human mind is locked," he replied. "Anyone who has discovered what I have just explained is no longer in awe, even at the sudden increase of his knowledge. He knows that everything appears as a result of the content of its location of appearance, and that the location for each situation is the existential model of that thing. Therefore, just as God takes on different images in relation to His various manifestations, His specific attributes perceived by human beings also change constantly. The mind of the discoverer accepts each of these different aspects without being overcome by wonder. On the other hand, what happens only consists of appearances, and the ultimate determining factor is what reveals Himself in Him. Thus, there is no one except Him in the realm of existence."

Enchanted, the students were listening to the Traveler intently. "My friends," he continued, "don't let your peppermint tea get cold, and don't forget that honey cures the heart."

Everyone reached for his tea, and the sound of sipping filled the room. The teacher looked at the Traveler with gratitude. "What do you think?" he asked.

The Traveler told him that he thought the sheikh symbolized closeness and that the devil symbolized remoteness. After the students had finished their tea, they turned their attention to the Traveler. "The mountains," he said, "seem black when they are far away;

yet, their color is much different than what we perceive with our senses. The cause of this illusion is distance. The same thing is true about the sky's blueness. We perceive any dark object in the same way when we are distant from it. This condition is valid for the models of possible things as well. They do not reflect a light of their own because they are considered non-existent. Such objects have an eternal constancy in the divine consciousness. In addition, when objects grow distant, they get smaller, even if they are illuminated. This is another effect of distance on perception. In reality, these objects are bigger than they seem—just like the sun and the Earth. The universe is known on the level that shadows are perceived, as a person remains unknown even when his shadow is seen. God remains unknown in the same way when He is perceived solely by considering the universe.”

As the Traveler delved deeper into the subject, the students became more confused. Realizing that it was time for prayer, the Traveler asked permission to leave. The students thanked him and bade him farewell.

26.

The Traveler and Abdullah attended the ceremony for the opening of the mosque of Cordova, which had been built at the sultan's order. The mosque was located in center of the city, near the banks of the Guadalquivir. It had been constructed in one year on a site where a church had previously stood. The sultan had ordered the demolition of the church and the erection of a mosque on the same spot. At first, this event had saddened the Traveler—the sultan had paid a fortune for St. Vincent's Church, and a few months later, his workers pulled it down.

Side-by-side, Abdullah and the Traveler strolled along the Guadalquivir. The Traveler was carrying a book to present to the sultan, and as they walked, he told Abdullah about this new work. The book started with the following words of wisdom: *God did not create in the skies or on Earth anything better than Israfil's voice. For this reason, when Sarafiel spoke, all the angels in the seven heavens stopped whatever they were doing to listen. God brought Adam down to Earth and called upon him with Sarafiel's voice. Adam wept for three hundred years, and when God asked him why he was crying, he replied, "My Lord, I am not weeping because of passion for heaven or fear of hell. My tears run because of my admiration for all those beautiful angels who, hand in hand, whirl in rapture around the wheel of fortune. As they rotate, they say, 'How great is our Sultan! We would perish if He did not exist. Since You are our Divine Lord, who can be as joyful and happy as we are! With You as are our friend*

and helper, who can be as fortunate as us!’ When God heard what the angels were saying, he told Adam to raise his head. Adam lifted his head and looked upward at the angels in the sky. They were dancing with Gabriel and Michael in the lead. He watched them for some time and felt the confusion in his heart cease.

Abdullah wept, and the Traveler put the book under his arm. With every passing day, he noticed that his friend was becoming more pure. “You have one who laments in your heart and weeps for himself,” he said.

“Do you remember?” Abdullah asked.

The Traveler was unsure what his friend meant.

“When we first met,” Abdullah explained, “you told me not to look with unclean eyes.”

The Traveler smiled.

“Since that day, whenever I remember those words, I cry.”

“Yes,” replied the Traveler, “tears clean one’s vision. One must wash his eyes with tears every day.”

“God declared to Moses that He is close to those who submit to Him and suffer anguish and sadness for Him,” said Abdullah.

The Traveler gazed at the river; the impression it created on him changed according to his state of mind. “Human beings resemble both rivers and mountains,” he said. “Sometimes they are open and wide like a grassy plain, and sometimes they feel that their hearts are like eagles’ nests.”

Following the course of the river, Abdullah and the Traveler remained silent for some time. In the distance, they could see a crowd gathering for the inauguration of the mosque. Speaking, as if to himself, the Traveler said, “I cannot say that there is no one with knowledge and wisdom in our times by observing people with doubt and prejudice. On the other hand, the prevalent view is that we live in an age when ignorance, lack of effort, and false claims are on the rise. People lie to each other, but what can we do? With whom should we be angry? Everyone is walking on his own path.” The Traveler’s voice was lost in the hum of the growing crowd.

Deep in thought and with his head bent, Abdullah remarked, “When all of our grief and distress are not only for matters of this ephemeral world, we will no longer be mere playthings of events. Mortality and the screams of death must fill our ears.”

They finally arrived at the mosque, and the Traveler studied the building’s architecture, instead of paying attention to the crowd mingling about. The exterior walls

supported by high, thick posts ending in merlons pierced with loopholes gave the building a strong external appearance. There were loopholes on the posts, as well. Six doors opened on the east side, and seven in the west. Framed horseshoe arches crowned these doors, as well as the mihrab. The main entrance, formed by three doors opening to the naves, further added to the sense of openness. Small windows embellished with interlocking arched segments of stone surmounted the doors. The windows and multiple segments of arches extended to the upper reaches of the wall, creating a dynamic surface. Indented, decorated doors and the contrast of the elegant softness of the walls and the sharpness of the sturdy posts bestowed the mosque's façade with remarkable vibrancy and vigor.

From the way the crowd suddenly stirred, it was apparent the sultan was about to arrive. The Traveler did not pay much attention. Having read the exterior of the building, he entered the courtyard with his companion. Standing in a corner, he studied the details of the construction. The importance given to the masonry was evidenced by the arches. The exquisite craftsmanship attracted one's attention. The Traveler and Abdullah crossed the spacious courtyard and entered the prayer hall consisting of nine naves separated by twelve arch sections extending to the south wall which indicated the direction of Mecca. The central nave was wider than the others. After observing the arches and dome for a while, the Traveler stated, "These represent the inclination of one's inner being to the heart; whereas the minarets symbolize vertical movement, or the exaltation of God."

The mosque's inner court had no galleries. It connected to the prayer hall through doors between heavy, t-shaped bases which carried the weight of double arches with round tops and horseshoe arches below. One felt as if something from past civilizations lingered here. Wide stone column capitals supported the posts between the arches, as well as the arches themselves. The space between the arches was not filled with masonry but left vacant. This architectural arrangement dividing the interior space both horizontally and vertically at the same level created a spacious atmosphere. Finally, the sultan arrived, and the crowd clung to the outer walls, leaving the center empty for the ruler. Inside, the Traveler was performing the ritual prayer to give thanks to God.

27.

When the opening ceremony was over, everyone left. Only Abdullah and the Traveler remained in the mosque. Sitting cross-legged in the *muezzin's* screened and elevated lodge, the two companions talked. Abdullah had grown accustomed to the Traveler's constant

changes, but it did not help him predict his friend's state of mind now. The Traveler's whole being had become a single heart. He had attained the meaning of "heart." He was an ever-changing being that changed its condition like a heart. Abdullah gazed at the Traveler, whose eyes were still fixed on the dome and the arches, and wondered what he felt. The dome was a strange form, giving a feeling of eternity as if it were placed over them like the heavens. This time Abdullah's prediction came true, and the Traveler recited a verse from the Quran: "*Verily your Lord is God who hath made the Heavens and the Earth in six days—then mounted His throne to rule all things.*"¹⁹ Revelation is, in fact, besieging," he said. "This is something known, yet we are unable to comprehend its attribute with our intelligence. It is our duty to believe that with His name All-Compassionate, He encompasses all existence; however, asking questions about His essence is a dangerous curiosity."

"We should believe this without comparing it to anything else, but what is wrong with explaining it with an example?" asked Abdullah.

"This is like saying God has a residence," replied the Traveler. "A person who asks whether God is on Earth or in the heavens is asking a question whose legitimacy is discussible."

"But doesn't He say that He neither fits on Earth nor in the skies but that His place is in the hearts of believers?" Abdullah queried.

The Traveler was happy that he had such an intelligent companion. "That saying does not attribute a residence to Him," he responded. "Attributing a place or an abode to Him is akin to comparing him to another being. He is unique."

"In that case?" asked Abdullah.

"Yes," said the Traveler, "in that case. The Holy Quran explains that God encompasses the Earth, but a human mind cannot comprehend this. The person who thinks God is contained in a thing, or has been born from or depends on something, is in fact holding Him in common with another being, because to depend on something means having been given to that thing. Saying that He is contained in something or that He takes shelter in something means that He remains there. Saying that He was born from something or someone means that He is just like a human being—that He has been created afterwards."

As soon as the Traveler finished speaking, he stood up and said, "Let us prostrate ourselves." He walked toward the *mihrab*²⁰ and said *Allahu akbar* to begin the afternoon

¹⁹ Quran, Surah 10: Jonah; 3rd verse.

²⁰ *Mihrab*: pulpit; the niche in a mosque wall indicating the direction of Mecca.

prayer. Abdullah accompanied him. During the second *raka*²¹ something strange happened. Abdullah watched in awe as the body of this wise man leading him in prayer suddenly expanded. His companion's body grew until his head almost touched the dome. Abdullah shuddered. When the Traveler turned his head to the right and to the left at the end of *namaz*, his body returned to normal. He turned to Abdullah and said, "My friend, when God pats our back, we grow like that."

28.

Had the Traveler wanted to attribute a name to the city of Fez, he would, without doubt, have come up with one name: radiance. This city illuminated his life. One night in a *masjid*, he had lost all sense of direction and become all eyes from head to toe. In his book where he related the secret states of the unknown, he wrote: *Know that the Prophet was all eyes from head to foot. Mentioning this, he had told his friends he could see them even when his back was turned. When I reached that level, I was leading the congregation in prayer at the Azhar Mosque in Fez. Suddenly, my entire being transformed into a single eye. I could see in all directions at the same time. Nothing was beyond my sight. I could see everyone: The people who entered the mosque, those who sat down, and the ones who were standing. I saw everything at once. When I reached this state, I was living in a district called "the eye of life." This radiant light came to me in a way that was more visible than all the gifts on my future path. All directions vanished. Neither the front nor the back existed anymore. There was no right or left, no up and no down. The distinction between directions ceased to exist. I was like a sphere, without edges. I was able to perceive the sides and all directions in my mind, but I neither sensed them nor was I limited by them. Wherever I looked, I saw the same light. I had turned into an eye; my being as a whole had become but a glance.*

29.

During the Traveler's trip to Morocco, Abdullah remained at the grand lodge in Seville. When his master entered his vaulted cell unexpectedly, Abdullah's heart skipped a beat, and he embraced the Traveler joyfully. "I suppose you are testing my patience," he said.

"Regarding a lesson in patience," the Traveler laughed, "you are luckier than I am."

²¹ *Raka*: a series of movements that form a part of *namaz*, or ritual prayer.

Every few months, the two used to go to the grand dervish lodge, where Sufis of various orders met together. Though not as majestic as the great mosque, it was a magnificent work of architecture. Those who gathered there had diverse views, yet they were oblivious to their differences in the lodge. On any given day, some dervishes chanted incomprehensibly, while others silently contemplated death and the reckoning of their deeds, and yet another group occupied itself with *dhikr*.

The Traveler was offering the dervishes dates which he had brought from Morocco when Abdullah asked him about the origin of the word “Sufi”—which he had thought about for the first time at the lodge. The Traveler was in good spirits and said, “All Sufis strive to follow the Prophet’s path, which is his trace. Those who follow this course are known as Sufiyya. There are different opinions about the source of the term, but the most convincing links it to the Banu Sufa of the Arab Mudar tribes. A woman of this tribe bore many children, but all died in infancy. Finally, she declared, “If I ever give birth to a boy, and he survives, I will place a *suf*, or piece of wool, on his head and place him in the service of the Kaaba. Later, she gave birth to a son, al-Rabit, and when he grew up, she kept her promise. This boy’s lineage was named Banu Sufa, and when Islam arose, their whole tribe became devout Muslims. Those who joined with them were called Sufis because they, too, wore woolen clothes.”

Abdullah was always enthusiastic when he and the Traveler visited the grand lodge in Seville. One day, his companion said, “Come, let us go.”

Abdullah did not ask the Traveler about their destination. They simply stood up, asked permission from the dervishes to leave, and went directly to the *madrasa*. Abdullah soon discovered that his companion planned to present his diploma from the school to Malik Ghazi. The Traveler would take pleasure in this, even though he did not spend time with sultans or visit their palaces. No matter how hard they tried to befriend him, he always kept his distance. Bahauddin Walad,²² the shah of scholars, served as his model, and he often told the story of this wise man:

“Bahauddin Walad had won the hearts of the people of Balkh, thus becoming the object of their emir’s resentment. He never met with rulers, and he reproached those learned men who preferred the patronage of a sultan to the glory of true knowledge. His attitude disturbed scholars in the company of the emir of Balkh, and they complained to the ruler. “Your Eminence,” they protested, “he fails to respect you, and considers us worthless. He does not accept our books, but deems intermediary studies and the mysteries of the heart

²² Bahauddin Walad: Rumi’s father and author of *Ma’arif* or *Love Notes of Self to Soul*, a book that Rumi admired.

primary. He gathers followers through his lessons—with the aim of seizing power. Don't be surprised if the populace tries to make him emir of Balkh. He mixes with the rabble, and ingratiates himself with the poor and destitute. He has a few students of noble rank, yet he treats them equally with the others. Tomorrow may be too late to stop him.

“These rumors intensified, and the emir eventually decided to preempt his potential rival. Bahauddin Walad's friends informed him of this development. After reflecting on the situation, the shah of scholars decided how to clean the dust of the world soiling his robe, as well as escape the ruler's anger. Exactly as expected, he received a message from the emir, stating, ‘If our sheikh accepts the land of Balkh, our crown and throne are his. He may come and receive them. We would be honored to be placed under his worthy command.’

“Bahauddin Walad knew that the time to emigrate had come, and he replied to the emir: ‘We are not interested in dominion. The ephemeral possessions, armies, treasures, crowns, and thrones of this world only befit someone like Your Eminence. We are dervishes—owning property or leading a royal life are not for us.’ He also touched his friends' emotions when he remarked, ‘Brothers, how can someone who says that his soul belongs to God's Prophet and that poverty is his pride be interested in a throne, a crown, or a flag? Come, let us commence our journey drunk with the content of our hearts and leave the emir in peace with his court and his subjects.’

“It is said that Bahauddin Walad's manuscripts filled the backs of three camels. His friends also loaded some furniture and provisions and equipped horses to ride. Forty dervishes and scholars specialized in manifest sciences prepared to accompany Bahauddin Walad. Like the Prophet who emigrated from Mecca to Medina, the sage was setting off to avoid the evil of hypocrites and those overcome with jealousy. When the people of Balkh, who loved him and frequented his lodge, heard of his departure, they cried in anguish. The emir mistrusted the reaction of the crowd, he dispatched a messenger in pursuit of the caravan to apologize and claim that he had been misunderstood. The shah of scholars refused to change his mind and told the ruler that he had abandoned the mortal world and its illusions to the emir. The group soon crossed the frontier, leaving Balkh behind. It is recounted that as the caravan pressed on, the inhabitants of cities and forts along the way saw its arrival in dreams, in which God's Prophet appeared as well. In these visions, Bahauddin Walad, sultan of the heart from the city of Balkh, spoke to the people, telling them to welcome him with all their hearts. Those who saw these signs often traveled a full day's distance to meet the caravan. Bahauddin Walad and his companions visited many towns before they finally arrived in Baghdad. The guards at the city gates questioned them about their origin and destination. ‘We have come

from God, and we are returning to God,' replied Bahauddin Walad. 'He is powerful and omnipotent. We are coming from homelessness and going to homelessness.'

"The guards were bewildered, and they notified the caliph that a caravan of scholars and virtuous men had arrived from Khorasan. Puzzled, the ruler summoned a renowned scholar, Suhrawardi, to the palace. When the sage heard the news, he declared, 'Only Bahauddin Walad of Balkh can utter such words. No other man is as learned and wise in our age.'

"Almost the entire population of Baghdad went out to welcome the shah of scholars. Suhrawardi, too, was among them. Upon seeing Bahauddin Walad, he kissed his hand and invited him to his *khanakah*. Veled courteously reminded him that it would be more appropriate to go to the *madrassa*, and they went to the Mustansiriye school. Suhrawardi showed his guest the utmost courtesy and respect. 'We were planning to settle here,' Bahauddin Walad told him, 'but if God—who possesses all glory—wishes, we prefer to put on our seamless white robes and go to Mecca, with your generous assistance.'

"It was rumored that the caliph sent Bahauddin Walad a welcome gift of numerous dishes of delicious food and three thousand Egyptian gold pieces on a golden platter. Refusing the presents, the sage commented, "The caliph's riches are suspect and forbidden by religion. One who squanders his fortune and revels in debauchery when so many of his subjects live in misery is not worth meeting.'

"Bahauddin Walad's response grieved the ruler, and he summoned Suhrawardi. It was often said that he was the most unjust and cruel of all the caliphs. 'I must see this man,' he declared to the scholar.

"'He doesn't want to see you,' replied Suhrawardi. 'I am caught between his spiritual majesty and your power.'

"The caliph refused to accept the scholar's answer, and after pondering the dilemma a while, Suhrawardi said, 'Perhaps you can see him in the mosque on Friday.' Then the wise man immediately went to Bahauddin Walad to invite him to speak at the mosque after the Friday prayer. News of this quickly spread throughout the city.

"On Friday, the people of Baghdad flocked to the mosque. *Hafizes*²³ with splendid voices recited *surahs* from the Holy Quran. Bahauddin Walad roused the crowd with his compelling words. 'O caliph of the Abbasids,' he declared, addressing the ruler directly, 'you are a successor who has done evil. Shame on you! Have you found confirmation for your vicious acts in the Holy Quran? Have you found support in the words of the Prophet? Did you

²³ *Hafiz*: one who has memorized the Quran.

learn something from esteemed caliphs or imams? Do you not fear His Revenging name? Are you not ashamed in front of your subjects? Your fate has been written by God! Small men with slanted eyes will descend on your realm, blowing in like the sirocco and devastating your domain like a plague of locusts. At God's will, they will kill you and extricate the hate you have for your religion. Take heed! Tear the veil of neglect from your heart. Open your mind, abandon the path of sin, turn to God, and beg forgiveness.'

"Grief overwhelmed the caliph, and he wept openly. Seven listeners in the assembly died, and their funerals were held the same day. The caliph sent many horses, and gifts of gold and silver to Bahauddin Walad, but this angered the sage even more. 'Give everything to the people,' he commanded. 'Thank God we are healthy. Those who have their health do not take alms. If we accept these gifts, we will hinder God's worship. Nothing can make God change His mind or prevent Him from realizing His wish.'

"Soon after Bahauddin Walad and his companions left Baghdad, they heard that Ghengis Khan had besieged Balkh with five hundred thousand Mongols ransacked many cities of Khorasan, and captured numerous prisoners."

Abdullah was even more devoted to the Traveler after hearing this story, and he believed that by faith alone an ordinary man could become a sultan.