

INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC METAPHYSICS

A CONTEMPORARY SUFI TREATISE ON
THE SECRETS OF THE DIVINE NAME



By the Moroccan Sufi Master

SHAYKH MOHAMED FAOUZI AL-KARKARI

Translated by Yousef CASEWIT & Khalid WILLIAMS



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Introduction

*I seek refuge in God from Satan the accursed
In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful
In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful
In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful*

In the Name of God

In the Name of God

In the Name of God

Allāh Allāh

Allāh

*There is no power nor strength but in God,
the Sublime, the Magnificent*

Through the power of the Prayer of Abraham (*al-ṣalāt al-ibrāhīmīya*) we begin this book of ours, entitled “The Kāf of Curtains over the Secrets of the Divine Hā” (*Kāf al-astār li-mā fī hā’ al-jalāla min asrār*).

Since our Order has now completed the seven Hā’-readings and we are coming to the Lām of Contraction (*lām al-qabḍ*), the disciple must have a place in the physical world to which he may return for consolation, and to help him understand, contemplate, and remember. For it is through recapitulating with intimate friends on the Path, as well as remembrance and study, that the secrets become firmly fixed in the heart, and understanding is made easy for the disciple. Every secret has branches

and derivations, and each of these branches takes the disciple to a deeper understanding. And since this world is woven from the secret's root, every particle moves in accordance with the secret that flows within it. Although we speak to you of the secret in this book, we do not divulge it; for it cannot be divulged since the secret is beyond the delimitations of letters and the forms of words.

The Lord having gratuitously favored us with the renewal of the Sufi Path in our time, we have divided the reading of the Singular Name into seventy secrets, each secret comprising ten branches. The Hā' comprises ten, as do the Lām of Contraction, the Lām of Knowledge, Separation, Union, Prophethood, and Messengerhood. The ten secrets within each of the letters of the Divine Name are divided into seven that are mass-transmitted and three that are rare. I do not call the latter "rare" (*shādhah*) in the sense that is used in the science of Hadith, but rather because they open for the disciple the door of power through which he is able to escape from the norms of sensory perception, and display saintly miracles and supernatural events.

We never depart from the meaning of the Name in anything that we say or write. After all, the Name does not leave us for the blink of an eye or with any passing thought. It was through it that we read and learned, and now through it we teach those who have saintly aspiration, sound intention, and an attitude of resignation. God says: **Read in the Name of thy Lord.**¹

1 Q 'Alaq 96:1.

It behooves the reader to know that books do not obviate the need for spiritual companionship, but complement it. For the secret is taken from the hearts of the gnostics, not from their books. Their books are there in order for you to understand the secrets they have disclosed to you, and to recognize what they have placed in your heart. This is why I have called this book “The Kāf of Curtains over the Secrets of the Divine Hā’.” For it does not lift those curtains, but serves as a likening and an exposition of the similarity of the curtains that you traverse in your path of understanding. In this book I explain to you in a simple manner how to traverse them, so that you do not wander aimlessly in meanings and drown in mires of doubt. These explanations are exemplifications of the curtains and veils that are cast over the door of the intellect, preventing access to understanding the secrets within the Hā’ of the Divine Name. I speak in this book of the first seven secrets only, and conceal the other three because they presume a realization that delimited intellects may be unable to bear.

Read this book with your heart before your intellect, and view it through the inner vision before the outer. Swim with me in the world of the letter, that you may find something to give you peace of mind and dispel your doubts.¹

1 The present book is a translation of *Kāf al-astār limā fi hā’ al-jalāla min asrār*, which was first published in 2018 by Maṭba‘at al-Burāq li’l-ṭibā‘ wa’l-ishhār, and reprinted by Dār al-Amān, Rabat, in 2020. We are immensely grateful to Abdullah el-Kammar for his generous support of this work.

Ode to the Shade of the Thin White Cloud

A poem that encompasses the seven secrets
of the Hā' of Identity

*If you are truly the Qays of love,
Then behold, Laylā has offered you a glimpse*

*Of her splendor; she whose beauty shines
Like the full moon in the sky of reality.*

*No eye has ever beheld such lustrous comeliness,
That soothes peoples' souls in delight.*

*My heart is inflamed with passion for her,
Entangled in the fetters of desire,*

*The vision of her flows through my very being;
It does not leave my heart, even when my eyes sleep*

*She gave me a drink from the cup of love with her hand,
And now I am neither alive nor dead.*

*Her scent is infused with the perfume of mystical secrets,
A sweet-smelling manifestation is received by the loved ones.*

*In intimate union, she let down the braid of her love,
Upon which is inscribed the covenant of the Karkariyya:*

*Rapture, passion, desire, lovesickness,
Truthfulness, sincerity, affection, and mercy.*

*Then when she drew back the veil that covered her,
The Lights of Identity shined within us;*

*Lights that sparkle with her aging old wine,
Reddish, intoxicating, bringing with it a tremble;*

*She called out, "Come hither, I have divulged my ranks!
By the cup of al-Karkarī, my reality is watered!"*

*A pre-eternal voice that our spirits recognize,
The day of affirmation, through the covenant of love;*

*A hidden voice that is sweet to hear,
Successive cycles, spheres of allusions.*

*She seized the bow of Lordship, and divided
The nearness of sanctity into the seven of majesty.*

*She possesses the arc of instruction, and we
The arc of receptivity by the Light of inner vision.*

*She took up the thimble of measuring, and played
The finest doctrine upon the strings of the law.*

*The melody of existence began to flow, and sent
The impassioned spirits into drunken rapture.*

*A holy melody, love itself,
Which reveals the treasures of the Hā' of Identity.*

*Upon the string of union, she played for us
A tune that showed us the method of our Order.*

*When our hearts became stirred with the music,
The inward eye awoke in us.*

*We saw the Light of love emanating
Upon existence, through the vessels of creation.*

*She flung down her staff, the soul, and knew
For certain beyond doubt that God is One.*

*All existence is sure to fade,
Save for the Lord, who forever remains.*

*Nothing is in existence except for our God,
Who is veiled by the intensity of His manifestation.*

*To the tune of passion, for us she sang
Of Man, the locus of vicegerency.*

*The spirits are the fragrance of his beauty,
For which the eternal birds sing.*

*It is the dot of the secret, with which is written
The pre-eternal verses of the hidden book.*

*Rule is his, by virtue of the secret's essence
Which the angels glorify in their supreme prostration.*

*A bottomless ocean, a secret concealed,
A cup that pours a draught of pure love.*

*The lamp of the innermost core of hearts,
The star of guidance to which spirits ascend.*

*His form is a meaning that bears witness
To what is hidden from us with human traits.*

*He is the Inhabited House of the heavens above;
Upon whose secret the Intimate Friend [Abraham]
leaned in intimacy.*

*In the world of bodies, he is the Ka'ba
To which all hearts make pilgrimage and obeisance.*

*His Light is from God's Light, flowing to creation;
For us he is the disclosure-site of supreme mercy.*

*He is the one, the unique, who encompasses
Everything in existence, mankind's intercessor.*

*He who sees him is fortunate and blessed,
And he who sees one who sees him has cause to rejoice.*

*When she sang of the secret of gnosis,
Our spirits were roused to the Lām of Sainthood.*

*We donned the holy garb of the Beloved in the presence
Of passionate love, and the sun of providential care appeared.*

*Immanence became for us a transcendent secret,
And humanity became the essence of Identity.*

*Existence became an outer inscription upon our being,
And we became its mysterious inner engraving.*

*We verified the reality of the soul by its secret,
Like Light flashing forth from the fire of expression.*

*We are the spark of the effusion of beauty,
From which all the levels of existence unfolded.*

*We became the center of truth-verification, by which
The unity of multiplicity is grasped.*

*We hearkened to the last chords of purity's tune,
Until at last it faded into darkness.*

*All that echoes now is the holy verse,
Has there come upon man a span of time?*

*No melody is sung, no tune is played,
Not even a whisper or a whistling breeze.*

*A cloud, no air above it, nor anything below,
Nothing there but sheer bewilderment.*

*Effacement and obliteration, no trace to be seen;
The door to the sciences of exclusive singularity.*

*That is the Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ, wherein
Say: He is God is the most powerful expression.*

*One knows not who says it, nor to whom it is said;
Say; that is the separation of reality.*

*Then when the springs of our spirits became pure,
We saw the reality of the union of sainthood.*

*I ask the Lord's forgiveness for every conjecture,
Every doubt that ever formed within us.*

*For the strings only stirred by divine decree,
The reality of the measuring of His will.*

*What they played was the tune of their annihilation,
That we might grasp the meaning of with-ness.*

*He who contacts this reality finds salvation,
Which none would refuse but one devoid of reality.*

*The Best of Creation drew the path of union,
Plain and straight with the dear Alif of mercy.*

*His is the gathering of the allness of one and all,
And the singularity of the singular, the scepter of sainthood.*

*The Alif of the name of majesty has no corners,
In which to hide a Hell or stow a Paradise.*

*The substance of the strings is the prime matter of their existence,
Which the people of eternity have mercifully attained.*

*The secret of the basmala of existence, through which
The laws were founded and set up straight and tall.*

*All draw water from the dot of sainthood,
The effusion of knowledge; a Path clear and pure,*

*Just as the Confidant drew from al-Khidr,
Who showed him the pronouns of the secret of sainthood.*

*The science of eternity, hidden and unexposed,
Except to the Messenger or the station of prophethood.*

*Those are the levels of Identity in dispersion,
Which may seem to you to be few.*

*Seven levels disclosed to you, which leaves
Another three that are yet hidden and rare.*

*That is ten in all, with the perfection of totality,
Seven in the pilgrimage, three upon the return.*

*I gathered them in seventy verses, like the veils
That stand between the Lord and His creation.*

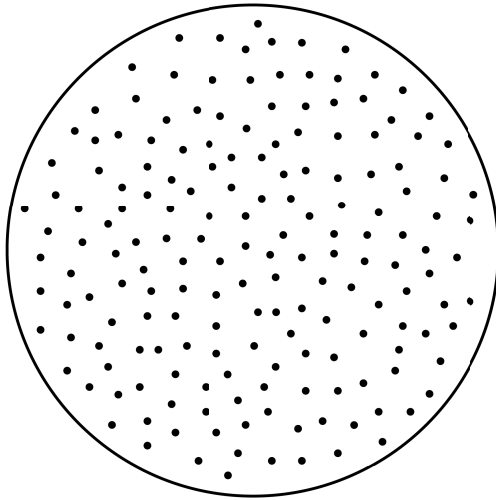
ODE TO THE SHADE OF THE THIN WHITE CLOUD

*I end them with abundant blessings and peace
Upon the best of creation, the master of mankind,*

*Muhammad the city of knowledge, our beloved,
And his family, the gates to the knowledge of reality.*

I – The Innermost Secret (*al-sirr*)

Wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God.



The Innermost Secret (*al-Sirr*)

The meaning of the innermost secret (*al-sirr*) in the terminology of the Karkariyya order:

The innermost secret is the subtle reality of divine mercy (*laṭīfat al-raḥma al-ilāhiyya*). This virginal reality is hallowed beyond any aspirations of servanthood which may seek to deflower it. It is stored within the kernel of the seed of the heart. The fruit that it yields is the eye-witnessing of the life-breaths of God's exclusive singularity (*aḥadiyya*), which flow through the manifestation-site of the primal self-identification of the Essence.

This subtle reality is the Divinity (*lāhūt*) that flows through all things. It appears in an imaginal form in proportion to the life that is stored within that thing; for it is the joining together of the name and the Named, and the route for the ascension of the lower self (*nafs*) to the Spirit (*rūḥ*).

This virginal subtle reality is free from contact with any aspirations of fantasy and imagination. It is the oil of mystical knowledge, distilled from the husk of all things other-than-God. These realities are subtle beyond expression, and cannot be delimited verbally or orthographically. It is a matter of sheer

fruition experience, tasted only by those who plunge the depths of the kernel of the heart.

As for the kernel (*lubb*), it is the preserved tablet of knowledge. Therein lies the root of the intellect illumined by the holy Light, where the physical eye meets the eye of the heart.

Only those who possess strong resolve may directly experience the innermost secret. They entirely orient themselves in pursuit of pure meaning, and ride upon the steed of willpower, with both a strong spiritual essence and the power of passionate love. They drink from the wellspring of life whose waters flow down from the mountain peaks of the pretemporal covenant of, **Yes indeed, Thou art our Lord**, where the breezes of the All-Merciful Cloud-Breath gently blow. Whoever is in such a state, and is accepted in pre-eternity, will witness the life-breath of the spirit of the divine command with his own eye. This spirit precludes all plurality and stands forever alone, in a state of total nondetermination and nondelimitation that is independent even of nondelimitation itself, for the Essence stands apart from the fetters of nonexistence and immutability.

Know, moreover, that the innermost secret is not something that can be spoken of, but a realization of the presence of the Real. It is the descent of the Real to the servant, and the ascent of the servant to the Real. It is a state, and a direct experience through unveiling. It is a certainty that is curtained by the “*As if*” (the *Kāf*) of “*As if you see Him (ka-annaka tarāh)*.”

Attaining the innermost secret means drawing a hand’s span closer to the Presence, so that the Presence draws an arm’s

length closer to you.¹ It is not a matter of reading the books of the Sufis and imagining that you have discovered the secret, or listening to your lower self’s ramblings and supposing that something has been unveiled to you. Rather, unveiling occurs by truly recognizing your own soul, and recognizing all things through your own self-recognition. God says: **The gaze did not swerve; nor did it transgress.**² That is, the Beloved’s ﷺ gaze did not swerve from his innermost secret at the Station of Two Bows’ Length, nor did it transgress the boundaries of his true nature. He ﷺ recognized none other than his true nature, and saw none other than his own essence.

Now, in order to learn the innermost secret and stand at the station of its people, you must first and foremost find its well-spring. By this I mean a Shaykh who will teach you how to reach God (*al-Shaykh al-mūṣil*), and whose very sight inspires in you an understanding of the seriousness and severity of this affair. As for the seeker who cannot find the waters of realization, he

- 1 This is a reference to the Holy Saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*), or extra-Qur’ānic pronouncement in the divine voice: “When the servant draws a hand’s span nearer to Me, I draw an arm’s length nearer to Him. When he draws an arm’s length nearer to Me, I draw a fathom nearer to him. When he comes walking to Me, I go running to him.” Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, #7098.
- 2 Q Najm 53:17 “The Prophet’s gaze did not swerve from the wonders being revealed to him (Aj). More generally, it implies that he did not swerve away from the truth that he sought (Ṭū). Other say [the lote tree of the boundary, a tree in the seventh Heaven to the right of the Divine Throne which the Prophet witnessed on his nocturnal ascent (*mi’rāj*)] was covered with angels and butterflies of gold, which were circumambulating it (Aj, IK, Q, Ṭū).” *The Study Quran*, 1292.

is to perform the dry ablution (*tayammum*) with dust, in the manner of those who are too sick to use water. He must adhere to the outward levels of the revealed Law as understood by the average believers, and profess God's perfect transcendence, while surrendering to God's folk.

You must also know that the innermost secret is a station, not a discourse. It is knowledge that lies beyond the spirit; far be it for the lower soul to sense it, or for the delimited intellect to witness it. It is beheld by neither angels nor devils. It is knowledge that is hidden and stored away. **None touch it save those made pure.**¹ God's Messenger ﷺ said, "Verily, there is a type of knowledge that is hidden, known only to the knowers of God."² Verbal expression does not encompass it and therefore cannot disclose its mystery. It pertains neither to the sensory domain nor to the domain of pure meaning, yet it is at once the sensory domain and the domain of pure meaning. So understand!

To directly experience the innermost secret, you must learn to live it: you must clothe your states in it, sleep with it, and wake up to it. You must smell, taste, and feel it. You must pray and fast with it. You must observe all the prescriptions mandated by the Law while being present with it through direct experience and witnessing, until it yields to you the fruit of your incapacity (*'ajz*). This incapacity will then take you to a higher level of understanding of the innermost secret, until you arrive at the farthest limit of your spiritual aspiration. At that point,

1 Q Wāqī'a 56:79.

2 Suyūfī, *La'ālī*, K. al-'ilm, vol. 1, p. 22.

the secret of the innermost secret (*sirr al-sirr*) begins.

Now, the innermost secret occurs in the disclosure-site of the letters (*majlā al-ḥurūf*) in the guise of two letters: one that is visible above the line, and another that is hidden beneath the line. Thus, for the possessor of the innermost secret, the letter of his body is fixed in the outer realm of the revealed Law, while the letter of his spirit floats through the multiple worlds of reality. He embodies the revealed Law in himself, and attains realization of what is outside himself.

The innermost secret, then, is to witness existence in a state of non-duality. It is to be neither near nor far. It is to be incapable of invoking Him, and to recognize Him without a trace. It is to not know Him, and to not be ignorant of Him. It is to not speak about Him, and to not be silent about Him. It is to be neither dead nor alive. It is to bring together the two opposites, to drink the two oceans, and to be their meeting place between them. It is to recognize who you are, and who He is, and who I am, and who we are. The innermost secret is to negate all things, then affirm them. It is to see that all things hallow Him through the voice of, **Nothing is as His like.**¹

1 Q Shūrā 42:11.

