

Extracts from the Letters of Shaikh Al-‘Arabī Ad-Darqāwī

translated by
Titus Burckhardt

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The sickness afflicting your heart, *faqīr*, comes from the passions which pass through you; if you were to abandon them and concern yourself with what God ordains for you, your heart would not suffer as it suffers now. So listen to what I say to you and may God take you by the hand. Each time your soul attacks you, if you were to be quick to do what God orders and were to abandon your will entirely to Him, you would most certainly be saved from psychic and satanic suggestions and from all trials. But if you begin to reflect in these moments when your soul attacks you, to weigh the factors for and against, and sink into inner chatter, then psychic and satanic suggestions will flow back towards you in waves until you are overwhelmed and drowned, and no good will be left in you, but only evil. May God guide us and you on the path of His Saints, Amen.

The Venerable Master, Saint Ibn ‘Atā-illāh says in his *Hikam*: “Since you know that the Devil will never forget you, it is your business not to forget Him who ‘leads you by the forelock’” (Koran 11:56).¹ And our Master used to say: “The true way to hurt the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend; on the other hand, if you engage in war with the enemy, he will have obtained what he wanted from you and at the same time you will have lost the opportunity of loving the Friend.” And we say: All good is in the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, and the only way that leads towards Him is through renunciation of the world, keeping apart from people, inner and outer discipline. “Nothing is more useful to the heart than solitude, thanks to which it enters the arena of meditation,” as the Venerable Master Ibn ‘Atā-illāh says in his *Hikam*. And we say: Nothing is of more profit to the heart than renunciation of the world and the fact of being seated between the hands of God’s Saints.

1. Grasp of the forelock: an Arabic idiom, referring to a horse’s forelock. The man who grasps it has complete power over the horse and for the horse the forelock is as it were the crown of his beauty, the sum of his power of self-assertion.

Dethronement of the ego is a necessary condition, according to us and according to all the Masters of the Way, and in this respect one of them said: “The very thing you fear from me is what my heart desires.” But you, *faqīr*, should not say this before having said it to your own soul and having forced it to follow this road and no other.

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As to this professor you told me about who is unable to find the state of presence,² tell him not to look towards the past nor towards the future, to become the son of the moment, and to take death as the target before his eyes. Then he will find this state, God willing.

We said to one of our brothers: Let him who wishes to be in a perpetual state of presence restrain his tongue. And we advise you: if you are in a state of perplexity (*hayrah*),³ do not hasten to cling to anything, either by writing or by anything else, lest you close the door of necessity with your own hand, because for you this state takes the place of the supreme Name, but God is wiser. Ibn ‘Atā-illāh says in his *Hikam*: “Sudden distress heralds feast days for one who aspires”; and again: “Distress is the key to spiritual gifts”; and again: “You will perhaps find a benefit in distress which you have not been able to find in fasting nor in prayer; therefore when it descends upon you, defend yourself no longer and do not be concerned with searching for some remedy, lest you drive away the good which comes toward you freely, and give up your will entirely to your Lord; then you will see marvels.” Our Master used to say when someone was overcome with dismay: “Relax your mind and learn to swim.”

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Do not give nourishment to all that arises in your heart, but throw it far away from you and do not be concerned with fostering it, forgetting your Lord the while, as most people do, thus going astray, wandering, losing their way in a mirage; if they understood, they would say: what an astonishing thing, the heart; in one instant it gives birth to countless sons, some legitimate, others illegitimate and yet others whose nature one cannot discern... How then could anyone who spends his time feeding all this offspring be available for his Lord? What a sorry creature, this son of Adam, who effaces the Cosmos until not a trace of it remains and whom the Cosmos in its turn will obliterate until not a trace of him remains, save a faint odor which in a little while fades away altogether.

2. *Hudūr*: the state of presence before God, concentration on God.

3. *Hayrah*: Dismay or perplexity in the face of a situation apparently without issue; or again, in face of truths which cannot rationally be reconciled; a mental crisis, when the mind comes up against its own limit. If we understand *hayrah* on the mental plane the advice given here by the Shaikh ad-Darqāwī is reminiscent of the Zen method of the koan, that is, of persistent meditation on certain paradoxes in order to provoke a mental crisis, an utter perplexity, which may open out into supra-rational intuition.

If you love your Lord, *faqīr*, leave yourself and your world, and people, except the man whose state uplifts you and who shows you God by his words. But beware, beware lest you allow yourself to be deceived by someone, for how many are they who appear to be preaching for God when in reality they are only preaching for their desires. The celebrated Saint, Sayyidī Abū 'sh-Shitā (may God let us obtain profit through him) says in respect to this: “By God, we call ‘My Lord,’ or ‘Son of My Lord,’ only him who cuts off our fetters.” The fact is not hidden from you, *faqīr*, that what imprisons a man in this world, which is the world of corruption, and holds him fast, is nothing but illusion (*al-wahm*); but if a man gets rid of this illusion, he passes into the world of purity from which he came; and God brings every stranger back to his homeland.

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Certainly all things are hidden in their opposites—gain in loss and gift in refusal, honor in humiliation, wealth in poverty, strength in weakness, abundance in restriction, rising up in falling down, life in death, victory in defeat, power in powerlessness and so on. Therefore, if a man wishes to find, let him be content to lose; if he wishes a gift, let him be content with refusal; he who desires honor must accept humiliation and he who desires wealth must be satisfied with poverty; let him who wishes to be strong be content to be weak; let him who wishes abundance be resigned to restriction; he who wishes to be raised up must allow himself to be cast down; he who desires life must accept death; he who wishes to conquer must be content to be conquered and he who desires power must be content with impotence. Which is to say, let him who wishes to be free rejoice in servitude, as his Prophet, friend and Lord (God bless him and give him peace) rejoiced in it; let him choose it as the Prophet chose it and not be proud nor rebel against his condition, for the servant is the servant and the Lord is the Lord...

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A strong man is one who rejoices to see that the world is slipping from his hands, leaving him and fleeing from him; who rejoices that people despise him, and speak ill of him and is satisfied with his knowledge of God. The Venerable Master, Saint Ibn 'Atā-illāh (may God be pleased with him) says of this, in his *Hikam*: “If the fact that people turn away from you or speak ill of you causes you suffering, return towards the knowledge of God in you; if this knowledge is not sufficient, then lack of satisfaction in the knowledge of God is a far greater trial than that people speak ill of you. The purpose of this slander is that you should not rely on people; God wishes to bring you back from all things so that nothing may distract you from Him.”