

THE  
UNVEILING  
OF LOVE

Sufism and the  
Remembrance of God

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AŞKIYYÖL - CERRAHI - HALVETİ

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## A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It was in 1916 (A.H. 1332) that my mother, Hajja Aysha Ozak, brought me into the world. My birthplace was our house near the *tekke* (Sufi meeting place) of the Jerrahi Dervishes in the Karagumruk quarter of Istanbul.

My father, Hajji Mehmed Efendi of Konya, was an Islamic scholar and a teacher at the court of Sultan Abdul Hamid. He was the first scholar in a long line of warriors. My two uncles were standard-bearers with the forces of Ghazi Osman Pasha, the hero of Plevna. One of them was promoted to the rank of general for his bravery in saving the standard from falling into the hands of the enemy. He was wounded in a later battle and taken prisoner by the Russians, but after his release from captivity he continued to serve as a general in the Ottoman army until the day he died. My other uncle, Bekir, fell in action at Plevna and was accorded a martyr's funeral.

My father's family was an old one, which divided into two branches: the Jebejioghullari and the Bashagaoghullari. Breaking with the family's military tradition, my father Mehmed Efendi studied at the Kurshunlu medrese (Islamic school) in Suleymaniye, Istanbul. He was then posted to the school in Plevna, at that time still part of the Ottoman Empire, where he married my mother, Aysha Hanum

My mother was the granddaughter of Seyyid Hussein Efendi, the Halveti Sheikh of the town of Yanbolu. Her father was Captain Ibrahim Agha, from the district of Eregli on the Black Sea, who had studied at the maritime college in the time of Sultan Mahmud the Just. Having fallen ill on a voyage to what is now Bulgaria, he went to seek treatment at the Yanbolu *tekke*. This was how my grandfather came to meet Sheikh Hussein Efendi, eventually joining his *tekke* through marriage to his daughter. Seyyid Hussein Efendi was brother to the Governor of Yanbolu.

When the Balkan provinces were lost in 1878 (A.H. 1293), the surviving members of my family migrated to Istanbul, where my father received his appointment to the Imperial Palace. My father's ancestors belonged to the Kizilkecheli clan of the tribe known as Kayi Turk. My mother's family, the Ozaks, were Seyyids descended

from Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet, on him be peace.

My father, Mehmed Efendi, died tragically when I was only six months old. My elder brother, Murad Reis, survived the 1914-1918 war, which caused the loss of many of my relatives, only to be killed one Friday in Istanbul by the Occupation forces. I had no one left my mother, my sister, and two cousins, little girls orphaned by the war. We were destitute.

At that time, when I was five or six years old, I was taken into the care of my father's schoolmate, Seyyid Sheikh Abdurrahman Samiyyi Saruhani of the Kadiri, Nakshbandi, Ushaki, and Halveti orders, who saw my upbringing for twelve years. During this time I finished primary school and was in the second year of secondary school when God took to His mercy my beloved Sheikh, who was as dear to me as my own father. Meanwhile I had been studying the Koran and had committed many parts of it to memory. I completed these studies under the chief Imam of the Fatih Mosque, Mehmed Rasim Efendi. For the next eight years I followed the lectures of Arnavut Husrev Efendi on Hadith and Islamic Law. Poverty obliged me to work by day, but in the evenings I studied under Gumuljineci Mustafa Efendi, who was nicknamed the "Walking Library."

In due course I qualified as a muezzin and served in that capacity first at the Ali Yaziji, then at the Soghan Agha Mosque. From there I moved to the Kefeli Mosque in Karagumruk, where I was instructed by the Imam, Shakir Efendi, in the art of book dealing. Then I was appointed muezzin to the Grand Mosque of Beyazit, beside which the booksellers have their market.

It was while I was serving at this mosque that I met the Imam of Bakirkoy, Hafiz Ismail Hakki Efendi, who admitted my voice and my style. This pupil of Eyuplu Hafiz Ahmet, the son of the famous musician Zekai Efendi of the Mevlevi Order, was to teach me the religious hymns and odes known as *ilahi*, *kaside*, *durak*, *mevlud*, and *mersiye*. My teacher was so fond of me that he gave me in marriage his close relative Gulsum Hanum, who was headmistress of a school. Thus I became part of his family. I moved into my bride's house, near Suleymaniye Mosque built by the famous architect Sinan. I had been appointed Imam of the Veznejiler Mosque, and for

twenty-three years I was to serve as honorary Imam at the great Suleymaniye during the month of Ramadan. When my own mosque collapsed, I was appointed Imam of the mosque in the Covered Bazaar.

As this mosque had no pulpit, and was therefore unsuitable for Friday congregational prayers, the community helped to restore a nearby ruin and I started leading Friday prayers there, in response to popular demand. This restored mosque is known as Jamili Han. Although now retired from the Imamate, I still lead Friday prayers there and give guidance and instruction in an honorary capacity.

At present I am the owner of a large bookstore, which is visited by people from all over the world. I can claim some knowledge of old manuscripts, since before my military service I studied calligraphy and decorative art under the Chief Calligraphers at the Academy of Fine Art, Haji Kamil, Haji Nureddin, and Turakesh Ismail Hakki Bey, as well as having forty-two years of practical experience in the book trade.

My first marriage lasted twenty years, but produced no children. I remarried after the death of my first wife, and am now the father of a girl and a boy.

I have performed the Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina eleven times. In Iraq I have visited six times, Syria and Palestine eight, Egypt three. In all these places I got to know many Sufis and Sheikhs. I have also met Sheikhs and scholars in Istanbul and other Turkish cities, have enjoyed their company, and have learned their views and teachings.

But of all the venerable persons I have met, I profited most from the one who was my benefactor and first Sheikh of my tender years, Sheikh Samiyyi Saruhani Ushshakiyul-Halveti. This holy person wrote over twenty books on Islamic law and Sufism, in Turkish and in Arabic. All of these works have been published. I also know of his many unpublished manuscripts on chemistry, alchemy, herbal medicine, and other subjects, which were destroyed during a fire that wiped out a great part of Istanbul. In fact, he himself destroyed some of his books on chemistry and alchemy, being in doubt whether they would be used for good purposes. This wonderful

person, with whom I spent much of my childhood, was loved and respected by all of his noble character, good humor, generosity, courage, friendliness, and humility.

The next guide I was to encounter during my early youth was another Halveti Sheikh from the Shabaniya branch, Seyyid Sheikh Ahmed Tahir ul-Marashi. His specialization was Sheikh Ibn al-'Arabi. With him I studied *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiya* and the *Fusus*. I studied the interpretation of the Koran under Nevshehirli Haji Hayrulla and Atif Hoja. I followed the teachings of Haji Abdul Hakim Arvasi and Sheikh Shefik Efendi, and with the wisdom received from these wonderful men of knowledge I have for thirty years preached to and taught the people in forty-two mosques in Istanbul, including huge crowds in the grand mosques of Sultan Ahmed (Blue Mosque, Yeni Jami, Nuruosmaniye, Beyaziy, Laleli, Valide Sultan, Fatih, Eyub, Kojamustafa Pasha, and Suleymaniye.

During my early youth, while studying Koran interpretation at the Aya Sofya Mosque in Istanbul, I dreamed one night of the Prophet, on him be peace. He was riding his camel, led by Imam Ali, may God be pleased with him, who was holding in his other hand his famous sword, the two-edged Zulfikar. Addressing me, the Prophet asked if I had faith and if I was a Muslim. When I said yes, he asked me if I would give my head for Islam. Again I said yes. Then the Prophet told Imam Ali to cut my head off in the name of Islam. Imam Ali asked me to stretch my neck out, then struck me with all his might, severing my head from my body. I awoke in terror. When I saw my Koran teacher next morning, I told him my dream and then told him who my father was. I knew he was a close friend of my late father, but I had never mentioned it before. He shook his head and said: "Ah, so you are the son of my fellow exile, are you?" My father and my teacher were among the seven hundred Sheikhs and theologians who were banished to the port of Sinop on the Black Sea by the revolutionaries of the Committee of Union and Progress, for having supported the Sultan. The exile of these religious dignitaries had continued until the First World War in 1914.

My teacher then interpreted my dream and said that I was going to join the Sufi path of Ali and that I would become the Sheikh

of a particular order.

Many years after that incident, when I had opened my store of rare books near the Beyazit Mosque and become a well-known Imam and preacher, I had another dream. I was in the middle of the Bosphorus between the Topkapi Palace and Uskudar, in a small sailing boat whose sails were torn and whose mast was broken. A terrible storm was raging. Someone handed me a sheet of paper and told me to read it so that I would be saved from the calamity. When I came back to my shop next morning, I saw the very person who had giving me the paper in my dream, passing in front of my shop. I could not father the courage to call him. A couple of days later I dreamed about the same person. He was walking on the other side of the street and beckoned to me with his walking stick. The next morning, in amazement, I again saw him passing in front of my shop. I felt that there was a spiritual meaning to these dreams, but I did nothing about it. A short while later I saw the same man again in a dream in which he hugged me so hard that I felt my bones about to break. Then he let me go, held up the crown of the Halveti Order, and put the turban on my head. I felt crushed under the weight of the turban. It was as if the seven heavens were sitting on my head.

As soon as I came to open my shop in the morning, I saw the man walking by, stick in hand. I told myself: "There is a mystery and a spiritual message in this situation. I am not going to call this man. Let him come to me." He walked by, my eyes following him, then he stopped and came and stood in front of my shop, stuck his head through the door, and said: "You bigot, three times you have seen me. When are you going to start having faith?"

"Right now," said I, grabbing and kissing his hand. This holy person was Seyyid Sheikh Ahmed Tahir ul-Marashi, the Sheik of the Halveti-Shabani. I became his dervish, and he would come to my shop every day. Some days he would speak, on others remain silent, but in either case he would be teaching me. This continued for seven years.

During this time I met a friend of my master, Evranoszade Sami Bey, who belonged to the same order. It was he who clad me in the dervish cloak. In that ceremony, I knew so little that I objected to

the cloak being put on my shoulders: “O Master, how can I permit someone like you to hold my cloak for me?” I was told that my mind did not yet grasp the subtle meaning, but that they were giving me the dervish cloak to wear.

Sami Bey left this world one Night of Power. Three years later my master Tahir Efendi fell and broke his hip as he was walking from my ship. As I was trying to lift him up, he said: “They have been trying to destroy me, and now at last they have succeeded.” He lasted three months. When I visited him before his death, he once showed me the crown of the saint Ibrahim Kushadali and said, “If I go, let Mustafa Efendi keep this crown.” This Mustafa Efendi was one of his *khalifas*. Then one day my master called me and told me his last wishes. He died the next day, which was a Saturday, and we buried him in the graveyard of the Faith Mosque, next to Sheikh Turbedar Efendi, who had been his Sheikh.

That night, having submitted to God the question whether I should become the dervish of Mustafa Efendi, I dreamed that he was laughing at me boisterously. I could not ascribe a meaning to this, so I submitted my question a second time. That night I dreamed that he was shouting at me angrily and calling me “softy.” Under these circumstances I could not become his dervish. I was left for a while without a Sheikh, waiting for a spiritual message. During that time I visited the *tekke* of the Kadiris in Beyogly and then the Rifais in Kasim Pasha. The Halveti *tekke* had burned down. These two places were the only centers where the dhikr ceremony was held.

During that time Gavsı Efendi, the Sheikh of the Kadiris, tried to persuade me to become his *khalifa*, using as intermediaries Ismail Efendi, the Sheikh of the Bedevis; Jevat Efendi, the Sheikh of the Sadis; and Colonel Salahettin Efendi, the Sheikh of the Sunbulis. I told them that although my Sheikh was dead, I was a Halveti; thus I could not decide by myself, but would have to submit the matter and wait for a spiritual message; if I received a positive answer, I would not need to be a khalifa, but would gratefully accept to be a humble dervish of the Sheikh.