



On Posthumous State

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It is to Him that you will be led back
Koran, 36:83

Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar was a spiritual master of the *Qalandari-Qadiri* sufi order of India. He lived in the later second half and the earlier first half of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries respectively. He was initiated into the order by Shah Taqi Ali Qalandar, a spiritual master of great eminence who lived in Kakori near Lucknow. After the passing away of Shah Taqi Ali Qalandar, he got further spiritual training at the blessed hands of Shah Ali Anvar Qalandar who was a direct descendant of the deceased master. Besides writing some authoritative works on Sufism, Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar is said to have performed a number of miraculous feats in his life time. His nephew Alim Qaysari who was himself an accomplished sufi, a poet and writer of the highest order compiled a number of extraordinary events occurred in the Shah's earthly sojourn in a book named *Uyun al-Ma'arif (Fountains of Wisdom)*. We wish to translate from the book referred to, one such event which is related to the posthumous state of an initiate whom he loved very much. It must also be made clear at the outset that the event in question throws light on the after-death state of the initiate, though not a one who has attained the highest degree of spiritual development but also not some ordinary human being.

Text

About his midwife who was nicknamed Munni, Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar had great affection towards her. At the time of her death he saw her spirit coming out of the body as if a glass had cracked releasing dusty air (*ghubari hawa*) before the eyes. Both Shah Ali Anvar Qalandar and Shah Taqi Ali Qalandar continued their spiritual support until Munni's spirit got considerably purified from corporeal attachments (*muqtadiyat-i nasuti*). Concerned about her posthumous state, Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar cast his spiritual glance to find her whereabouts. He delved into the world of meaning (*alam-i m'ana*)¹ or the unmanifested but could not find even her trace there. Fearing she might have been left behind in the corporeal

¹ It can be said that the *alam-i ma'na* is the meeting point between the manifested and the unmanifested so that the being residing therein has travelled much further but still has to go far.

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form (*nasut*) he then asked Shah Ali Anvar Qalandar as to what had become of her. Where did she finally go? The latter told him that the initiates of his order (*Qalandari-Qadiri*) no longer remain in the world of corporeality (*nasut*) after bodily death and further showed him a station (*maqam*) where the divine Names (*asma*) come into collision (*tasadum*) with one another. He asked him to go and see her there. Accordingly, Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar again tried to search her in that particular station of the world of meaning (*alam-i ma'na*) and finally reached a spot wherein was a furnace like that of a brick-kiln covered with a lid, the interior of which was full of fire. After having uncovered the lid he could see Munni dressed in a robe of fire appearing outside. He asked whether she was fine. Suddenly, the robe of fire divested itself of her subtle body with a crackling sound. She then assumed a rose-coloured form, made a smile and flew further beyond.

Commentary²

The human spirit (*ruh-i insani*) in its posthumous journey goes back to its final abode—the Ultimate Reality (*haqiqah*) in accordance with the Koranic expression “all are returning unto Us.”³ In the process of return the spirit arrives at a station where all the divine Names (*asma*) simultaneously collide (*tasadum*) with one another as a result of which they all stand cancelled. This phenomenon which is called ‘the death of the spirits’ (*maut al-arwah*) or the station of total annihilation (*fana-i mahd*) has been mentioned by Shaykh Abd al-Karim Jili in his book (Chap. 61) entitled **The Universal Man (*Al-Insan al-Kamil*)**. “In the face of the Absolute (*qadim*) the relative (*hadith*) leaves no trace of its existence”, said Shaykh Junayd Baghdadi to the effect.

As it happens, the human spirit (*ruh-i insani*) has a dual character. On the one hand it is determined (*mutayyan*) and is therefore characterized by a certain relativeness (*huduth*), while on the other it is oriented to the Ultimate Reality (*haqiqah*) and *ipso facto* possesses the attributes of Absoluteness (*qidam*). Seen from the viewpoint of *huduth* the spirit undergoes annihilation (*fana*) and as a result it experiences a sort of suffocation (*habs*) in itself but it is also true that it is indestructible (*ghayr fani*) in so far as it participates in the nature of the Ultimate Reality (*haqiqah*) because that which exists (*wujud*) cannot not exist (*madum*). However, the suffering experienced by the spirit in its transient state (*hadith*) takes on the form of fire with which it is engulfed by all sides. Even in our ordinary life while in a state of suffocation one feels the heat coming out from the heart and pervades the whole body causing uneasiness. The same can be said about the events that occur in the world of meaning (*alam-i ma'na*) wherein the qualities (*sifat*) assume corporeal forms. Thus the suffering during the total annihilation (*fana-i kulli*) assumes the form of fire in the posthumous state. Now the one who has attained the highest degree of spiritual development (*irfan*), that is, the unconditioned state (*sarafat*) in his life will experience after bodily death, a blissful union (*mawasilat-i haqiqi*) with the Ultimate Reality instead of going through a suffocating state during annihilation. In fact, his spirit tends to shed all the bodily attachments (*kathafat-i jismi*) after having overcome its temporal dimension (*jahat-i huduth*) and then finally reverts to its non-composite (*basit*)

² The event described above is being commented upon by Alim Qaysari

³ Koran, 21:93

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condition in the One and Only Being (*wujud*) whence the attainment of constant bliss therein. But the initiate, who relatively possesses a lesser degree of spiritual realization does experience suffering in proportion to his attachments (*lawth-i huduth*) to the temporal realm. While more attachments take longer periods of suffering the lesser ones will stay for only a short while. In brief, when Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar tried to know about Munni's posthumous condition, she was in a state of suffering (and therefore inaccessible) that is to say her spirit was undergoing a process of annihilation (*fana*) as a result of which her determination (*ta'ayyun*) was losing its hold. After having taken a hint from his master, Shah Wahhaj al-Din Qalandar followed her to a place (*maqam*) of her suffering where all the divine Names were on a collision course. Out of love and compassion (*uns-o inayat*) he helped her spirit come out of the furnace when he uncovered its lid acting as a veil upon her. He then enquired whether she is well. This very enquiry being compassionate in nature set her free and she immediately experienced a liberating bliss (*inbisat*) thanks to which the robe of fire slipped off her body making a crackling noise. Her spirit having thus freed (*farigh*) from bondage, smiled and moved further into the realm of the Absolute (*alam-i itlaq*).