

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MOSES

A Contemporary Sufi Commentary
on the Story of God's Confidant
(*kalīm Allāh*) in the Qur'ān

By the Moroccan Sufi Master

SHAYKH MOHAMED FAOUZI AL-KARKARI

Translated by **YOUSEF CASEWIT, Ph.D.**

Edited by **KHALID WILLIAMS**



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أعوذ بالله من الشيطان الرجيم

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Introduction

The journey to God comprises stations where travelers halt, waystations where they dwell, and meadows where devout invokers revel, each in accordance with their preparedness and dedication.¹ For the disparity between the levels of arrival (*wuṣūl*)—though there is no actual arrival—is in accordance with the disparity of saintly aspirations. Moreover, the secrets of proximity upon the carpet of direct witnessing (*shuhūd*) differ according to the different states of the servants.

Since the Path is wild and fraught with peril, there is need for the direction of a Shaykh who has insight into the maladies of the soul, and a firm rooting in the presences of the Holy. This is because deliverance is realized at his hands, and the locks of the unseen are opened through his luminosity, and through his guidance and saintly aspiration the aims and furthest ends are identified. Spiritual objectives are achieved through him, and disciples attain the stations of the passionate lovers through his

1 The original title of this book is *Al-Tarātīl al-Ḥā'iyya fī al-āya al-Hārūniyya al-Mūsāwiyya* (The *Hā'*-Readings of the Hārūn and Mūsā Verses). It was published in Casablanca by Maṭba'at Ṣinā'at al-Kitāb, 2016. This translation was made possible through the generous support of Saif Islam, Saad Ansari, El Mehdi Amine Boutayeb, Afifa Rahman, and Tarek Ghanem.

companionship. This is why God alludes to mustering one's aspiration to follow such Shaykhs in His Holy book when He says: **Follow the way of those who turn in repentance unto Me²**, and when He says: **O you who believe! Reverence your Lord, and be among the truthful.**³

Know, may God assist you with His Light, that the divine knowledge that God's folk transmit to one another is dependent upon fruitional experience (*dhawq*) and direct witnessing (*shuhūd*), for it lies beyond the fantasies of the intellects and the stages of delimitation. Given that this is the case, this direct knowledge is not attained by reading books, but rather is received from its folk when the Shaykh's sun reflects upon the disciple's heart, till the latter's privative earth shines with the Light of its Lord⁴. Whoever wishes to attain direct knowledge of God in any other way is wishing for the impossible. In placing this book between your hands, our goal is to rouse the resolve of those who seek to traverse the stations of certainty, and to describe the Path to those who embark upon the vessel of divine success with spiritual exertion and sincere companionship, and so that the wayfarer may have clarity in this matter, and discernment between what is correct and what is false. This is especially since we speak here of some of the descents of the Hidden *Alif* in the ocean of union (*waṣl*), and how it manifests in the river of

2 Q Luqmān 31:15. The translations of Qur'ānic verses are from The Study Quran, with some modifications.

3 Q Tawba 9:119.

4 Q Zumar 39:69.

separation (*faṣl*), and of the circles of realization that encompass Sainthood (*wilāya*), Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and Messengerhood (*risāla*), and of the different witnessing-sites between the pulpits of transcendence and immanence, and of the states of souls, and the determination of saintly aspirations and states according to the dictates of the All-Merciful's permission, and other aspects of wayfaring and gnosis that the wayfarers will encounter in their journey.

This book is an experiential meditation upon the life of Sayyidunā Mūsā and Hārūn عليهما السلام, through the first reading of the *Hā'* whose circumference encompasses all hidden matters. This book, then, unveils some of the hidden angles of the unseen *Hā'*-secrets in the presence of Mūsā and Hārūn.

We ask God to accept this work of ours, and to benefit servants and nations, and to make it a means of ascent through the levels of servanthood, and to unlock the hearts and intellects of everyone who encounters it and reflects upon its contents.

1.

The Presence of Divine Mercy (*Hadrat al-Raḥamūt*)

Mudhākara from the Friday

Gathering of 4th Jumādā al-Thāniya 1435/April 4th 2014

Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm

Know, dear seeker of truth, that the presence of our master Hārūn ءالهارون, like the other presences, is one part of the circle of the lordly presence whose ringstone is the presence of our master the Messenger of God Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh ﷺ. This presence is the presence of entering unto the Singular *Alif* by means of the *Hā*-reading (*al-qirā’a al-Hā’iyya*) of the singular Name of God (*al-ism al-mufrad*). This presence, moreover, enables us to begin to experience contact with the Hidden *Alif* (*al-Alif al-muqaddar*), the *Alif* of the divine Name, because it is a presence that brings together Messengerhood (*risāla*) and Prophethood (*nubūwa*), for our master Mūsā ءالموسا is a messenger whereas our master Hārūn is a prophet.

Now the *Alif* is composed of three vertically aligned dots, for it is not possible to draw a straight line with anything other than three dots. Two dots would not be enough to draw the *Alif*

straight, because it could become crooked, and then it would no longer be an *Alif* at all. Thus it descends from the presence of pre-eternity (*azal*) to the levels of letter-qualification. These three dots are the dot of Messengerhood (*risāla*), the dot of Prophethood (*nubūwa*), and the dot of Sainthood (*wilāya*).

Know, moreover, that the Hārūn-Presence is full of gnostic sciences and secrets, and replete with mysteries and lights. So listen with your heart in order to follow, and in the hopes that you may free yourself from the caprice of your evil-enjoining soul, and advance toward the presence of proximity.

You should know, dear esteemed ones, that hearts necessarily follow wealth (*māl*). That is why it is called *māl*, for it causes its possessor to incline (*yamīl*). The Messenger of God ﷺ said: “Verily, every community has its trial, and the trial of my community is wealth.”⁵ Thus, when the people of Mūsā collected their wealth after crossing the sea in order to get rid of it by casting them into the fire, the Samaritan transformed the gold into a calf that lowed. Whereupon they worshiped it instead of God, because they had rid themselves of their wealth outwardly while clinging to it inwardly. They cast away their wealth with their hands, but their hearts followed after it, and that is why they worshipped it when it became a calf. Each of them sought his share of the calf. To this effect, Jesus ﷺ used to say: “Store your treasures in heaven,” that is, store them through righteous deeds so that God may lift them to Him. For when the hearts

5 Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*, 3319; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, 2:599.

chase after these treasures, they will find them to be stored with a Powerful Owner (*malīk muqtadir*). Thereupon, they will become attached to Him. That is, they will become attached to the Everlasting, and will abandon the perishing. For the soul is innately disposed to seek what is higher.

Know also that permission (*idhn*) is a ray of divine approval that is reflected upon the mirror of destiny, whether it comes from the Messengers, the Prophets ﷺ, or their heirs. To this effect, when the Samaritan took a handful of dust from the footsteps of the messenger,⁶ namely Gabriel ﷺ,⁷ he asked for permission from Sayyidunā Hārūn ﷺ to cast what he had in his hand. Hārūn ﷺ thought that the Samaritan had gold in his hand, just like the others, and so he gave him permission.⁸

6 Q Tā Hā 20:96.

7 According to *The Study Quran*, the verse a **handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger** (Q 20:96) refers to the tracks of dust or sand left behind by the “horse of life” (*faras al-ḥayāt*), upon which the Archangel Gabriel was riding when he was sent to take Moses to meet God at Mt. Sinai, an event witnessed by the Samaritan. The Samaritan took some of this dust and noticed that whenever this dust was placed upon something, it would become spirit, flesh, and blood; that is, it would become a living thing. (See the Qur’ān commentaries of Zamakhsharī and Qurṭubī). *The Study Quran*, p. 802.

8 Relevant passages from *The Study Quran* are worth citing for more context concerning the verse Q 20:87: **They said, “We did not fail our tryst with thee of our own will, but we were laden with the burden of the people’s ornaments. So we cast them [into the pit], and thus did the Samaritan throw also.”** The Israelites’ response indicates that they were tricked by the Samaritan. According to some commentators, the people’s ornaments refers to the heavy jewelry lent to the Israelites by the Egyptians before the latter were destroyed, and which was therefore unlawful for the Israelites to keep. From a spiritual point of view, the burden of the people’s ornaments can represent worldly riches or

When the Samaritan cast it, he intended for the gold to transform into a calf that has movement and sound, and his intention came to fruition. Now had he not taken permission (*idhn*) from the Prophet ﷺ, the gold would not have turned into a calf. For permission from Prophets and their heirs carries the secret of the formula “in the Name of God” (*bismiLLāh*), and that is why things react to it. It is illuminated by the holy spirit that revives whatever it flows through.

Similarly, knowledge can be a veil from God, for the Samaritan learned knowledge that enabled him to see the footsteps of the messenger and to know its value in that it carries the characteristic of life. He also knew the importance of receiving permission from Prophets. He had knowledge of all of this and more, but he used his knowledge to lead people astray from God’s Path. It is to this effect that God’s folk say that knowledge is a veil if you halt at it and behold yourself with an eye of

wealth, which becomes a kind of spiritual “burden” for people by giving them a false sense of security and immortality that weakens their sense of reliance upon God and their ultimate return to Him, as in 104:1– 3: Woe unto every slandering backbiter who amasses wealth and tallies it, supposing that his wealth makes him immortal . See also 18:7– 8c; 18:46c. Aaron told the Israelites that these ornaments were a source of religious defilement (*najas*) and thus were sinful to keep; he ordered them to throw these ornaments into a pit until Moses returned, which they all did. Alternately, some have said that it was the Samaritan who ordered them to throw the ornaments into the pit, telling them that they should wait to see what God wants to do with the ornaments. Then, without their knowledge, the Samaritan lit the pit on fire and used the now malleable ornaments to form the golden calf. *The Study Quran*, pp. 800–801.

self-admiration and pride vis-à-vis God's creatures, or if you employ it in other than God's good pleasure.

A human being cannot be subjugated to another human being by virtue of the spirit that God blew into him. The subjugation of slaves to men is none other than the subjugation of the animality of man, not the humanity of man, because a thing cannot be subjugated to its own kind. Thus, the subjugation of humans to fellow humans is a result of the disparity in their degree. For this reason you must always look at humanity with an eye of elevation, and you must subjugate your soul to the Prophet ﷺ, because he has more rank, elevation, and humanity than you. Thus, Sayyidunā Hārūn ؑ was older than Sayyidunā Mūsā yet lower in rank than him, and he used to follow his commands and rule according to his degree.

Now with respect to the singular Name of God, the seeker must journey from the *Hā'* of the Name back to the *Alif*, bearing in mind their differing levels. Entering unto the Singular *Alif* is achieved through the attributes of the saint (*walī*), not through those of the believer (*mu'min*). Attaching to the elevation (*rifā*) of the *Alif* causes the knower of God to taste the reality of servanthood. Likewise, journeying towards the entrance unto the *Alif* with respect to the Hārūn-presence is of two kinds: beholding the resplendent planet (*al-kawkab al-durrī*) as message, and beholding the resplendent planet as prophecy. This is the position of the *Alif*. In a sense, your wayfaring is like a circumambulation (*tawāf*) around the *Alif*. This *Alif* is not the *Alif* of the singular Name of God exactly, but represents the

descent of the Primordial *Alif* (*al-Alif al-aṣḥī*) into the two *Lāms* of the divine name, so that you may read it by virtue of the *Hā'*. For the *Lām* is like an *Alif* that is curved at the bottom. Moreover, the *Alif* of the divine name descends into every one of the ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names of God; it appears in the rest of the names as a Hidden *Alif*, so that in this sense each Name has an opening onto the Essence, and an opening onto the Attributes.

You should thus be like a *Lām*, by virtue of the love and annihilation (*fanā'*) in the intermediary (*wāsiṭa*), so that your shank intertwines with its,⁹ and its Light, secrets and gnostic teachings flow through you the way they flow through the *Lām*.

9 This is a reference to the verse, **And the shank intertwines with the shank** (Q. 75:29). It also represents how Arabic letters join together, the middle *Lām* of the Divine Name intertwining with the letters before and after it to make an unbroken line.