

Ibn 'Ata' Allah's *Aphorisms*: Some New Translations^{1*}

By Mohammed Rustom (translator)

1. A sign that you depend on action is that you lose hope when you sin.
2. Your desire for detachment despite God's having placed you amidst causal phenomena comes from hidden passion, and your desire to be with causal phenomena despite God's having granted you detachment is a descent from high aspiration.
3. Lofty aspirations can never pierce the walls of destiny.
4. Relieve yourself of self-contrivance, for you need not do what someone else is doing for you.
5. Your striving for what is assured to you, and your falling short in what is asked of you, are proof that the traces of insight have been wiped away from you.
6. Despite your intense prayer for something, do not let a delay in its being granted cause you to despair. For God assures you of a response in accordance with what He chooses for you, not in accordance with what you choose for yourself, and at the time that He wants, not at the time that you want.
7. Do not let an unfulfilled promise cause you to doubt God's promise, even if its time was specified. Doing so will impair your insight, and dim the light of your consciousness.
8. When God gives you an opening, making Himself known, do not be troubled if your actions are paltry. For, He only gives you an opening because He wants to make Himself known to you. Have you not considered that God's making Himself known is what He brings to you, and that actions are what you offer to Him? What a difference there is between what you offer to Him and what He brings to you!
9. Actions vary according to the variety of incoming states.

¹ * Translated from the Arabic text of the *Hikam* as found in Ibn 'Ajiba, *Iqaz al-bimam f sharh al-Hikam* (Beirut 2008).

10. An action is a lifeless body, and its spirit is the sincerity hidden inside.
11. Bury your existence in the ground of obscurity, for an unburied seed will never bear fruit.
12. Nothing benefits the heart like a spiritual retreat—through it, the heart enters the field of contemplation.
13. How will a heart upon whose mirror are imprinted the forms of created beings be illumined? How can it travel to God while it is held back by its passions? How can it expect to enter God's presence while it has not cleansed itself of the filth of its forgetful moments? How can it hope to understand subtle mysteries while it has not repented for its sins?
14. All of created being is darkness and is only illumined by the manifestation of God in it. So whoever sees created being but does not witness Him in it, or with it, or before it, or behind it is veiled from the sun of divine knowledge by the clouds of phenomenal traces, and is in desperate need of light.
15. One thing that points you to God's dominating power is that He veils you from Himself through what does not exist alongside Him.
16. How can a thing veil Him while He manifests everything, and is manifest with everything, in everything, to everything, before the existence of everything, is more manifest than everything, and is the One alongside whom there is nothing? How can a thing veil Him while He is closer to you than everything, and is the One if not for whom nothing would exist? How wondrous! How can existence appear in nonexistence, or how can the created exist alongside the One who is eternal?
17. Totally ignorant is the one who desires a moment that manifests other than God.
18. Putting off actions for when you are free comes from the ego's flippant nature.
19. Do not ask God to take you out of a situation so that He can use you for something else—if He wants, He can use you without taking you out of that situation.
21. When you make demands of Him it is because of your suspicion

- of Him, and when you seek Him it is because you are absent from Him. But when you seek other than Him it is because of your lack of shame before Him, and when you make demands of other than Him it is because of your distance from Him.
22. Every breath you take puts a share of your destiny behind you.
 23. Do not anticipate a time when you will be free from other than God, for this will curtail your attentiveness of Him in that very situation in which He has currently placed you.
 26. A sign of success in the end is that you turn to God from the beginning.
 27. Whoever has a luminous beginning has a luminous end.
 28. Whatever is stored away in the depths of your consciousness will appear in the visible, outside world.
 35. The root of every disobedient act and moment of forgetfulness is complacency, and the root of every obedient act, moment of wakefulness, and virtue is the absence of complacency. It is better for you to keep the company of an ignoramus who is not complacent than a scholar who is complacent. What a difference there is between the scholar's knowledge that causes complacency and the ignoramus's ignorance that does not!
 37. God was, and nothing was with Him. And He is now as He was then.
 45. An action springing from the heart of a person who has renounced the world is never insignificant, but action springing from the heart of a person hankering after it is never significant.
 61. Nothing leads you along like illusion.
 62. You are free when you let go, but a slave when you crave.
 63. Whoever does not approach God through the gentle caresses of His generosity is dragged to Him through the chains of tribulation.
 64. Whoever is ungrateful for blessings stands a chance of losing them, but whoever is grateful for them tethers them by their reins.
 68. God sets up one group for His service, and He singles out another group with His love: *Each do We aid—both these and those—with the gift of your Lord; and the gift of your Lord is never restricted [17:20].*

73. If you want to know your status in God's eyes, look at the situation in which He has currently placed you.
86. If you want greatness that never fades away, then do not seek greatness that does fade away.
88. When created beings give something to you, that is deprivation; but when the Creator of beings withholds something from you, that is generosity.
96. A disobedient act causing disgrace and need is better than an obedient act causing conceit and pride.
100. Your best moment is when you witness your utter poverty, and then go back to your lowliness.
101. When God estranges you from His creatures, it is because He wants to open the door of intimacy with Him.
102. When you make a request, it is because God wants to grant it to you.
103. The sage is always in utter need, so he never reposes in anything other than God.
114. When the ignorant person awakens, he turns his gaze to what he will do; but when the intelligent person awakens, he turns his gaze to what God will do with him.
126. If you are forbidden to claim a quality that you do not have but which people can have, do you think you will be allowed to claim a quality which only belongs to the Lord of the worlds?
128. It is not so much about seeking as it is about being gifted with proper conduct.
129. Nothing asks for you like need knocking at the door, and nothing brings you divine gifts faster than being lowly and poor.
137. Nothing that exists veils you from God, since there is nothing with Him. Rather, what veils you from Him is the illusion that there is something with Him.
144. The most ignorant person is one who replaces his certainty with someone else's conjecture.
150. Heart and consciousness are the dawning places of light.
174. The arrival of utter poverty is a banquet for spiritual aspirants.

176. Utter poverty is the royal carpet of divine gifts.
199. Whoever does not recognize the worth of His blessings when he has them recognizes it when he loses them.
206. Empty your heart of other than God and it will be filled with divine knowledge and mysteries.
209. Whatever of your life that has passed will never come back; so what remains is priceless.
210. When you love something, you are a servant to it. But God does not love for you to be a servant to something other than Him.
211. Your obedient acts do not benefit Him, nor do your disobedient acts harm Him. He only commands you to do one and forbids you from the other because of the effects that will rebound on you.
232. The best kind of knowledge is one accompanied by the fear of God.
233. If knowledge is linked to the fear of God, it is in your favor. But if it is not, it is against you.
238. Whoever thinks he is humble is, in reality, proud; for humility cannot be seen except from above. Thus, when you think yourself to be above, in reality you are proud.
239. The humble person is not the one who sees himself as being above his act of humility, but the one who sees himself as being below it.
240. True humility arises from witnessing God's magnificence and the disclosure of His qualities.
241. Nothing divests you of a quality except your witnessing that quality.
243. One who hopes for compensation from his beloved or seeks some desired goal from his beloved is not a lover. A lover is one who freely gives to you—not the other way around.
248. You will be with created beings so long as you do not witness the Creator of beings. But when you witness Him, the created beings will be with you.
253. How can you seek compensation for an action that God gives to you as charity? Or, how can you seek reward for sincerity that God has gifted to you?
263. Contemplation is the heart's lamp—when it burns out, it can never be rekindled.