

A GREAT SUFI MASTER

SOLOMON'S RING

**The Life and Teachings of a Sufi Master
by Gul Hasan**

Translated from Urdu by Hasan Askari

This book is a gem to behold and its contents are a treasure. It contains stories, parables, Revelations and the teachings of the great Sufi Master Bhauth Ali Shah (d. 7 March 1880) and a brief account of his life written by his illustrious disciple Gul Hasan and translated, rearranged and introduced by the distinguished Sufi scholar and poet Hasan Askari. Gul Hasan had completed this *tadhkira* (record: memoir), named it *tadhkira ghauthya*: The Tree of Gnosis. This happened on 14 *Shaban* 1301 *Hijra* [9 June 1884]. We had to wait for over 100 years before the English translation of this Urdu text to appear. The Master revealed himself in a dream to Hasan Askari which prompted him to save the termite-infested Urdu manuscript in his possession and now he has done a great service by making this translation available to us.

Digressing tentatively, we could say that this is the age of an autocratic scientism and an arrogant group of scientific men who know not the eternal limitations of their game. The cacophony of the industrial revolution spread into Darwin's transformist conjecture (please note that it is still a fatal and morbid conjecture), into Marx who replaced Yahwa as an idol (note the many icons of Marx and marxist heroes that have mushroomed on the earth and the materially real decorated corpses of Mao and Lenin kept live for posterity to pray to), into Freud who scribbled graffiti on the pages of the Old Testament, and finally culminated in the Big Bang [!] (It should

start somewhere no?). There was a Big bang. Nobody heard the bang. There was NO hearing then!.

What is common to all anti-religious anti-mystical thought systems (dialectical and other materialisms included) is that they insist violently that all religions and the sacred texts are futile nonsense. All those who speak about God, Immortality, Tawhid, Advaita, Brahman, Allah, Buddha, Krishna, Christ etc. are fools who don't comprehend material reality. Yet, outside castes, creeds and nationalities a primordial tradition of the seekers of the Great Light existed ever since Man came to be on the earth and would continue to Reveal its Divine Resplendences to the fortunate and the humble till the Apocalypse when All would reunite in Infinite Ecstasy with God. This book is a portion of the Revelations of that vast esoteric tradition which includes Yogic, Sufi, Tantrik, Zen, Christian Gnostic etc.

After an honest and personal introduction and a somewhat too short an essay on Sufism by Hasan Askari we read an introduction by the author of the book Gul Hasan. Then seventy six stories as told by the great master are narrated. There is a brief account of the master's teachings and his spiritual life. There is also a passionate soliloquy by a Hindu Rishi on Advaita Vedanta and we recognize that it is literally the Tawhid of the Sufi Path.

This hilarious story called 'Moses and the Lizard' gives a glimpse into the book.

Once Moses was sitting in a house when a lizard scuttling across the roof urinated and a few drops fell on to Moses. Irritated, Moses raised his hands to God and said, "For what purpose did you create that creature?"

God replied, "Moses, do you know that every day this lizard asks me, Why did

you create that man and what is his purpose?” (p.12)

The book is about *Tawhid* (the Islamic doctrine of the Oneness/Unity of God). The following story “Negation and Affirmation” clarifies.

One of our friends went into his village mosque one night to offer his prayers. There he saw a man performing zikr (remembrance), eyes closed, chanting the mighty words of negation and affirmation. When he said, “*La Ilaha* (There is no God)”, he disappeared, and when he said, “*Il’l’Allah* (but God)”, he reappeared.

The following morning, while our friend was standing in the street outside the mosque, he saw a faqir approaching him. “You must have been surprised at what you saw last night,” said the faqir, adding as he left, “Be at the mosque tonight and I’ll show you something more surprising.”

When our friend entered the mosque the following night he saw the faqir already settled in his zikr. When he said the words of negation, he disappeared along with the faqir, and at the recital of affirmation he reappeared with him. During his disappearance he had no idea where he was, nor could he understand how he was reunited with his consciousness as an existence and an identity.

After some time, the faqir stopped his strange zikr and turned towards him, and said, “It is all a great jugglery — even if you reach perfection in the art of zikr you will still have no clue about God. Have you?” (p.24)

Here is another story about Tawhid of Annihilation (say *Samadhi*) and total Oneness with God.

Hallaj (d.922) was hanged because he added the word *haq* (truth) to *ana* (self). Yet otherwise the whole world says “Haq, Haq” many times and nobody is hanged.

(Hallaj is reported to have said openly *Ana'l Haz* (I am the truth) which became one of the bases of the orthodox charge of blasphemy against him. For details, see Louis Massignon, *Passion d'Al-Hallaj*, vols. 1 and 2 (Paris, 1992), translated as *Tasin* by Abdus Salam (Leeds, 1991).) (p.34)

Ghauth Ali Shah was initiated at a very early age into three major Sufi orders: Suhrawardiya [assuming a distinct identity in the thirteenth century], Qadriya and Naqshbandiya [originating in the twelfth and fourteenth centuries respectively] and also into several dimensions of mystical life by nineteen spiritual elders, eleven of whom were Muslim and eight of whom were Hindu. (p.177)

There is a beautiful account of a dream in which Ghauth Ali Shah encounters Lord Krishna and Prophet Mohammed and recognizes that the universal Truth is the same however it is expressed.

The Gayatri Mantra always begins with om and it is not Gul Hasan who added this invocation to its beginning as the author says. (p.189) Gul Hasan's translation of the Gayatri is somewhat strange.

Krishna in the glossary is identified as an incarnation of god Vishnu. But the meaning of Vishnu (All pervasive) is not given and I was amused at the lack of a capital G for God. Further for symmetry and universality, Prophet Mohammed should also have been included in the glossary. It is 'Dasaratha' and 'Madhava' not 'Jasrat' and 'Mathava' as mentioned in the text.

This book gave me so much joy that I felt honoured to be a reader. The translation is lucid and flowing. But ironically its price is prohibitive, \$ 46.00 (cloth bound) and \$ 22.00 (paper-back). Another truthful irony is that this book is obviously banned

in Arabia. But let us welcome such books. “Just as the waters of the sky reach the same ocean so do all the prayers reach the same Godhead.”

We can discern that the problem is not about the Universals but about the particulars. This painful problem of particulars should surely have an Apocalyptic Consummation as the sacred books affirm when a million Suns would appear in the sky and the Kingdom of Light would be established on the earth.

“On that day nothing from one’s wealth or family will benefit anyone before God except a heart pure and gentle” (Qur’an 26.89).

“Christ came into the world to purify, not to fulfil. He himself foreknew the failure of his mission and the necessity of his return with the sword of God into a world that had rejected him.”

“Be not repelled by the world’s crookednesses; the world is a wounded and venomous snake wriggling towards a destined offsloughing and perfection. Wait, for it is a divine wager; and out of this baseness, God will emerge brilliant and triumphant.” (Sri Aurobindo – Thoughts and Aphorisms, p. 169,295)

Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me. (Isaiah 28:11–12, quoted in Corinthians 14:21).

Mar Valah! Om Nama Shivaya! La Ilaha Il’l’Allah! Om Namō Maitreya Buddhaya! Hari Hi Om.