Hidayatul Adkiya ila Tariq al-Auliya


Sharh Sayyid Bakri Shatta.

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In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

This commentary is a work in progress of the Hidayatul Adkiya ila Tariq al-Auliya (Guidance of Intelligent towards the way of Auliya) of the gnostic (Arif billa) Shaykh Zain al-Din ibn al-Shaykh ‘Ali ibn al-Shaykh ‘Abmad al-Mihari. The Adkiya, a poem in the Arabic language - is popular among the Keralite Muslim community in India. It is regarded as the formal text book in tasauf in all Arab Colleges in Kerala. Many commentaries and explanations exit, the primary one, in my view, by Sayyid Abu Bakr Shatta al-Makki.

I am using the commentary by Sayyid Abu Bakr Shatta, together with the lectures delivered on the Adkiya by Shaykh Ahmad Hendricks, which were also based the commentary by Sayyid Abu Bakr Shatta as my primary source. I will add extra notes and comments from various authentic sources, which will be of benefit insha Allah.

In this poem, Shaykh Zain al-Din advises the student with the general pieces of advice or wasayah, if followed will give the student a firm footing in the path of the awliya.

The true scholars of Mecca like Sayid Bakri Shata were not one track minded regarding a particular Tariqa but rather, were balanced and followed the middle way. In this work the Shaykh shares the nine indispensable qualities of the Tariq or path of the Auliya.

Says the Shaykh, Abu Bakr Shatta, in his introduction,

“In this book I have explained the meanings and difficulties of the poem. I answered my brothers by writing this book although I am not qualified to do so and I have in me the hope that eventually, Allah will place me on the Tariq of the righteous. There is an excellent saying, which goes as follows,

‘And act as if you are one of them (the Sufiya) as imitating them is a path to salvation. Imitate them even if you are not like them to imitate them is a means of coming nearer to Allah.’

Following in their footsteps will be your savior. Imitating the great men and noble hearts of the past will blessings (barakah) in your life. Imitating them is your pathway of nearness to Allah and your paradise (jannah) lies here. I am a human being and to err is my nature. If you find errors in this work then rectify me as there is a high level of concern and grief in my time (approximately 200 years ago) and due to this high level of worry and grief, it brought us to make mistakes in our writings.”
Sayid Bakri Shatta responded to the request of his students in the form of a commentary on the poem by Shaykh Zain al-Din, which was quite challenging for them to understand. The need for a linguist to translate and comment on the poem was critical for a solid understanding of the poem as one needs deep insight into the Arabic language in order to sharh the poem.

Interestingly enough, the authors grandson settled in Malabar, India in a place called Kerala and took the name Zain al-Din ibn Abd al-Aziq al-Mulaybari. Here he built a mosque and invited his Shaykh, ibn Hajar al-Makki to visit. This was the biggest center for knowledge in the East. Ibn Hajar placed a vase in this Mosque in India and said, ‘whoever studies under the Shaykh at this mosque holds tight to our knowledge (‘ilm)’

Praise (hamd) equal to His grace is to Allah, who favored us with taufiq for doing high level good deeds

Praise (hamd) is to Allah, who flavored us; led us towards right path and high value. He gave us strength and power to worship Him. His mercy and favor are great and perfect. All praises are submitted to Him with the hope that they will be equal to his mercy and favor. But they never will be equal, because Almighty says:

وَإِن تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّـوِ لََ تُُْصُوىَا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّـوَ لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“And if you should count the favors of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful”

Hamd – from hamd we get the name Muhammad, Ahmad, Humayd and so on. Says the Arab that Hamd means to praise but it’s a praise that needs to be understood. It is as if one was in a state gazing at a picture for a long time. Suddenly his attention is drawn to something so unique like Table Mountain, which he sees for the first time. He then gasps with air at the uniqueness and magnitude of what he is seeing. This state is accompanied with awe and reverence and this is called Hamd.

Sayyid Bakri Shatta says ‘We thank Allah Who chose for His slaves Taufiq.’

Taufiq as defined by ‘Ulama means that Allah makes it possible by giving the slave physical health to do good works (‘ibada).

Imam al-Haramayn adds, ‘and even the non-Muslim gets this, the difference being that he does not perform his ‘ibada’. It is Allah who inspires the slave with motivation in the soul to do worshipping Allah alone.

Taufiq means the gift from Allah, which includes physical health as well as the inspiration to perform ‘ibada to.

Hamd means thanking Allah for blessing his slaves with Taufiq.
On the virtues of Hamd by ibn Kathir

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal recorded that Al-Aswad bin Sari said, "I said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Should I recite to you words of praise for My Lord, the Exalted, that I have collected' He said,

«أما إنْ رَبِّكَ يُِ المْدَ
أَمَّا إنْ رَبِّكَ يُِ المْدَ»

(Verily, your Lord likes Al-Hamd.)"

An-Nasa'i also recorded this Hadith. Furthermore, Abu 'Isa At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah recorded that Musa bin Ibrahim bin Kathir related that Talhah bin Khirash said that Jabir bin `Abdullah said that the Messenger of Allah said,

«أَفْضَلُ الذِّكْرِ لََ إِلوَ إِلََّ اللهُ، وَأَفْضَلُ الدُّعَاءِ المْدُدُ»

(The best Dhikr (remembering Allah) is La ilaha illallah and the best supplication is Al-Hamdu Lillah.)

At-Tirmidhi said that this Hadith is Hasan Gharib. Also, Ibn Majah recorded that Anas bin Malik said that the Messenger of Allah said,

«مَا أَنْعَمَ اللهُ عَلَى عَبْدٍنِعْمَةً فَـقَالَ: الَْْمْدُ للهِ، إِلََّ كَانَ الَّذِي أَعْطَى أَفْضَلَ مَِِّا أَخَذَ
»

(No servant is blessed by Allah and says, 'Al-Hamdu Lillah', except that what he was given is better than that which he has himself acquired.)

Further, in his Sunan, Ibn Majah recorded that Ibn `Umar said that the Messenger of Allah said,

«إِنَّ عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِ اللهِ قَالَ: يَا رَبِّكَ الَْْمْدُ كَمَا يـَنْبَغِي لَِِلََلِ وَجْهِكَ وَعَظِيمِ سُلْطَانِكَ. فَـعَضَلَتْ بِالْمَلََْكَيِْْ فَـلَمْ يَدْرِيَا كَيْفَ يَكْتُبُانَِِا فَصَعِدَا إِلََ اللهِ فـَقَالََ: يَا رَبـَّنَا إِنَّ عَبْدًا قَدْ قَالَ مَقَالَةً لََ نَدْرِي كَيْفَ نَكْتُبُهَا، قَالَ اللَهُ، وَىُوَ أَعْلَمُ بَِِا قَالَ عَبْدُهُ: مَاذَا قَالَ عَبْدِي؟ قَالََ: يَا رَبِّ إِنَّوُ قَالَ: لَكَ الَْْمْدُ يَا رَبِّ كَمَا يـَنْبَغِي لَِِلََلِ وَجْهِكَ وَعَظِيمِ سُلْطَانِكَ. فَـقَالَ اللهُ لََُمَا: اكْتُبَاىَا كَمَا قَالَ عَبْدِي، حَتََّّ يـَلْقَ انِِ فَأَجْزِيوِ بَِِا.
»

(A servant of Allah once said, 'O Allah! Yours is the Hamd that is suitable for the grace of Your Face and the greatness of Your Supreme Authority.' The two angels were confused as to how to write these words. They ascended to Allah and said, 'O our Lord! A servant has just uttered a statement and we are unsure how to record it for him.' Allah said while having more knowledge in what His servant has said, 'What did My servant say' They said, 'He said, 'O Allah! Yours is the Hamd that is suitable for the grace of Your Face and the greatness of Your Supreme Authority.' Allah said to them, 'Write it as My servant has said it, until he meets Me and then I shall reward him for it.) Quoted from the Tafsir ibn Kathir.
Imam Qurtubi said, “Thanks with the tongue is praise of the Bestower of Blessings and speaking about the blessings. The Messenger of Allah, May Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, “To talk about blessings is gratitude.” Part of a narration related by ash-Sha’bi on the authority of an-Nu‘man ibn Bashir that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, “He who is not grateful for a little cannot be grateful for a lot, and he who is not grateful to people cannot be grateful to Allah [whereas] to talk about blessings is gratitude, and leaving it is ingratitude (kufr). The community (jama’ah) [leads to] mercy, and dissension [leads to] debasement.” Quoted by al-Qurtubi in his Jami‘ Ahkam al-Qur’an Tafsir cala Surah Wa’d Duha.

Narrations on Hamd by the Sufiya

Imam Qushayri said in the introduction of his risala,

‘Praise be to God Who has no rival in the greatness of His sovereignty, Who is unique in the splendor of His might, Who is dignified in the supremacy of His oneness, Who is made holy by the exaltation of His eternity, to Whose Magnitude of Essence there is no likeness or challenger, and Who is elevated in His attributes above any limitation or deficiency! His are the attributes that pertain to none but Him alone and His are the signs that testify that He is not similar to His creatures. Blessed is He, the possessor of the highest dignity! There is no boundary to encircle Him, no device to entrap Him, no time to confine Him! No one can be His helper, there can be no offspring next to Him, no number to count Him, no place to contain Him, no time period to embrace Him, no understanding to measure him, and no imagination to picture Him. Far removed is He from such questions as “How is He?”, “Where is He?”, or statements such as “Through His creation He has acquired beauty”, or “Through His actions He removed from Himself imperfection and deficiency”. For “Nothing is like unto Him, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.” No living thing can overcome Him, omniscient is He and omnipotent! I praise Him for what He possesses and what He produces. I thank Him for what He withholds and what He bestows. I place my trust in Him and am satisfied with Him. I am content with what He gives and what He does not give.’

It is related that al-Sari al-Saqati once said:

“For thirty years I have regretted that I once said: ‘Praise be to God!’ Someone asked him how this could be. He answered: ‘Once there was a fire in Baghdad. I came across a man who told me that my shop had survived the fire, to which I said: ‘Praise be to God!’ For thirty years now I have had regrets about having said this, because I wished for myself a better lot than that which had befallen my fellow Muslims.”

Yahya b. Mu‘adh said:

“O my God, the sweetest gift in my heart is hope for You; the best words of my tongue are praise for You; and the moment that I shall love most of all is the moment when I shall meet You [in the Hereafter].”

It is said: “Praise is due [to God] for [the gift of] breath and gratitude is due for the blessings of the senses.” It is also said: “Praise begins with Him, while gratitude is your following that which comes from Him.” According to an authentic report [from the Prophet]: “Among the first ones to be invited to Paradise are those who have been grateful to God for any state [He has put them into].” It is also said: “Praise is due for what [God] averts [from you], while gratitude is due for the good He does [to you].” (Kushayri, chapter on Shukr).
Sahl al-Tustari said,

‘The meaning of ‘Praise be to God’ (al-ḥamdu li’Llāh) is ‘thanks be to God’ (al-shukru li’Llāh), [for] gratitude towards God is obedience (ta’ā) to Him. Obedience to Him is guardianship (wilāya)2 from Him, Exalted is He, and thus God, Exalted is He, has said: ‘Your patron (walī) is God only, and His Messenger, and the believers...’ [5:55] God’s patronage can only be fully attained by becoming free of all other than Him’.

Some of the scholars have expressed their views as follows,

Thanks expressed by the limbs means to act in obedience to Allah and to abandon disobedience to Him. Thanks with the heart is recognition of the magnitude of the blessing and the knowledge that it is a gracious bestowal and not from the slave’s own merit.

Know that the blessings which require gratitude cannot be enumerated, but they can be expressed in terms of three categories: _worldly blessings such as health and wealth; _blessings of the din such as knowledge and carefulness (taqwa); _and other-worldly blessings, which are one’s being recompensed with much reward for few actions in a short life.

People have two ranks with respect to gratitude: _there is the one who shows gratitude for the blessings which come to him particularly; _and there is the one who thanks Allah on behalf of all His creatures for the blessings which reach all of them.

There are three degrees of gratitude: _the degree of the ordinary people is gratitude for blessings; _the degree of the elect is gratitude for blessings and for misfortune, and in every state; _and the degree of the elect of the elect is that they are absent from blessing through witnessing the Bestower of blessings.

A man said to Ibrahim ibn Adham, “Who are the best of men?” He reflected and said, “The poor who when they are prevented (refused), are grateful, and when they are given something they prefer others to themselves.”

Whosoever praises anything anywhere in the world is ultimately praising Allah. The sensible world contains millions of things which compel man's attention and admiration for their beauty and usefulness, but if one tries to look behind the veil of appearances, one would find in each and every thing the manifestation of the same creative power.

Admiring anything that exists in the created world is no more than showing one's admiration for a work of art or craft, which in fact is a praise of the artist or the craftsman. This small statement of the Holy Qur'an opens a new perspective for man lost in the labyrinth of multiplicity, and shows him how the many are knit together in the same unity, and how all praise in reality belongs to One whose power is absolute, and that it is only in our ignorance or indifference that we regard this praise to be due to anyone else.

If there is only one Being in the whole universe who inherently deserves all praise, it necessarily follows from it that this Being alone should be worthy of adoration and worship. Thus we can see that although the phrase, Alhamdulillah, has been used to signify praise, yet, by implication, it cuts the very root of polytheism or the worship of created beings, and at the same time brings out in a self-evident manner the first and the basic principle of the Islamic creed -Oneness of God.

And Allah knows best.