

Muslim Sūfī Shaikh ‘Abdu’l-Qādir al-Jīlānī (1077-1166 AD), “Sultan of the Saints”

[compiled by Timothy Conway, Ph.D., from various sources]

The great scholar of Muslim mysticism (Sūfism), Annemarie Schimmel, reported in 1975 that ‘Abdu’l-Qādir al-Jīlānī of Baghdad, Iraq is “probably the most popular saint in the Islamic world, whose name is surrounded by innumerable legends... ‘Abdu’l-Qādir’s tomb in Baghdād is still a place of pilgrimage for pious Muslims [“perhaps, after that of the Prophet and those of certain members of his family, the most visited and venerated tomb in Islam”—Martin Lings], mainly from the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent, where the order [founded in his name, the Qādiriya Sūfīs] was introduced in the late 14th century. [During his life, his] fame soon reached incredible heights. He is called *Muhyī ud-dīn*, ‘the reviver of religion.’ ... A number of sayings are attributed to him in which he claims the highest mystical rank possible.... A satisfactory explanation of the transition from the sober Ḥanbalite preacher [the fundamentalist Ḥanbalis are the strictest, most anti-mystical of Islām’s four legal schools of interpretation] ... to the prototype of saintliness venerated all over the Muslim world is still lacking. The poems in honor of ‘Abdu’l-Qādir, which are sung at his anniversary in the fourth month of the Muslim lunar year, reveal the tremendous admiration of the people for this mystical leader.... He is the *ghauth-i a’zam*, the ‘Greatest Help,’ and the *pīr-i dast-gīr*, ‘the Pīr [Master] who keeps one’s hand’ for support.... Old Sindhi songs describe how his spiritual realm extends from Istanbul to Delhi, town by town, country by country being blessed by him... In folk piety Gīlānī has become the master of the *jinn* [subtle-plane beings], and many haunted caves and sacred places in the Maghreb are devoted to his cult. He has also had a decisive influence in the Islamization of West Africa.” (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina, 1978, pp. 247-8)

Scholar Terry Graham states: “Gīlānī is an enigma to scholars, because there is little to be gleaned from the biographies of him which indicates that he had the intention of creating a system [the Qādiriya order] for spiritual realization. Rather, his approach seems to have been based purely on adherence to his person.... The sense of personal association which present-day Qāderi dervishes feel for their founder... is unique in Sūfī orders, where the common practice is to identify with one’s immediate initiating and training master alone.” (“‘Abdu’l-Qādir al-Jīlānī [Persian spelling] and the Qāderiya Order,” *Sufi*, Issue 3, Fall 1989, pp. 22-28) Elsewhere we read of ‘Abdu’l-Qādir: “He came to be recognized as the leading authority in the religious sciences, but it was not until he was 50 years old that he first appeared in public as a preacher. His fame as an orator attracted students from all over the Muslim world. It is said that his sermons converted many Jews and Christians to Islam, and many Muslims to the spiritual life. Financial support from his many followers enabled him to establish a *ribāt* (Sūfī center), where the poor and needy were cared for. He served as *muftī*, teacher of Quranic exegesis, *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh* [religious law]. ‘Abd al-Qādir’s Sūfī path consists in fighting the ‘greater jihād’ against the lower self, rather than the ‘lesser jihād’ of the physical struggle against the enemies of Islam. His way is to eradicate the idolatry of the self, to recognize in all that happens, whether of good or of evil, the will of God, and to live in submission to his will according to the Holy Law.... His sober Sufism [cf. the more ecstatic, “intoxicated” Sufism] gained wide acceptance among the orthodox circles, and therein lies the reason for the great spread of the Qādiriya order throughout the Muslim world.” (J. Bowker [Ed.], *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, 1997, p. 4)

[The following biography, with comments and diacriticals, is drawn from the website **Personalities in Islam**, www.islamic-paths.org/Home/English/History/Personalities/Content/Jilani.html]

“Some have painted him as one of the greatest Sūfīs, rather the greatest Sūfī, and have alleged that he performed several unheard-of *karāmāt*, or miracles [healings, bilocations, clairvoyance, etc.], while others have described him as one of the greatest *ulamā*, that is, scholars, of Islām. From a neutral point of view we can say he was a great reformer, a great idealist, a great scholar, a great preacher of Islām and a great Sūfī. His unbounded scholarship of Islām was so great that the great Moorish scholar and philosopher, Ibn al-’Arabī [d.1240] gave him the title of *Qutb*, that is, the focal point [axis] of Islām.

“In the sixth century A.H. [12th cent. CE], Muslim civilization, under the lavish rule of the Abbāsīd khalīfate [750-1258], was going under and the Muslims in general were losing their attachment to religion. There was real moral bankruptcy and the people were indulging in luxury and the pleasures of this life. In the background there was a reign of corruption, a reign of injustice, and a world of indiscipline. People were steeped in irreligious activities and there was hardly any regard for moral scruples. From the Khalīf [ruler] to the common man, all had gone away from religion.

“Under this extreme decline of morality ‘Abdu’l-Qādir al-Jīlānī used to stand up boldly to address the people to remind them of their moral responsibility. The Khalīf, the *qadis*, the governors, the public, the merchants, the *ulamā* – all sections of people were the target of his addresses or *khutbas*. He would criticize their defects and shortcomings very boldly and would suggest the measures and remedies of the *Qur’ān* [Islām’s holy Scripture] and *Sunna* [customs of Prophet Muḥammad, 570-632]. At first his voice was hardly heard and his audience very small, about ten or fifteen people. But gradually, in the course of time, his audience became sixty to seventy thousand people. They would listen to him with all their heart and mind and would drink deep from the fountain of his scholarly lectures.

“This distinguished and ever-respected scholar, Sayyid Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdu’l-Qādir, was born in Persia in the province of Jīlān [on the Caspian Sea’s southwest shores in the northern part of modern Iran] in the year 1077. He was called al-Jīlānī after the name of his birthplace. His father, Abū Ṣāliḥ, was a very religious person and great *‘ālim* [ascetic saint]. Abū Ṣāliḥ was a descendant of [saints going back to Muḥammad’s daughter] Fāṭima’s son, Ḥaṣan [d.670] and Abū Ṣāliḥ’s wife was descended from Fāṭima’s other son, Ḥuṣayn [d.680]. [Her two sons are Islām’s most famous martyrs.]

“From his boyhood, ‘Abdu’l-Qādir was very calm, quiet, thoughtful and a keen seeker of knowledge. In his childhood he studied Arabic and Persian in the local *madrassa*. When he was 18 [some years after the death of his father, he was permitted to go to Baghdād] to study the *Qur’ān*, *Ḥadīth* [sayings of the Prophet], *fiqh* [religious law], theology, logic (*mantiq*), history and philosophy. When he was setting out for Baghdād, his mother gave him forty gold coins and hid them by sewing them in his undergarment. On the way, his caravan was attacked by bandits. When they asked him if he had anything, he showed them his forty gold coins hidden in his undergarment. The bandit leader rebuked him for having admitted this. At this ‘Abdu’l-Qādir replied that his mother had asked him, when she bade him farewell, never to tell a lie, even at the risk of his life. Hearing this, the bandit leader was greatly moved, and he along with the other bandits accepted Islam and vowed to live an honest life henceforward.

“[At Baghdād...] soon he showed his genius as an excellent student by dint of his sharp memory and deep understanding. But he was more attracted to the spiritual side of learning, and

Sūfism made its full impact on him. Side by side with his studies in the Nizāmiyya Madrasa [est.1092], he freely mixed with all the renowned Sūfīs of his time in Baghdād. In this way he got very closely acquainted with the famous Sūfī of Baghdād, [Abū Khair] Ḥamād ad-Dabbās [d.1131], who accepted him as one of his favorite disciples. [Other sources hold that ‘Abdu’l-Qādir never studied at the famed Nizāmiyya Madrasa, though that was his original intent; a vision of the *Kiḍhr* or Inner Guide led him away to be trained by the rigidly conservative Ḥanbali legalists, especially Abū Saïd ‘Alī al-Mukharrimī. The anti-Sūfī Ḥanbalis despised the liberal Ash‘arite theological views taught at Nizāmiyya Madrasa, an institution opened to mystical Sūfism as a result of the work there by the great scholar-mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d.1111) and his saintly brother Aḥmad al-Ghazzālī (d. 1125). The accounts of al-Jīlānī studying law under the Ḥanbalis nevertheless say that he spent much of his extra time with Sūfīs like Ḥamād ad-Dabbās, learning their deep spirituality; biographical accounts also state that the pious youth, after soon exhausting his gold coins—much of it on charity—lived in great poverty, fasting often, eating only wild vegetables and plain bread begged from a baker.]

“He dedicated himself to attaining the depths of Sūfism by his constant devotion and association with the Sūfīs. After his studies were over [he eschewed the life of a legal professor and instead] he preferred to live in loneliness away from the public, and to meditate on his Lord. He took on a strict and rigorous life of abstinence and austerity and used to spend his nights in prayer and meditation. He would complete one reading of the *Qur’ān*, almost every night, by keeping himself awake; and it is said that with one *wudu’* (ablution) he used to say the *Isha’* [night] and *Fajar* [morning] prayers. Then he left Baghdād and went to a lonely desert where he spent 25 years in meditation and self-purification. At that time he had the look of an ascetic, unworldly man. The goal of this long course of Sūfī self-purification was to know his Lord and he was successful in his quest. [Evidently by this point many miracles happened around him.]

“At the age of 51, he came back to Baghdād, to be among people again, and started preaching the message of Islām at the instigation of the Sūfī Yūsuf al-Hamadhānī [d.1140]. [Qādir al-Jīlānī’s old Ḥanbali mentor al-Mukharrimī turned over his *madrasa* to Shaikh al-Jīlānī, but al-Jīlānī, a non-Arab Persian “foreigner,” had been reluctant to preach to Baghdād’s Arab public; a vision of Prophet Muḥammad persuaded him to do so.] People started gathering round him in groups, and gradually in thousands. They accepted his leadership. He gave his addresses at a local open space and people from all walks of life thronged to him. They would listen to him spellbound and would correct themselves as he directed and prescribed. The open space had to be widened and additional place provided for accommodating the tens of thousands of his audience and disciples. A large guest-house was built for visitors [free room and board for students, saints, scholars, and the needy].

“The name of ‘Abdu’l-Qādir al-Jīlānī was on the tongues of all the people of Baghdād and his discourses were the topic of their conversation. He portrayed the glory of Islām in a new light and presented this glory with new splendor in the light of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna*, in such convincing language and with such spirit, that people in thousands became his disciples. They gave him the title of *Muḥyiddīn*, the Reviver of Islām. His tens of thousands of followers consisted of Sūfīs, *fuqaha* [lawyers], *ulamā* [religious officials], ministers, the Khalīf and the common people. And they all used to get equal treatment from him. His dedication, his struggles, his self-purification and his total submission to Allāh attracted all people, and earned him the nickname of *Ghawth al-A’zam*, that is, Sultan (Chief) of all the Sūfīs.

“Abdu’l-Qādir in his ripe old age married four wives and was blessed with 27 sons and 22 daughters. His family life was calm and peaceful. He used to fast [from food and water during daylight hours] the entire year except for five days. He would give [free] *khutbas* and *fatwas* [legal decisions] during the day and meditate for the entire night. This was his usual practice. Only after the *Maghrib* prayer would he eat, together with all the beggars and destitutes around him, joining in the same meal. In this way he spent his life in the service of Islām and humanity, and died at the age of 91. Millions of his followers belonging to his *Tarīqa* [mystical order], the **Qādiriya**, still actively remember him and celebrate the anniversary of his death.”

[A biography filling in the above sketch with many rich stories is S.A. Salik, *The Saint of Jilan*, Lahore, Pakistan: M. Ashraf, 1953.]

From Shaikh Qadir al-Jīlānī’s *khutbas*/discourses, several anthologies of his teachings were compiled: *Fūtūḥ al-Ghayb* (Revelations of the Unseen), *al-Fath ar-Rabbānī* (Victory of the Lord), *Malfuzat* (Utterances), etc. He allegedly wrote over forty books on religion and spirituality, but, alas, only a few of these invaluable works are available today (a massive Baghdād fire in 1258 likely destroyed the rest): *Sirr al-Asrar* (*Book of the Secret of Secrets and the Manifestation of Lights*) written for a disciple; *Al-Ghunya li-Talibi Tariq al-Haqq* (*Sufficient Provision for Seekers of the Path of Truth*), five volumes written by the Shaikh at the request of another *murid* (disciple) on all aspects of Islam, inner and outer. A collection of some of his correspondences, *Khamsata ‘Ashara Maktuban* (*Fifteen Letters*) is also extant. Excerpts from all these works are available at a website on the Shaikh: www.al-baz.com/shaikhabdalqadir/Books_and_Text_of_Wisdom/books_and_text_of_wisdom.html. See also A.D. Ahmad (Tr.), *Futuh al-Ghaib*, Lahore: M. Ashraf, 1967; and a collection of the Shaikh’s talks edited by Shaikh Muḥammad al-Casnazani al-Husseini (present-day head of one of the main Qādiriya lineages of Baghdād), *Jila’ al-Khatir* (*Purification of the Mind*) (Prof. S. al-Dargazelli & Dr. L. Fatoohi, Tr.), Delhi, India: Adam Publ., 1998.

Teachings of Shaikh ‘Abdu’l-Qādir al-Jīlānī:

[From the *Malfuzat* (*Utterances*) (Muhtar Holland, Translator),
www.al-baz.com/islam/abdalqadirjilani/malfuzat_main.htm:]

Surely you can see that if someone abstains from this world, so as not to be distracted by it from seeking the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He), he must likewise abstain from the hereafter, so that it will not distract him from Allāh.... You are in isolation from the Lord of Truth. When will you isolate your heart from creatures and seek the company of the Lord of Truth, going from door to door until there is no door left, from town to town, from heaven to heaven until there is no heaven left?

The believer [*mu'min*] must leave his natural inclination [*tab*] behind, moving in the direction of his Lord. As long as he is following this present course, he is exposed to harmful influences affecting his person and his property. He is reverting to his sins, to his bad behavior and to infringing the rules of the sacred law [*shar*] of his Lord. He must not seek help through supplication [*du'a*], nor must he seek help from anyone other than his Lord. No, he must remember his sins and practice self-criticism until, when he has done a thorough job of this, he can resort to acceptance of the decree of destiny [*qadar*], to surrender [*taslim*] and entrustment [*tafwid*] as far as his

heart is concerned. Once he is in this state, he will see an open door. “Whoever is dutiful toward Allah, He prepares a way out for him.” (*Qur’ān* 65:2) He puts His servant to the test to see how he will behave: “And We have put them to the test with good things and bad things.” (7:168)

Fool! You go through the motions of ritual prayer without sincerity. You perform the prayers [*tusalli*] for the sake of other people, and while you are fasting [*tasumu*] your eyes are on their dishes of food and on the contents of their houses.... I am giving you good advice and treating you with compassion. I am afraid you may die an atheist [*zindiq*], a pretender [*mura’i*], an impostor [*dajjal*]-doomed to suffer in your grave the punishment of the hypocrites [*munafiqun*]. So desist from what you are up to. Strip yourself naked and then put on the clothes of dutiful devotion [*taqwa*]. You will soon be dead. There is no hostility between me and you. You will have cause to remember what I am saying to you.... The remedy for someone who is separated [from the Lord] is detecting the cause of his separation, turning from it in repentance and confessing it in His presence.

There is nothing worth talking about until you cross the wastelands, the deserts, the two continents and the two oceans –the continent of creatures and the continent of the self [*nafs*], the ocean of the law [*hukm*] and the ocean of knowledge [*’ilm*]—as well as the shore.

The innermost being [*sirr*] is the secret of the mystery [*sirru’s-sirr*]

What did he [Moses] see [in God’s revelation at the burning bush]? The eye of the head saw a fire [*nar*], while the eye of the heart saw a light [*nur*]. The eye of the head saw a creation [*khalqan*], while the eye of the heart saw a Divine Truth [*haqqan*].

Your house sits on the River Tigris and yet you are dying of thirst. Just two steps and you would reach the All-Merciful [*ar-Rahman*]. The lower self [*nafs*] and creatures [are the two things you need to step away from]. Just two steps and you would reach your goal [God] in both this world and the hereafter.

I shall put out the fire [*hariq*] that threatens to burn your house down.

[To a powerful, rich man:] Open your eyes and take notice of what is in front of you. The squads of chastisement have come to get you. Woe unto you, O stupid fool! You will soon be dead. All that you are now involved in must fade away and be scattered. This fellow here will have to part with his children, wife and home, and then make friends with the dust, the grave, and either the stokers of Hell or the angels of mercy [*mala’ikat ar-rahma*]. O passing traveler, O transient, O temporary loan! Glory be to the One who treats you all so kindly [*subhana man manna ’alaihukum*], O you who like to have fun without ever taking notice! ... You are lazy. You are a little ignoramus, a silly little fool. You think you have something to give. How many like you this world has fattened and then devoured! It made them plump with fame and fortune, then ate them up. If we had seen any good in it [worldly fortune], you would not have beaten us to it. Do not all things come home to Allah? (*Qur’ān* 42:53) As for what we are involved in, it all comes from Allah (Exalted is He).

When someone has progressed to the ultimate degree of saintship [*wilaya*], he becomes a *Qutb* [*spiritual axis, pole or pivot*]. As such, he must carry the burdens of all creatures put together, but he is given the equivalent of the faith [*iman*] of all creatures put together, so that he will have the strength to bear what he must bear.

Pay no attention to my long shirt and my headcloth. This is what one wears after death. This is a shroud [*kafan*], the shroud of the dead. This is what befits me now, after I have been accustomed

to wearing coarse wool [*suf*] and to eating rough or going hungry. I now have a pressing engagement, but not with any of you [i.e., with God].... It is not an affectation. This is an outward appearance [*zahir*] that has an inner content [*batin*] to prove its authenticity, and an inner reality that has an outer manifestation to confirm it.

There is nothing worth talking about until your lords [*arbab*, everything that “rules” you] become one single Lord [*Rabb*], until your interests become single and the object of your love becomes single. Your heart must be unified. When will the nearness of the Lord of Truth pitch its tent in your heart? When will your heart come to be enraptured [*majdhub*] and your innermost being [*sirr*] drawn near [*muqarrab*], and when will you meet your Lord after taking your leave of creatures? As Allah's Messenger (Prophet Muhammad, Allah bless him and give him peace) has said: “If someone devotes himself entirely to Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He), He will provide him with everything he needs, but if a person devotes himself entirely to this world, Allah will leave him [unsafely] in its care.” [In the former case], things will occur miraculously [*tukhraqu'l-'adat*] for his benefit. He will receive what Allah has at His disposal, but only after total dedication to Him with his heart and his entire being [*kulliyya*].

Do you know anything at all about Allah (Exalted is He)? No, by Allah! You are all madly in love with this world and its glamour.... Cast your lower self into the Valley of Destiny until, when its time has come, the top rung of your ladder makes contact with the door of nearness [to the Lord]. You will be welcomed by a Face more lovely than all the charming beauty of this world and the hereafter. The fond affection [*mawadda*] between the pair of you will be complete. All obstacles and intermediaries will disappear.

If you realized that this world was sure to leave you in the lurch, you would not ask so much of it. When your inner [*batin*] becomes worthy to serve Allah, only then will this world become fit to serve you. Its wine is poison; it may taste sweet at first, but it soon turns bitter. Once it has filtered through into your heart and you have come under its control, it converts into a poison and kills you.

Allah (Exalted is He) gave that servant life, then He resurrected him as a different creature. Flesh had withered away, bone had weakened, skin had grown thin. The lower self had lost its sweet taste, passion [*hawa*] had departed and natural inclination [*tab'*] had been overcome, while the heart contained the spirit [*ruh*], the inner meaning [*ma'na*], the direct experience [*ma'rifa*] and realization of Divine Unity [*tawhid*]. The Lord of Truth brings His servant back to life after his death, his carnal desires and appetites having died a spiritual [*ma'nawi*] death.... Allah brings him back to life after He has shown him what is over there. To the servant He has left dead at His door, He shows the vast scope of His wisdom and His mysteries, the multitude of His soldiers and His subjects. Then, when He has shown him His kingdom and informed him of His secret [*sirr*], He joins his spirit [*ruh*] to his body and his outer [*zahir*] to his inner [*batin*], so that he may receive his allotted shares [*aqsam*] in full. Prior to this, even if all the portions of the East and the West had been spread out before him, he could not have taken one single atom from them. Through a mysterious power [*qudra khafiya*], an inner will [*irada batina*] exerted by Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He), His Prophets [*anbiya'*], His saints [*awliya'*] and the special few [*khawass*] among His creatures are detached from their worldly desires. Not the slightest trace of carnal desire and willfulness remains within them, so that their inner beings [*bawatin*] are purely devoted to Him. Then, when He wishes to grant them their allotted shares in full, He

creates the life of worldly existence [*wujud*] within them, so that all the allotted shares may be received.

Be aware that you are made to suffer because of your acquisitiveness, and be convinced that Allah (Exalted is He) is capable of sustaining you without effort or strain.... In Allah you have ample compensation for the loss of anything other than Him.... When someone has really come to know Allah, and has been admitted to His presence, he won't reach out with his eyes or his hands toward anything in His kingdom.

You must not go into seclusion with ignorance for company. Do not make a practice of it before you are adequately prepared. "Complete your studies, then retire [*tafaqqah thumma 'tazil*]."

You make no progress at all [despite all your study]. ... If there is no difference for a person between one day and the next, he must be a dimwit! ... Your ultimate destination is uncertain, so do not overestimate the purity of your spiritual state [*hal*].

Do not be an ignorant fool, sitting at home and indulging in your fantasies. Here we have medicines that we have drunk and found beneficial. Here we have something tried and tested, to which we can show you the way.

O seeker far from home, O wanderer lost in the trackless wilderness of destiny [*qadar*]! ... You need to empty your heart of this world, of carnal appetites and pleasures and trivial concerns of every kind. You must let it contain only remembrance [*dhikr*], contemplation [*fikr*], remembrance of death and remembrance of what lies beyond death. In it you must practice the alchemy [*kimiya'*] of curtailing expectation. You must say: "I am already dead," because actions become pure through the curtailment of expectation [*qasr al-amal*].... Someone who has mastered this is separated from everything, disconnected from everything. He wears the garb of abstinence [*zuhd*], then the garb of annihilation [*fana'*], then the garb of real experience [*ma'rifa*].

These people [of the Lord] have dissolved their lower selves [*nufus*], natural impulses [*tiba'*], passions [*ahwiya*] and tastes [*sharab*], to the point where they have died in the spiritual sense [*ma'nan*], where they have become extinct [*fanu*] in the spiritual sense. The hand of [divine] power [*qudra*] has taken control of them. The mortician of destiny [*qadar*] rolls them over to right and to left...

O my dear son, if you are still alive in the morning, do not take the evening for granted, and if you are here when evening comes, do not take the next morning for granted. Yesterday is past and gone with everything it contained, to be a witness for you and against you [at the Resurrection]. As for tomorrow, you do not know whether you will survive till then or not. You are simply the son of your today.

Become connected [*ittasil*], then become disconnected [*infasil*], then make connections [*awsil*]. "Complete your studies, then retire [*tafaqqah thumma 'tazil*]." If someone tries to worship Allah in a state of ignorance, he will do more harm than good. You must take along with you the lantern of your Lord's sacred law [*shar'*]. By the light of the law [*hukm*], you will enter into the domain of knowledge [*'ilm*].

[When one turns entirely to God:] The veils will be removed. Trouble and confusion will disappear. The lower self [*nafs*] will become calm. Tranquility [*sukun*] will arrive. The gifts of grace [*altaf*] will arrive.

Instead of wasting your time on the whys and the wherefores and on speculating about the future, you should pull yourself together, get moving and get down to work.... More is required of you than merely professing Islam. When will you put the truth into practice? When will you act on the truth?

Abstinence and renunciation are appropriate before direct experience [*ma'rifa*], before you attain to the King, before you know who you really are [*qabla an ta'rifa man anta*], what your title [*laqab*] is and what your [true] name [*ism*] is.

The believer [*mu'min*] must ask, as a way of calling himself to account and improving his behavior: "What did I intend by saying what I said? What did I intend by taking the step I took? What did I intend by eating what I ate? Why did I act as I did? Why did I do it? Is this in accordance with the Book [Qur'an] and the *Sunna*?" You must acquire certitude [*yaqin*] after self-examination [*muhasaba*].

One of the distinguishing features of the champions of truth [*siddiqun*] is that they resort to Allah in every case. When they wish to conceal their spiritual states [*ahwal*], they may resort to the give and take of dealing with creatures, but their hearts remain with Him while their bodies are in the company of His creatures.

The saints [*awliya*] of Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He) are already there in the nearness of the Lord of Truth. They have lived their lives in a close relationship with the Lord. They have died many deaths: first of all to that which is unlawful [*haram*], secondly to that which is dubious [*shubha*], thirdly to that which is indifferently permissible [*mubah*], fourthly to that which is unambiguously lawful [*halal tilq*], and fifthly to everything apart from Allah. They are dead to all these things; they neither seek them nor come anywhere near them. They appear to have undergone a transmutation, turning them into inner contents [*ma'ani*] with no outer forms [*suwar*]. Then Allah (Exalted is He) revives them.

[From the biography of the Shaikh, entitled *Necklaces of Gems or Qala'id al-Jawahir*, translated by Muhtar Holland. Here the Shaikh explains a long traditional list of Sūfī topics:]

When asked about love [mahabba], the Shaikh (may Allah be well pleased with him) said: It affects the heart, inspired by the Beloved [*Mahbub*], by contrast with Whom this world comes to be like ... a funeral wake. Love is total devotion to the Beloved, in every respect, both in private and in public, with a self-effacing predilection. It is a natural impulse, not an affectation. Love is blindness to everything other than Beloved, due to solicitude for Him. It is also blindness to the Beloved Himself, due to a profound respect for Him. It is therefore total blindness. *Asked about detachment [tajrid], the Shaikh explained:* It is the detachment of the innermost being [*sirr*] ... by steadily restraining it from pursuit of the object of desire, by stripping it bare, then clothing its nakedness with the assurance of freedom from restriction, and by returning from the creation [*khalq*] to the Truth [*Haqq*], in a state of repentance. *Asked about knowledge acquired by direct experience [ma'rifa], he said:* It is insight into the meanings of the secrets of the hiding places of the mysteries, and recognition of the visible signs of the Lord of Truth [*Haqq*] in everything that exists, by viewing every element thereof in the light of the meanings of His Uniqueness [*Wah-daniyya*]. It is the acquisition of the knowledge of Reality [*Haqiqqa*] in the extinction of every transitory being, when the Everlasting [*Baqi*] points toward it with the sign of the awe-inspiring

dignity of Lordship [*Rububiyya*]. On spiritual aspiration [*himma*]: The aspirant becomes completely naked, in every part of his being. In the case of his lower self [*nafs*], it is stripped of the love of this world. In the case of his spirit [*ruh*], it is stripped of attachment to the Hereafter. In the case of his heart [*qalb*], it is stripped of any will that competes with the Will of the Master [*Mawla*]. As for his innermost being [*sirr*], it is detached from paying the slightest attention to the created universe, even with a quick peep or glance. On the highest degree of Divine remembrance [*dhikr*]: This remembrance is permanent and enduring. No trace of forgetfulness impairs it, no heedlessness disturbs it, for the feelings, instincts and thoughts are all involved in the act of remembering. This is the frequent remembrance [*dhikr kathir*] referred to by the Lord of Truth (Glory be to Him, Exalted is He) in His revelation (*Qur'an* 144). Ardent yearning [*shawq*]: it cannot be truly authentic until it is completely stripped of its deficiencies: namely, the influence of an underlying motive, the pursuit of an ambitious desire, or the protection of a selfish interest. Absolute trust [*tawakkul*]: It is the preoccupation of the innermost being [*sirr*] with Allah (Exalted is He), to the exclusion of any other than Him. When someone puts all his trust in the Lord, he forgets whatever he used to rely on, for His sake, and depends on Him entirely, to the exclusion of all apart from Him. Absolute trust is the raising of the glance of the eye of direct perception [*ma'rifa*], by the innermost being [*sirr*], toward the hidden mystery of things decreed by destiny [*maqdurat*]. Contrition [*inaba*]: Contrition is the effort to pass beyond the intermediate stations, and to beware of halting on the ascending stages; then to advance to the highest of the hidden levels ... then to return entirely to the Lord of Truth (Exalted is He)... [It] means returning to Him from Him, for safety's sake [*hadharan*], and returning to Him from everything and every attachment other than Him. Repentance [*tawba*]: the process whereby the Lord of Truth looks toward His ancient and predestined providence [*'inaya*] for His servant, directs that providence toward His servant's heart, and tenderly detaches it, by attracting it toward Him and grasping it. When this takes place, the heart is drawn toward Him, away from corrupt ambition. The spirit obediently complies, heart and the mind follow suit, repentance is truly accomplished, and the whole affair becomes proper to Allah. The world [*ad-dunya*]: Evict it from your heart into your hand, so that it cannot beguile you. On Sufism [*tasawwuf*]: The Sufi is someone who makes that which the Lord of Truth wishes from him the object of his own wish. He renounces this world, so it serves him, and his allotted shares [*aqsam*] coincide with his needs. He achieves his purpose in this world, before the Hereafter, for his well-being is ensured by his Lord. Sheer exultation [*ta'azzuz*] is taking pride for the sake of Allah and in Allah. It entails abasement of the lower self [*nafs*] and the raising of the aspiration [*himma*] toward Him. Boastful arrogance [*takabbur*] is taking pride for the sake of the lower self, and in passionate desire. It entails the excitement of natural instinct, and the predominance of self-will, instead of respect for Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He). The true nature of thankfulness [*haqiqat ash-shukr*] is the acknowledgment of the gift of the Benefactor [*ni'mat al-Mun'im*], with humility, an overt recognition of the blessing, and a reverential confession of one's inability to give adequate thanks. Thankfulness can be subdivided into several categories, namely: 1) Thankfulness expressed by the tongue [*shukr al-lisan*]. This constitutes the acknowledgment of the gift [*ni'ma*] with an attitude of humble acceptance [*istikana*]. 2) Thankfulness expressed by the body and the limbs [*shukr bi'l-badan wa 'l-arkan*]. This is the characteristic indication of loyalty and readiness to serve [*al-wafa' wa 'l-khidma*]. 3) Thankfulness expressed by the inner feeling [*shukr bi'l-qalb*]. This requires a careful balance between the visible display of appreciation and the constant preservation of a sense of reverence. Beyond this stage, thankfulness passes from the realm of the visible to the realm of the invisible

[*ghaiba*], where the focus of attention is the Benefactor [*Mun'im*], rather than the gift [*ni'ma*]. ... *Patience [sabr]* means coping with misfortune by remaining on your best behavior. It means welcoming His decrees, and accepting them. ... The patient pauper is worthier than the grateful rich man, and the grateful pauper is worthier than either. As for the pauper who is both patient and thankful, he is worthier than any of them.... *Goodness of moral character [husn al-khulq]*: you are not affected by the rudeness of creatures once you have become acquainted with the Truth [*Haqq*]. You belittle your own lower self [*nafs*] and whatever arises from it, in full recognition of its faults and you honor your fellow creatures and what arises from them.... *Personal extinction [fana'] [the Sūfī goal]*: It is experienced when the Lord of Truth discloses Himself to the innermost being [*sirr*] of His saint [*wali*], with a most immediate manifestation [*tajalli*]. Under the impact of that demonstration, the whole universe is annihilated, and the saint becomes extinct. The extinction he thereby undergoes is actually his survival in perpetuity [*baqa'*], but he will only survive under the direction of the Everlasting One [*Baqi*], for it is He who has rendered him extinct, and it is He who has granted him perpetual existence. *On survival in perpetuity [baqa']* [what remains after *fana'*]: It comes about only through the Meeting that is not accompanied by extinction nor by separation. This only happens like the twinkling of the eye, or even more immediately. ... *On contentment [rida]*: the removal of desire for favorable attention, satisfaction with whatever has been predestined in the foreknowledge of Allah in His eternity-without-beginning [*azal*], and contentment with what has been foreordained in destiny's decree [*qadar*].... *Divine providence [inaya]* is sempiternal [*azaliyya*], for it is one of Allah's Attributes [*Sifat*]. He hasn't divulged it to anyone, and it can't be reached by any device.... No deficiency can corrupt it and nothing can disrupt it. It is the secret of Allah (Exalted is He). *On the state of ecstasy [wajid]*: the spirit [*ruh*] is preoccupied with the sweetness of the remembrance [*dhikr*], and the lower self [*nafs*] is preoccupied with the pleasure of the entertainment [*tatrib*], while the innermost being [*sirr*] remains wholly devoted to the Beloved Friend [*Habib*], impervious to any outside influence, in its dedication to the Truth, in the presence of the Truth [*Haqq*]. The experience of ecstasy is a beverage which the Master [*Mawla*] gives his saint [*wali*] to drink, on the pulpit of His Noble Grace [*Karama*]. When he drinks, he becomes light-headed and his heart flies on the wings of intimate friendship [*uns*] in the gardens of Holiness [*Quds*]. Then it falls into the ocean of awe, and is thrown into a trance, so the ecstatic [*wajid*] swoons into unconsciousness.... *On hope [raja']*: As far as the saints [*awliya'*] are concerned, hope means having a good opinion [*husn az-zann*] of Allah (Exalted is He). It has nothing to do with any desire for benefit, nor for the removal of harm, because those who are worthy of sainthood [*ahl al-wilaya*] know full well that He has taken care of all their needs. That knowledge makes them realize the value of personal extinction [*fana'*].... To have a good opinion of Allah means recognizing Him in the beauty of His attributes [*sifat*], then basing your expectation [*amal*] of Him on what is relevant to Him, not on what relates to His servant. That expectation must be based on the knowledge that His attributes include Beneficent [*Muhsin*], Generous [*Karim*], Compassionate [*Rahim*], Gracious [*Latif*], and Kind [*Ra'uf*]. The craving of the common folk [is] dignified by the term "hope" [*raja'*], but ... the term "greed" [*tama'*] is more appropriate.... *On direct witnessing [mushahada]*: the experience of becoming blind to the two realms of being [this world and the Hereafter] with the eye of the heart, and beholding the Lord of Truth with the eye of direct perception [*ma'rifa*]. *Spiritual inebriation [sukr]*: the fermentation [*ghalayan*] of the hearts, brought about by the remembrance [*dhikr*] of the Beloved. *Certainty [yaqin]*: the verification of the causes and the secrets, through mastery of the transcendental mysteries, contact with the Be-

loved, separation from everything apart from Him, the cultivation of intimate familiarity, estrangement from external influences, and total absorption in remembrance [*dhikr*]. When the wish for Him envelops the heart, the whole of it becomes His possession. Then, when He has possessed it, the wish for anything other than Him falls from the heart, and the transfer of ownership becomes a reality. This is a pure state of being. When you remember Him, you are a lover [*muhibb*], and when you hear His remembrance of you, you are a loved one [*mahhub*]. Your fellow creatures are the veil that screens you from your own self [*nafs*], and your own self is the veil that screens you from your Lord [*Rabb*].

What is required of the faqir, the spiritual pauper [the truly unattached Sūfi] is that he should be flexible in thinking [*fikr*], centered in remembrance [of God, *dhikr*], courteous in disagreement and ready to assist in reconciliation [*muraja'a*]. He must seek nothing from the Lord of Truth but the Truth [*Haqq*], and he must practice nothing but truthfulness [*sidq*]. He must be the most tolerant of people, and the most self-effacing. His laughter should be of the cheerful, smiling kind, and his curiosity should be used as an instrument of learning. He should be a reminder to the heedless, and a teacher to the ignorant. He mustn't hurt those who hurt him, and he mustn't meddle in things of no concern to him. He must give plenty in the way of favors, but little in the way of offense. He must be careful to abstain from things that are unlawful, and stand well clear of things that are of dubious legality. He must be a helper [*ghawth*] to the stranger, and a father to the orphan. His joy should be apparent in his face, while his sadness is stored in his heart. He should be engrossed in his contemplation [*fikr*] and happy in his poverty [*faqr*].... He must be graceful in movement, bountiful in kindness, charming in outlook, generous in providing benefits, refined in taste, excellent in moral character, and very gentle. He should be a precious substance that melts and flows. He should be long on silence [*samt*], agreeable in manner [*na't*], forbearing when he is treated foolishly, and very patient with anyone who treats him badly. There should be no freezing [*jumud*] of the feelings in his presence, and no extinguishing [*khumud*] of the fire of Truth.... He must treat the elderly with deference, and the young with compassion. He must be worthy of trust [*amana*] and far from betrayal [*khiyana*]. His habit should be true devotion, and modesty should be his natural disposition. He should always be on the alert, and make vigilance his constant practice. He should take little for granted, and be very long-suffering. He should mean little to himself, but a great deal to his brothers. His behavior should be an example of good conduct [*adab*], and his speech should be a marvel [*'ajab*]. He must never gloat over anyone's misfortune, nor speak ill of anyone behind his back. He must be dignified and very patient, content and very thankful. He should spend little time in talking, and make a frequent practice of ritual prayer [*salat*] and fasting.... He should treat his guests with cordial hospitality, and supply everyone present with whatever food is available.... He must not be a verbal abuser, backbiter, slanderer, calumniator, or faultfinder. He must not be impetuous, inattentive, envious, irritable, malicious, or ungrateful. He must have a tongue that is stored away [*makhzun*], a heart that is grief-stricken [*mahzun*] [over the evil in the world], a way of speaking that is measured [*mawzun*], and a way of thinking that travels far and wide, through what has been and what is yet to be [*ma yakun*]."

One of 15 extant letters of the Shaikh (the 5th Letter):

My dear friend! When the suns of our spiritual experiences [*ma'arif*] rise from their points of ascension in the skies of our innermost beings, the earths of our hearts will be illuminated by the light of [as the *Qur'ān* says]: *And the earth will shine with the light of its Lord. (wa ashraqati 'l-ardu bi-nuri Rabbi-ha--39:69)*--and the coverings of the darkness of ignorance will be removed from the eyes of our minds, with the ointment of: *But now We have removed from you your covering. (fa-kashafna 'an-ka ghita'a-ka--Qur'ān 50:22)*. The eyes of our inward intellects will then be dazzled by the radiant emanations of the lights of holiness [*al-quds*]. Our processes of thought will wonder in amazement, at the disclosure of the marvelous secrets of the realm of the spiritual kingdom [*al-malakut*]. Excited by the thrill of ardent love [*al-'ishq*], the seeker will go a-wandering in the deserts of the quest. Then, in the sites of nearness, the raptures of yearning [*ghalabat ash-shawq*] will become familiar to him, and the herald of: *Allah is truly Bountiful toward mankind. (inna 'llaha la-Dhu Fadlin 'ala 'n-nasi--10:60)*--will proclaim: *And He is with you wherever you may be. (wa Huwa ma'a-kum aina-ma kuntum--57:4)*. Once he has discovered the secret of 'togetherness' [*al-ma'iyya*], the seeker will lose his personal existence, in compliance with the dictate: *And do not set together with Allah another god. (wa la taj'alu ma'a 'llahi ilahan akhar--51:51)*. As soon as he has plunged into the sea of the personal extinction [*fana'*] of: *No part of the matter is your concern. (laisa la-ka mina 'l-amri shai'un--3:128)*--so that he may obtain the jewel of the affirmation of Oneness [*tawhid*], the waves of solicitude [*ghaira*] will fling him into the ocean of sublimity [*'azama*]. Each time he makes for the shore, in the plight of bewilderment, he must say: *My Lord, I have wronged myself, so forgive me! (Rabbi inni zalamtu nafsi fa-'ghfir li--28:16)*--for then he will be picked up by the rescue vessels of the kind favors of: *And We have carried them on land and sea. (wa hamalna-hum fi 'l-barri wa 'l-bahri--17:70)*--and they will set him down on the beach of the tender kindness of: *We visit with Our mercy whom We will. (nusibu bi-rahmati-na man nasha'u--12:56)*. They will hand him the keys to the treasure houses of the mysteries of: *And Allah is always encompassing all things. (wa kana 'llahu bi-kulli shai'in Muhita--4:126)*--and they will point out to him the indications of: *And that unto your Lord is the final destination. (wa anna ila Rabbi-ka 'l-muntaha--53:42)*. He will thereby come to know the meaning of: *And He revealed to His servant that which He revealed. (fa-awha ila 'abdi-hi ma awha--53:10)*--and he will understand the implication of: *Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord. (la-qad ra'a min ayati Rabbi-hi 'l-kubra--53:18)*. [*Khamsatta Ashara--Fifteen Letters*, www.al-baz.com/shaikhabdalqadir/Books_and_Texts_of_Wisdom/]

From *Al-Fath ar-Rabbani*—The Sublime Revelation (62 discourses, given in the Baghdad Ri-baat and Madrasa, in AH 545-546). Excerpts from the 8th Discourse, transl. by Muhtar Holland:

The pious pretender [*mura'i*] wears clean clothes, but his heart is filthy.... His game may be hidden from the common folk [*'awamm*], but it is not concealed from the Elite [*khawass*] (the true saints).... Strip yourself bare of what you now have on, so that I may get for you from the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He) an outfit that will never wear out. Get undressed so that He may clothe you. Take off the garment of your indifference to the rights [*huquq*] of Allah. Take off the garment of your attachment to creatures and your idolization [*shirk*] of them. Take off the garment of lust, frivolity, conceit and hypocrisy, of your love of being acceptable to people and having them approach you and bring you gifts. Take off the clothing of this world, and

put on the clothing of the hereafter. Divest yourself of your power, your strength and your very existence [*wujud*], and throw yourself down before the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He)... without idolatrous worship of any created thing. Then, if you do this, you will see His gracious favors all around you. His mercy will come to join you, and His blessing and benefit will clothe you and enfold you in their embrace. Flee to Him. Dedicate yourself wholly to Him, naked, with no you and no one other than you... When someone blots out creatures by virtue of his realization of Unity [*tawhid*], blots out this world by virtue of his renunciation [*zuhd*], and blots out everything else apart from his Lord (Almighty and Glorious is He) by virtue of his longing, that person is completely prepared for righteousness [*salah*] and success [*najah*], and he will enjoy all the blessings of this world and the hereafter. You must experience the mortification of your lower selves, your desires and your devils, before you die. Experience the special death [*al-mawt al-khass*] before the common death [*al-mawt al-'amm*].

O my people! Respond to me, for I am the crier of Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He), calling you to His door and His obedient service. I am not calling you to myself. The hypocrite does not call the people to Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He); he is a self-promoter. He is looking for favors and acceptance, seeking worldly gain.

O ignorant one, you give up listening to words like these, and sit there in your cell, with only your own self and your passions for company! What you need first is the fellowship of the Shaikhs [*shuyukh*], and the slaying of the lower self, the natural instincts and everything apart from the Master (Almighty and Glorious is He). You must stay by the door of their houses, I mean the Shaikhs', then after that you may go off by yourself, and sit in your cell alone with the Lord of Truth. When this has been fully accomplished by you, you will come to be a remedy for the people, a rightly guided guide [*hadi mahdi*] by permission of the Lord of Truth (Almighty and Glorious is He).

As you are now, your tongue is pious [*wari'*], but your heart is immoral [*fajir*]. Your tongue praises Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He), while your heart resists Him. Your outer being is a Muslim, but your inner is an unbeliever [*kafir*]. Your outer is a monotheist [*muwahhid*], but your inner is a polytheist [*mushrik*]. Your asceticism [*zuhd*] is part of your facade. Your religion [*din*] is part of your facade. Inwardly, you are a mess. It is like whitewash on the toilet, or a lock on the garbage can. Since this is how you are, Satan has set up camp in your heart and made it a place for him to live in.

The believer starts with the development of his inner being, then tackles the development of his outer being. Someone who is constructing a house will spend large sums of money on its interior while the gateway is just rubble; he will leave fixing the entrance until after he has completed the main building. One must likewise begin with Allah (Almighty and Glorious is He) and earning His good pleasure [*rida*], and then pay attention to creatures with His permission.

[--another gem from Muhtar Holland's website www.al-baz.com]