

Extracts from the Letters of Shaikh Al-`Arabi Ad-Darqawi

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THE DARQĀWI ORDER OF SUFIS

THE first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, published in 1913, while admitting the importance of the Darqāwī order (see *Derkāwā*) in Morocco and Algeria adds: "There are also a few *zawāyā*¹ of little importance in Tunisia, Tripolitania and the East." The second edition which is now being published, far from correcting this belittlement has cut down the article (this time under *Darkāwā*) to about one seventh of its original length, and does not even mention the influence of this order outside Morocco and Algeria; and while admitting that the order still exists, it tells us how many members it had in Algeria at the end of the last century and how many it had in Morocco in 1939, without any indication as to how many there might have been in 1965 when the article was published!

Perhaps the authors of the articles in question did not know that not every branch of the Darqāwā call themselves by that name. For example, the full name of the Madanī branch is *At-Tarīqat al-Madaniyyat ad-Darqāwiyyat ash-Shādhiliyyah*, for Mawlāy al-`Arabī ad-Darqāwī, the founder of the order and the author of the epistles which follow, was himself a *Shādhili*. But in practice only one name is used: some members of this particular branch call themselves *Madaniyyah*, others call themselves *Shādhiliyyah*, but they are all none the less *Darqāwā*, reciting the litanies of that order, performing its sacred dance (which differs from those of the Shādhiliyyah who are not Darqāwā), and referring to Mawlāy al-`Arabī ad-Darqāwī as "the Shaikh of our Shaikhs." It is ironical that it should be one aspect, and not the least aspect, of his greatness, the fact that he had such a wealth of great disciples, which has caused him to be underestimated in orientalist opinion. Some of these were recognised by him as "autonomous" Shaikhs. Amongst such was his favourite disciple, the Sharīf Mawlāy Muhammad al-Būzīdī, who was to have succeeded him but who died before him, and whose disciple Ahmad ibn `Ajībāh was the author of some remarkable Sufi treatises.

Mawlāy al-`Arabī was succeeded in Morocco by his son Mawlāy at-Tayyib ad-Darqāwī from whom the present Moroccan head of the order is descended. Another of Mawlāy al-`Arabī's successors was Muhammad al-Fāsī, who founded one Darqāwī Zāwiyah in Cairo and another in Colombo. Many if not all the Shādhiliyyah of Ceylon are in fact Darqāwā and look to the Cairo centre of the Fāsiyyah-Darqāwā as being their mother *zāwiyah*.

Another successor of Mawlāy al-ʿArabī was Muhammad Hasan Zāfir al-Madanī (the founder of the already mentioned *Madaniyyah*) who had originally come from Medina in search of a spiritual Master and who had taken guidance from many Shaikhs, until he finally met the founder of the Darqāwā himself. The Shaikh al-Madanī's, son, also named Muhammad Zāfir, writing at the end of the last century, tells how his father met Mawlāy al-ʿArabī in 1809 and adds: “He took the path from him and his heart was opened under his guidance, and if it be asked who was my father's Shaikh, it was Mawlāy al-ʿArabī ad-Darqāwī.”

The Shaikh al-Madanī had a large following and founded many *zawāyā*, the chief of which was at Misurata in Libya where he is buried. He was succeeded by his son who went to Istanbul where it is said that he was the Shaikh of the Sultan ʿAbd al-Hamīd. However this may be, there can be no doubt that he had considerable influence in Turkey, and it was there, in 1879, that he wrote his book on the order, *al-Anwār al-Qudsiyyah*, published in Istanbul in 1884. Another of his father's successors, named ʿAbd al-Qādir, founded a *zāwiyah* in Alexandria. These Darqāwā are thus as it were “first cousins” to the Darqāwā of Cairo. But it was no doubt through yet another successor, the Sharif ʿAlī Nur ad-Din al-Yashrutī, that the Madanī branch had its widest expansion. This eminent Sufi, who was born in 1793 and died at the age of 105 in 1898, spent several years with his Shaikh at Misurata and then migrated to Acre in Palestine. His daughter, Sayyidah Fātimah, who lives in Beirut, is thus the child of a man who was born in the 18th century (there must be few others alive today who can make such a claim) and her book about her father and the order in general, *Rihlah ila ʿl-Haqq*, published about 1954, is a precious link with the past. During his long life, which spanned the whole of the 19th century but for two years, this spiritual grandson of the Shaikh ad-Darqāwī founded many *zawāyā* centring on Acre, the most important of these being at Jerusalem, Damascus, Beirut and Aleppo. Today the order is particularly wide-spread in the Lebanon from where it has also taken root in Mozambique, where it has thousands of members.

But even more than the Madanī—Yashrutī branch, it is probably the ʿAlawī branch of the Darqāwā which has given that order its fullest flowering outside Morocco. Shaikh Ahmad al-ʿAlawī was descended from Mawlāy al-ʿArabī by quite a different line from those already mentioned. By the time of his death, in 1934, his disciples in Algeria (including North Africans in Paris and Marseilles), Tunis, the Yemen, Abyssinia, Syria, Palestine and elsewhere were said to be well over 200,000 in number. After his death, under the head of his Damascus *zāwiyah*, the late Shaikh Muhammad al-Hāshimī, ʿAlawī-Darqawī *zawāyān* were founded in Aleppo, Horns, Hama, Latakia and Amman. In Aleppo, at some seasons even more than once a week, one may find as many as 5,000 ʿAlawīyya—Darqāwā congregated at the tomb of the Prophet Zachariah in the great Omayyad Mosque.

If the new *Encyclopaedia of Islam* had had an article on the Shaikh al-ʿAlawī, this could have done much to make up for its shortcoming as regards the Darqāwā. But his altogether remarkable figure has been passed over in complete silence. Is it too much to hope that this might be remedied in a supplement?

EXTRACTS

THE sickness afflicting your heart, *faqīr*, comes from the passions which pass through you; if you were to abandon them and concern yourself with what God ordains for you, your heart would not suffer as it suffers now. So listen to what I say to you and may God take you by the hand. Each time your soul attacks you, if you were to be quick to do what God orders and were to abandon your will entirely to Him, you would most certainly be saved from psychic and satanic suggestions and from all trials. But if you begin to reflect in these moments when your soul attacks you, to weigh the factors for and against, and sink into inner chatter, then psychic and satanic suggestions will flow back towards you in waves until you are overwhelmed and drowned, and no good will be left in you, but only evil. May God guide us and you on the path of His Saints, Amen.

The Venerable Master, Saint Ibn 'Atā-Illāh says in his *Hikam*: "Since you know that the Devil will never forget you, it is your business not to forget Him who 'leads you by the forelock.'" (Koran XI, 59).² And our Master used to say: "The true way to hurt the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend; on the other hand, if you engage in war with the enemy, he will have obtained what he wanted from you and at the same time you will have lost the opportunity of loving the Friend." And we say: All good is in the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, and the only way that leads towards Him is through renunciation of the world, keeping apart from people, inner and outer discipline. "Nothing is more useful to the heart than solitude, thanks to which it enters the arena of meditation," as the Venerable Master Ibn 'Atā-Illāh says in his *Hikam*. And we say: Nothing is of more profit to the heart than renunciation of the world and the fact of being seated between the hands of God's Saints.

Dethronement of the ego is a necessary condition, according to us and according to all the Masters of the Way, and in this respect one of them said: "The very thing you fear from me is what my heart desires." But you, *faqīr*, should not say this before having said it to your own soul and having forced it to follow this road and no other.

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As to this professor you told me about who is unable to find the state of presence,³ tell him not to look towards the past nor towards the future, to become the son of the moment, and to take death as the target before his eyes. Then he will find this state, God willing.

We said to one of our brothers: Let him who wishes to be in a perpetual state of presence restrain his tongue. And we advise you: if you are in a state of perplexity (*hayrah*)⁴, do not hasten to cling to anything, either by writing or by anything else, lest you close the door of necessity with your own hand, because for you this state takes the place of the supreme Name; but God is wiser. Ibn 'Atā-Illāh says in his *Hikam*: "Sudden distress heralds feast days for one who aspires"; and again: "Distress is the key to spiritual gifts"; and again: "You will perhaps find a benefit in distress which you have not been able to find in fasting nor in prayer; therefore when it descends upon you, defend

yourself no longer and do not be concerned with searching for some remedy, lest you drive away the good which comes toward you freely, and give up your will entirely to your Lord; then you will see marvels.” Our Master used to say when someone was overcome with dismay: “Relax your mind and learn to swim.”

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Do not give nourishment to all that arises in your heart, but throw it far away from you and do not be concerned with fostering it, forgetting your Lord the while, as most people do, thus going astray, wandering, losing their way in a mirage; if they understood, they would say: what an astonishing thing, the heart; in one instant it gives birth to countless sons, some legitimate, others illegitimate and yet others whose nature one cannot discern...How then could anyone who spends his time feeding all this offspring be available for his Lord? What a sorry creature, this son of Adam, who effaces the Cosmos until not a trace of it remains and whom the Cosmos in its turn will obliterate until not a trace of him remains, save a faint odor which in a little while fades away altogether.

If you love your Lord, *faqīr*, leave your self and your world, and people, except the man whose state uplifts you and who shows you God by his words. But beware, beware lest you allow yourself to be deceived by someone, for how many are they who appear to be preaching for God when in reality they are only preaching for their desires. The celebrated Saint, *Sayyidī* Abū-sh-Shitā (may God let us obtain profit through him) says in respect to this: “By God, we call ‘My Lord,’ or ‘Son of My Lord,’ only him who cuts off our fetters.” The fact is not hidden from you, *faqīr*, that what imprisons a man in this world, which is the world of corruption, and holds him fast, is nothing but illusion (*al-wahm*); but if a man gets rid of this illusion, he passes into the world of purity from which he came; and God brings every stranger back to his homeland.

* * *

Certainly all things are hidden in their opposites—gain in loss and gift in refusal, honour in humiliation, wealth in poverty, strength in weakness, abundance in restriction, rising up in falling down, life in death, victory in defeat, power in powerlessness and so on. Therefore, if a man wishes to find, let him be content to lose; if he wishes a gift, let him be content with refusal; he who desires honour must accept humiliation and he who desires wealth must be satisfied with poverty; let him who wishes to be strong be content to be weak; let him who wishes abundance be resigned to restriction; he who wishes to be raised up must allow himself to be cast down; he who desires life must accept death; he who wishes to conquer must be content to be conquered and he who desires power must be content with impotence. Which is to say, let him who wishes to be free rejoice in servitude, as his Prophet, friend and Lord (God bless him and give him peace) rejoiced in it; let him choose it as the Prophet chose it and not be proud nor rebel against his condition, for the servant is the servant and the Lord is the Lord...

* * *

A strong man is one who rejoices to see that the world is slipping from his hands, leaving him and fleeing from him; who rejoices that people despise him, and speak ill of him and is satisfied with his knowledge of God. The Venerable Master, Saint Ibn 'Atā-illāh (may God be pleased with him) says of this, in his *Hikam*: “If the fact that people turn away from you or speak ill of you causes you suffering, return towards the knowledge of God in you; if this knowledge is not sufficient, then lack of satisfaction in the knowledge of God is a far greater trial than that people speak ill of you. The purpose of this slander is that you should not rely on people; God wishes to bring you back from all things so that nothing may distract you from Him.”

* * *

By God, my brothers, I did not believe that a learned man could deny a vision—in the waking state—of the Prophet (God bless him and give him peace), until the day I met some learned men in the Qarawīn Mosque and had a conversation with them on this matter. They said to me: “However is it possible to see the Prophet when one is awake, since he has been dead for over 1,200 years? It is only possible to see him in a dream, since he himself said: ‘He who sees me, that is to say in a dream, sees me in reality, for the Devil cannot imitate me,’” I answered: “Of necessity, he can be seen in the waking state only by one whose mind—or let us say, whose thoughts—have transported him from this corporeal world into the world of Spirits; there will he see the Prophet without the slightest doubt; there he will see all his friends.” They were silent and said not a word when I added: “Indeed he can be seen in the world of Spirits.” But after a while they said to me: “Explain how this is so.” I answered: “Tell me yourselves where the world of Spirits is in relation to the world of bodies.” They did not know what to reply. And then I said: “There where the world of bodies is, there also is the world of Spirits there where the world of corruption is, there also is the world of purity; there where is the world of the kingdom (*mulk*), there also is the world of kingship (*malakūt*); in the very place where the lower worlds are, there are to be found the higher worlds and the totality of worlds. It has been said that there exist ten thousand worlds, each one like this world, (as recounted in the ‘Adornment of the Saints’) and all these are contained in man, without his being conscious of it. Only he whom God sanctifies by absorbing his qualities into His own, his attributes into His own, is conscious of this. Now, God sanctifies many of his servants and does not cease from sanctifying them until their end.”

The Venerable Master and saintly Lord Ibn al-Bannā (may God be satisfied with him) says in his “Inquiries”:

Understand, for thou art a copy of Existence
For God, so that nothing of Existence is lacking in thee.
The Throne and the Pedestal, are they not in thee?
The higher world and also the lower world?
The Cosmos is but a man on a big scale,
And thou, thou art the Cosmos in miniature.

And the venerable Master, Saint al-Mursī (may God be satisfied with him) said:

“O thou who goest astray in the understanding of thine own secret,
Look, for thou shalt find in thee the whole of existence;
Thou art the Infinite, seen as the Way and seen as the Truth,
O thou synthesis of the Divine Mystery in Its Totality.”

For men whose spiritual station (*maqām*) is extinction (*fanā*), the divine qualities are but the Essence (*dhāt*) of God, for when these men are extinguished in God, they contemplate His Essence only; they no sooner contemplate It, than they see nothing outside of It; and this is why they are called *dhātiyun* (“essential”). Now the Divine Essence possesses such infinitude, such beauty and goodness that even the most perfect intelligences among the elect are bewildered, to say nothing of the majority; for It becomes so subtle and so fine that It vanishes because of excess of subtlety and fineness; and in that state, It says to Itself; My Infinitude, My Beauty, My Goodness, My Splendour, My Penetration, My Elevation, My Exaltation know no bounds. Thus It is unmanifested. But the Infinite is not infinite unless it is at the same time unmanifested and manifested, subtle and solid, near and distant, having simultaneously the qualities of beauty and severity, and so forth; now, when Essence wished to manifest all this, It wondered (while knowing quite well): How shall I manifest it? And It answered Itself: I shall reveal and veil Myself at the same time; and this is what It did. Hence the essences of things, or more exactly, the forms which, as such, are present or absent, subtle or solid, higher or lower, near or distant, spiritual or sensory, merciful or terrible. These are all Essence, or, if you prefer, forms in which the Beauty of the Essence is manifested, although they are unable to manifest the Essence as such, since in Itself there is nothing but Itself alone and there is nothing outside of It. On this subject, the Masters of the Way among our brothers in the East have said:

Without any doubt?

In the absence of doubt, the All is beauty, the beauty of God,
Doubt's target is but the trace of nothingness.

O thou who drinkest at the source (*'ayn*), when thou shalt realize, doubt will cease.

The Essence is the very essence and source (*'ayn*)⁵ of the qualities;

In this truth there is no doubt.

And many other words have been uttered with the same meaning by the Masters of the Way in the East and in the West. If you understand our allusions, *faqīr*, then may God bless you, and if not, take note of your quality in order that our Lord may expand you by His Quality. And know that Majesty is Essence, whereas Beauty is Qualities; but the Qualities are none other than the Essence, as they recognize who have attained the state of extinction, though the others do not, that is to say, our masters in outer knowledge. Now there is no doubt that the outer is pure severity (*al-jalāl*), whereas the inner is pure clemency (*al-jamāl*)⁶. Yet the outer lends something of its severity to the inner, just as the inner lends some of its clemency to the outer, so that the outer becomes clement severity and the inner severe clemency. However, the outer severity is real and its clemency only borrowed; just as the inner clemency is real, its severity only borrowed. Only he knows

this who, as we have done, has studied esoteric knowledge deeply, has submerged himself and been extinguished, as we have been submerged to the point of extinction. (May God be satisfied with us).

Hear, *faqīr*, what the venerable Master and Saint, Abū 'Abd-Allāh Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Ansāri as-Suhayli says in his book entitled *The Highest Degree of the Spiritual Traveller in the Revelation of the Ways*. “Know (and may God illumine our hearts with the light of gnosis and lead us on the path of all holy gnostics) that gnosis is the degree of *ihsān*⁷ and the last step of the gnostic. God (be He exalted) said: ‘They have not valued God according to his right measure’ (Koran XXII, 73), that is to say, they have not truly known Him. He also says: ‘Thou wilt see how their eyes overflow with tears because of what they perceive of the Truth.’ (Koran V, 86). And the Prophet says: ‘The pillar is the support of the house and the pillar of the just is the knowledge of God.’ Now we understand by gnosis (*ma'rifah*) the fixing of contemplation in a state of sobriety, accompanied by the exercise of justice and wisdom ; and this is something quite different from the definition of knowledge (*ma'rifah*) given by doctors of the Law, who see nothing beyond the knowledge of dogma. Although in principle gnosis includes all knowledge, including therefore theological knowledge insofar as it is knowledge, nevertheless the knowledge of God is distinct from all other knowledge because it concerns the significance of the Divine Names and Qualities, not in an analytical way, but without any separation between the Qualities and the Essence. This is the knowledge which gushes from the spring of union, which is derived from perfect purity and which comes to light by dwelling unceasingly in intimate consciousness with God (may He be exalted)...” Finally he says: “If this is acquired, then gnosis is none other than the highest degree of initiates and the goal of those who travel towards God, and this is the quality in which they give their self in exchange for God. And even if nothing is left of them but their name alone, still we will speak of their states and their condition so that you may know, thanks to that, the whole extent of what we have failed to obtain from God (may He be exalted) and so that you may follow that way on which the solitary ones have gone before you, in which the gnostics have been victorious, while the limited ones, the men of outer knowledge, reject it. ‘Truly we belong to God and to Him we return.’” (Koran II, 155)

(Original editorial inclusions that followed the essay:)

The question is, When do the passions perforce obey the mind? The answer Meister Eckhart gives is this. What time the mind is fixed on God and there abides, the senses are obedient to the mind. As one should hang a needle to a magnet and then another needle on to that, until there are four needles, say, depending from the magnet. As long as the first needle stays clinging to the magnet all the other needles will keep clinging on to that but when the leader drops the rest will go as well. So, while the mind keeps fixed on God the senses are subservient to it but if the mind should wander off from God the passions will escape and be unruly.

¹ Plural of *zāwiyah*, literally "corner," the name given to the place where the members of an order congregate.

² Grasp of the forelock: an Arabic idiom, referring to a horse's forelock. The man who grasps it has complete power over the horse and for the horse the forelock is as it were the crown of his beauty, the sum of his power of self-assertion.

³ *Hudūr*: the state of presence before God, concentration on God.

⁴ *Hayrah*: Dismay or perplexity in the face of a situation apparently without issue; or again, in face of truths which cannot rationally be reconciled; a mental crisis, when the mind comes up against its own limit. If we understand *hayrah* on the mental plane the advice given here by the Shaikh ad-Darqāwi is reminiscent of the Zen method of the *koan*, that is, of persistent meditation on certain paradoxes in order to provoke a mental crisis, an utter perplexity, which may open out into supra-rational intuition.

⁵ *Adh-dhat*: is the Essence in the absolute meaning of the word, the ultimate reality to which all qualities relate; as for *al'ayn*, which is used here as a synonym of *ad-dhat*, it means more exactly essential determination, archetype; at the same time, the word *'ayn* includes the meaning 'source' and 'eye', which makes it even more suggestive in this context.

⁶ The divine Qualities can be divided into two groups relating respectively to Majesty (*al jalāl*) and Beauty (*al jamāl*). Majesty, the revelation of which burns and consumes the worlds, is in one aspect rigorous, severe, whereas Beauty is the synthesis of mercy, generosity, compassion and all analogous qualities. In Hinduism, Shiva and Vishnu have respectively the same functions. Earlier in this text, we translated *jalāl* and *jamāl* by "majesty" and "beauty"; in the present context, applied cosmically and psychologically, it is more suitable to speak of "severity," "clemency," and so on.

⁷ *al-ihsān*: contemplative virtue, defined by this saying of the Prophet: "Worship God as if you saw Him; if you do not see Him, nevertheless He sees you."