

# Islamic Thought and the Art of Translation

*Texts and Studies in Honor of William C. Chittick  
and Sachiko Murata*

*Edited by*

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*The author has no share save the post of translator, and no portion but the trade of speaker.*

From the preface of Jāmī, *Lawā'ih*, trans. William C. Chittick in Sachiko Murata, *Chinese gleams of Sufi light: Wang Tai-yü's Great learning of the pure and real and Liu Chih's Displaying the concealment of the real realm*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000, 134





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# Made in God's Image: A Contemporary Sufi Commentary on Sūrat al-Insān (Q 76) by the Moroccan Shaykh Mohamed Faouzi al-Karkari

*Yousef Casewit*

## 1 Introduction

The Karkariyya is a contemporary branch of the Shādhilī Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*) founded by Shaykh Mohamed Faouzi al-Karkari (b. 1974) in 2007 in the small northeastern Moroccan town of el-Aruit, near the coastal city of Nador. Despite its humble beginnings, the Karkariyya has established itself as one of Morocco's most dynamic centers for the dissemination of Sufi teachings. It is based in a large Sufi lodge (*zāwiya*) that accommodates thousands of visitors throughout the year and houses dozens of male and female resident disciples (*mutajar-ridīn*) who live with the Shaykh for extensive periods of rigorous spiritual training. The order's largest branches are presently located in France, Algeria, Tunisia, and Oman, with a growing presence in various cities of Morocco, West Africa, and North America. The Karkariyya's active outreach on social media platforms has contributed to its growth from a local Moroccan order to an internationally diverse, multicultural, and multilingual network of Sufi seekers.

The major events that shaped the Shaykh's life, including his ascetic practices and decade of wandering throughout Morocco, are described in a hagiographical work penned by his Belgian disciple Jamil Zaghdoudi entitled, *At the service of destiny: A biography of the living Moroccan Sufi master Shaykh Mohamed Faouzi al-Karkari*. Shaykh al-Karkari is heir to the Moroccan Shādhilī-Darqāwī-ʿAlawī lineage, and places himself on par with the prominent 19th and 20th century revivers of North African Sufism, including al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī (d. 1823) and Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī (d. 1934). As such, the spiritual teachings and practices of Shaykh al-Karkari closely resemble those of the Moroccan Darqāwīs, especially Aḥmad Ibn ʿAjība (d. 1809), with a special emphasis on the direct witnessing (*mushāhada*) of divine light. The Shaykh's works occasionally invoke the writings and teachings of Ibn ʿArabī, although the latter's teachings tend to be channeled through the Shādhilī writings of Ibn ʿAjība.

To date, Shaykh al-Karkari has authored seven Arabic works which attest to both the continuation and revival of the North African Shādhilī tradition. Many



of his books have been translated into French, English, and Spanish, although three of his works are most important to his teachings. The first, entitled *The foundations of the Karkariyya order* (*al-Kawākib al-durriyya fī bayān al-uṣūl al-nūrāniyya*), articulates the key practices of the order and provides legal justifications and metaphysical expositions of the pact (*al-‘ahd*), the sacred dance (*al-ḥaḍra*), the patched cloak (*al-muraqqa‘a*), the invocation of the divine name (*al-ism*), Sufi wandering (*al-siyāḥa*), the spiritual retreat (*al-khalwa*), and realization of the innermost secret (*al-sirr*). The second, *Introduction to Islamic metaphysics: A contemporary Sufi treatise on the secrets of the divine name* (*Kāf al-astār li-mā fihā l-jalāla min asrār*), is an exposition of Sufi doctrine and the Shaykh's notion of the seven “readings” (*qirā‘āt*) or degrees of realization of the divine name, *Allāh*. The third, entitled *The Sufi path of light* (*Kitāb al-Maḥajja al-bayḍā’*), argues for the centrality of divine light as both a key to and criterion for spiritual wayfaring in the Quran, the *sunna*, and the Sufi tradition. Aside from these three principal works, al-Karkari has also published a series of books based on transcriptions of his spiritual discourses (*mudhākara*) that offer commentaries on the lives of various Quranic prophets including Moses, Jesus, and Solomon.

Below is a translation of *The holy presence: On the human configuration* (*Kitāb al-Ḥaḍra al-quddūsiyya fī l-nash‘a al-insāniyya*). This short treatise was first published in 2015 in a collection of al-Karkari's Sufi poetry and aphorisms entitled *The chalice of spirits* (*Dīwān dinān al-arwāḥ*).<sup>1</sup> The treatise presents the meanings of *Sūrat al-Insān* (Q 76) from the perspective of God's “holy presence,” or in the manner of a holy saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) pronounced in the divine voice. The treatise is divided under subheadings and describes paradisaical delights and infernal torments as disclosures of divine names and attributes. Throughout the treatise, the Shaykh invokes key Sufi themes such as the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the hidden treasure, disclosures of divine names, the symbolic significance of the letters of the Quran, and the Aeon (*dahr*) which stands between sheer eternity and temporality.

1 Al-Karkari, Mohamed Faouzi, *Dīwān dinān al-arwāḥ*, Casablanca: Maṭba‘at Ṣinā‘at al-Kitāb, 2015, 165–182.

## 2 Translation

### *The Holy Presence: On the Human Configuration*<sup>2</sup>

#### The Aeon and the Human Being

Has there come upon man a span of the Aeon in which he was a thing unremembered? [Q 76:1]<sup>3</sup>

Dear human being, there *came upon you a span of the Aeon* in which you were a *thing unremembered*. You were not subject to the vicissitudes of time, nor restrained within the confinements of space, because you were not a *thing* at all, nor was there even *anything* like you. Before before-ness you were concealed in the holy invisible heart of the unseen realm. There, you swam within the *Aeon* itself, hallowed beyond time and space. Night did not enfold you, nor did day envelop you, in that Aeonic pre-eternity where the eternal attributes permeate the stages of perfection.

Then, when We desired to descend from the Treasure to bring Our Love into fruition, you manifested in Our image, and We concealed you within the clay of immanence and the water of transcendence, and We molded you with the attributes. Then when you became baked clay, Our omnipotence etched within you the secret of will—“what, then, has deluded you with regard to your noble Lord?” [Q 82:6].

I created your clay with My Hand and etched the realities of your vicegerency upon your form, so that you may become manifest through the wet clay of power, and nonmanifest through the lights of the Presence. Between the pores of your clay, the awesome lights of divine singularity shone forth from behind the veil of might, so that the angelic periphery fell prostrate unto you, for you are the Ka’ba of existence and the manifestation-site of direct witnessing.

For when We were a non-delimited existence that did not accept forms, Our realities had to be reflected in entities and possibilities that were receptive of them, and so each name manifested as a mirror for Our realities. And it was in you that all these realities were brought together, and in you that every name became manifest.

I brought you into manifestation within *a span of the Aeon*, delimited by nondelimited meanings, and I *stretched forth* your *shadow* upon the earth of

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Khalid Williams for his feedback on this translation.

<sup>3</sup> Quran translations are based on Nasr, Seyyed Hossein et al. (eds.), *The study Quran: A new translation and commentary*, New York: HarperOne, 2015.

existence, then I “withdrew you unto Myself, a gentle withdrawal” [Q 25:46]. I made you nondelimited through the secret of supreme vicegerency, so that you became nondelimited in your delimitation, transcendent in your immanence.

So return to the center of your identity for *a span* of your time, and you shall find Me to be *the Aeon* itself. Annihilate the periphery in the center of Will, and you shall discover Me within your nonmanifest Cloud, your hidden core, your nonexistent being.

### The Mixture of Divine Power

Truly We created man from a drop of mixed fluid that We may test him, and We endowed him with hearing, seeing. [Q 76:2]

I *created* you from the *mixture* of opposites, and I proportioned your form with My hand, fusing together the sensory with the suprasensory, *that I may test* you with the burden that the heavens and the earth were unable to bear.

The *drop* of will began within the womb of power, and you witnessed the presence without form, while the realities of passion danced around you to the melodies of love, urging you to break out of your treasure-nature and become manifest, chanting the hymns of ‘I loved to become known.’

Then you appeared from between the opposites, churning in the isthmus of the two oceans in “the most beautiful stature” [Q 95:4], in Our All-Merciful form and Our holy attributes, “hearing and seeing, so O mankind! What has deluded you with regard to your noble Lord, Who created you, then fashioned you, then proportioned you, assembling you in whatever form He willed?” [Q 82:6–8]. You are seduced by your own self from Me, and the herebelow has wrapped your heart with chains of appetites and pleasures, and the hereafter has shackled you with its palaces and amorous peers. You are a slave of worldly vestiges, a prisoner of separative entities, bound by the rope of your selfish interests, having fallen from the *most beautiful stature to the lowest of the low*.

And when you wished to depart, you only left one realm of being for another, spinning within an infinite orbit without ever standing still for a single moment. You must raise your saintly aspiration toward Our presence and return to Our mighty precinct, for there is none other than Us.

You must strive for the *kāf* of Spiritual Excellence, O human, the *kāf* by which you may see Me with My sight, and hear Me with My hearing, and come to Me with My foot, thereby becoming hearing, seeing, and a luminous lamp. Turn in repentance from yourself, and return to yourself within you. Mount the

stead of My Lights so that you may plumb the oceans of My secrets. Pass away from the all, until you see that I am the all.

### Guidance upon the Way

Truly We guided him upon the way, be he grateful or ungrateful. [Q 76:3]

We *guided you upon the way* to attainment, clarified for you the foundational principles, and disclosed Ourselves to you through the majestic Name. We made you a *book in which there is no doubt*, engraved with Our beautiful names, and wrote you down with the Pen of singularity and the ink of pre-eternity.

The guidance is from yourself to yourself, from your earth to your heaven, from your sensory faculties to your suprasensory reality. “Whoever is guided is only guided to his own soul” [Q 10:108]. Look at yourself and you shall see Me; search within yourself and you shall discover Me; plunge into yourself and you shall find Me. Read your hidden book and know its concealed secret that no angel or jinn can behold. Do not skip a single line, nor underestimate a single vowel or letter.

The *omen* of your secret is *fastened upon your neck*, and is closer to you than you are to yourself. So step outside of yourself, remain with yourself and for yourself, and drink the ginger of existence from your “boiling spring” [Q 88:5].

If you are *grateful*, you are *grateful* to yourself; if you are *ungrateful*, it is because of your own delusion. “And whosoever gives thanks, he gives thanks only for his own soul; and whosoever is ungrateful, truly my Lord is Self-Sufficient, Generous” [Q 27:40].

“We have surely prepared for the disbelievers chains, shackles, and a blazing flame” [Q 76:4].

As for the one who denies My commanding reality, and is heedless of My radiant presence, his recompense shall be *chains* of deprivation from My light, *shackles* of veils from My secrets, and the *blazing flame* of distance from the holy presence.

### The Cup of the Pious

Truly the pious drink of a cup mixed with camphor. [Q 76:5]

The *pious* are the servants of the attribute, those who are upon the innate disposition, in whose hearts gush forth the spring of singularity, so that the rivers of love flow within their souls, and the streams of yearning pervade their spirits,

and the oceans of servanthood stir in their innermost secret hearts, delivering them from the contaminations of place and confinements of space, so that they see with My eye and hear with My hearing.

I gave them to drink from the *cup* of My gentleness that discloses itself through My holy Lights, mixed with the *camphor* of intense love, a pre-eternal drink from a pre-eternal *cup*, without shape or color. If it were to be unveiled, the people of heaven and earth would prostrate to its beauty; and if they were given to drink one drop of it, they would all be enraptured by the sweetness of its esoteric realities, their intellects dazzled by the pleasure of witnessing. A glance at it erases sin, and a sip from it quenches hearts. Whoever sees it knows Me, and whoever tastes it loves Me.

Its *camphor* (*kāfūr*) is one of My secrets, tasted only by the one who passes away in Me and subsists through Me. Its *kāf* is immanence for the people of faith; its *alif* measures out the constituents of spiritual excellence; its *fā'* is knowledge for the people of gnosis; its *wāw* is life for the people of certainty; and its *rā'* is an expansion for the servants of the All-Merciful.

### The Fountain of God's Servants

A fountain whereof drink the servants of God, while they make it gush forth abundantly. They fulfill their vows and fear a day whose evil is widespread, and give food, despite loving it, to the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. [Q 76:7–8]

The *fountain of the servants of God* is not mixed with the *camphor*-veils of the dualist attributes. It is transcendent beyond transcendence. Its *drink* is sheer in essence and single-sourced, because for them there is no difference between subjugation and gentleness. To their unitary essences, the attributes resemble one another; they bring together the opposites, and have become liminal entities within the coolness of the spring. They are at once the drinkers and the cup-bearers, *making it gush forth* and then *drinking*.

They *drink* from the spring of the hidden Name, then draw from within their spirits “drinks of diverse hues” [Q 16:69] and stations for the folk of the attributes and acts, *wherein there is healing* for the sickness of beholding other-than-God, a balm for the wounds of separation, and an antidote to the poison of the ego.

*They fulfill their vows*, willingly sacrificing themselves by passing away in My oneness. They have no existence except through Me, for I am the One and they are the manifestation-sites of My levels.

### The Indigent, the Orphan, and the Captive

And they give food, despite loving it, to the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. [Q 76:8]

The *food* of the presence is beloved to the people of the beatific vision, because it is their inner provision. Whoever gives of what his soul loves pierces through the most intense veils of separation. “You will never attain piety till you spend from that which you love” [Q 3:92]. So *spend from* the lights and gnostic sciences that I have bestowed upon you.

The “indigent is the one whose spiritual provision is limited” [Q 65:7] and is incapable of seeking it for himself because he finds repose in sensory objects. Therefore you must feed him from the holy feasts that were provided to you.

*The orphan* is the one without an intermediary to support him with the gnostic sciences of the unseen. You must admit him into the protection of your stronghold, and embrace him among the children of the presence, “as progeny, one from another” [Q 3:34].

*The captive* is the one who is bound by the chains of natural appetites and the attributes of the evil-enjoying soul. You must set free the saintly aspiration within him, so that he may rid himself of the shackles of his earth-nature and break from the fetters of his illusion.

Before feeding them, teach them *in the name of God* so that they may realize its realities. Let them eat from the stations of proximity before them, as was decreed for them in pre-eternity; and let them not encroach upon the stations of others, nor eat from the middle, for that is the locus of the descent and of blessing.

### The Face of God

We feed you only for the Face of God. We do not desire any recompense or thanks from you. [Q 76:9]

My true servants are those who have passed away from the sensory human substance and from the wages of deeds. They aspire through their deeds for My approval, not for amorous peers and palaces, nor out of fear of chains and fires. They seek the neighbor before the house. Their hearts wish to gaze upon the Cup-Bearer on the day of approval and good-pleasure. “Faces that Day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord” [Q 75:22–23].

There is no distance between Me and My true servants. They are the intermediary, and they are the veil. They are the manifestation-site of My beauty

and mercy. I have permitted to them My beauty, and so they enjoy My Light. I have allowed them to behold My secrets, and so they attain realization of My names. Wherever they turn, they witness pure meaning before sensory object, and so they grasp the allusion and transcend the expression. You see them turning their faces unto the heaven of dominion, so I turn them toward the qibla of the Name: the sacred mosque of pre-eternity.

### Radiance and Joy

“Truly we fear from our Lord a grim, calamitous day.” So God has shielded them from the evil of that Day, bestowed upon them radiance and joy.  
[Q 76:10–11]

Things have no existence alongside the One whom “nothing is like unto Him” [Q 42:11]. Transcend time and you shall enter the stronghold of the Aeon; and I am the Aeon.

There is no past and no future, but only your now. Do not confine My gaze in time, for time is passing away, and I am the Subsistent. Rather, look at yourself and you shall see Me. My signs within you are a concealed and sewn up mass; and on the horizons they are inscribed in unstitched differentiation.

Whoever beholds himself discovers Me, and whoever beholds My traces loves Me; for My traces are proof of My names, and My names are proof of My attributes, and My attributes are a proof of My Essence. Pass away from the engendered realms of being, and behold the Being-Giver; pass away from the cup, and behold the Cup-Bearer.

How could you presume to know Me while you are imprisoned by your spatial directions, confined to your human nature, enthralled by your bodily structure, enraptured with love for that which passes away?

The Light of My Face pervades the heavens and the earth. “No disproportion dost thou see in the All-Merciful’s creation” [Q 67:3]. See with the eye of oneness, and you shall behold Me in the all; efface spatial location, and spatial extension will come to naught. Cling to the possessive particle ‘My’ [in My spirit, *rūhī*; Q 38:29], that it may bring you back to the original inblowing.

My servants have passed away from time, and burst through the walls of their bodily frames, and penetrated the courtyard of non-spatiality with their inner vision, freeing themselves from the bonds of number and reckoning. I greet them with joy, radiance, nearness, and manifestation. They wander in My beauty, dazzled. Your gaze falls upon them, but you do not see them, for you are

veiled by yourself from them. You must travel the path of the people of love, and be among the righteous.

### The Garden of the Gnostic Sciences

And [God has] rewarded them, for having been patient, with a Garden and with silk. Therein they recline upon couches, seeing neither sun nor bitter cold. Its shade shall be close above them, and its clusters shall be made to hang low. [Q 76:12–14]

The *garden* of gnostic sciences is surrounded by the trench of the “I”-letters. Build the bridge of “He” with lowliness, needfulness, repentance, and seeking forgiveness, that you may enter among the ranks of the servants.

Whoever enters the garden of gnostic sciences, I shall clothe in the *silk* of My attributes, and conceal his qualities with My qualities, and cover his characteristics with My characteristic, until he says to a thing, “Be!,” and it is” [Q 2:117].

He *reclines upon couches* of names and stations, covered by *the shade* of nearness from the *sun* of yearning and the *bitter cold* of spiritual states, with the fruits of pure meaning *hanging low* as he enjoys the delights of abandonment in God.

### A Spring Named Salsabil

And vessels of silver and goblets of crystal are passed around them—silvern crystal that they have measured out with due measure. Therein they are given to drink of a cup mixed with ginger, a spring therein named Salsabil. [Q 76:15–18]

They are encircled by attendants in the abode of permanence, because in the herebelow they were the center of the command and the *qibla* of disclosures. They were the Ka’ba of My Lights and the manifestation-site of My secrets.

*Vessels* of marvelous forms fashioned from the *silver* of My attributes *are passed around them*, and *goblets* of unseen subtleties fashioned from the *silvern* Lights of My Essence; *goblets of the crystal* glass of their inner hearts, resplendent planets and lordly suns, *that they have measured out* during their vanishing lives *with due measure*, and filled them up with Lights and secrets.

They are My true servants, and I give them to drink from a *cup mixed with the hot ginger* of yearning, and the pleasure of complete absorption in the presence of My attributes. This *mixture* is a *spring* of divine attributes and Essence,



tasted by the one who has passed away in the hot *ginger* of yearning as well as the cool *camphor* of plunging, so that he brings together countless opposites, and the Salsabil of the Eternal One manifests for him.

### The Blissful Presence

Immortal youths wait upon them; when you see them you would suppose them to be scattered pearls. And when thou seest, there thou wilt see bliss and a great kingdom. Upon them are garments of fine green silk and rich brocade. They are adorned with silvern bracelets and their Lord shall give them to drink of a drink most pure. Truly this is a reward for you, and your endeavoring is held in gratitude. [Q 76:19–22]

As they dwell in the gardens of My presence, the *immortal youths* of name-disclosure *wait upon them*, *pearls* cultivated from the drop of mercy descending from the heaven of My most holy effusion, guarded in the oysters of their breasts.

An incomparable *bliss* in the garden of the presence. Behold, again and again, and you shall *see* what you have never seen: a garden of My presence, not delimited by the cycles of time, closer to you than the straps of your sandals, My *reward* is not a delayed payment.

I clothe them in *garments* of reward, *fine silk* of the names and *rich brocade* of the attributes, and I beautify them *silvern bracelets* of My lordly character traits.

*I give them to drink of a drink purified* from temporality, squeezed from the pre-eternal wine, that they may purify themselves of their claims, and awaken from their illusions, and be able to *touch* that which is *concealed*, and swim in the “locations of the stars” [Q 56:75–79].

### The Name of the Lord

Truly We have sent down the Quran upon thee as a revelation. So be patient with thy Lord's judgment and obey neither sinner nor disbeliever among them. And invoke the Name of thy Lord morning and evening, prostrate unto Him during the night, and glorify Him by night at length. Truly they love the ephemeral and put a weighty day behind them. [Q 76:23–28]

The engendered realms of being are traces of the differentiated *furqān*, and durations of time are traces of the gathered Quran. The dot of the *bā'* is the

secret of union, while the letter is the door of duality. Read the stitched non-differentiation within the unstitched differentiation and you shall become a gathered Quran; understand the unstitched differentiation through the stitched non-differentiation, and you shall become a human being.

“Whoever remembers Me, I shall remember him. So remember Me, and I shall remember you” [Q 2:152]. Whomever I remember, I shall remind him of himself, and whomever I remind of himself shall be guided toward Me. I shall make for him a mirror by which he may behold his true nature and know that he is the center of the orbit of transcendence, as well as the periphery of the realm of immanence. For when My Identity desired to disclose Itself from the Treasure, for and by Itself, It manifested through the human reality that encompasses all the names, is adorned by all the attributes, and bears all the properties and levels. When the angels of the heavens saw it, they fell prostrate before the Adamic human form. You are therefore the index of the book of existence, and you are the reality of My supreme name.

Whoever desires to attain Me, let him remember Me *by night at length*, and glorify Me *morning and evening*, till I cover His description with My description, and conceal His attribute with My attribute, and manifest for him knowledge of opposites, and split the *lām* for him into two *alifs*, so that he recognizes the difference between the master and the servant. The one flows through all numbers, and prostration is the dot of conjunction and intimate union: “prostrate and draw nigh” [Q 96:19]. He will fall down in perpetual prostration, and his prayer will be constant and everlasting.

### The Reminder

We created them and made firm their frames; and whensoever We will, We shall exchange them for others like them. Truly this is a reminder; so let him who will, take a way unto his Lord. And you do not will but that God wills. Truly God is Knowing, Wise. He causes whomsoever He will to enter into His Mercy. And as for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment. [Q 76:28–31]

I have *reminded* you, O forgetful one. I have alerted you, O distracted one. Mount the steed of invocation, and fly away from yourself toward yourself. Remove the secondary connections and causes between Us, so that you may enter into the election of pre-eternity, and the light of your innate disposition may pour into the cup of your heart. This is My *way*.

Expose yourselves to the breezes of union, and halt before the doorstep of My will and the source of My desire. *Take the way* of the servants of the presence; the manifestation-sites of My success-giving and My guidance, the

guardians of the courtyard of mighty approval, so that you may be “exchanged for others, and be brought into being as another creation,” [Q 23:14] in “the most beautiful stature,” [Q 95:3] in My merciful form and luminous attributes.

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