بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

By the Same Author

Dajjal — The king who has no clothes

Blood on the Cross

The Journey of Ahmad and Layla

The Wives of the Prophet
may the blessings and peace of Allah
be on him and his family and companions.

Fatima az-Zahra

Asma bint Abi Bakr

The Difficult Journey

THE WAY BACK

Ahmad Thomson

Published by
Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd.
1, Wynne Road
London SW9 0BD

©Ahmad Thomson 1994

First published in Great Britain in Muharram 1415 / June 1994
by

Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd
1 Wynne Road
London SW9 0BB

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without the permission in writing from the Publisher.

Typesetting by Ahmad Thomson

The English translations of the Qur'an appearing in the text are based on that of Muhammad Pickthall, *alehi rahma.*

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Thomson, Ahmad

The Way Back

1. Islam. Contemporary Islam

I. Title

ISBN 1 897940 20 3

Printed in Great Britain by Deluxe Printers. Tel: 081-965-1771

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii

Author's Note viii

Interface ix

MAKKA 1

BADR 9

MADINA 11

UHUD 23

MADINA 27

UHUD 35

MADINA 39

TABUK 71

AMMAN 77

DAMASCUS 79

HIMS 87

HALAB 91

ADANA 99

EREGLI 101

KONYA 105

KUTAHYA 109

ISTANBUL 113

ATHENS 125

PATRAI 141

BARI 145

ROME 151

CHALON 165

PARIS 167

BEAUVAIS 171

CALAIS 185

DOVER 189

LONDON 191

CANNOCK 195

WOOD DALLING 201

Postface 207

Glossary of Arabic Terms 209

Bibliography 259

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been written had it not been for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit who showed me the beauty and majesty and truth of Islam and who sent me out on the Hajj, and who was there to greet me on my return.

It is dedicated to all those who helped along the way, and it is especially for all those who have been, or who hope to go, on the Difficult Journey and the Way Back.

My thanks are also due to all those who supported me while this book was being written, including Afsar Siddiqui, Muhammad Abdar-Rahman Saeed, Ahmad As-Suwaidi, Abdal-Aziz Al-Alayan, and Hamid Al-Jazayri, and particularly my parents, Hugh and Mary, my wife's parents, Paul and Jean, and especially my wife, Susan, whose patience and love helped me keep going.

Finally, I would also like to thank all those who have helped make it possible to have this book published, long after it had been written, especially Dr A A El-Kassas and Fouad Mattar. Thank you!

Ahmad Thomson
London
Spring 1994

Author's Note

Most of the definitions in the Glossary of Arabic Terms are taken directly or derive from the books listed in the Bibliography which should all be read in order to arrive at an understanding which is far beyond the scope of this book. They are from the overflowing wisdom of Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, by the permission of Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family and his companions and all those who follow in his footsteps, and grant them peace.

INTERFACE

There was a time when I was completely unaware of the pilgrimage to Makka, and there was a time when I had heard and read about it, and there was a time when I travelled to Makka to do it, and there was a time when I did it – the Difficult Journey – and then suddenly, there was still more time, and it was time to head back out on the open road once again and travel the Way Back.

In its own way, although not in the same way, the return journey back to England was just as difficult and as exciting as the outward journey to Makka had been, travelling from place to place and from moment to moment, until finally I arrived back to a world that looked like the one I had left six months earlier, but which was very different, and which would never be the same again.

When one objective is achieved, another takes its place. As one journey comes to an end, another journey begins. When one door closes another door opens – from the moment when we are born to the moment when we die – and even then we will find that this is not the end of the story.

The body may decay and turn to dust, but the spirit goes on, to face the questioning in the grave by the angels, and a period of waiting in an interspace that is out of space and out of time, experienced either as a place of bliss or agony, until the world comes to an end, and the Last Day arrives, and we are brought back to life, and life in the Garden or the Fire begins, for ever.

And for those whose life's journey leads to the Garden is the final stage of their journey – the vision of Allah, in which it is clear that there is only Allah. Surely we come from Allah and surely to Allah we return.

Ahmad Thomson
Autumn 1990

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

And he said: 'Embark therein!
In the Name of Allah
Be its course and its mooring.
Surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.'

(Qur'an: 11.41)

MAKKA

The Hajj was over and the time had come to leave Makka. Abdal-Jalil, who had been my constant travelling companion throughout the journey to Makka, and I, re-entered the Haram for the last time for the time being, and began our farewell tawaf, the Tawaf al-Wada, swallowed up in the constant swirl of pilgrims that inexorably circled the Ka'aba throughout the day and the night, the people forever changing as pilgrims came and went, while the movement round the Ka'aba remained forever the same. As with my previous tawafs, I only began and ended the set of seven circuits by kissing the Black Stone, for the Haram was still overflowing with pilgrims and it was virtually impossible for everyone to kiss the stone each time that they passed it. Yet again I marvelled at the people who surrounded me on every side, people who had come from all over the world to be here at this time.

How dynamic and full of life this ever changing pattern of moving people was, and how radiant their eyes and faces were! How different this spectacle was to the carefully structured seating arrangements of the United Nations General Assembly, where the carefully cultivated political stances and the well thought out officially acceptable speeches virtually eliminate any chance of spontaneity, as the World Government solemnly goes about the business of putting its plans into action behind the camouflage of democracy: One World Government, obeying One World Bank, with One World Currency, and nearly everyone in debt.

As I did the tawaf, calling on Allah as best I could, my heart was filled with gratitude for what was now past, and with hope for what was still in the future. I was at one of the most significant cross-roads of my entire life, for all that was left of my whole life up until now was no more than a fading dream, and whatever lay ahead was unknown. I was faced with a new beginning, and it was very important to start off in the right direction. In fact this was initially a simple decision, for, having done the Hajj, the next step was clearly to set out on the road to Madina, where the Prophet Muhammad is buried, together with many of his companions and followers, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his

family and his companions and all who follow him with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

Although I had no money, and only the clothes I was wearing, and my ihram, now carefully folded up and packed away in the leather camel-bag which I had purchased all those light years ago in the wild Sudanese west market of Nyala after our return from Daribe, I was completely at ease and relaxed. After having been on the open road for nearly five months, my trust that Allah would provide for my every real need was certain and strong. Despite the magnitude of my own insignificance, I knew without a shadow of a doubt that Allah is a generous Lord, and since the four ladies from our community in England who had also just done the Hajj had very generously asked Abdal-Jalil and myself to act as their escort on their journey to Madina in a hired van, we did not even have to wonder how we were going to get there.

✿ ✿ ✿

All too soon my Tawaf Al-Wad'a was completed, and all too soon I had done my two rakats at the Maqam Al-Ibrahim, and all too soon I had finished making all the duas that flowed into my heart and out on my tongue. After drinking my fill of Zamzam, I met Abdal-Jalil at our meeting place opposite the golden water outlet that peeps out over the top edge of one side of the Ka'aba, and then, trying to drink in the majesty and splendour of the Haram as deeply as possible so that the memory would last for ever, we reluctantly and slowly left the vast Mosque, not taking our eyes off the Ka'aba until it was out of our sight.

As we made our way past the crowded tea houses and eating places that surround the outside of the Haram, my mind flashed back to the moment when we had first arrived in Makka at dawn, with the call to prayer filling the air, and an incredible peacefulness pervading the crowded streets and busy market stalls, as everyone made their way towards the Mosque to pray subh. It seemed a very long time ago now, and also, only a moment away.

Now that I had seen the harsh desert that surrounds Makka with my own eyes, the presence of this very special city in the middle of nowhere seemed all the more miraculous. Not only does the Ka'aba stand in silent majesty at its heart, but also its streets are

filled with life, and its shops and markets always seem to be filled with the best food there is, despite the enormous amounts that must be eaten each day, especially during the time of the Hajj. Wherever I looked, there was food in abundance, and in particular, every kind of fruit was to be found, ripe and ready to eat. It was amazing to realise that all this had started from nothing, that all this had been empty desert until the Prophet Ibrahim had left Hagar and their baby Ismail near Safa and Marwa, and the waters of Zamzam had welled up out of the sand where the baby boy's tiny heel had kicked it.

As Abdal-Jalil and I walked through the streets of Makka, I was sharply aware that the prosperity which surrounded us, both spiritual and material, was in fact part of the continuing response to the prayer of the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be on him and his family, which he made after building the Ka'aba, and which is recorded in the Qur'an:

And when Ibrahim said: 'My Lord, make this territory safe,
and protect me and my sons from worshipping idols.
My Lord, surely they have led many people astray,
but whoever follows me is surely of me,
and as for whoever disobeys me,
then surely You are Forgiving, Compassionate.
Our Lord, surely I have settled some of my family
in an uncultivable valley near Your Protected House,
Our Lord, so that they may establish the prayer,
so incline some people's hearts
so that they may yearn for them,
and provide them with fruits
so that they may be thankful.
Our Lord, surely You know
what we hide and what we show,
and nothing in the earth or in the heaven
is hidden from Allah.
Praise be to Allah Who has given to me,
in my old age, Ismail and Ishaq.
Surely My Lord is indeed the Hearer of supplication.
My Lord, make me establish the prayer,
and some of my descendants, Our Lord,
and accept my prayer.

Our Lord, forgive me and my parents
and those who believe
on the Day of Reckoning.

(Qur'an: 14.35-41)

After a short walk, Abdal-Jalil and I arrived outside Abdal-Hamid's mother's house where we had arranged to meet everyone who had been in our party during the time of the Hajj. The taxi van was already there and so were Mansura and Saba and Rukaya and Rashida. We bid Muhammad Abdal-Bari and Uthman and Muhammad Qasim goodbye, saying that insh'Allah we would meet them in Madina, and thanked Abdal-Hamid and his mother and sister once again for all their more than generous help and hospitality, and then we were all aboard the taxi van and threading our way out through the busy streets of Makka, whose heated hustle and bustle contrasted starkly with the cool peace and tranquillity of the Haram which we had just left. As is often the case when the time comes to move on, we were sad to be leaving, and glad to be on our way again, for nothing lasts and life goes on!

Soon we were speeding through the desert on a broad tarmac road, with the sun on our faces and the wind flapping in our robes, feeling incredibly clean and fresh both inside and out, without a trace of anxiety or longing in our hearts, just looking forward to our visit to the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Madina Al-Munawarra, the illuminated city, the city which is illuminated by the presence of the ruh of the Last Messenger of Allah and of the arwah of some of his family and companions and sincere followers, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and all of them and on all who follow in their footsteps.

And as we sped through the heat of the day, I reflected on the words of Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit who once said:

The destination is just an excuse.
What matters is the journey itself.

And I reflected on the words of Shaykh Muhiy'd-din ibn al-Arabi, who once wrote:

Whoever engages in travel will arrive!

How true they were. We had started out on the Difficult Journey, trusting in Allah, travelling in the way of Allah, and by Allah we had arrived! We had done the Hajj! And now we were on another journey, or you could say on the next stage of our life's journey, and, insh'Allah, we would arrive! Although we were leaving Makka behind, Madina was waiting for us, and insh'Allah we would soon be visiting the grave of the one man who had influenced our lives more than any other human being in existence, including even our parents – the Messenger of Allah, whom we had been attempting to follow and emulate ever since we had first embraced Islam. Were it not for him, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, we would not be living in the way in which we were now living, and we would not have been to Makka to do the Hajj, and we would not now be on our way to Madina. Were it not for the means, the end would have escaped us!

✿ ✿ ✿

Everyone follows someone in life, and I had found no one better to follow than the Prophet Muhammad – and accordingly those who were most close in following him, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and on all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day. Amin.

✿ ✿ ✿

As we sped through the hot desert air along the open road, a wide well tarred and travelled road that led directly to Madina, I imagined how different and more difficult it must have been for the Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr when they made their hijrah to Madina by camel, hunted by the Quraysh, but protected by Allah. In my mind's eye, I pictured them travelling across the emptiness of the desert beneath the vastness of the sky, in the burning heat of the sun, and the chilling cold of the night, not knowing all the miracles that would unfold around them in the years to come, but already filled with awe and wonder and illumination as a re-

sult of everything that had already taken place during their extraordinary lives.

We too travelled through the emptiness of the desert beneath the vastness of the sky, in the burning heat of the sun, but at speed and in the midst of constant two way traffic, the numerous crumpled hulks of large imported American cars rusting by the roadside bearing eloquent witness to the vulnerability of the new technology when placed in inexperienced hands.

After we had been on the road for a couple of hours, the early afternoon sun had become burning hot, even though it was late November and winter was approaching fast, and since there was no covering over the metal framework at the back of the van, Abdal-Jalil and I did our best to rig up a makeshift awning, using the striped cotton rug which Abdal-Alim had given to me in England just before we had set out on the Difficult Journey. After a brief struggle with the blustering wind, the corners were securely fastened to the metal hoops, and although the loud flapping made conversation virtually impossible, the four of us who were in the back of the van now enjoyed at least some degree of shade.

After we had travelled on a while longer, we stopped for a meal at a roadside eating place, sitting cross-legged in the shade on high divans and tucking gratefully into the large plate of fish and rice that graced the top of the equally high table. Having rested, and eaten and drunk our fill, we prayed dhur and asr together, shortened and combined once more now that we were travelling once again, and then, having secured our decidedly tattered awning a little more firmly, we were off, with the wind tugging at our robes and eventually tearing my striped rug to pieces now that it had finally served its purpose, flying off and away into the slipstream of the van. Although the fierceness had gone out of the sun by now, Abdal-Jalil and I undid and retied our turbans, swathing our newly shaved heads like Tuaregs in order to minimise the very real risk of sun-burn, just as we had done some two months previously as we jolted up into the foothills of the Jebel Nuba on the back of a Mercedes lorry bound for Kaduqli. It seemed like a memory from another lifetime.

By the time the sun was low in the sky, we had reached the turn-off for Badr, and at our request the driver swung off the main road and we bumped our way down the dirt road that leads to the place where the first decisive battle between the early Muslims and the enemies of Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, had taken place almost fourteen centuries earlier. Fortunately I had read several of the accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's life, and consequently wherever we went, it was possible to picture what had once taken place there, with the result that the past and the present were continually fused together in one unified experience and state of awareness.

BADR

The van came to a standstill near a coach and a few other vehicles that were parked on a bare patch of ground. We all got out and stretched our legs. I looked around at the rough empty terrain as the sun dipped towards the horizon, straining my ears in case it was possible to still somehow hear the sounds of the battle that had once echoed around the plain of Badr, miraculously encapsulated in time: three hundred and thirteen poorly armed Muslims fighting two thousand well equipped kafirun but assisted from the Unseen by thousands of angels whose presence was confirmed by the sight of kafir heads being toppled by blows not made by any man, and in their midst, the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, whose strategy was to ask Allah for victory and then to fling a handful of dust and pebbles at the enemy, causing confusion in their ranks, and a crushing defeat, confirmed by the ayah of Qur'an which states:

You did not kill them, but Allah killed them,
and you did not throw when you threw,
but it was Allah who threw,
that He might test those who trust
with a good test from Him.
Surely Allah is Hearer, Knower.

(Qur'an: 8.17)

The place was silent, except for the sounds made by other visitors, but there was definitely a presence in the air, a faint echo of all that had once happened there some fourteen hundred years ago. I approached the wells of Badr, near which some of the enemy's bodies had been buried, and recalled what the Prophet had said to them: "Have you discovered what your Lord promised to be true? For I have found what my Lord promised me to be true." Some of his companions had asked him why he was speaking to the dead, and he had replied: "They hear me as you do, but they cannot answer."

I rejoined the others and we began to make our way down the path that leads to the graves of the shuhada, the fourteen men who had been martyred fighting in the way of Allah during the battle. It would soon be maghrib, but insh'Allah there was just enough time to visit and greet them before it would be time for the prayer. Suddenly a middle-aged man wearing a robe and haik barred our way. "No women allowed here," he said officiously. We were amazed, for there was nothing in the Qur'an or Sunnah to justify his words, and accordingly, instead of wasting valuable time in fruitless argument, Abdal-Jalil and I stood firmly in his path and told the ladies to go on ahead.

The man was visibly surprised, but could do nothing to oppose us, and as soon as the ladies had reached the graves we bid the startled man 'As-salaamu-alaikum' and then made our own way down to the simple tombs, where we paused and greeted their noble occupants and made dua to Allah for them, firm in the certainty that their arwah were present and aware of us, even though we could not see them:

And do not say that those who are killed in the way of Allah are dead. Surely they are alive, but you do not perceive it.

(Qur'an: 2.154)

We stood at their graves and reflected in silence, as the light slowly faded and the stillness of dusk enveloped us, until the adhan for maghrib floated out through the growing darkness from where the various vehicles were parked.

We hastened back up the pathway to where everyone was lining up for the prayer, found water, did wudu and joined the prayer line, thankful to be doing the prayer in such a place at such a time. Directly after the prayer I looked around at the other people who were present. The man who had tried to bar our way was nowhere to be seen. The temperature had already dropped considerably, and clambering aboard the van for the last time, we bumped our way along back up to the main road and were soon speeding along the main highway once again on the last leg of our journey to Madina Al-Munawarra, the illuminated city.

MADINA

It was not very long before the glow of Madina appeared ahead of us, lighting up the night sky more brightly than the stars, and although it was night when we arrived, and the waning moon had not yet risen, the lights of Madina were shining out more brightly than any other city I had ever visited. There was a translucent quality about the whole place, so that even the buildings and the trees seemed to be shimmering in light, and above all, there was a quiet peace that pervaded the entire city, reminding me of the majestic tranquillity of the Haram in Makka, but having a beautiful peacefulness all of its own. Clearly the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad for Madina had been answered just as completely as the prayers of the Prophet Ibrahim for Makka, for it is related that Abu Hurayra said:

> **"When people saw the first fruits of the season, they brought them to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, took them and said, 'O Allah, bless us in our fruits. Bless us in our city. Bless us in our sa' and bless us in our mudd. O Allah, Ibrahim is Your slave, Your Khalil and Your Prophet. I am Your slave and Your Prophet. He prayed to You for Makka. I pray to You for Madina for the like of what he prayed to You for Makka, and the like of it with it.' Then he called the smallest child he saw and gave him the fruits."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 45.1.2)**

And also:

> **"The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'There are angels at the entries of Madina, and neither plague nor the Dajjal will enter it.'"**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 45.4.16)**

Madina is most certainly an illuminated city. Its air is vibrant with light. A deep peace pervades it. In the days that followed I never saw anyone having an argument or raising their voices in anger, and even the hooting of car horns was a very rare event, especially in the vicinity of the Prophet's Mosque, which was where our taxi van finally dropped us all off.

Having thanked us for acting as their escort, and we them for having made it possible for us to reach Madina, the ladies bid us farewell and left to find the place where they would be staying, but not before we had arranged to meet the next afternoon after asr, for they wanted to visit the place not far from Madina where the battle of Uhud had taken place, and accordingly would require our services as an escort once again.

As had been the case so many times before during the last five months, Abdal-Jalil and I found ourselves alone together in a new place and situation once again. Clearly our next move was the Prophet's Mosque, and indeed just as we were heading for the wudu area, a most beautiful adhan filled our ears. We had arrived just in time to pray isha.

Having done wudu, we headed for the main entrance of the Mosque, which is decorated with brightly shining chandeliers and beautifully patterned carpets, and shortly after praying our two rakats on entering the Mosque, it was time to pray isha. The Mosque was full to overflowing, for many hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come to Madina either before or after doing the Hajj, and since there are many who believe that whoever does forty consecutive prayers in the Prophet's Mosque is virtually guaranteed the Garden, it is always filled to capacity.

The baraka in the Mosque was overpowering, and the air was filled with fragrance and perfume. To be standing there in the prayer line after a long day's travelling was sheer bliss! It is related that Abu Hurayra said that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> **"A prayer in this mosque of mine is better than a thousand prayers in any other mosque, except the Masjid al-Haram [in Makka]."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 14.5.9)**

And it certainly felt like it. The Imam's calm and clear recitation of Qur'an during the first two rakats was filled with a sweetness that resonated deep in my heart, and the profound silence that filled the Mosque during the second two rakats made it clearer than ever that we were in the direct presence of Allah.

After the prayer was over, we waited patiently for most of the people to leave, so that it would be possible to approach and greet the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

All the prophets have been buried on the spot where they have died, and accordingly when the Prophet Muhammad died in Aisha's room, which was right next to the original Mosque, the Prophet Muhammad was buried there. As time passed, the lives of the first two khalifs who led the Muslim community after him, Abu Bakr and Umar, came to their respective ends, and they were buried next to the man whom they had loved so much more than anyone else in the world. As more time passed, the original Mosque was repeatedly rebuilt and extended by successive Muslim rulers, and in the process the simple structure that houses their graves was itself housed by the newly extended Mosque, which continued to expand backwards and sideways.

It was to this structure that we now wished to draw near, although for the time being it was not in sight, for it stands right near the front of the present Mosque, and we were still right at the back. As more and more people left the Mosque, which was still being extended in order to accommodate the ever increasing numbers of Muslims from all over the world who are constantly compelled by their love for the Prophet to visit Madina, Abdal-Jalil and I made our way forwards, moving carefully so as not to pass directly in front of those who were praying voluntary rakats, past the innumerable marble pillars, under the shining chandeliers, over the richly carpeted marble floor, across the central courtyard that is paved with white marble and open to the sky, past more pillars, under more chandeliers, over more carpets, until we were now part of the crowded queue of people waiting to greet the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Slowly we moved forward, surrounded by beauty and splendour and perfumed baraka. We had arrived at the source of our knowledge and wisdom! The simple structure that houses the graves of the Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr and Umar appeared to be constructed largely of wood, and at the end nearest us, there was a slightly raised platform on which some of the fuqara whose task it is to keep the whole mosque clean were seated. My heart leapt, for I knew from what I had already been told that this was the site of the Suffa, where some of the poorest and most exalted companions of the Prophet had once sheltered and slept. Instinctively I found myself wishing that I had been alive when they had been alive, that I had been one of them, receiving wisdom directly from the Prophet Muhammad and sharing in all the amazing and miraculous and wonderful events that had taken place around him. It must have been so incredible to have lived at that time!

The people ahead of us moved slowly forward, and we found ourselves passing alongside the structure, and past what had once been the entrance to the original simple mud dwelling. As we faced the direction of Makka, with the structure housing the graves on our left, and the ornate mimbar – the wooden steps from which the imam gives his khutba on the jumua – on our right, I recalled the following words of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace:

> **"What is between my house and my mimbar is one of the meadows of the Garden, and my mimbar is on my watering-place [al-Hawd]."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 14.5.10)**

Although we were still in this world, in the Rowdah as this area of the Prophet's Mosque is called, we had just stepped into the Garden, surrounded by fragrance and deep tranquillity!

I breathed it all in deeply, grateful to be there, in the Rowdah, in the Garden, in the presence of the Prophet, in the Presence of Allah. The only other place like this in the whole world was the Haram in Makka, but whereas the Haram of Makka is majestic, the Haram of Madina is beautiful. Whereas the colour of Makka is red, the colour of Madina is green. Although the Messenger of Allah was

born in Makka, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, he chose to establish his community in Madina, and this is where he died, and this is where he is buried.

At last we were at the far end of the structure, and peering through the ornate metal grille that is set in its wall, I could clearly see the outline of the Prophet's tomb. Next to it, the tombs of Abu Bakr and Umar were also clearly visible.

'As-salaamu-alaikum ya rasulu'llah, wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu' – 'Peace be on you O Messenger of Allah, and the mercy of Allah and His blessing', I said softly but clearly, knowing that he would return my greeting, even though I could not hear his reply. I paused, and then made dua for him, being careful to address my duas to Allah and not to him, asking Allah to give him light and baraka in his grave, and to bless all those who came to visit him, hoping for the Prophet's intercession on the Last Day. Whatever words came to my heart seemed insufficient, and whatever I asked to be given to the Prophet had clearly already been given to him anyway, so that in the end, all that I could request from Allah was to be given access to the pure Islam that the Prophet Muhammad had embodied so nobly, and to be given wisdom and understanding of the Qur'an that had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, and to be with the Prophet Muhammad in the Garden in the next life, just as I was with him now in the Garden in this life, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and on his family and on his companions and on all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

When visiting the Prophet Muhammad, it is necessary to have the utmost courtesy, not only because he is the Messenger of Allah and the best of creation, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, but also in order to avoid worshipping him instead of Allah by attributing power to him that in fact belongs solely to Allah. The Prophet is, nevertheless, as he himself stated, the one who will intercede with Allah on behalf of his community on the Last Day, and it is accordingly within the bounds of courtesy to ask him directly to intercede on your behalf on the Last Day, as long as you remain fully aware that it is Allah who decides what happens.

Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day, and who knows anything about the Prophet Muhammad or his companions or his close followers cannot help loving him and them, but although you may love them, you may not worship them.

✿ ✿ ✿

After greeting the Messenger of Allah in his grave and making dua for him, I moved along and greeted Abu Bakr and Umar, may Allah be pleased with them, and having made dua for them also, I moved on round the far side of the structure and returned to the main body of the Mosque where I sat down, feeling both highly privileged and completely insignificant at the same time. A few moments later I was joined by Talha.

Talha was a young student whom I had first met in London a couple of years earlier. We did not know each other well, but occasionally we would happen to meet at the jumua prayer at the Regents Park Mosque. He too had just been on the Hajj, and indeed we had recently come face to face amongst all the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in the Haram in Makka after the Hajj was over, and shortly before Abdal-Jalil and I were due to leave for Madina. During our short meeting there he had explained that he was now studying at the University of Madina, and that when I came to Madina, I would be most welcome to stay as his guest at his small flat. I had accepted his invitation on the spot, and now here he was again, to fulfil it!

Abdal-Jalil joined us at this point, and Talha led us through the streets of Madina to the building in which he lived. By now it was growing late and we were both hungry and tired. After a simple supper, we were soon fast asleep, stretched out on the carpet in Talha's small room. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah, we had arrived safely!

✿ ✿ ✿

We awoke early next morning to the sound of the piercingly beautiful adhan that floated throughout Madina, and having prepared ourselves for the prayer, we walked through the early dawn to the Prophet's Mosque, arriving well in time to do the prayer. Once again the overpowering peacefulness of the place filled my awareness, and as always, the air was sweetly perfumed, and as

always, it was a joy to be surrounded by nothing but Muslims, so different to the lands of Europe which I would soon have to cross, insh'Allah.

After the prayer we returned to Talha's flat for a simple breakfast, and then the day was ours to do as we wished. Talha had to go out to the University, which is situated outside the city; Abdal-Jalil wanted to make contact with Muhammad Abdal-Bari and the others who should also have reached Madina by now and be staying as the guests of Shaykh Al-Bukhari; and I, I just wanted Madina to myself, without becoming too caught up in everyone else's arrangements.

Having arranged to meet Abdal-Jalil directly after asr, at the place where we had agreed to meet the ladies, I made my way back to the Prophet's Mosque which was considerably less crowded than it had been at the prayer times, and having gazed all around me at its beauty, I approached the structure up near the front and, peering through the metal grilles once again, I greeted the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and Abu Bakr and Umar, may Allah be pleased with them, filled with awe at the realisation of just who it was that I was greeting.

✿ ✿ ✿

Between the tombs of the Prophet and Abu Bakr, there is an empty space large enough for another grave. It is related that the Prophet Isa, peace be on him, will be buried there after he has returned to this world and eventually died a natural death, and that Muhammad and Isa will be the first two people to be brought back to life on the Last Day.

As I recalled this, I immediately found myself hoping that I would still be alive to see the day when Isa returns to this earth to kill the Dajjal – the Antichrist – and his followers, and to rule as a just ruler in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, just as the Prophet Muhammad foretold, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on both of them.

Having completed my greetings, I helped myself to a Qur'an, found an empty space in the Rowdah, and after making all the duas I could possibly think of, I completed them by asking Allah

to grant them, and all the duas I had made during the Hajj, and all the duas I had ever made in my life, by the baraka of Surah Ya Sin, which I then quietly recited as best as I could, sealing it by reciting Surat'al-Ikhlas three times, followed by Surat'al-Fatiha once, and then the opening ayat of Surat'al-Baqara, which describe what the Qur'an is and who it is for:

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Alif. Lam. Mim.
This is the Book in which there is no doubt,
a guidance for those who are in awe,
those who believe in the Unseen,
and establish the prayer,
and spend from what We have provided them;
and those who believe in what has been revealed to you,
and in what has been revealed before you,
and who are certain about the next world.
These depend on guidance from their Lord,
and it is these who are the successful.

(Qur'an: 2.1-5)

The Qur'an commands these people to ask for Allah's blessings on the Prophet Muhammad in the following words:

Surely Allah and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet.
O you who believe, ask blessings on him and great peace.

(Qur'an: 33.56)

Accordingly after I had completed my recitation of Qur'an, I spent some time reciting a simple prayer on the Prophet, that I had first learned shortly after I had embraced Islam, and which I had been repeating, either silently or out loud, whenever I was able, ever since:

Allahumma salli ala sayyedina Muhammadin
abdika wa rasulika'n-nabiyyi'l-ummiyy
wa ala alihi wa sahbihi wa sallim.

Which means:

O Allah, bless our master Muhammad,
Your slave and Your Messenger, the unlettered Prophet,
and his family and his companions and grant them peace.

After a while, I sealed my prayers on the Prophet by reciting the prayer called the **Treasury of Truths** which was given to Shaykh Muhammad ibn Al-Habib by the Prophet Muhammad himself:

O Allah, bless and grant peace
to our lord and master Muhammad,
the first of the lights
emanating from the oceans of sublimity of the essence,
with every one of Your perfections
in all Your self-manifestations, in the two worlds
– the hidden and the seen –
he realises the meanings of the names and attributes.
He is the first to give praise and worship
with every kind of adoration and good action.
He is the helper of all created beings
in the world of forms and the world of spirits.
And blessings be upon his Family and Companions
with a blessing that will lift the veil
from his noble face for us
in visions and in the waking state
and will acquaint us with You and with him
in all ranks and presences.
Be gracious to us, O Lord, by his rank,
in movement and in stillness,
and in looks and in thoughts.
Be gracious to us, O Lord, by his rank,
in movement and in stillness,
and in looks and in thoughts.
Be gracious to us, O Lord, by his rank,
in movement and in stillness,
and in looks and in thoughts.

(Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib)

I sealed this prayer in turn with the following well-known ayat from the Qur'an:

Glory be to your Lord,
the Lord of might,
above all that they describe,
and peace be upon the messengers,
and praise belongs to Allah,
the Lord of the worlds.

(Qur'an: 37.180-182)

Feeling refreshed and revitalised, I looked around me at the quiet beauty of the Prophet's Mosque, for it is a very beautiful mosque. The spacious courtyard in the centre which is open to the sky lets in a great deal of natural light, and, as at the Ka'aba, there are white doves forever wheeling above it and round the green dome that is situated directly above the Prophet's tomb.

Carpets cover the marble floors, and ornate chandeliers hang from the ceiling. From its very simple beginnings, the Mosque has gradually been extended and beautified through the passing years, as more and more Muslims from further and further away have come to visit it. And indeed, as at the Ka'aba, it is the people who endlessly come and go – men, women and children, ranging from the very young to the very old, and coming from virtually every land and walk of life under the sun – that fill it with life in all its infinite variety and indescribable glory, worshipping God in the manner that the Prophet Muhammad exemplified and embodied so beautifully, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. They are all amazing people, each face either beautiful or majestic, whatever its own unique colouring or form might be, veiling the spirit of a human being who is indeed very fortunate to be there, illuminated by the baraka that permeates every atom that fills this particular space in creation.

Wherever you look, you see people standing or bowing or prostrating or sitting in prayer, or quietly sitting, softly reciting the Qur'an or doing dhikr or simply reflecting, each one worshipping the God Whom they do not see but Who, they know, sees them. They come and go like waves in the ocean, with a high tide at every prayer time, so that there is not one empty space at the time of the prayer, ebbing and flowing in a constant ebb and flow that first started over fourteen centuries ago when the Prophet Muhammad

and his noble companions first built that simple structure of mud and wood that was partially sheltered and shaded by palm leaves, and whose mud floor was partially carpeted with rough mats woven from palm leaves.

I tried to picture those early days as best I could – when the first Muslim community was outwardly poor and inwardly rich, and not the reverse – wishing yet again that I had lived then and that I had been one of the close companions, for these were the most glorious days of Islam – not the ones which came later – and these were the people that formed the best community that has ever lived or ever will live on the face of the earth.

And as I tried to picture how it used to be, I was also aware of how it would be towards the end of time, when there would be no Muslims left in Madina, as what was left of this world approached its final end:

> **Yahya related to me from Malik from Ibn Himas from his paternal uncle from Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Madina will be left in the best way that it is until a dog or wolf enters it and urinates on one of the pillars of the mosque or on the mimbar." They asked, "Messenger of Allah, who will have the fruit at that time?" He replied, "Animals seeking food, birds and wild beasts."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 45.2.8)**

How could it not be so, I reflected, for nothing in creation lasts, however beautiful or wonderful or noble it is. As Allah says in the Qur'an:

> **Everything in it is in annihilation,**
> **and what remains is the face of Allah,**
> **the Lord of majesty and glory.**
>
> **(Qur'an: 55.26-27)**

And also:

> **To Allah belong the East and the West,**
> **and wherever you turn,**

there is the face of Allah.
Surely Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.

(Qur'an: 2.115)

✿ ✿ ✿

Eventually it was time for dhur, and after the prayer was over, I took a stroll in the early afternoon sun through the streets of Madina, now mostly paved and tarred, where once the Prophet and his companions used to walk. My footsteps took me to Baqi, the cemetery of the people of Madina, where many of the family of the Messenger of Allah and his companions and followers are buried, may they have light and peace in their graves. Its gates were closed shut and locked, and accordingly it was not possible to visit the graves within, so I had to content myself with giving a general greeting to their occupants and making an all-embracing dua for all of them. Like most Muslims, I found myself wishing that I would be buried there too one day, and although the chances of that happening might seem unlikely, what Allah wants happens!

After a while, I returned to the Mosque, for I was hungry and a little tired, and there I rested until it was time to pray asr. Immediately after the prayer was over, I made my way to the place where Abdal-Jalil and I had arranged to meet the ladies, and within twenty minutes everyone had arrived and we were being driven quietly through and out of Madina towards Mount Uhud.

UHUD

Uhud is a large mountain just outside Madina where another hard fought battle between the Muslims and the Quraysh took place, three years after the battle of Badr and five years after the Hijrah. However in this battle the Muslims had not enjoyed the overwhelming victory that they had experienced at Badr, partly because the archers who had been told to guard the Muslims' rear, and not to abandon their positions whatever happened, had joined in the pursuit of the Quraysh when they appeared to be fleeing, with the result that some of the enemy cavalry were then able to sweep back round and attack the Muslims from behind. In the fighting that ensued, there were heavy losses on both sides, the Prophet himself was wounded, and many Muslims including his uncle Hamza were killed fighting in the way of Allah.

The Quraysh, despite their own losses, had regarded the outcome of this battle as at least a partially successful revenge for the defeat that they had suffered at Badr, whereas the Muslims were aware that even those who had been killed fighting in the way of Allah were not losers, for, as Allah states in the Qur'an:

Surely Allah has bought from the believers
their lives and their wealth
because the Garden will be theirs.
They shall fight in the way of Allah,
and they shall kill and be killed.
It is a promise which is binding on Him
in the Tawrah and the Ingil and the Qur'an.
And who fulfills his covenant better than Allah?
So rejoice in the agreement that you have made,
for that is the supreme triumph.

(Qur'an: 9.111)

Our van soon arrived at the place where some of the shuhada are buried, and we stopped briefly to greet them and make dua to

Allah for them, knowing that their arwah are in the Garden, and their bodies still as fresh as the day on which they died:

> **Yahya related to me from Malik from Abdar-Rahman ibn Abi Sa'sa'a that he had heard that Amr ibn al-Jamuh al-Ansari and Abdullah ibn Umar al-Ansari, both of the tribe of Banu Salami, had their grave uncovered by a flood. Their grave was part of what was left after the flood. They were in the same grave, and they were among those martyred at Uhud. They were dug up so that they might be moved. They were found unchanged. It was as if they had died only the day before. One of them had been wounded, and he had put his hand over his wound and had been buried like that. His hand was pulled away from his wound and released, and it returned to where it had been. It was forty-six years between Uhud and the day they were dug up.**

(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 21.21.50)

In describing the state of those who have died as martyrs while fighting in the way of Allah, Allah states in the Qur'an:

And do not think that those who are killed
fighting in the way of Allah are dead.
No, they are alive.
With their Lord they have provision,
joyful with what Allah has given them
from His bounty, and rejoicing for those
who have not joined them but are left behind,
because no fear shall come to them,
and neither shall they grieve.
They rejoice because of the favour and bounty of Allah,
and because Allah does not neglect the reward of the muminun.

(Qur'an: 3.169-171)

As I tried to imagine the state of bliss which the shuhada enjoy – asking Allah to make me die shahid one way or another when my time comes – I also reflected on the other different ways in

which people may die shahid – witnessing Allah at the moment of their annihilation, and in the on-going state that lies on the other side of death – for the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> **"There are seven kinds of martyr other than those killed in the way of Allah. Someone who is killed by the plague is a martyr, someone who drowns is a martyr, someone who dies of pleurisy is a martyr, someone who dies of a disease of the belly is a martyr, someone who dies by fire is a martyr, someone who dies under a falling building is a martyr, and a woman who dies in childbirth is a martyr."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 16.12.36)**

I would have liked to have stayed longer, but the van had probably been hired for a limited time, and accordingly we were soon on our way to the area where the battle of Uhud had first begun, the Muslim army with its rear protected by the mountain itself and the archers who had been positioned up on its rocky slopes.

We were the only people there that afternoon. We gazed around us in awe at the silent reddish rocky mountain whose ravines had once been filled with the sounds of battle. I had been told that it is a sunnah to eat the small green plants that grow there, and accordingly I did so, finding them to be bitter at first, but then with a sweet after-taste, just as they had been described to me. I wanted to climb up the mountain, just as the Prophet had done, for it is related that he said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, "This is a mountain which loves us and we love it." However, I was aware that the ladies would wish to return before I had climbed very far, and accordingly I decided to pay Uhud another visit before the time had come for me to leave Madina.

Soon it was time to return to Madina, as the sun began to near the western horizon and tint the sky with all the colours of a sunset, and we clambered back into the van and bumped our way back to the main road. Having arrived back near the Prophet's Mosque, Abdal-Jalil and I bid the ladies farewell, and then prepared ourselves for maghrib.

As it turned out, I did not see the ladies again until shortly after I had arrived back in England, when they appeared to me in a clear dream, Mansura, Saba, Ruqaya and Rashida, clothed in the garments of the people of the Garden, and gliding along like stately sailing ships, smiling at me from a distance and saying, 'Thankyou!'

MADINA

After praying maghrib, Abdal-Jalil and I returned to Talha's flat, where a smiling Talha and a much needed meal awaited us, and after having prayed isha back at the Prophet's Mosque, we were soon fast asleep once more, relaxed and at peace in this very special city where so much of what happened in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, is still the basis of life there today.

It was the awareness of what had happened in Madina all those centuries ago that pervaded my consciousness wherever I walked, for I spent much of the next couple of days simply wandering through the streets of Madina, walking where once the Prophet and his companions had walked, as well as all those who followed after them, may Allah bless him and them and give them peace. I was free to do as I pleased, for Abdal-Jalil had found alternative accommodation, and Muhammad Abdal-Bari and Uthman and Muhammad Qasim were nowhere to be seen, and my generous host Talha was busy with his studies. I was perfectly content with this state of affairs, for it meant that I could do whatever I wanted without having to fit into other people's arrangements.

I walked everywhere, through the streets of the new town, and through the streets of the old town, and even out to the palm groves that are clustered around the city's outskirts, until I was tired and hungry, when I would return to the Prophet's Mosque, and do wudu, and seek sanctuary in the Rowdah, where I would recite some Qur'an, or sing from the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, or do dhikr, or simply sit and reflect, until it was time for the next prayer.

✿ ✿ ✿

During these long walks, in which I had no one to guide me, I nevertheless came across many of the places that have a deep historical significance for Muslims, including, for example, the mosque at Quba. This had once been a small village near Madina, and its mosque was one of the first mosques to be built. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, had stayed in

Quba for about three weeks after his hijrah from Makka with Abu Bakr, and before finally entering Madina, and accordingly the place in Quba where he led the prayer, and where the mosque now stands, is often called the first mosque in Islam. Accordingly, when I chanced upon it, I stopped to do two rakats on entering the mosque, and then waited to pray dhur there.

✿ ✿ ✿

On my way back, I saw the remains of one of the stone fortresses in which some of the Jews who had breached their peace treaty with the Muslims, and who had betrayed and plotted against the life of the Prophet, had been besieged until they were driven out of Madina. I did not know whether it had once belonged to the Banu Nadhir, who had once planned to drop a large rock on the Prophet's head while he was sitting with them, or to the Banu Qurayza, who had planned to betray and attack the Muslims during the famous battle of Khandaq, but it was clearly a very cleverly built edifice and had lasted the ravages of time extremely well. No wonder the Jews had thought that they were impregnable! As I was looking around inside the fortress, a middle-aged man also entered the building, and nodded seriously as I tried to state the obvious in my broken Arabic – that the stratagems and fortresses of the Jews had been no match against the might of Allah. 'Allah *wa* rasulihi' – 'Allah *and* His Messenger', he replied, emphasising the importance of the role of the Prophet Muhammad in all that had taken place.

✿ ✿ ✿

I also visited the site of the battle of Khandaq, the battle of the Trench, which took place after the battle of Uhud, in the fifth year after the Hijrah, and which had been won by the Muslims in spite of their being heavily outnumbered by about ten thousand kafirun, thanks to a combination of factors, including the unexpected tactic of digging a large trench between the unprotected side of Madina and the enemy, awful weather which only troubled the enemy, mutual distrust between the different tribes who had combined in order to wipe out the Muslims, and the extremely low morale that Allah had placed in the enemy's hearts. Again, I tried to imagine what it must have been like, as the trench was swiftly dug before the enemy arrived, at a time when the Muslims had little food,

until the two armies suddenly faced each other across its relatively narrow width, and the contests in single combat began.

I had faced death before, and come close to it, but never in battle, and I was aware that this must be a very unique experience, especially if fighting in the way of Allah, for the outcome is itself always especially raw and dramatic and unique.

It must have been a very tense time, for the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, did not pray dhur and asr on the day of the Trench until after the sun had set, and he was aware that the Banu Qurayza planned to cut off the Muslims' food and water supplies and attack them from the rear when the time was ripe, and yet somehow, by the grace of Allah, instead of simply charging and overrunning the Muslims, the enemy had been forced to flee.

✿ ✿ ✿

Near the site of the battle of the Trench is the Masjid al-Qiblatain, the Mosque of the Two Qiblahs, where, about seventeen months after the Hijrah, the Prophet Muhammad had been commanded to stop facing Jerusalem when doing the prayer and to face the Ka'aba in Makka instead, right in the middle of the prayer. He, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, had changed the direction he was facing immediately, and everyone standing in the prayer behind him had followed suit, may Allah be pleased with them. It was this re-orientation that had even more decisively distinguished the small but now rapidly growing Muslim community from the Jews and the Christians, who both faced Jerusalem when they were praying.

Everyone has a direction, and ever since that time, it has been possible to recognise the Muslims simply by virtue of the fact that they face in the direction of the Ka'aba in Makka when they do the prayer, and not in the direction of the place where the Temple of the Prophet Sulayman used to stand, and where the Al-Aqsa Mosque now stands, in Jerusalem.

Wherever I walked through the streets of Madina, I tried to recall what had once happened there, and to picture all that had taken place there in the time of the Prophet, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him. Of course, I was only aware of a very little of all

that had happened, and I knew that whatever I imagined probably did not accurately correspond to the way it had actually been, and yet, just by being there, it brought what little I knew more to life. Although I had no money and nothing to eat, and would not beg, I was extremely content to be there, for as well as what its past contains, Madina is still a very beautiful and peaceful place in which to dwell, and those who are privileged to live there are extremely fortunate, for only good people are permitted to dwell there for any length of time:

> **The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Madina is like the blacksmith's furnace. It removes the impurities and purifies the good.'**
>
> **Malik related to me that Yahya ibn Sa'id said, 'I heard Abu'l-Hubab Sa'id ibn Yasar say that he heard Abu Hurayra say that he heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, "I was ordered to a town which will eat up towns. They used to say, 'Yathrib', but it is Madina. It removes the bad people like the blacksmith's furnace removes impurities from the iron."'**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 45.2.4-5)**

After I had been in Madina for three days, Talha invited me to come and visit the University of Madina, which is situated several miles out of town. Naturally I accepted his invitation, for I was interested to see what it was like – and disappointed when I did, for the pattern of life there was so different to that which had been embodied by the first Muslim community. There were no families there, no babies or children or old people, no households, no market place – in fact none of the basic dynamics of everyday life – other than a large community of young men with the best of intentions and fine aspirations, studying the different sciences and branches of knowledge in Islam, but within a social context that was very different to that which had been experienced by the Prophet Muhammad and his community. This was very clearly an academic community, based on the western model, and, as is so

often the case with the western model, set apart from the city to which it belonged.

I could not help recalling my experiences in the Sudan, where the traditional centres of learning were at the heart of the community, and where the heart of the community was a wise and humble man and not an institution, so that people were drawn to learn from him out of love, rather than being obliged to attend lectures in order to pass examinations in order to obtain paper qualifications.

I thought of Tayyaba, where Abdal-Jalil and I had spent the last precious days of Ramadan, and of Shaykh Tayyab, continually surrounded by his close followers and an apparently never ending stream of visitors, living Islam to the full, so that I had immediately thought, 'This must be like what it must have been like in the time of the Prophet!'

I looked around me at the concrete blocks and the large empty buildings, and immediately thought how similar it was to the university that I had attended in England, where information was available in vast amounts, and wisdom virtually non-existent. My heart sank.

I was made welcome by all the students that I met, many of whom had just returned from Makka after doing the Hajj, and after a meal in the western style cafeteria, with each of us eating off our own steel tray while seated at a table, rather than sharing together from one large dish while seated on the ground, I was invited to stay the night, and indeed to stay as long as I wished. Gratefully I accepted the invitation, for I did not want to become a burden for Talha, and I was also interested to see just what life was like on the university campus. Although my hosts were all Muslims, I was very aware that this was not the living Islam which had originally attracted me so irresistibly, so that I was left with no choice but to dive into the unknown and embrace Islam, and yet I was not fully aware of just why this was so.

That night I was given a bed in one of the dormitories, the first bed I had slept on since leaving Shaykh Al-Fattih Qarib'Allah's zawiyya in Omdurman, and after answering the inevitable stream of questions that issued from the lips of my hosts as best I could, we all eventually went to sleep.

We were awoken the next morning by a strident adhan for subh, followed by the angry voice of one of the students who went round all the dormitories switching on the lights and banging on the lockers and shouting 'Prayer! Prayer! Prayer!' in a loud harsh voice. My heart sank. How different this experience was to all the places where I had been where it was a joy to awake to the sweet yearning of the dawn adhan, and a joy to do wudu and then stand in prayer in the freshness of the early morning of a brand new day!

What a difference there is between those who do what they are told primarily out of fear of the Fire, and those who do what they are told primarily out of longing for the Garden, and those who do what they are told primarily out of love for Allah and His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and on all those who follow him and them.

After we had done the prayer and had breakfast, I made my way back to Madina and the peace and security of the Rowdah, whose fragrance and tranquillity soon put my heart at peace. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once said to me, "Nothing can prevent the meetings that take place in the Rowdah," and on this particular morning I tasted the truth of his words.

Despite the calm and peace of the Rowdah, I was a little perturbed at the prospect of the return journey to England, travelling overland, with winter approaching, and no money in my pockets, and only a green Sudanese robe and turban to cover my nakedness. I was certain that Allah would provide, just as He had provided us with all that we needed on the Difficult Journey to Makka, and I knew that all my provision had been written for me even before I had been born – indeed even before I had been conceived in my mother's womb – and I knew that whatever was written for me would surely find me, including death itself, and yet, being human, I was still a little worried at the prospect of the unknown. It might well turn out to be a difficult and exhausting journey, the Way Back.

As with all great ventures, the difficult part was actually getting started, taking the first step in an entirely new direction, instead of succumbing to the temptation to play it safe and return the same way as I had come. It was like being in the crater of Daribe. We were there, but we could not stay, and we could not return along the way we had come, so we could only return by going forward and hoping that there was indeed a way ahead that led back to the destination we desired.

I knew that I would soon have to start out from Madina, and that there was no going back, but at this point I did not even know for certain whether or not it was possible to travel by road all the way to Istanbul, and even if it was possible, I did not know whether or not I would be permitted to travel that road, for I did not have any visas stamped in my passport to take me through Jordan and Syria, and, being so close to the occupied lands of Palestine, there was no knowing what the political situation in these countries would be like.

As I sat there alone in the Rowdah, trying to see what would be my best course of action, I began to realise that the only way to go about it was to start travelling, on foot if necessary. As in the journey to Makka, and then to Madina, I would not ask anyone for anything. Allah knew my situation and was aware of my need, and there was no need to turn to anyone else for help. Did I not repeat **'Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'een' – 'Only You we worship and only You we ask for help'** at least twenty times each day in the course of doing my prayers? If I really meant what I was saying, then I should act accordingly! **'Hasbuna'llahu wa ni'm'al-wakil ni'm'al-mowla wa ni'm'al-nasir' – 'Allah is enough for us and He is the best guardian, the best protector and the best helper!'**

As these thoughts were passing through my mind, the Mosque had been slowly filling up as the time for dhur approached. A middle aged man who looked as if he was from Turkey had come and filled the empty space next to me, and having completed his two rakats on entering the Mosque, he leaned over to me and said, "How long will it take to travel to England overland?" Without pausing to think about it, I said the first thing that came into my heart: "About three weeks," I replied. He nodded and smiled, and then

lowered his head as the adhan for dhur filled the air, and in that moment I knew for certain that I would soon be travelling north. "Insh'Allah I will head for Istanbul," my heart said, with relief, now that the matter was clear, and everything seemed possible:

Surely those who say:
'Our Lord is Allah'
and then go straight,
no fear shall come to them,
and neither shall they grieve.
These are the people of the Garden,
there for ever,
as a reward for what they used to do.

(Qur'an: 46.13-14)

✿ ✿ ✿

Now that my mind was made up, there was still one thing that I wanted to do, and that was to visit Mount Uhud once again. Accordingly I waited until after asr, when the heat of the afternoon was bearable, and then began to walk out through the streets of Madina along the road that leads to Uhud.

UHUD

The walk to Mount Uhud took longer than I had expected, and it was almost maghrib by the time I reached the graves of the shuhada. I stopped to greet them once again, and having made my duas for them to Allah – asking Him to give them light and peace in their graves, and to give me what He had given them – I hurried over to the small nearby mosque as the adhan for maghrib filled the dusk, did wudu, and joined the handful of people who were there in the prayer.

As soon as the prayer was over, I left the mosque and began to make my way up the slopes of the mountain that had once trembled beneath the feet of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, until he had commanded it to be still. After a few minutes, I passed by a few simple dwellings as I hastened up the mountain side, determined not to be deterred by the approaching night from climbing a good way up its mighty slopes.

It must have looked a trifle odd, to see this lone figure heading up the mountain in the growing darkness towards apparently nowhere in particular, for some men emerged from the houses and called out to me, beckoning me to come over and join them. 'Wa alaikum as-salaam,' I called back, waving to them, as if returning a simple greeting, but keeping on the move, for I did not wish to be delayed unnecessarily and to waste what light there was left in having to explain my actions.

As I continued along the small path that led upwards, I could still hear the people behind me calling out to me, and on looking round, discovered that they were following me. As they quickened their pace, I quickened mine, until suddenly they were in hot pursuit and I was in full flight, adrenaline and excitement coursing through my body, as I found myself leaping upwards from boulder to boulder like a startled gazelle on the run from its hunters.

In no time at all I had left my pursuers far behind and was high up the mountain side, perched in the darkness on a large craggy

boulder that gave me a lovely panoramic view of the glowing lights of Madina that shone out in the distance far below, with the dark emptiness of the desert stretching out beyond the illuminated city to the dark blue night sky that was now alive with a myriad of shining stars. Above me was the dark silent mass of Mount Uhud, and beyond it the vast depths of the starry heavens, and I was glad to be there, panting and perspiring after my exhilarating chase up its slopes. I had hoped to climb the mountain in the daylight, but in a way it was just as good to be here in the night, and to taste its peaceful silence to the full.

As I relaxed and looked about me, I considered my approaching journey north once again. It was all very well thinking that I would just start walking in the hope that some kind soul would stop and give me a lift – for I had often done just exactly that in my previous travels in Europe – but this was not Europe, and once you were out in the desert, it was rough country to say the least. As I gazed out over the dark barren wastes that surrounded Madina, I realised that I did not particularly want to end up in the middle of this desert when night fell, with no food or water. I could now understand why some of the more faint-hearted companions of the Prophet had not wanted to go on the expedition north to Tabuk, for it must have been a long and arduous trail. Nevertheless, I was still determined to travel that road myself, and unless Allah had made other arrangements, then I would start walking, even if it killed me.

After reflecting on the stark beauty of Mount Uhud for a little while longer, I decided to head back for Madina, for the chill of the desert night was beginning to make me shiver. Carefully I picked my way back down the mountain side, amazed at how high I had come without even realising it, for in the excitement of the chase, my only concern had been the very next foot or hand hold and the need to keep my balance.

Eventually I arrived back on the lower slopes and rediscovered the path that I had left far behind me in my flight. As I approached the small cluster of dwellings that nestle up above the mosque, I was amazed to find a group of about twenty men waiting for me, some of them armed with sticks. I walked up to them, and greeted them warmly, and then, in answer to all their questions, we all sat

down as I explained in my very limited Arabic what I had been doing and why, relief and amusement appearing on their faces as understanding dawned.

Having settled their minds, I at last rose to my feet, saying that it was time I was on my way back to Madina – only to be told that while I had been up the mountain, they had called the police, and that it would be better if I waited until they arrived. I felt my heart jump a little, for no one particularly likes to be the subject of a police enquiry, but shrugged my shoulders and agreed to do so. I had not done anything wrong, and besides, I had no choice in the matter, for my companions' minds were already made up. Accordingly I spent the next twenty minutes chatting with everyone and drinking tea, wondering all the while what on earth is Allah going to do with me next, until finally an American-style police car drew up nearby with all its lights flashing.

The large policeman who emerged from the car did not stand on ceremony. Having listened to what everyone had to say, and after briefly examining my passport, he motioned me to go to the car. As I rose to my feet, he deftly grabbed the fingers of my right hand in a powerful and painful grip, and searched my pockets with his free hand, telling me to shut up and get in the car when I politely pointed out that this was not the way to treat a Muslim and a visitor to Madina.

There was no point in resisting. Whatever appeared to be happening, the reality of the situation was that I was in the hands of Allah, and He would do as He wished with me. I sat silently in the back of the car as we drove back into Madina, thankful that I did not have to walk back, feeling a little bewildered by this sudden chain of events, quietly calling on Allah for a good outcome, and submitting to whatever the decree of Allah had in store for me.

MADINA

I was expecting that I would be taken to the police station and subjected to a lengthy interrogation once we were back in Madina. It was a prospect that I did not particularly relish, for I had not had anything to eat since breakfast and I was feeling tired and hungry. To my surprise, however, the car drew up outside a smart looking tent pitched in an empty patch of ground in the middle of Madina. The policeman told me to get out and then led me inside the tent, where there were a few empty chairs, and a young man seated behind a desk. Having spoken a few words to the young man, the policeman turned and left, leaving my life as abruptly as he had entered it. The young man smiled and asked me to have a seat, before busying himself with some papers. I sat there a little mystified, wondering what was going to happen next. What an evening this was turning out to be!

A few minutes later, another young man entered the tent, and after a few words with the man behind the desk, I was told to follow him. We emerged back into the busy streets of Madina, full of light and life, for all the shops and stalls and eating places were still open, doing a brisk trade as crowds of pilgrims thronged the streets, relaxing and enjoying themselves now that the serious matter of the Hajj itself had been duly completed. What a contrast it was to sharing the silent beauty of Mount Uhud with the emptiness of the sky!

After making our way through the hustle and bustle of Madina for about ten minutes, we finally arrived outside what looked like a small office. The young man showed me inside, gave me a big smile, bid me 'As-salaamu-alaikum', and disappeared back into the crowds outside. I just stood there, a little puzzled. What on earth was going on? I looked around the small office and at the two men who were there, one sitting behind a desk, the other leaning nonchalantly against a wall. It was difficult to tell what nationality they were, but it looked as if they might be from Turkey.

"Well then," said the man behind the desk in perfect English, "where do you want to go? Do you want to go to Istanbul?"

"Yes," I replied, surprised by the accuracy of his question, "as a matter of fact I do want to go to Istanbul."

"Good! Then you can come with us! I'm not exactly sure when our bus is leaving, but come back here tomorrow afternoon after asr and I'll be able to tell you for certain. It will either leave directly after the jumua, or on Saturday morning, insh'Allah." He smiled, as if he was somehow aware of my inward amazement at the way in which events were unfolding. "You must be Ahmad. How is Abdal-Jalil? I met him on the Day of Arafah during the Hajj. Has he made his mind up yet? When I talked with him, he wasn't sure whether he should travel back to England with you, or go and find work in the Gulf."

"I think he has decided to find work in the Gulf," I replied, but I haven't seen him for the last two or three days, so I don't know what he's up to for sure."

"Well, if you see him between now and tomorrow, let him know about the bus. He is welcome to come too!"

As if he had been reading my mind, for I was wondering what I was going to do about paying the fare, the man who had been leaning against the wall reached inside his breast pocket, pulled out a battered wallet, and extracted two one hundred rial notes. "Here," he said, "please have these. Bismillah!"

Gratefully I accepted his much needed gift, and having thanked them both for their help and generosity, I bid them goodnight, stepped back into the crowded street outside, and made for the nearest eating place, where I was soon tucking into what seemed like my first square meal in days. Subhana'llah! I thought, it is just as the Prophet said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him. Allah does not cease providing for His slave from where he does not expect!

As I savoured the delicious meat and rice, and felt strength returning to my limbs, I decided that I would keep half of the money that I had been given to pay for the bus fare, and the rest I would spend. My head was till virtually bald, after having been completely shaved after the Hajj, and during the chill nights it had been feeling the cold, for my cotton turban was not enough to protect it. Accordingly I decided to buy a woollen tarbush to keep it warm,

for it was now almost December, and the further north I travelled, the colder it would become. I also wanted to buy some dates for my Shaykh, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, for I knew that he enjoyed eating the dates of Madina. I would have liked to have bought some perfume as well, amber, and musk, and 'oud, but these were expensive luxuries, and reluctantly I knew that I would have to do without them.

By now it was late, and having rounded off my meal with a strong sweet coffee and a sticky cake, I decided to stay the night at Talha's. Although I had an open invitation to stay at the university, it looked as if my days in Madina were numbered, and I wanted to spend as much time as possible in Madina itself, close to the presence of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and them.

As I threaded my way through the still crowded streets, my eye caught sight of a beautiful brown woollen tarbush, whose simple geometric decoration was highlighted with white and a darker brown. A few minutes later I was five rials the poorer, and one tarbush the richer, and my head was warm at last! Having arrived at Talha's flat, I prayed isha and then lay down to sleep, reflecting gratefully on all that had happened that day, in the few brief moments of awareness before I fell asleep. What a day it had been! Alhamdulillahi wa shukrulillah!

I awoke immediately the next morning as the sound of the dawn adhan drifted in through the open window, and within quarter of an hour I was inside the Prophet's Mosque. After we had prayed subh, I stayed a while to recite some Qur'an, and then, having prayed two rakats once the sun had risen, I went off in search of a good strong cup of coffee and some sponge cake.

Later, as I walked through the streets of Madina in the old part of town, I came across a handsome young man selling Madina dates. Although they looked very good ones, I decided to wait until I had seen what there was on offer in the date market before buying any dates for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir. However I could not resist this unexpected opportunity, and asked the man for three kilos for my own personal consumption. As he was weighing them out, I could

not help asking, "Where can I find the best dates?" His face immediately tinged faintly red – just as it is related that the Prophet's face used to change colour if something annoyed him – and he looked directly at me. "These *are* the best dates," he replied. I should have taken him at his word, but instead I concluded the transaction by paying for the three kilos and continued on my way.

After a while I arrived at the date market and began to work my way down past every stall, feasting my eyes on the huge mounds of dates that met my gaze wherever I looked. The dates of Madina are undoubtedly the best dates in the world, and indeed it is related that the Messenger of Allah said that the roots of the date palms of Madina are in the Garden. The best of them are huge, and seven of them are enough to satisfy your hunger and sustain you as effectively as any other meal. Despite the obvious good quality of these dates, however, I could not find any that seemed as good as the ones I had just bought. The young man had meant what he said. Quickly I retraced my steps to where he had been standing – but he was gone, and not for the first time in my life I found myself wishing that I had followed my heart and not listened to my head!

By now it was nearly time for dhur, and accordingly I returned briefly to Talha's flat to drop off the dates that I had bought, before doing wudu and making my way back to the Rowdah, whose peaceful fragrance and perfumed tranquillity welcomed and refreshed me yet again. As always the prayer was beautiful and revivifying, and I found myself wishing that all the prayers I prayed could be as profoundly satisfying and as free from any form of distraction, whether outward or inward, as this.

After the prayer was over, who should appear but Abdal-Jalil, looking well and purposeful. It turned out that he had been with Muhammad Abdal-Bari and Uthman and Muhammad Qasim who were indeed staying as the guests of Shaykh Al-Bukhari, and that there was going to be a gathering of dhikr that very evening, it being laylat'al-jumua, to which I was invited. My heart jumped for joy at the prospect, for I love gatherings of dhikr, and I had not been to one for some time now.

I in turn passed on the greetings and message from the man at the coach office whom Abdal-Jalil had met on the Day of Arafah. Abdal-Jalil smiled and replied that after meeting that man, he had

also met another man who had said he could fix him up with a job working on an oil-rig. They had subsequently met again in Madina, and now everything was arranged, and insh'Allah he would soon be flying out to the Gulf. I smiled, as I remembered Abdal-Jalil voicing his aspirations about becoming a millionaire as we trekked across the foothills of Daribe in the Jebel Murra. If anyone deserved to be a millionaire, then he did, and I wished him well!

After we had been chatting for several minutes, and I had told Abdal-Jalil what had been happening to me, we were joined by a tall smiling man from the Sudan who was one of the fuqara of Shaykh Al-Bukhari. He greeted us warmly and then produced three small wrinkled dates from one of the pockets of his voluminous white robe and handed them to me with a quiet 'Bismillah'.

"These are some of the last dates to be harvested from the last two surviving date palms to have been planted by the Prophet, salla'llahu alayhi wa sallam," explained Abdal-Jalil. "They were recently cut down by the Wahhabis because, they said, some people were idolising them! So count yourself lucky!" We laughed sadly at the blind stupidity behind this act of mindless destruction, and then I ate the three dates on the spot, one by one, reciting Surat'al-Ikhlas silently each time before I put them into my mouth:

A'udhu bi'llahi min ash-shaytani'r-rajim
Bismillahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim

Qul Huwa'llahu Ahad
Allahu's-Samad
Lam yalid wa lam yuwlad
Wa lam yakun lahu kufuwan Ahad.

Which means:

I seek protection in Allah from the outcast shaytan.
In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Say: He is Allah the One
Allah the Everlasting
No one is born from Him and He is not born from anything
And there is nothing like Him.

(Qur'an: 112.1-4)

The dates were chewy and sticky and overflowing with flavour. My wish had been granted. I had wanted to taste the best dates in Madina, and there could not possibly be any dates better than these! After I had finished my little feast, I carefully wrapped the three date-stones in my one handkerchief and stored them safely away in my pocket. As things turned out, I kept them with me for a long time, and eventually planted them in a remote part of Kew Gardens during one long hot summer, hoping that somehow they might grow there!

✿ ✿ ✿

After chatting with Abdal-Jalil and the tall Sudanese faqir for a while longer, we all decided to go our separate ways, and having arranged to meet Abdal-Jalil and the other fuqara from England outside the Bab As-Salaam, which is one of the side entrances to the Prophet's Mosque, fifteen minutes before maghrib, I retraced my steps back to the date market. For all I knew, I might be on a coach bound for Istanbul tomorrow, and this might be my last chance to purchase some dates for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit.

It was now the hottest part of the afternoon, and many of the stalls in the date market were closed, but as it happened I did find one stall that had an excellent selection of dates, the best of which were just as good as the ones I had bought earlier on in the day. Having ascertained what the price per kilo was, I calculated that I had just enough money to buy seven kilos, with a little left over to spare, and accordingly I was soon striding down the streets of Madina with about fifteen pounds of dates, which, I had been informed, were called 'Sharabanas' – 'Drinkers', slung over my shoulder.

The last of my spending money was crying out to be spent, for as Abdal-Aziz used to say, 'How can you expect Allah to give you more, when you still haven't spent what you already have?' I had already learned in the Sudan never to cling to money out of anxiety for my future needs, for to do this is to deny the unlimited generosity of Allah, and accordingly I treated myself to one more strong sweet coffee and gateau in the best coffee shop in town, without the slightest qualm of apprehension or remorse, before surrendering the last of my loose change to the first beggar that I encountered. All that I had left was the hundred rial note that I

had put to one side to pay for my coach ticket. Insh'Allah it would be enough!

Having returned to Talha's flat once again, I packed the Sharabanas firmly at the bottom of my Sudanese camel bag, on top of the small sword that I had purchased in Omdurman, resolving not to touch them again until it was time to present them to Shaykh Abdal-Qadir, insh'Allah, and then returned to the Prophet's Mosque to wait for asr. How relaxing it is to base your day on the times of the prayer, rather than on the hours of a wrist-watch. Time becomes elastic and accommodating, and somehow it seems as if there is more time in which to do what you have to do, and less urgency as you do it. Once again the adhan for the prayer filled the air, and once again the Mosque was filled to capacity with people of all shapes and sizes and ages and colours, standing and bowing and prostrating and sitting in prayer, while the pigeons wheeled above the open courtyard and the sinking sun shone down on the lovely green dome that crowns the grave of the Best of Creation, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him!

✿ ✿ ✿

After asr I returned to the coach office, only to find that both the men who had been there the night before were not there now. Instead there was a keen-eyed white-haired smartly-dressed man called Mustafa, who greeted me and welcomed me and insisted that I should travel on his coach, which was leaving Madina on Saturday morning at ten o' clock in the morning sharp, insh'Allah. "Don't worry about visas," continued Mustafa, sounding utterly confident and capable, "I will handle that at each border for you." There only remained one more question, the ninety-nine million dollar question:

"How much is the ticket?" I asked.

"Two hundred rials," he replied firmly.

My heart sank. I paused, and then pulled out all the money that I possessed in the world. "I'm afraid I only have one hundred rials," I said apologetically. "Would it be possible for you to accept this?"

"I'm sorry," said Mustafa, "the fare is two hundred rials. You must admit that it is a very reasonable price."

For a moment there was silence in the office. I did not know what to say or do. And then a man whom I had hardly even noticed, but who had been there all the time, resolved the situation. "It's alright," he said, "I'll pay the other hundred," and pulling out a large wadge of notes from a pocket, he peeled off one of them and gave it to me.

"Baraka'llahu fi'k!" I said with true gratitude. "Thankyou so much. May Allah give you the Garden!" And so saying, I handed the two pieces of paper over to Mustafa with a firm 'Bismillah!'

"Bismillah!" said Mustafa with a big smile on his face. "Be here at nine o' clock on Saturday morning, and don't be late!"

"Don't you worry," I replied, "insh'Allah I will be here then," and so saying I shook his hand and the hands of everyone else who were present, bid them a joyful 'As-salaamu-alaikum', and stepped back out into the streets of Madina, glad to have finalised my travel arrangements thanks to the grace and generosity of Allah, but also half wishing that I could remain in Madina, for there is no doubt that it is the best city in the world as far as the muminun are concerned.

✿ ✿ ✿

Once again I returned to Talha's flat, extremely grateful to have such a convenient haven so close to the Prophet's Mosque. There was just time to have a good wash and a ghusl before it was time to meet the other English fuqara at the Bab As-Salaam, and then, insh'Allah, I would have the honour of meeting Shaykh Al-Bukhari and his fuqara and the delight of dhikr and a laylat'al-fuqara in Madina itself.

As I made my way towards the Prophet's Mosque an hour later in the late afternoon sunshine, freshly washed and wearing a clean white robe and my green turban over my new tarbush, I felt young and new and free of care. How good it was to be alive! The immediate prospect of an evening's dhikr filled me with expectation, and now that the next stage of my journey north had been arranged, there was nothing apparently in the foreseeable future that might be any cause for concern.

There was, however, one matter which had not yet been resolved, and which was making me feel a little unsure: When Abdal-

Jalil and I had first arrived in Makka, immediately before the rites of the Hajj were about to begin, Muhammad Abdal-Bari had informed me that Shaykh Abdal-Qadir had asked him to arrange a marriage for me, with the help of Shaykh Al-Bukhari, in Madina. At the time I had cut him short, for we were all in ihram, saying, "Let us discuss this after the Hajj. A man in ihram should neither marry, nor become engaged to be married, nor arrange a marriage."

Immediately after the rites of the Hajj were over, Muhammad Abdal-Bari had announced that he no longer wished to be the Amir of our group, and had relinquished the burden of having to make any of the decisions that a leader has to make. Accordingly Abdal-Jalil and I had made our own arrangements as regards the journey to Madina, and during our last few days in Makka, neither Muhammad Abdal-Bari nor I had raised the subject or discussed the matter any further. We had subsequently travelled to Madina by different routes, and had ended up staying as the guests of different hosts. We had not yet met during our stay in Madina, and accordingly our proposed meeting that evening would be the first time that we had seen each other for nearly a week. The proposed marriage was bound to be discussed at some point, and I could not help feeling uncertain about what the outcome might be.

Although there would be great baraka in any marriage arranged by Shaykh Al-Bukhari, I could not help feeling uncertain about marrying a lady whom I hardly knew. Having been brought up in the west, it seemed best to me that a man should choose the woman he wanted to marry. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir had once said that there are three kinds of marriage, of which the last kind is the best: the one where you marry the first woman who comes along, the one where you wait and consider your choice and then choose, and the one where you do not choose but accept the choice of the leader of your community, trusting in his foresight and judgement and wisdom. I could appreciate the truth of his words, but now that I was faced with the immediate possibility of such a marriage, I did not feel any enthusiasm for it, for I wanted to marry a woman whom I loved and who loved me, and it seemed preferable that such love should already exist to a certain degree before the marriage took place, rather than that we should marry as virtual strangers, hoping that this love would appear later after the marriage had taken place and once the two of us had come to know each other better.

I was also well aware that the Prophet Muhammad had said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, that a man may marry a woman because of her beauty, or because she comes from a good family, or because she is wealthy, or because she is a sincere mumin and follower of the deen of Islam, and that the last of these reasons is the best. I knew that if this proposed marriage did indeed take place, then it would be on the basis of the best of these reasons, and yet I could not help wondering whether or not I and the wife that Shaykh Al-Bukhari might choose for me would be entirely compatible. It was a delicate and difficult matter. I had met couples who had had arranged marriages and who were happily married, as well as couples who had fallen in love with each other and married, only to find that they could not live happily together. And I had also met with the reverse of these situations. I would be only too glad to marry if I met the right partner, but I had no desire to rush into a marriage that might prove to be unhappy or disastrous, and in my mind it seemed clear that although it is very beneficial if a husband and wife are both Muslims – for this means that their understanding of existence and orientation in life are fundamentally the same – this does not in itself guarantee that they will be happily married, and although they may respect and understand each other, this does not necessarily mean that they will love each other.

I was aware that the root of my lack of enthusiasm and my uncertainty was partially a combination of lack of trust and fear of the unknown, but, looking deep into my heart, I knew that I did not wish to marry at this particular point in time, and I could not deny it. I was also well aware that in the past Shaykh Abdal-Qadir had often asked me to do things that I had not wanted to do at all, and yet whenever I had opposed what I wanted and had done as he had asked, the outcome had always turned out to be very different to the one I had envisaged, and had usually been of great benefit to myself. Accordingly I knew that I would be well advised not to actually actively oppose this latest request from my Shaykh.

I was fully aware that at the heart of this matter was my contract with my Shaykh, for the seeker of knowledge agrees to surrender his will to his spiritual guide and teacher, and to do as he tells him to do, solely in order to be guided along the way that leads to self-knowledge and gnosis of Allah. This process necessi-

tates knowledge of the self and purification of the self, so that it may be freed from all its desires for what is other than Allah, and from any illusions that it may have about its own reality. Accordingly it is often the case that the true Shaykh asks his follower to do something which the follower may neither understand nor desire, but which is necessary if the follower's self is to be confronted and recognised for what it is. If this treatment of the self is to be successful, then there must be great love and trust between the follower and the teacher. Only the one whose desire for gnosis of Allah is paramount obeys his Shaykh in all that he asks, and only the one who trusts his Shaykh completely obeys him, for only then are the intentions and actions of the follower sincere. He follows the guidance of his Shaykh because he trusts him, knowing that it is he, and not his Shaykh, who is responsible for his actions, and that it is he, and not his Shaykh, who will be answerable for them on the Last Day.

This situation is often compared to the relationship between the Prophet Musa and the Prophet Al-Khidr, peace be on them, which is described in the Qur'an in Surat'al-Kahf. We are told that Al-Khidr had been given knowledge by Allah that Musa did not have, and that Musa asked Al-Khidr to allow him to accompany him so that he might learn from him. Al-Khidr replied that Musa would not be able to bear with him, because he would not be able to understand his actions, but nevertheless allowed Musa to accompany him on the condition that he did not question his actions. Having set out together, three situations arose along their way, in which Musa could not help asking why Al-Khidr had acted as he did. After Musa had questioned Al-Khidr's actions for the third time, Al-Khidr said that this was where the two of them had to part company, but before doing so, explained why he had acted as he had done in those three situations, and concluded by saying, **"And I did not do it of my own accord,"** (Qur'an: 18.82), meaning that his actions were by Allah.

The relationship between the true Shaykh and the sincere seeker of knowledge is very similar to the relationship between Al-Khidr and Musa in many ways, for no matter how hard he tries, the seeker does not always understand his teacher. It is for this reason that Shaykh Abu'l-Abbas al-Mursi once said, "Whoever asks his Shaykh

'Why?' will never be happy." Unless he trusts his guide completely, the seeker's lack of trust in him means that the two part company before the seeker has reached the destination of the gnosis of Allah that he once desired. The parting between the two occurs simply because the seeker of knowledge cannot bear with the one who possesses it.

Although, if I was honest with myself, I did not want to have an arranged marriage in Madina at this point in time, I also did not want to part company with Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, for I knew that he was the best guide and teacher I had ever met, and that having met, I need look no further. Accordingly I inwardly surrendered my will to the will of Allah and decided to submit to whatever He decreed in the matter. I would do nothing to avoid the marriage or to precipitate it. As I approached the Prophet's Mosque, I made the dua that I often make when faced with a choice about which I am uncertain: "May what You want happen, O Allah, but please only decree what is best for me."

As it turned out, events unfolded in accordance with my inward state: I arrived in good time at the Bab As-Salaam, with my hand-written Diwan that had been hand-bound in leather by Hajj Abdullah Abu Ali back in London not so long ago, in my right hand, and sat down just inside the Mosque to wait for the other English fuqara to arrive. The time at which we had agreed to meet came and went. The minutes passed. The Mosque filled with people. The sun sank below the horizon. The adhan was given, and a few minutes later I was standing in the front row of the prayer, drinking in the sweetness and power of the Qur'an as it was recited by the Imam in the first two rakats of maghrib.

After we had prayed maghrib, and the sunnah prayers after it, I looked hard for the fuqara, on both sides of the Bab As-Salaam, but they were nowhere to be seen. Partly disappointed, and partly relieved, I decided that the only thing to do was to have my own night of dhikr in the Rowdah of the Prophet, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, for there was no other place that I would rather be, and accordingly I moved further into the Mosque and found a place that was close to both the grave of the Prophet and the qiblah wall.

Sitting cross-legged on the thick beautiful carpet, only a few feet away from the tomb of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, I dived into the Diwan, singing softly so as not to disturb any of the other people who were also intent in their worship of Allah, either reciting the Qur'an, or doing dhikr, or making duas, or doing voluntary rakats. I began with the qasida that, in the circumstances, seemed most fitting, **The Song Written before the Prophet**, singing the words to one of the many beautiful melodies that I had been so fortunate to have been taught in the past:

THE SONG WRITTEN BEFORE THE PROPHET

We are present in the Rowdah of the Prophet,
seeking acceptance and welcome.

We have come, O best of refuges,
bowed, in humility and bewilderment.

Ask Allah to give us every help,
that we may attain our desire at the time debts fall due.

You have a vast power which is beyond compare
and a message greater than every messenger's.

You are the door to Allah in every good thing;
whoever comes to you gains acceptance and union.

Every secret which came to the prophets
is from your sublimity, confirmed through transmission.

I have looked to the Prophet to plead with Allah
in my affairs, for he is the accepted intercessor.

All whose journey ends at the house of a generous host,
get what they ask for, even their most extreme desires.

We have given thanks to Allah for every time
that He has given us the gift of a visit to the Messenger,

And a visit to all those in Baqi
of the Companions and the offspring of Fatima,

And a visit to every wife and daughter and son
of the deliverer of mankind on the Day debts fall due,

And a visit to every martyr in Uhud,
and the uncle of the Messenger.

We have asked by them perfect peace for us
on our journey to our land and when we enter it.

We have sought deliverance on the Day of Gathering
and safety from the ignorant.

Our Lord, bless the Prophet and his Family
and Companions and the Followers.

(Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib)

To read the English translation of the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib is one thing, but to sing its qasidas in Arabic is quite another thing altogether – for the sounds and meanings have a direct effect on the heart, in a manner that has nothing to do with the thought process or intellectual understanding – and, as I discovered, to sing them in the Rowdah itself is yet again quite another thing altogether – for the intensely peaceful baraka that fills the place and permeates every atom there with a deeply profound tranquillity, bathes the heart in light and enables you to do dhikr easily and with attention.

By the time I had finished singing the first qasida, a deep peace pervaded my heart, and as I continued with the next one I could feel it expand and glow:

THE QUALITIES OF MUHAMMAD

Muhammad is the fountain-head of lights and darknesses
and the source of their emergence
from the presence of pre-endless-time.

So his light was the first of lights
when He determined the manifestation
of His Names in the first world.

From him all things were clothed
in their origination in existence,
and their continuity is uninterruptedly from him.

The prophets and messengers
have come from him one by one,
and all the kings and all the creatures.

The relationship of the Seal and the Poles
to his light is that of a drop
to oceans of light and refreshment.

The sun and the moon and the stars have appeared from him,
as have the Throne, and the Tablet of Forms,
and the Footstool, and the dynasties.

So witness the light which has spread through existence
and do not see other-than-it,
and you will soon arrive.

For he is the highest manifestation
of Allah's Names
and the perfect secret of the Attributes.

So Allah chose him in His timeless knowledge
and sent him to the whole of creation
and to the other messengers.

After awakening him Allah conveyed him one night
to the distance of two bow-spans
until he achieved his desire.

The higher world rejoiced
when he ascended,
and the Throne gave him security from fear.

He perceived the veils and the lights
until he drew near and it was proclaimed:
'Draw near My Beloved, and set aside your shyness.'

'Rejoice in the sight of Our lights
and demand all you want
and it will be given without delay.'

So the Chosen One returned with every noble quality
and he informed the people
about al-Aqsa and the paths to it.

**Take refuge with him in every dilemma, O my brother,
and your speech among the people
will become like honey.**

**Delight in hearing of his good character and qualities,
and evoke his virtues,
and be on guard against mistakes.**

**How many miracles have come from his hand!
They have left the envious
and all other spiritual teachings powerless.**

**The greatest of the miracles
which were manifested for him
is that Book which brought us deeds.**

**In every act there are benefits which come from it,
whose number cannot be numbered,
and which are not perceptible to the eyes.**

**The Book of Allah itself contains some of these benefits
by which every one who is sick of heart
is healed of his sickness.**

**No hero is capable of his mighty power,
so the inability to praise him
is the best of ways.**

**I have copied you in my praise
and I have come to your compassion
seeking intercession with Allah, so intercede on my behalf.**

**With Allah you are the greatest of creation in degree,
so bring our hearts closer to what we hope for,
O my desire!**

**By your rank,
created beings serve whoever seeks shelter with you,
O helper of every wali!**

**O my support, I have sought shelter with you
so do not leave me to my body and my self,
but heal us of our ill feelings.**

Nothing befalls the slave whose helper you are:
on the level land and on the mountains
you are my staff.

I have become confused about myself,
so take me by the hand.
For me there is no turning away from your first light.

May the God of the Throne bless you
as long as the sun of reality is manifested
with the Names and the Acts.

And so with your Family and Companions
as long as the grass grows
and the sky pours down abundant rain.

Then I ask for acceptance for all the Men of Allah
as long as created beings give praise to the One
Who is above identification with forms.

And unfold all blessings on our brothers,
in this world and the next,
and do not abandon us to our actions.

Forgive our parents all their mistakes, and the Muslims,
by an outpouring from You,
O One before-endless-time!

(Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib)

After completing this extraordinary qasida that indicates, so eloquently, the true nature of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, and the vast extent of his knowledge and wisdom, I sang several of the shorter qasidas that are to be found in the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, including the ones entitled **Counsel on Death** and **Counsel:**

COUNSEL ON DEATH

Prepare yourself for death, O my brother, for
it will descend. Do not draw out your hopes
in case your heart treats you harshly.

Persevere in reflection which will make you aware
and move you to do good works,
for life will depart.

Constantly go over the states of the last hour,
the raising of bodies, and the Gathering,
and the Balance which is set up.

Then there is the Sirat
which will have obstacles laid out on it
to make the crossing difficult for the rebellious.

While whoever was obedient and sincere towards Allah
will pass over it like a flash of lightning
or a wind and will go on.

If you wish to be given a drink from the Hawd
on the Day of Gathering
you must love the Prophet and his descendants.

And bless the guide who intercedes for mankind.
He is the one who will plead for us
when creation is terrified.

May the blessings of Allah be upon him in every country,
and his Family and Companions
and those who love him.

I ask the Lord, Allah,
for the gift of bliss and a seal of goodness
for me and those who draw near.

And also:

COUNSEL

Peace be upon the brotherhood in every place,
a place that embraces all
in every assembly.

I wish to give good counsel to all,
hoping for the attainment of desire,
might, victory and strength.

My first counsel to the one who has dedicated himself to
fear of Allah is that he accompany those who are free
in making-happen and in casting-out.

For this is the basis of wealth
if you are intelligent;
rely on it and stick to the shari'ah.

All those who have obtained knowledge and dominion
have only obtained it
by accompanying a humble man,

By whom I mean the Shaykh
whose light has overflowed,
and who has brought secrets and wealth with him.

If you desire lights and the opening of inner sight,
then copy him in exaltation of Allah
and turn from conflict.

And persevere in dhikr taught with idhn
and neglect it neither in the state
of distress nor of success.

Enrich the awakenings that come from the dhikr
by keeping to the shari'ah,
and quickly tell your Shaykh all that happens to you.

So the negation of choice, and then all will,
is the purest of springs,
if you are able to hear.

These are the stations of certainty:
You start out with turning-away [from wrong action],
doing-without, and then fear which brings restraint.

Hope, gratitude, then patience and trust,
then satisfaction
and the love that joins them all.

Its causes are the pure contemplation of what we have,
and of the perfection of the Attributes,
then contemplation of the dazzling light;

By it, I mean the Messenger Muhammad,
may blessings be upon him
in quantity as great as all that is even or odd,

And on his Family and Companions
and every gnostic calling to the path of Allah
in every assembly.

(Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib)

I felt as if I could have gone on singing from the Diwan all night, glorifying Allah and asking for His blessings and peace on His beloved Prophet whose light pervades not only his grave, and the Rowdah, and his Mosque, and Madina, but the whole of creation. However, time was passing, and sensing that it would soon be time to pray isha, I had to be satisfied with just one final qasida, **Withdrawal into the Perception of the Essence:**

WITHDRAWAL INTO THE PERCEPTION OF THE ESSENCE

The face of the Beloved appeared
and shone in the early dawn.

His light pervaded my heart,
so I prostrated myself in awe.

He said to me: 'Rise! – and ask of Me!
You will have whatever you desire.'

I replied: 'You. You are enough for me!
Away from You I cannot live!'

He said: 'My slave, there is good news for you,
so enjoy the vision.'

'You are a treasure to My slaves
and you are a dhikr to mankind.'

'Every good and every beauty in man
has spread from Me.'

'The Attributes of My Essence were hidden,
and they were manifested in the existence-traces.'

Truly created beings are
meanings set up in images.

All who grasp this are among
the people of discrimination.

The one who is cut off from us
has not tasted the sweetness of life.

Our Lord, bless the one whose light
has spread through all mankind.

(Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib)

As my night of dhikr drew to its close, I sealed it with one final blessing on the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. It was one of the first invocations that I had learned after embracing Islam, and as I recited it, it was as if I was only just beginning to understand its true meaning for the first time, in spite of all the countless times that I had repeated it in the past, now that I was actually at the graveside of the one on whom these blessings were being asked:

May Allah bless him and his Family and grant them peace,
and his Companions and all the believing slaves of Allah.
Amin. Amin. Amin.
And peace be upon the Prophets and the Messengers.
And peace be upon the Prophets and the Messengers.
And peace be upon the Prophets and the Messengers,
and on all the saliheen.
And the last of our prayer is:
Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.
There is no great power and no strength but through Allah,
the Mighty, the Great.
My help is only with Allah.
In Him I have put my trust.
And to Him I turn in renewal.
Praise belongs to Allah
for the blessing of Islam,
and it is blessing enough.
Glory be to your Lord,
the Lord of Might, above what they describe,

and peace be upon the Messengers,
and praise belongs to Allah,
the Lord of the worlds.

I paused, tasting the sweet peace and radiance in my heart for a moment, and then did a very quiet hadra, outwardly sober and inwardly drunk with light, still remaining seated so as not to draw attention to myself, followed by a recitation of the Ayat'an-Nur, the Sign of Light:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.
The likeness of His light is as if there were a niche,
and in the niche is a lamp,
and in the lamp is a glass,
and the glass as it were a brilliant star,
lit from a blessed tree, an olive,
neither of the east nor of the west,
whose oil is well nigh luminous,
though fire scarce touched it.
Light upon light.
Allah guides whoever He wants to His light.
Allah sets up likenesses for man.
And Allah knows all things.

(Qur'an: 24.35)

Enveloped in the deep inward silence that followed, and in the sweet perfumed fragrance of the Rowdah that surrounded me, I made dua, asking Allah for blessings and peace on the Prophet Muhammad and his Family and his Companions, and on all the Muslims – those who had already died, and those who were still alive, and those who were yet to be born. I asked Allah to bless my living guide and teacher, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, and all the past teachers who are the individual links in the human chains of transmission of knowledge and wisdom that stretch in an unbroken line from the Prophet Muhammad himself all the way through to today's great teachers. I asked Allah to bless all the teaching Shaykhs and all those whom they teach. I asked Allah to bless my parents, and all my relations, and everyone whom I had ever met or would meet, and to give them the Garden. I asked Allah always to be with the people whom He loves, and to be protected from the kafirun and the munafiqun. I asked Allah to direct my

life, so that both I and everyone else were protected from the wrong actions of either myself or anyone else, and to guide me in it, so that it led to knowledge and wisdom and gnosis in this world, and to peace in the grave after my death, and to no fear on the Last Day, and to a swift passage across the Sirat, and to a drink at the Hawd on the other side, and to a place in the Garden for ever, and to the vision of Allah in the Garden within the Garden.

Just as I was coming to the end of my duas, the adhan for isha filled the Mosque, and my whole being. What a perfect evening it had been! When the time came to stand for the prayer, my body felt as light as a feather, and my heart as bright as a light.

After the prayer was over, and when I had completed my sunnah prayers, I was just making my way across the open courtyard beneath a sky full of stars towards one of the side entrances, when the faqir of Shaykh Al-Bukhari who had given me the three dates earlier on that day suddenly appeared before me. His face was shining, and his teeth and robe and turban gleamed with whiteness, as he pointed to the heavens with his right index finger and said in a voice filled with contentment and joy, "Li'llah ... li'llah ... li'llah!" – "To Allah ... to Allah ... to Allah!"

That night, I had a clear dream: A group of people were gathered together, with confetti in their hands, as if they were waiting to celebrate a wedding. Suddenly, I saw myself running through and past them, to a waiting lorry – like the ones in which Abdal-Jalil and I had crossed the desert in the Sudan – which I boarded just as it was driving off, leaving the people looking surprised and speechless as the confetti fell from their hands.

The meaning of the dream appeared to be clear, and it seemed to indicate that my being presented with the possibility of marriage at this stage had been more in the nature of a test along the path to knowledge of Allah, to see whether I wished to continue the journey or not. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, once said that the good dream of a man who is salih is a forty-sixth part of prophecy, but nevertheless, I was well aware that the interpretation of dreams is an exact science, and that it is all too easy to project a meaning onto them that is not

correct, and accordingly I still waited to see just exactly what would happen during the next twenty-four hours.

✿ ✿ ✿

I prepared for the jumua in good time, but arrived at the Prophet's Mosque to find that it was already completely full and overflowing. Accordingly I found a place in the sun on the white marble paving that surrounds the Mosque, and after praying two pairs of rakats, I sat in the midst of the growing crowd of people, at peace with my self and the world around me, and perspiring from the heat.

As I sat amongst all the freshly washed and perfumed people who had gathered for the jumua prayer, sitting cross-legged on the cold white marble and relaxing in the hot sun and the slight breeze that helped to keep us cool, I again marvelled at the sheer variety of people who surrounded me, all of whom were here simply because of one man, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, whatever their own individual nationalities and mother tongues and social status might be. It was amazing!

I tried to drink it all in as deeply as possible, to imprint it forever in the depths of my innermost being, so that wherever I went, and whatever happened, I would never forget the precious days I had spent in Makka and Madina. Today I was in Madina. A week ago I had been in Makka. In a week's time only Allah knew where I would be, for within twenty-four hours, insh'Allah, I would be truly on the Way Back, with everything that had once been waiting for me in the future now behind me forever.

Insh'Allah, in the years to come, I would return to Makka and Madina again, and again, but the first time is always the most extraordinary time, when whatever you experience is new and fresh and most immediate, and as I sat there surrounded by people and yet completely alone – although not at all lonely – I was sharply aware of how precious each moment in life is, and how different they are, and how quickly they pass, and how swiftly life changes, so that what was once apparently real and close to hand disappears, and is gone forever.

✿ ✿ ✿

Eventually the adhan was given, and after the khutba we all rose to do the prayer, thousands and thousands of Muslims, facing Makka and worshipping Allah in the manner that we had been taught, thanks to the Messenger of Allah, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, whose grave and body and spirit were so close at hand. The texture of the jumua here in Madina was different to that of the jumua in Makka, more human and intimate, and yet equally peaceful and profound. Baraka is baraka whatever it may feel like!

After the prayer was over, I made dua, for the Prophet once said that there is a time during the day of the jumua when Allah gives to a Muslim slave standing in prayer whatever he asks for. It is related from Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> **"The best of days on which the sun rises is the day of jumua. In it Adam was created, and in it he fell from the Garden. In it he was forgiven, and in it he died. In it the Hour occurs, and every moving thing listens from morning till sunset in apprehension of the Hour except jinn and men. In it is a time when Allah gives to a Muslim slave standing in prayer whatever he asks for."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 5.7.17)**

Hoping that I might be making my dua in this special time – although I subsequently discovered that it occurs between asr and maghrib – I thanked Allah for all the blessings with which he had favoured me up to now, and asked Him to continue to do so. Then, having asked for all that I wanted to ask for, I asked Allah for a safe journey back to England. During our meeting the previous afternoon, Abdal-Jalil had told me that there was going to be a large three day gathering of dhikr at Darqawi in Norfolk, starting on the 25th of December, which was now only three weeks away, and accordingly I asked Allah to get me back to England in time to be there. "O Allah," I concluded, "Insh'Allah I will catch the coach to Istanbul tomorrow, so if I have made a mistake then stop me, and if there is a better course of action then make it happen! May I only want what You want, and may what You want be what is best for me. Amin."

Having sealed my duas with a prayer on the Prophet and the Fatiha, I waited for the crowds of people to diminish, and then entered the Mosque and made my way to the fragrant peace and tranquillity of the Rowdah. Having greeted the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and Abu Bakr and Umar, may Allah be pleased with them, I helped myself to a Qur'an and recited the Surahs that I know best and love most.

I had enjoyed singing qasida after qasida from the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib the night before, but of course nothing can compare to the Qur'an itself, for it contains the words of Allah and is the only book on the face of the earth which has not been composed by man. I recited with even greater enjoyment from the Book which had been revealed by Allah through the angel Jibril to Muhammad, the Prophet who was himself illiterate and could neither read nor write, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Reciting the Qur'an has a very profound and far-reaching effect on the heart, and after about three quarters of an hour I had to stop, for it was just too overwhelming and powerful to recite any more than this. As I waited for the time of asr to arrive, I marvelled at those who know the entire Qur'an by heart, and who are forever reciting it, sometimes as often as once a week, or every three days, or in a single night. As with everything else in life, different horses for different courses.

After we had prayed asr, I spent the rest of the afternoon wandering through the streets of Madina once more, as my last precious hours in the illuminated city slipped away. Returning to the Prophet's Mosque for maghrib, I stayed there until isha, still marvelling at its peace and fragrance as I sat cross-legged on one of its rich carpets with my back against one of its pillars. How different it was in every respect to the various churches in which my early Christian education had placed me, and which I had instinctively disliked, even though I had not known why!

Finally, once the prayer was over, I returned back to Talha's flat for a good night's sleep, excitement beginning to grow in my heart at the prospect of the journey ahead. I still had not met Muhammad Abdal-Bari or Uthman or Muhammad Qasim or Abdal-Jalil, and unless something happened unexpectedly at the last minute, it looked like I would be on that coach come the morning.

The adhan for subh roused me instantly at dawn, and although I did not realise it at the time, it was the last time that I would awake to the sound of the call to prayer for three weeks. As Talha and I walked to the Prophet's Mosque in the fresh early morning, I thanked him for being such a generous and understanding host, for although he was engaged in intensive studies, so that I had not seen very much of him, he had given me the run of his flat and had shared whatever food he had with me. I thanked him and wished him all the best before we entered the Mosque, for I intended to remain there after the prayer until sunrise, and by the time I returned to the flat to pick up my camel-bag, he would have already left for the university.

For the last time for some time I stood in one of the long lines of men praying behind the Imam, his measured voice clearly reciting the Qur'an in the peaceful fragrance of the Mosque, with the lights shining out from the chandeliers, as each man fixed his eyes on the place where his forehead would rest when he went into prostration. How restful the prayer always is, but especially here!

After the prayer was over, I waited until many of the worshippers had left the Mosque and then found a quiet corner in the Rowdah. It was almost time to say farewell, but there was still some time for a little dhikr. I began by reciting the wird from the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, and then began to make all the duas that flowed freely into my heart and out on my tongue, finishing off by asking for a good journey and a wonderful future. As always, when travelling, I asked Allah to expose me to the good of the places I would pass through, and to protect me from their evil, and to put me in the company of the people whom He loves. Having completed my duas, I asked Allah to grant them by the baraka of Surah Ya Sin which I then duly recited.

By now the sun had just risen, and after doing two rakats to ask for a safe journey, I approached the structure that houses the tombs of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and Abu Bakr and Umar, may Allah be pleased with them. I greeted and made dua for each of them in turn, and then bid them farewell, filled with gratitude and with my heart at peace, after all that had taken place since the day I had embraced Islam.

Then, gazing all around me, one last time, at the graceful arches, and the marble pillars, and the rich carpets, and the lovely chandeliers, and the open courtyard, and the Suffah, and the Rowdah, and the structure that houses the graves of the Chosen One and two of his most noble companions, I walked purposefully out of the Prophet's Mosque, this most beautiful of mosques, with the early morning sun striking the green dome that shelters the Prophet's grave, and catching the wings of the doves that always seem to be forever fluttering and circling around it, may Allah bless the Prophet Muhammad and his family and his companions and all who follow him and them in what they are able with sincerity until the Last Day, and grant them peace.

✿ ✿ ✿

Within half an hour, I had returned to the flat, eaten my breakfast of bread and dates and water, collected my camel-bag with its precious cargo of dates for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir, and made my way to the travel office. The coach, which was standing nearby, was already nearly completely full, but I could see a free aisle seat near the back of the bus on the left hand side, and, greeting my fellow travellers as I worked my way down the aisle, this was where I ended up sitting, next to a young man called Muhammad, after stowing my camel-bag safely behind the seat at the very back of the bus.

I had kept what remained of the dates that I had bought from the young man in the street two days ago, with me, for when I became hungry on the journey, but as I made myself comfortable in my seat, it suddenly occurred to me that I probably had just enough dates to give one to each person in the bus. I was right. By the time every one of my fellow travellers had taken one, there were three left, which I ate myself. I was now at the mercy of Allah, with no money and no food of my own, and many hundreds of miles travelling ahead of me. Allah once said, on the lips of His Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, in a Hadith Qudsi, **"Spend! – And I will spend on you!"** Well, I had done my bit. The rest was up to Allah.

As we all sat and waited for the time to leave to arrive, I felt a little tense and awkward. It was strange not having Abdal-Jalil at my side, and I missed his company. For five months we had shared

all the hardships and pleasures that come with travel. We had travelled the Difficult Journey together, and had found ourselves in many different situations, both rough and smooth, and easy and difficult, and above all we had arrived, and done what we had set out to do. At the end of it all, we understood each other well, and respected each other, and were the best of companions. It was a pity that our destinies now lay in different directions, but that is life. In the years ahead we would meet briefly again from time to time, always united by the shared experience of having travelled the same road together for so long, but right now each of us faced a new beginning and a different destination.

I sat in silence, exchanging the odd word with the man beside me, but feeling at a loss for words, now that we were about to start out on the next stage of the journey. For months I had been travelling in the sunshine, and now that we were heading north, I knew that a meeting with winter could not be avoided, and I did not particularly relish the prospect of feeling cold again after all the days of warmth that I had enjoyed. Contraction always follows expansion, just as expansion always follows contraction, and although the opposites are the same for those who are truly balanced, I had always preferred expansion to contraction, enjoying the former and enduring the latter.

Shortly before ten o' clock, Mustafa appeared on the scene, looking very smart and efficient, and giving me a smile and a wave when he caught sight of me down near the back of the coach. Having collected all our passports and checked to make sure that everyone was present, Mustafa gave the signal to Aziz the driver, the powerful Mercedes engine roared into life, and then we were off, slowly rolling into motion and out of Madina along the road that leads north to Tabuk. The journey had begun!

As we passed through the streets of Madina Al-Munawarra, I gave a quiet adhan, for this is always a good way to start a journey, and then recited the last three Surahs of the Qur'an, the Surahs of Protection, as they are often called, followed by Surat'al-Fatiha and a prayer on the Prophet Muhammad:

I seek protection in Allah from the outcast shaytan.

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Say: He is Allah the One
Allah the Everlasting
No one is born from Him and He is not born from anything
And there is nothing like Him.

(Qur'an: 112.1-4)

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Say: I seek protection in the Lord of daybreak
From the evil of that which He has created,
And from the evil of the darkness when it is intense,
And from the evil of casting spells,
And from the evil of the one who envies when he envies.

(Qur'an: 113.1-5)

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Say: I seek protection in the Lord of mankind,
The King of mankind,
The God of mankind,
From the evil of the sneaking whisperer,
Who whispers in the hearts of mankind,
Of the jinn and of mankind.

(Qur'an: 114.1-6)

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Praise to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
the Merciful the Compassionate,
King of the Day of the Life-Transaction.
Only You we worship and only You we ask for help.
Lead us on the Straight Path,
The path of those whom You have blessed,
Not of those with whom You are angry,
and not of those who are astray.

Amin

(Qur'an: 1.1-7)

O Allah, bless our master Muhammad,
Your slave and Your Messenger, the unlettered Prophet,
and his Family and his Companions and grant them peace.

Glory be to your Lord,
the Lord of Might, above what they describe,
and peace be upon the Messengers,
and praise belongs to Allah,
the Lord of the worlds.

Amin.

TABUK

As the coach cleared the outskirts of Madina and began to pick up speed along the open road that stretched ahead, with everyone looking fresh and relaxed and radiant, I looked around me at my fellow travellers. With the exception of Muhammad sitting next to me, they were all relatively old people, with lined, kind, joyful faces, contented to have made the journey of a lifetime and to have fulfilled the requirements of the fifth pillar of Islam, and probably now ready to die whenever their time came, sooner or later.

They must have seen many changes in the course of their lives, and undergone many hardships, including the attempts of Attaturk and his kafir followers and masonic backers to eradicate Islam as a social reality in Turkey completely. Many of them must have been children or teenagers at a time when the penalty for a man who wore a beard, or for a woman who wore the veil, was death. Thousands of Muslims had been killed in those days, and many more hundreds of thousands had been deprived of access to the teachings and practices of Islam, and yet despite all these trials, there were still many Muslims in Turkey, as this coach full of Turkish muminun so clearly showed.

The fact that they were all relatively old reflected the present government's continued policy of discouraging and limiting the practice of Islam as much as possible by only permitting a limited number of Muslims to go on the Hajj each year, and only those who were nearing the end of their lives. Indeed I wondered how Muhammad had managed to obtain official clearance to go on the Hajj from a government whose mediaeval constitution still expressly forbids any form of governance in accordance with the teachings of Islam, and whose criminal penal code, which is based on the European penal codes of the nineteenth century, makes it a serious criminal offence to form any political party which is committed to following all or even part of the way of Islam in any manner.

Although Muhammad spoke a little English, politics was definitely a taboo subject, and when we did start talking, he spent some

time trying to persuade me to come and work at the same sawmill as he did. I would be welcome to settle there and eventually marry, and in fact as it so happened, the women in his town were the most beautiful women in the whole world. I thanked him for his invitation, and after a while managed to make it clear that I intended to return all the way to England.

By now Madina was already far behind us, and we were well out on the open road once more, the powerful figure of Aziz the driver, who kept on reminding me of Anthony Quinn in **Zorba the Greek**, skilfully guiding the coach along the wide black road that stretched out ahead across the desert. It was good to be alive, and now that we were on our way, and the die was cast, I felt more relaxed and less anxious. It is always a good feeling to be on the move, heading towards new horizons and fresh experiences, and I have always felt most at home when speeding down along the open road on four wheels with the country flashing past on either side and only Allah knows what up ahead.

As we continued northwards towards Tabuk, mile after mile after mile, I marvelled at the companions who had accompanied the Prophet, may Allah bless him and them and grant them peace, on the famous expedition to Tabuk which had taken place in the ninth year after the Hijrah. It must have been a very long and arduous journey to make by camel, at the hottest time of the year, and with the prospect of having to face the Roman legions in battle at the end of it, and yet they had done it, with the result that the Romans had retreated without a single battle having taken place, and the rulers of the lands which lay between Roman territory and Muslim territory had signed peace treaties with the Prophet so that the Muslims' borders to the north were now secure.

I imagined what I would have done if I had been alive at that time. Insh'Allah I would have been one of those who was neither too afraid, nor too poor, to go on the expedition, although right now I was glad that all I had to do to reach Tabuk was to sit back in my comfortable seat and enjoy the ever-changing view.

As the miles flashed by and the sun began to drop towards the western horizon, I gazed out through the windows of the coach at the barren desert vistas that surrounded us, with a thousand memories floating through my mind, as I held a short action replay of

everything that had taken place since I last travelled in a coach, which had been when Abdal-Jalil and I were on our way from Jeddah to Makka in the early pre-dawn hours of the night, when the young moon of Dhu'l-Hijjah had already long set, and the stars were bright and near but still light years out of reach, the two of us with our hair still wet after our ghusls, and still getting used to the feel of our ihrams, shivering with cold and anticipation as the time for the Hajj drew near. Subhana'llah! What a Hajj it had been! And what a visit to Madina it had turned out to be!

Now, with Makka and Madina only days and hours behind me, I felt completely renewed and emptied out of years of accumulated clutter within. I felt young and fresh and illuminated and almost indestructible. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! I had done it! By the grace and generosity of Allah I had been on the Hajj! I had visited the Prophet in Madina! And I knew as surely as I know anything, that as his body lay there in its grave, entirely free from the slightest trace of decomposition, and with his spirit free to roam at will, the Prophet Muhammad is aware of every person who enters and leaves Madina, and he returns the greeting of anyone who greets him, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and his followers.

The visit to these two protected places had really added an extra dimension to my understanding of Islam, with regard to both its present social reality and its origins. What little I knew about the Prophet and his companions, and all that had happened in their lifetimes, had become far more vivid in my mind's eye as I visited the places in which they had once lived and breathed. And as I had reflected on what little I knew of all that they had done and said and experienced, I was made increasingly aware of how little I knew about life, and how little I had done in my life, in comparison to them.

In addition to this, all the Muslims that I had met and seen, on the way to Makka and during the Hajj and after it, were living proof of the extent to which the teachings of Islam can ennoble and perfect a human being, each in accordance with his or her own capacity. And again, I realised how limited my own capacity was, in comparison to some of the truly wonderful human beings that I had been given the honour to see and meet.

And yet I knew that this was besides the point, for each person's capacity is determined by Allah, and all that matters is whether or not each person realises his or her own potential in their lifetime. It is pointless feeling insignificant or meaningless in comparison to others, or wishing that you were not yourself, but someone else. All that really matters is our acting with the best of intentions and with sincerity. Thus it is related by Abdullah ibn Umar:

> **"When we took an oath of allegiance with him to hear and obey, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said to us, 'In what you are able.'"**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 55.1.1)**

And by Umayma bint Ruqayqa:

> **"I went to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, with the women who took an oath of allegiance with him in Islam. They said, 'Messenger of Allah, we take a pledge with you not to associate any thing with Allah, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to kill our children, nor to produce any lie that we have devised between our hands and feet, and not to disobey you in what is known.' The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'In what you can do and are able.'"**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 55.1.2)**

As the hours passed by we hurtled on through the desert, which was sometimes flat and sandy and sometimes quite mountainous, with large outcrops of hard black rock, stopping only occasionally for people to relieve themselves, or to do the combined travelling prayers when the time was right. After we had prayed maghrib and isha together, shortly after the sun had disappeared behind the western horizon, we continued on through the night, until Aziz had driven enough for one day, and pulled over to the side of the road so that we could all have a sleep.

At some point we must have passed near the remains of the people of Thamud, an ancient people who had carved their dwell-

ings out of rock and who had been destroyed by an earthquake after they had rejected the Prophet Salih, but there was no sign of their remains from the road, and none of my travelling companions appeared to know exactly where they were situated. I recalled that the Prophet, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, had told his companions on the expedition to Tabuk to keep their eyes lowered as they passed them by, and not to drink from their wells, and to leave them quickly behind. This was what we had done too, some fourteen centuries later.

✿ ✿ ✿

We were on our way again early the next morning before sunrise, the air fresh and invigorating, and the sun finally rising and lighting up the desert with a raw and rare beauty, as everyone gazed out through the windows at the spectacle, all feeling a little the worse for wear, but still in good spirits, and enjoying the journey, each moment in time experienced in a different place, each second different to the one before it, and never to be repeated, until, after an hour or two, suddenly there were buildings up ahead, and trees, and flowers, and cars, and people, and here we were in Tabuk! The first stage of our journey north was already over.

✿ ✿ ✿

After resting for a couple of hours in Tabuk, during which time I wandered about, wishing I had some money to buy some food, we were on the move again. By now we were well and truly out of the immediate gravitational pull of the Haramayn, and my attention was now fully directed towards the horizon ahead of me, rather than at the one that now lay behind. For so many months the goal had been Makka, and then the Hajj, and then Madina, but now it was Istanbul, a city which I had only visited once before, in the days before I had embraced Islam. My memories of it were still clear, and it would be interesting to see how it seemed now that I was a Muslim, to see if it had changed now that I had changed.

Later on that day, we arrived at the border between Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and Mustafa sprang into action, walking briskly over to the customs buildings with a large stack of passports in his arms. In no time at all, he was walking briskly back again with a large confident smile on his face. I was grateful for the fact that he

was handling the customs officials on my behalf, for it must have saved me a great deal of explaining, and also, it cost me nothing. The engine roared into life again, and off we went. We were in Jordan now, and well on the way to Amman.

AMMAN

I was asleep when we rolled into Amman the next day, for by now my sleep pattern had shifted into travelling mode, and the times when I was awake and when I was asleep were no longer related as usual to the passage of day and night. I was awakened by Muhammad gently shaking my shoulder, and for a moment I gazed about blankly in bewilderment at the large city that now surrounded us. The terrain had changed completely while I had been asleep, and we were now in much more mountainous country. The coach was parked off the road at the top of a large hill in one of Amman's suburbs, and we had a good view of the city as it sprawled lazily over a series of hills and valleys in the afternoon heat, with the barren countryside stretching out beyond it. Much of the city looked as if it had been there for a very long time, and there was a feeling of ancient timelessness in the air as everyone descended from the coach and stretched their legs.

We had clearly stopped for a meal break, for many of my fellow travellers unpacked dried bread and green chillies from their luggage and brewed up sweet, sweet tea on their little gas burners, beckoning me to join them and share their food. Gratefully I accepted their invitation, for by now I was both very hungry and thirsty. For the next few days this was to be our staple diet, dried bread and green chillies and sweet tea or water, for all of us were poor, and yet this simple meal always tasted lovely. Although none of my fellow travellers spoke English, with the exception of Mustafa and Muhammad, everyone was extremely friendly, for we were united not only by our being Muslims but also by our having been on the same Hajj together, and like true Muslims they were glad to share what little they had with each other.

When everyone had finished eating, we all prayed dhur and asr together, for there was plenty of open space by the roadside where the bus was parked, and then we were on our way once again. As we headed on and up towards the Syrian border, I was aware that Baghdad lay not all that far away to the East, while Jerusalem was even closer, to the West, but although I wished to

visit both these places – Baghdad, in order to visit the tombs of Imam Junayd and Shaykh Abdal-Qadir Al-Jaylani, and Jerusalem, in order to pray in the Al-Aqsa Mosque – this was clearly not the time to do so, and I kept to my intention of continuing straight ahead along the most direct route back to England.

On we went, making good time as Aziz the driver clung tenaciously to the steering-wheel and refused to become tired. He was a very good driver, moving fast but not taking any risks, and I for one felt completely at ease travelling in his coach. I was amazed at his stamina and at his cheerfulness. Clearly he was a man who lived up to his name. By late afternoon we had crossed into Syria, the terrain almost imperceptibly becoming greener and less barren the further north we went, and it was well after sunset when we finally arrived in Damascus, another very ancient city where so much had taken place in the past, and parked in a huge patch of waste ground that was already crowded with other buses and coaches, surrounded on three sides by vast slowly decaying stone walls. The place was full of people and full of life. The Mongols may have almost completely massacred the entire population of the city a few centuries back, but it had certainly picked up again since then!

DAMASCUS

As soon as we had rolled to a stop, Mustafa informed us that we would not be leaving until eleven o' clock the next morning, and then bid us good night. We were free to do as we pleased, and what I wished to do more than anything else right then was to visit the tomb of Shaykh Muhiy'd-din ibn al-Arabi, who had been one of the greatest gnostics of his time, and who had once said, "Take your knowledge only from the one who acts by it," and "Whoever casts the balance of the Shari'ah from his hand for an instant is destroyed," and "All that occurs to your mind, Allah the Exalted is different from that."

There are many of those who have criticised his writings, such as **The Seals of Wisdom** and **The Makkan Revelations**, simply because they have not understood them, but all those who have been blessed with gnosis or who know that gnosis is possible even if they have not been blessed with it themselves, have affirmed that his title of 'the Sultan of the Gnostics', which was given to him by Shaykh Abu Madyan, is both accurate and fully deserved.

Shaykh Abdal-Wahhab Ash-Sharani quotes his brother, Shaykh Hajj Ahmad al-Halabi as saying that he once stayed in a room overlooking the tomb of Shaykh Ibn al-Arabi: 'One of the rejectors came after the evening prayer with fire, and he wanted to burn the coffin of the Shaykh. A few feet before the grave he sank and vanished into the earth while I was looking. His family missed him after that night so I told them the story. They came and began to dig and found his head. Whenever they dug, he sank and went deeper into the earth until they could do no more, and so they filled up the earth over him.'

I did not have the faintest idea where the great Shaykh's tomb was, but decided to try and find it before it grew too late, and as if to confirm my intention, a fellow traveller quietly pressed some Syrian money into my hand with a soft 'Bismillah' just as I was about to leave the bus. Gratefully I thanked him for his generosity,

and then made my way to the busy street that bordered the fourth side of the coach park. To my surprise, the first man I asked showed me to a nearby bus-stop and told me which bus to catch and what destination to tell the driver.

Within ten minutes I was on the right bus and within about half an hour I was standing alone in a deserted windy street, shivering with cold, as large drops of rain began to fall and fill the air. For a moment I was unsure what to do next, but then an old man came by and pointed down a dark alleyway in answer to my question. Slowly I followed his direction, stepping unexpectedly into a large cold puddle that was hidden in the darkness, until there before me, on an open patch of ground, was the domed tomb of Shaykh Muhiy'd-din ibn al-Arabi. It was in complete darkness, and indeed I could not be entirely sure that this was the tomb I was looking for, but on making my way to what looked like the entrance, I discovered that there was a small sheltered porch, at the back of which was a mighty door.

The porch was quite spacious, and in one corner, near the door, there was a sleeping man wrapped up tightly in a burnoose. Quietly I tried the handle of the door, but it was tightly locked, and all that I succeeded in doing was to awake the sleeping faqir, who confirmed that this was indeed the tomb of the great Shaykh. I thanked him, and having established the direction of the qiblah from him, I did wudu in the rain outside, returned to the shelter of the porch, greeted the Shaykh in his grave, did two rakats, and then sat myself down on the opposite side of the porch to the faqir, who appeared to have gone back to sleep again. After doing a little dhikr and making some dua to Allah for both the Shaykh and myself, I rose to my feet, bid the faqir 'As-salaamu-alaikum', gave him enough money to buy a meal, and then departed back the way I had come, emerging back onto the street beyond the alleyway just in time to catch the next bus back to the coach depot. It had all turned out to be much easier than I had expected, al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah, and insh'Allah there had been good in the visit.

I still had not prayed maghrib and isha, for I had not wanted to miss the last bus back to the coach depot and be stranded in the middle of a strange city late at night, and accordingly I now set out in search of a mosque, carefully remembering the way my foot-

steps took me, so that it would be easy to make the return journey back to the coach. After walking for about a mile in what turned out to be a poorly illuminated residential area of the city, I came across a small quaint mosque whose carpeted interior was both intimate and welcoming, and which fortunately was still open. I was also glad to find that it had good toilet facilities, for I was beginning to feel a little rough around the edges after having spent virtually three days on the coach, and it was good to have a decent wash before doing wudu and returning to the clean calm mosque to do my travelling prayers.

After praying maghrib and isha, I made my way back to the coach along the way I had come. Fortunately it had stopped raining now, but it was still cold and windy, and my green cotton robe from Tayyaba, in which I had sweated so profusely so often, gave little protection against the cold. Thankfully my woollen tarbush from Madina was at least keeping my head warm, but I knew that at some point I would have to find warmer clothes. Back in the bus, it was almost as cold as outside, and I only slept fitfully through the night, until the first adhans came wafting in through the coach window at dawn.

Relying on the assumption that there was at least a half an hour interval between the dawn adhan and subh, I quietly slipped out of the coach and walked briskly to my little mosque, arriving just in time to do wudu and pray subh with everyone else who was there. There were only a handful of people present, but it did not surprise me, for although the present government was not as openly committed to the repression of Islam as was the Turkish government, it was only prepared to tolerate the practice of Islam in a very limited form, and certainly not to actually govern in accordance with its guidance, and accordingly the common people had to be very discreet in their actions if they wished to avoid trouble from the police.

✿ ✿ ✿

Although I did not know all the details, I was aware that much of this repression of Muslims by governments that were described as being 'Islamic' was one of the long-term results of the successful de-stabilisation of the corrupt Turkish Caliphate that had come to an end only just over fifty years earlier, in 1924. This had been part

of the overall strategy that was directed towards creating the state of Israel in the occupied territory that had become known as Palestine, and to ensure economic supremacy over the Muslim lands by developing their oil wealth and conditioning their inhabitants to complete and utter dependency on the rapidly spreading world-wide masonic banking system. The further north we travelled, the more I could feel the influence of another way of life, and it was clear, just by looking at its effects on the people around me, that in many ways it was directly opposed to the way of Islam.

✿ ✿ ✿

I returned to the coach beneath a sky that was cloudy and overcast, feeling cold and a little tired and dispirited. On returning to my seat, it was to find that Muhammad had trodden on some foul-smelling excrement which had now become smeared over the foot-rest. He was still half asleep, so I found some paper and cleaned the mess up as best I could. How far away the pure perfumed fragrance of the Rowdah seemed now, and how I wished that I was still there!

As the morning developed, it grew a little warmer, and I ventured out of the coach again, although never too far away, for I did not have a watch, and I did not want to miss the bus. A thriving second-hand clothes flea market had sprung up in the midst of all the coaches, but I did not bother to attempt to buy a jersey with what money I had left, for while we were actually on the coach the heating was enough to keep us warm, and somewhere along the line up ahead I wanted to have enough money to buy myself a square meal!

Eventually the time came to leave. Mustafa and Aziz, who had probably spent the night in a hotel, appeared looking refreshed and relaxed, and after a quick check to ensure that we were all aboard, we were off once again. It was a pity to be leaving such a historic city after such a short stay, and I hoped that one day I would be able to return when circumstances permitted and to take a look around in a more leisurely fashion. At least I had been able to visit the one being whom I had really wished to visit, and although, if there had been more time, it would have been good to visit Shaykh Abdal-Qadir Isa, who had a zawiyya in Damascus, the only living

Shaykh whom I wished to visit right now was my own Shaykh, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit.

During the course of the Difficult Journey, Abdal-Jalil and I had visited many Shaykhs, and had benefited from all of them, but I had met no one whom I would have preferred to have taken as my guide. I had always trusted Shaykh Abdal-Qadir from the first moment that we had met, but during our travels I had come to realise more fully just how good and reliable a guide he was, and to know with even greater certainty that I had no desire or need to look for any other Shaykh.

Our visit to Makka and Madina had confirmed the majesty and beauty and truth of Islam, which would not have become established had it not been for the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, and I had not met anyone who reminded me and taught me more about Allah and His Messenger than Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit. Accordingly he was the only teacher with whom I now wanted to be, for the living Shaykh is the door to the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, just as the Prophet Muhammad is the door to Allah, may He be Exalted and Glorified. As Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once said, "Loyalty to your Shaykh is part of sincerity."

It is good to visit many Shaykhs for the baraka and for spiritual gifts and knowledges, but it is best to take only one Shaykh as your spiritual healer and guide along the path that leads to self-knowledge and gnosis of Allah. Your Shaykh not only shows you outwardly what living Islam really is, and what it is to behave with true courtesy, but also guides you in the direction that your life takes, so that you are protected from your own self-deceptions and ignorance, and from fruitless or pointless or harmful action, in order that you may arrive at an inward state of peace and wisdom, which could not otherwise have been attained, without guidance.

As with other sciences, it is possible to learn from more than one teacher, especially in the realm of gathering information and collecting data, but anyone who wishes to master the science of the self must have a master who not only teaches him or her all that he or she needs to know, but is also capable, by the idhn of

Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, of transforming the inward state of the seeker, for self-transformation is an essential element of this science, and it cannot be achieved on your own, no matter how many people you meet and no matter how many books you read and no matter how much dhikr you do; and it cannot be achieved by a pseudo-teacher who teaches without idhn, no matter how charming or charismatic or impressive he is; and, ultimately, it cannot even be achieved by a Shaykh who has been given the idhn to teach and guide people along the path that leads to gnosis of Allah, unless that is what Allah wants. The end cannot be achieved without the means, and it is Allah Who has power over everything.

Our coach swung out of the park onto the busy road and threaded its way out through the crowded streets of Damascus. Like Amman, it had the feeling of a city that had been there for a long time, and in fact I later discovered that the Prophet Yahya, who is more commonly known as John the Baptist in the west, is buried there, which gives some indication of how old the city is.

Soon we had left Damascus behind us, and were out on the open road once more, still heading north and still gaining height. The countryside was becoming greener and greener and more and more mountainous the further north we travelled, and this slow but steady transition from flat desert to green mountains reminded me strongly of the journey I had once made by train seven years earlier from Tehran to Moscow, when I had experienced the same gradual change, the gradual greening of the desert, until suddenly it was desert no more.

There was also another distant memory that now appeared unexpectedly and with startling clarity in my heart. It was the memory of a lady who had been my girlfriend for a while at university, in the days long before I knew anything about Islam. The relationship had not lasted for long, although we had remained on good terms thereafter, and after leaving university we had lost touch with each other altogether, and gradually I had thought about her less and less. Now, suddenly, I remembered her, and missed her, and wanted to see her again.

Gradually, as the day wore on, and as I stared thoughtfully out at the changing landscape that rested coldly beneath the grey overcast skies, I began to think that insh'Allah I would visit her if and when I managed to return to England. If she was interested in accepting Islam, then it was possible that we might marry. However all this was in the realm of possibility, and in the future, and I tried to remain in the present moment, neither dwelling in the past nor speculating about something that might never happen in the future.

As I sat there, however, gazing out at the changing wintry vistas that came and went and disappeared, and silently repeating the prayer on the Prophet, or quietly reciting the Qur'an, or softly singing the Diwan, or humming some of the songs which I had loved to sing in the days before I had embraced Islam, and which I still loved to sing, my mind kept on returning to her, and by the time we rolled into Hims shortly before sunset, it was made up. Insh'Allah I would visit her when I returned.

HIMS

The bus came to rest at the edge of the large square that stands in front of the large white-marbled red-carpeted mosque that graces Hims. We were just in time to pray maghrib, and rapidly everyone descended from the coach and headed for the toilet and wudu facilities. The air was decidedly chilly here and there was a fresh breeze blowing that added to the cold, and I wrapped my arms across my chest and hugged my shoulders as we hurried over the square.

Inside the lofty building, even the toilet facilities were palatial, and a far cry from the very simple facilities that were all that was needed in the deserts of the Sudan. Each individual toilet compartment was fashioned from cold white marble. All that you had to do was to squat astride the main channel of swiftly flowing water that ran through them all, swiftly sweeping away whatever fell into it; and then there was another strategically placed jet of water that poured out of the wall in front of you and curved down into the main channel, without splashing your feet, providing you with unlimited clean water with which to clean your private parts once you had finished. Similarly, over in the wudu area there were no taps, just jets of water which curved down into a drainage channel filled with swiftly flowing water below your feet as you sat on a smooth white marble seat with your feet balanced in front of you on a white marble footrest that ran the whole length of the wall. It was the best designed toilet and wudu area I have ever come across, and it was also spotlessly clean. Clearly, however, such a system is only possible where there are unlimited supplies of water which ideally have their source above the level at which they are being used, so as to have their own natural water pressure.

Having done wudu, I entered the mosque. It was quite breathtaking and clearly the work of master craftsmen, its simple white marble structure rising high up into the depths of a lofty dome, while its thick red carpet added warmth and colour to its spacious interior. After a few minutes, the adhan echoed majestically around the almost empty building, for besides ourselves, there were hardly

any residents of Hims there to do the prayer, and then a few moments later the Imam's voice was resonating through the air as he recited the Qur'an out loud in the first two rakats of the prayer. It certainly was not the Rowdah in Madina, but it was nevertheless very beautiful and peaceful.

After the prayer was over, I found a quiet corner to one side and prayed two rakats for isha, before making my way over to the two tombs that were situated just inside the mosque over by the main entrance. To my delight I discovered that they belonged to two of the companions whose courage and knowledge I especially admire: Khalid bin Walid and Abdullah ibn Umar.

Khalid had been a fearless warrior who, after initially siding with the Quraysh against the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, had embraced Islam and fought many a decisive battle in the way of Allah, while Abdullah ibn Umar had become one of the most reliable transmitters of Islam to pass on its practice and wisdom to the first generation of Muslims not to have actually met the Prophet, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all who follow him and them.

Although Khalid bin Walid had desperately wanted to die fighting in the way of Allah, and had thrown himself into the thick of every battle in which he fought, he had died a natural death, and yet I am as sure as one can be that his intention will be rewarded accordingly. The following hadith always reminds me of Khalid bin Walid and his resting place in the white-marbled red-carpeted mosque of Hims whenever I read or remember it:

> **Yahya related to me from Malik from Abu'z-Zinad from al-A'raj from Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Allah laughs at two men. One of them kills the other, but each of them will enter the Garden: One fights in the way of Allah and is killed, then Allah turns to the killer, so he fights [in the way of Allah] and also becomes a martyr.'**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 21.14.28)**

Having made dua to Allah for them, wishing them light and peace in their graves, and a high station in the Garden, I stepped out into the coming night, and hurried quickly back to the relative warmth and protection of the coach.

Everyone must have been feeling the cold, for as we continued on our way, out came the dried bread and green chillies, and thankfully I felt the heat of the food permeate through my body, as we all tucked into our simple feast. I marvelled at the strength and resilience of my fellow travellers, many of whom were husband and wife, for they were not young, and yet I sensed that they were a great deal tougher than I.

Above all, I admired Aziz the driver, for he drove long hours, and he drove well, with his precious cargo of hajjis relaxed and at ease and probably unaware of all the tricky situations that he encountered along the winding mountainous roads. While we slept or dozed or peered out at the dark landscape, Aziz drove on confidently through the night, and I wondered how many times he had made this journey, and how many times he had been on the Hajj. Being the man who drives the coach was certainly one way of beating the quota system!

HALAB

Eventually the coach coasted into Halab, or Aleppo as it is often called, in the early hours of the morning, and Mustafa announced to his sleepy audience that we would not be leaving for at least another twenty-four hours. I could vaguely see that we were in a very large parking area, much larger than the one in Damascus, but decided to stay put until it was light, sinking back into a sleep that lasted until the adhan for subh brought me to my senses.

I slipped out of the coach through the back door and followed the shadowy figures that were all making for the large mosque that loomed up out of the darkness on the far side of the parking area. Having located the toilet and wudu facilities, I made good use of them, almost gasping from the coldness of the water, and in due course did the prayer with everyone else in the large half-empty mosque.

After the prayer was over, I saw many people clustering around a richly decorated tomb, which I soon learned was that of the Prophet Zakariyya, the man who had looked after Maryam the mother of Isa when she was a child, and the father of the Prophet Yahya. I greeted him with respect, and made dua to Allah for him and myself. I could see why the whole area through which we had been travelling since leaving Tabuk, and which used to be called Sham before it was occupied by the British and the French at the turn of the present century, and divided up into different states – which are now known as Jordan and Palestine and Lebanon and Syria – is called the Holy Land, for wherever we went, there always seemed to be a Prophet or a great wali buried nearby.

The weather was now decidedly much colder, and wet, and on returning to the coach I put on all the other clothes that I possessed, so that I was now wearing two sets of Sudanese underwear, two cotton robes, my woolly hat and my sandals. I had stopped wearing my turban, for we were now entering that part of the world where men with beards and turbans tend to get arrested and tortured and imprisoned indefinitely, unless they have been bought,

and I had no desire to have either of these possibilities happen to me.

As it was, I was already beginning to look conspicuous in my robe, for most of the men that I had seen in Syria were dressed in drab western style clothing, and yet I also had no desire to be intimidated. Although I was inexorably leaving the Muslim lands behind me as I approached Europe, just as we had inexorably left Europe behind us as we approached the Muslim lands on our outward journey, it was difficult to re-adapt again after all these months of having lived as I pleased. After having been in the company of Muslims for so long, it was a rude shock to realise that I would soon be encountering once again people who neither understood nor wanted to understand Islam and who could not stand Muslims. I had quite simply forgotten that such people existed!

My first priority, however, was warmth and not appearance, and once daylight had broken and the city had come to life, I set out to put the last of the money that I had been given in Damascus to good use. Passing a large area of fine looking buildings that were in the process of being demolished, I came upon the old part of town and stopped at the first simple eating place I could find.

To my delight, they had foules mesdames, and I ordered a large bowl of them and a hunk of crusty bread. They had a different flavour to those of Egypt and the Sudan, but a series of vivid memories still flashed through my mind at the first mouthful, and for a few moments I was in Athens, and in Cairo, and in Khartoum, and in Omdurman, and in El Obeid, and in Nyertati all over again. The bowl was soon empty, and the bread soon gone, and the strong coffee afterwards did not last long, but the effect was immediate, and I noticed that the spring was back in my step as I returned to the parking area, passing by thick stone walls and sombre old buildings that looked as if they had been there for centuries.

It was clear that Halab must have been a fortified walled city in the past, and indeed over on the far side of the parking area I could see the old citadel of Halab looking bleak and grim and isolated. The whole place reminded me of Poitiers, in France, in a funny sort of a way – one of those places that smells of death, because every so often it seems to have been destined to be the location for

some great conflict or desperate struggle, involving much bloodshed and a good deal of killing.

As in Damascus, so in Halab, I found that there was a huge flea market in full swing in the parking area on my return, and, after taking my time and choosing carefully, I had managed to purchase a pair of waterproof half-length rubber boots that reached a few inches over my ankles, two pairs of thickish socks, and rather a thin light grey turtleneck jersey. I bought some bread with the last of my money as I returned to the coach to change my footwear, and that was that!

Just as I was nearing the coach, I lost my attention for a brief moment and stepped straight onto a large blob of pasty yellow excrement. I looked at the sole of my sandal in dismay. It was covered in the stuff, there was no grass on which to wipe it clean, and it was beginning to rain. I needed to clean it before getting back into the bus, and I also needed to take shelter immediately. I just could not be bothered to deal with the situation properly. Swiftly I put on a pair of socks and my new boots, one at a time, gingerly picked up my sandals by the back-straps, put them neatly next to a lamp-post for some lucky passer-by to discover, and headed for the shelter of the coach. On reflection, it seemed rather a rash and impulsive thing to have done, for they were good sandals and still had a great deal of wear left in them. When, however, I descended from the coach a little later on, with my feet feeling gloriously warm at last, the sandals had gone.

I spent the rest of the morning strolling around the streets of Halab. The weather had brightened up a little and it was good to be able to stretch my legs and get some exercise after having spent most of the last four days sitting in the coach. I went and took a closer look at the citadel which turned out to be surrounded by a very deep moat. The ancient fortress looked dark and foreboding under the cloudy sky, and I surmised that it must have been the scene of many a grimly fought battle in the past. Years later, when I chanced to read a little about its history, I found that my first impressions had indeed been correct.

As I continued my little tour of the city, fearlessly stepping into even the murkiest puddles now that I had my new wellies on, it seemed that half of Halab was being knocked down, the finer older buildings that had been constructed with stone being replaced by hastily and haphazardly erected monstrosities made with steel girders and reinforced concrete. It seemed a pity to destroy so much in the name of progress. In the years to come, whole towns would be levelled to the ground by the government in an attempt to suppress the resurgence of Islam in Syria, so that it could continue to make progress as a kafir democracy, but this was 1977, and any confrontation between the Muslims and the government was still a relatively minor one at this stage.

✿ ✿ ✿

After a while, I heard the adhan for dhur, and made my way to the mosque from which I had heard the call to prayer. Just as I was entering the mosque, which was surprisingly full of people, an incredibly ugly beggar came straight up to me and held out his hand. I would have loved to have given him something, but I had just spent the last of my money. I explained to him in sign language that I was very sorry but I had nothing. He caught hold of my robe and tugged at it with extreme urgency, as if he thought I was refusing to give him anything and was imploring me to change my mind. Again, I tried to explain that I had nothing, and then went into the mosque to do the prayer.

After the prayer was over, I did two rakats for asr and then rested for a while. Finally I rose to my feet and began to make my way out of the mosque. As soon as I emerged into the open, the same incredibly ugly beggar was there, waiting especially for me it seemed, for he again made straight for me with his hand outstretched. Again, I tried to tell him that I did not have anything to give him, and even began to turn my pockets inside out to prove it. Suddenly, much to my surprise, my fingers encountered the equivalent of a fifty pence piece tucked away in one corner of my right hand pocket.

Without a moment's hesitation, I handed it over to the beggar with a firm 'Bismillah', returning his searching look with a smile, and wondering whether or not he might have been Al-Khidr in disguise. Whoever he was, he was welcome to the money, for I had

been the recipient of so much generosity throughout my life, and especially during the last few months, that it was good to be able to be generous to someone else in turn, even if it was not with very much.

I returned to the coach, picking my way through the busy market whose stalls and carts seemed to fill every space that was not already taken up by a bus or a coach, and settled back in my seat to have an afternoon siesta. I had not been there for very long before one of the hajjis, who had been most friendly towards me during the journey and always concerned for my well-being, came and sat down next to me in the aisle seat opposite my own. Courteously he advised me in his very broken English that if I had any western-style clothes, then this was the best time to put them on, for we would soon be crossing the border into Turkey where it was still illegal to dress like a Muslim in public. I tried to hide the fact that I had neither western clothes nor money – for as Shaykh Abu Madyan once pointed out, poverty is a light as long as you veil it, and if you manifest it, its light departs – and replied that I was quite happy to be dressed as I was, and that I was sure that no harm would come to me in Turkey since I was not actually Turkish myself.

My companion, however, would not give up, and as soon as he had realised what my situation was, he took me by the hand and led me out of the bus into the midst of the flea market and told me to choose a suit, categorically refusing to accept 'No' for an answer. I submitted to what was happening and began to look at what was on offer. Although there were second-hand clothes stalls wherever you looked, the selection of suits on offer was pretty awful, for they were drab and dark, and shapeless and ill-fitting, and in fact the kind of suits that I had long ago dubbed Turkish refugee suits. Suddenly, however, I spotted a light blue suit, almost completely buried under a pile of particularly awful looking clothes, and on picking it out and holding it against me, it looked like it would be a good fit. Although the material was thin, the suit had a good look to it. My companion and I nodded at each other in agreement, and then the bargaining began.

After about five minutes the price was agreed, about half the starting price, and exactly ten times the amount that I had given to

the beggar earlier on. My benefactor took out his wallet and opened it up. It contained the exact amount that had been agreed, no more and no less. With a quiet 'Bismillah' he handed over the single green piece of paper, and the suit was mine. Gratefully I accepted it, certain that somewhere down the line my generous companion would receive ten times the amount he had just paid for it, for the Prophet Muhammad said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, that whatever you give in the Name of Allah will be repaid by Allah at least ten times over in this world, as well as being rewarded in the next world.

A little later on, I looked like a different man, with my rubber boots disappearing into the smartly creased trouser-legs of my suit, and my jersey and jacket concealing the Sudanese underwear that I still wore underneath for added warmth and protection against the cold. Even my patterned tarbush seemed to blend in with my new look, and to all intents and purposes, I was just another person in the crowd. Everyone in the coach smiled and nodded their approval. I was now ready for Turkey.

✿ ✿ ✿

We were off early the next morning, as soon as we had prayed subh in the Mosque of the Prophet Zakariyya, climbing out of Halab and up into the mountains, slowly winding our way towards the border. By mid-morning we were there, only to find ourselves in a very long queue of waiting vehicles, most of them being buses and coaches full of returning hajjis like ourselves.

We had to wait for several hours before it was our turn to be searched and processed, and I spent much of the time walking up and down the long line of waiting vehicles trying to keep warm, for we were now at quite a high altitude and the wind was bitterly cold. By now I was feeling extremely hungry and tired and a little sorry for myself. Difficulty in a hot climate like the Sudan is one thing, for even if you are hungry and tired, at least you can relax, as long as you are not too thirsty, but difficulty in a cold climate is something else, for if you are cold it is impossible to relax your shivering body.

On one of my circuits, Mustafa joined me and chatted away encouragingly and confidently as we strolled along. He seemed to

know many of the coach drivers and couriers personally, and one of them kindly offered us some bread and black olives, probably little realising how greatly needed and appreciated they were. On our return to our coach, I was also given some more bread and green chillies, and the temptation to help myself to a few of the dates that I had bought for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir receded.

This was probably just as well, for when our turn to pass through customs finally came only a little later on, the entire bus was searched very thoroughly, and any dates that the officials discovered were confiscated on the spot. I was a little perplexed why this should be so, and quite relieved when my camel-bag, which was behind the back seat and under a pile of luggage, was over-looked. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah, I still had the 'Sharabanas' and I still had my sword and brique!

At last we were cleared and allowed to go on our way, and again I was very grateful for Mustafa's efforts on my behalf, which meant that I still had not spoken to a single customs official since entering Jeddah. Slowly the coach picked up momentum and began to thread its way through the dark late afternoon mountain scenery. It was early December, and there was snow on the highest peaks. The deserts that we had sped through further south a few days ago now seemed a long, long way away.

It was as if we had travelled from summer through to autumn through to winter in the space of only three days.

I looked out through the window at the stark majesty of the dark rugged mountains, feeling a combination of awe and determination, as Muhammad renewed his attempts to persuade me to settle and marry in his home town. It looked like the Way Back was going to be as cold and as difficult as the Difficult Journey had been hot and difficult. At least the coach was warm as long as we were on the move. I was not quite sure what my next move would be once we reached Istanbul, but I did have a friend there called Khalid who had invited me to stay with him if I ever passed that way, and I did have his address with me, thanks to Abdal-Jalil who had written it down and given it to me when we had met for the last time in Madina. Insh'Allah, Allah would open up the way for me. And not for the first time I reflected on the meaning of one of my favourite passages in the Qur'an:

Surely those who say: 'Our Lord is Allah'
and then go straight,
the angels descend upon them,
saying: 'Fear not and do not be sad,
and hear the good news about the Garden
which you have been promised.
We are your protecting friends
in the life of this world,
and in the next world.
There you will have
all that your selves desire,
and there you will have
all that you ask,
a gift of welcome
from the Forgiving, the Compassionate.'
And who is better in speech than the one
who prays to Allah and does good and says:
'Surely I am one of the Muslims.'

(Qur'an: 41. 30-33)

ADANA

It was cold and dark when we rolled into Adana, and it seemed a dark and cold city. It was clearly too cold for anyone to spend the night on the coach, and in fact it turned out that accommodation had been booked for everyone in a very dark and dingy hotel, with the exception of myself. Since I was not one of the original party that had set out with them on the outward journey, no booking had been made for me. Aziz the driver, however, very kindly said that I could share his room, which turned out to have a large double bed with plenty of space on it for the two of us.

It had been nearly a week since I last had a proper wash, other than doing wudu before the prayer and washing my private parts with water after using the toilet, whenever water happened to be available, and it felt like it, for I was beginning to itch and scratch all over. I asked Aziz if there were any washing facilities in the hotel, and after he had had a few words with a young shifty looking boy who worked there, I was shown into a cold grey bathroom that housed an extraordinary looking boiler-cum-shower that defies description.

Having lit a small wood fire round at the back of its bottom end, we waited for about five minutes, and then the boy pronounced it ready, showing me which taps to turn to achieve the desired results before he left. Having bolted the door, I stripped off and turned on the tap, and to my surprise a strong jet of lovely hot water poured out of the shower attachment at the top end of the contraption. Fortunately I had some soap with me, and after thoroughly soaping my body from top to bottom, I rinsed it all off and followed it up with a ghusl. Fifteen minutes later, I had completed one of the top ten showers of my life! And since I had my ihram with me, I was able to dry myself thoroughly with one of the two large pieces of towelling.

I returned to the room, which was completely empty except for the bed and the mattress and three blankets. Since it was cold and without heating, I kept all my clothes on in order to keep warm

and crept quietly in under the blankets, for Aziz was already fast asleep. How lovely it was to be clean and warm and horizontal!

I was just drifting off to sleep, when the door to the room suddenly burst open, light flooding in from the bare light-bulb out in the passage outside and outlining the silhouette of the young boy who had fixed the shower for me standing in the doorway. He hesitated, and then muttered an apology, before turning and shutting the door noisily behind him. How different to the warmth and courtesy of the people in the Sudan I thought, as I fell into a very sound deep sleep.

✿ ✿ ✿

Everyone was visibly refreshed as we set out the next morning, and I could see that thoughts of home and family and friends, and the tales that there would be to tell, were beginning to fill my fellow travellers' minds, as they laughed and chatted with renewed spirits. Clearly we had all benefited from a good night's rest.

After we had been on the road for a few hours, we drove into quite a large town and came to rest in the main square, quite near to an impressive looking mosque that must have been standing there for centuries. It was the day of the jumua prayer, and we had arrived in good time.

EREGLI

Aziz the driver climbed down out of the driver's seat and beckoned to me to follow him. We hardly had any words in common, but we were relaxed in each other's company, and he had clearly decided to take me under his wing. Aziz strode off away from the coach with me in tow and headed straight for a nearby working men's cafe, where he ordered two very large bowls of soup and piles of thick crusty bread. The soup was graced with several chunks of tough fatty meat and tasted a little sour, but I ate it thankfully, wondering a little whether or not it was halal, but not asking. It had been bought for me by a Muslim, and that was the only guarantee I needed for a meal for which my whole body cried out. Hungrily we both tucked in to the feast, not saying much, but just concentrating on eating.

Aziz brushed aside my thanks with a gruff smile as I finished the last mouthful and ordered two strong Turkish coffees, and then, when we had finished these, and Aziz had paid the bill, we stepped back out into the winter morning and continued on our way to our next port of call, which turned out to be a traditional Turkish barber's shop, complete with cut-throat razors and leather strops and exotic lotions in elegant glass bottles.

At first the barber wanted to cut my beard off, so that I was only left with a moustache, like Aziz, but having made it clear that I wished to keep it, I was treated to a very elegant beard trim, while Aziz enjoyed the full works. By the time the barbers had finished with us, it was time for the jumua, and the two of us crossed back over the square to the mosque, feeling well-fed and spruce, without a hair out of place, and smelling strongly of the barbers' perfume, may Allah reward Aziz for his kindness to me a thousand times over.

We entered the huge cold lofty mosque, slipping past the heavy leather curtains which hung down over the inside of the entrance from a great height, and which could not quite keep out the cold drafts entirely, and prayed two rakats on entering the mosque. The mosque was full of people, mostly old people, but with some young

faces there as well, and it felt good to be there. I looked around me in wonderment. It was hard to believe that only a week ago I had been sitting outside the Prophet's Mosque in the hot sun, wondering whether I would be catching the bus to Istanbul the next day, and that the week before that I had been sitting outside the Haram in Makka under the hot, hot sun, wondering how I was going to get to Madina. Subhana'llah! Events had certainly happened quickly!

The adhan echoed through the lofty building, a sound that I had been hearing less and less since we had left Madina, and then in the silence that followed, the old yet strong Imam rose to his feet and began the khutba. It was in Turkish, and I did not understand any of it, except for the ayat of Qur'an that he quoted in the original Arabic, but it did not matter. It was so good just to be there, and finally to stand and do the prayer, where thousands and thousands and thousands of Muslims down through the centuries had stood in prayer before me.

✿ ✿ ✿

As soon as the jumua was over and everyone was back in the coach, we were on our way again, refreshed both outwardly and inwardly in every way, and eager to arrive at our next port of call which was Konya, the town in which the great wali of Allah, Mawlana Jalal'ud-din Rumi, is buried. I looked forward to visiting his tomb if it was possible, for I had read some of his very articulate and perceptive writings in the past, and it was clear from what little I knew about him that as well as being drunk with love of Allah, he had also been a very fine and knowledgeable scholar who was in full possession of all of his obviously excellent faculties, as is evident to anyone who reads even a few lines of his famous **Mathnave.**

For the next two hours or so we climbed further and further up into the mountains, until we were up past the snow-line, driving slowly through a white rugged landscape that lay beneath a dark stormy sky from which myriads of snowflakes slowly floated down. It was an extraordinarily beautiful and majestic sight, and one that was all the more enjoyable when viewed from a well-heated bus.

We stopped for a short break near a road-side cafe when it was time for asr, and I marvelled at the toughness of some of the old

men who crouched outside the coach in the falling snow, doing wudu with cold water. They must have been in their fifties and sixties, perhaps even their seventies, and yet it might have been summer for all the notice that they seemed to take of the cold. "No way!" I thought, as I stayed put in the cosy warmth of the coach, glad that I had prayed my two rakats for asr immediately after the jumua.

When everyone who was doing the prayer had done it, we all ran through the snow to the nearby cafe, which was heated by a huge fire filled stove in the centre of the room. We all huddled close to it, sipping sweet hot Turkish tea from delicately curving miniature glasses, my fellow travellers smiling and talking and laughing with the people who were already there, while I just sat there and grinned, until it was time to be on our way again, climbing slowly up through the mountain pass and the gently falling snow flakes until we started to descend again, finally emerging out onto the high mountain ringed plateau on which Konya stands.

KONYA

Once we had arrived in Konya, and Aziz had found a suitable place to park the coach, Mustafa announced that we would be stopping there for two hours. "Don't be late," he joked. "We're almost there now, and we don't want to leave anyone behind!" I immediately asked one of my fellow travellers if the great saint's tomb was nearby, and giving me a broad smile, he informed me that it was just round the corner and that he would take me there himself.

We were soon at the outer entrance of Mawlana Jalal'ud-din Rumi's tomb, and I was horrified to discover that they had turned the great saint's tomb into a kind of museum and were charging an entrance fee for anyone who wished to visit it. My guide had other things to do, and pressing more than enough money to pay for the fee into my hand, he bid me 'Bismillah' and 'As-salaamu-alaikum' and disappeared from sight.

I approached the narrow passage-way that led past the ticket office window, and offered the correct fare to the important looking official on the other side. "No!" he said pompously. "No foreigners allowed!"

"But I am a Muslim," I said. "I have just been on the Hajj."

"No!" he said loudly. "No foreigners allowed!"

I was determined to visit Jalal'ud-din Rumi, and was just about to deliver some well chosen words, when another man in uniform poked his head round the inner door to the ticket office and called the official over to him.

I hesitated for a second, as the official disappeared out through the door with the other man, and then seized the moment. My way was clear and there was no one to stop me. I strode quickly through the rest of the passage-way, passed quickly across a small courtyard, and disappeared into the building which houses, as I now discovered, not only the tomb of Mawlana Jalal'ud-din Rumi, but also the tombs of some of his closest followers. Their graves were grouped closely round that of their master, close in death as they

had been in life, the first of the famous whirling dervishes, whose outward turning veils an inner stillness in which Allah is the centre of attention.

The 'museum' had in fact been quite tastefully arranged, with the flutes and drums of the Mevlevis displayed in softly lit glass cabinets, and their tombs draped with dark rich velvet and crowned with the large rich turbans that the dervishes sometimes wear. For anyone who has not been present to witness the Mevlevis when they are turning, this collection of artefacts must be quite an interesting sight, but how far removed it is from the actual turning itself, and the baraka of the gathering that is only concerned with the remembrance of Allah!

In a way it reminded me of the Mahdi's tomb in Omdurman, with its little museum only containing a few outward traces of what had once been an amazing dynamic reality, like a collection of the fragments of the shell of some rare bird that has long since flown to another world. Here, however, the similarity ended, for whereas it had seemed that there was no one actually buried in the Mahdi's tomb, no unseen ruh making its presence felt, here there was a definite presence, a deep and majestic baraka that was so pervasive and apparent that it seemed to be almost tangible and visible.

When I approached Mawlana Jalal'ud-din Rumi's tomb, I was even more strongly aware of a mighty energy that was so overwhelming that for a moment I almost swooned and lost consciousness. I regained my balance, and having recited some Qur'an and the prayer on the Prophet, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, I made dua to Allah for the great master and his followers, and for those who had inherited his knowledge, and for myself. It would have been good to have visited Shaykh Sulayman Dedi, but, as with Shaykh Abdal-Qadir Isa in Damascus, my stay in Konya was very limited, and not knowing where his zawiyya was, I had decided not to go out of my way in trying to meet him.

Having completed my duas, I paused for just a little while longer to drink in the peace and tranquillity of my surroundings, and then, bidding the great Shaykh and his fuqara 'As-salaamu-alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu', I emerged from the mausoleum back into the late afternoon light, and retraced my footsteps back across

the small courtyard, grateful to have been able to make such a worthwhile visit.

I was half expecting a little trouble from the official in the ticket office, but there was no one there, and swiftly I passed through the narrow passage-way, past the window, and out into the street beyond. In the course of my travels I had learned three things: that the moment is sharp, and if you do not cut with it, it cuts you; and that you should not become involved in what does not concern you; and that you should keep the company of the wise.

By now I was in need of a hot drink, and since I still had all the money that I had been given, I set out in search of a tea room. In the course of my looking, I came across the main mosque, and quickly went in to see what it was like. Since I had already prayed asr, I could not pray the two rakats on entering the mosque, but it was good just to be there. In many ways it was like the mosque in which we had prayed the jumua, large and lofty and built to last, as indeed it had, with great heavy leather curtains hanging down over the entrances to keep out the cold. I could not help concluding that it is easier to keep a mosque in a hot country cool, than it is to keep a mosque in a cold country warm, and although each kind has its own particular advantages and disadvantages, and each has its own special baraka, I could not help acknowledging to myself that on balance I preferred warm climate Islam to cold climate Islam.

As I left the mosque, I met a perfume seller near the main entrance. He had all my favourites, and they were good quality ones too, the real thing and not synthetic imitations, and I would have loved to have bought some from him. Unfortunately they were not inexpensive, and I had to tell him that I could not afford them. He smiled understandingly, and smeared the backs of my hands with musk and amber and rose-oil, telling me that I could buy some from him another time. Rubbing them onto my beard and clothes and the inside of my tarbush, I thanked him for his generosity and continued on my way, discovering a little tea-room round the corner that looked clean and simple and not too expensive.

There were some tasty looking sponge cakes on display, and to my delight and relief, I discovered that I had exactly the right

amount of money for one cake and a coffee. For the next ten minutes I sipped and chewed and savoured my little jumua feast, with the perfumes filling my senses, sitting in a corner close to the tall stove whose flue disappeared up through the ceiling, and gradually relaxing as warmth returned to my limbs. What a lovely yawm al-jumua it had been!

I returned to the coach to find that everyone was already there, and within five minutes we were on our way again, not waiting to pray maghrib, although judging by the darkening skies its time could not have been very far away. This did not bother me, for since we were all doing travelling prayers, we were free to do them when it was most convenient, and if there was no water to hand, we could always do tayyamum.

On we went through the night, stopping only for people to go to the toilet, and I wondered how Aziz managed to do it, unless he had been sleeping during our stay in Konya. At some point I prayed maghrib and isha in the bus, using my tayyamum stone which I always have with me on long journeys, and sitting facing Makka the long way round the earth while I did the prayer. I slept on and off as we sped through the darkness, sometimes chatting with Muhammad, with whom I had now become good friends, and then, when the eastern sky eventually began to pale, I prayed subh likewise, reciting the passages of Qur'an in a distinct yet quiet voice. After the prayer was over, I sat back and relaxed, repeating the prayer on the Prophet for a while, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, until I drifted back to sleep.

It was late morning when we finally arrived in Kutahya, famed for its pottery and lemon cologne, with Aziz the driver's face looking tired and lined in the rear-view mirror, and everyone else smiling and looking excited, and there, to my surprise the coach journey ended, and the next stage of the Way Back began, for this was the home town of everyone on the bus, other than Aziz and myself.

KUTAHYA

It seemed as if the whole town was there to welcome the hajjis back, and as everyone off-loaded and gathered their luggage together in the main square, the coach was surrounded by a crowd of relatives and friends, eager to greet and assist my fellow travellers. I looked at Mustafa in surprise, for he had not told me that the coach would not actually be going all the way to Istanbul, but he put me at ease immediately with a big smile and a "Don't worry, we'll put you on the bus to Istanbul later. – Welcome to Kutahya!"

I must have been introduced to half the people there, as I was invited from tea-house to tea-house to drink apparently endless glasses of sweet Turkish tea and eat apparently endless pieces of freshly baked sponge cake, and although I could hardly understand a word that was being said, everyone made me welcome and put me at my ease. Gradually, however, the hajjis bid me farewell and headed for home and hot water and rest, until everyone except Mustafa and Aziz and myself had dispersed. "Now you must come to my house," said Mustafa with a welcoming smile.

Before doing so, Aziz checked through the coach to make sure that nothing had been left behind. All that remained was my Sudanese camel-bag, looking rather strange and out of place in its present setting, and a huge thick black wool greatcoat. Aziz picked it up and looked at it and nodded his head as if in approval, and then handed it over to me with a gruff 'Bismillah'.

"Oh thank you!" I said, for I was very cold, and there was snow on the ground. "Thank you! Baraka'llahu fi'k!"

Gratefully I put the heavy coat on and immediately started to feel warmer. The sleeves were a trifle long, but otherwise it was a good fit. As we walked round to Mustafa's house, which turned out to be only about ten minutes' walk away, Mustafa explained that Aziz still had to travel on to Ankora, where his wife and children were waiting for him, but before doing so, he would drop me off at the main coach station, where there was a frequent service to Istanbul.

Once we were at Mustafa's house, there was yet more tea and cake, as Mustafa greeted his family and handed his two small children their surprise gifts from Makka. Aziz was obviously keen to be on his way, for he still had a long way to go and must have been very tired, and accordingly we did not stay long. As he rose to his feet, Mustafa pulled out a huge fold of paper money and carefully counted out Aziz's share for having done the driving. He handed it over to Aziz who smiled and thanked him, and then almost as an afterthought, Mustafa grandiloquently peeled off a couple of notes and presented them to me – "Bismillah!" – along with my passport.

"Oh thank you," I said, for it was comforting to have some money handy for the next part of the journey. "Thank you. Baraka'llahu fi'k. And thank you so much for helping me this far."

"It was nothing!" beamed Mustafa. "We are brothers! Have a good journey!"

✿ ✿ ✿

Having bade Mustafa farewell, Aziz and I returned to the coach and drove to the main coach station. The coach seemed strangely silent and empty after having been filled with so much life for the last week, and I suddenly realised that I would probably never see any of the faces that had become so familiar during the journey up from Madina ever again, in this world at any rate, although insh'Allah we would meet again in the next.

At the coach station we discovered that there was a coach leaving for Istanbul in a couple of hours. Aziz ordered the ticket for me and paid for it, handing it over with yet another gruff 'Bismillah' and a tired smile, and making sure that I knew exactly where to catch my next coach before giving me a firm hand-shake and a firm 'As-salaamu-alaikum'. He strode out of the coach station without a backward glance, still looking like Anthony Quinn in **Zorba the Greek**, and disappeared for good. He was a rogue was Aziz the driver, a generous kind-hearted rogue of Allah, with a heart of gold!

✿ ✿ ✿

Once Aziz had left, I washed and did wudu and waited until it must have been maghrib, and then prayed maghrib and isha to-

gether in a quiet corner of the almost deserted coach station, my dark greatcoat feeling like a huge burnoose, completely enveloping me whenever I went into sajda. After I had finished the prayer and made some duas thanking Allah for having brought me this far and asking for an equally swift onward journey, I sat and waited for my coach to arrive.

The world around me had changed so rapidly during the last month, that I hardly knew whether I was coming or going, but my heart was at peace, and I was enjoying the journey, and all I had to do was to take things as they came, step by step, moment by moment, going with the flow, as I travelled all the way along the Way Back.

After about half an hour's wait, the coach arrived and I boarded it with the handful of other passengers who were also travelling further north. It was a thoroughly modern coach, with clean comfortable seats and very efficient heating, and as we passed through the quiet streets of the town, the courier went from passenger to passenger, sprinkling us liberally with the famous lemon cologne of Kutahya. I breathed the perfume in deeply and relaxed, gazing past the reflections of the interior of the bus that vibrated gently on the surface of the large windows, through to the ever-changing view beyond, and then suddenly, I felt very, very tired.

The full-length back seat at the rear of the coach was unoccupied, and having received the permission of the courier to lie down on it, I slipped my rubber boots off, and stretched out lengthways, and fell fast asleep. It was only the second time since leaving Madina that I had been able to sleep lying down, and how gloriously wonderful it felt!

ISTANBUL

I came to my senses in the early hours of the morning, just as we were driving through the outskirts of Istanbul. It was a cold grey winter morning, and most people were still asleep. The last time that I had been here had been in very different circumstances. It had been in the summer time, about two years before I had embraced Islam. My parents were driving down to Tehran from Vienna, and since I was enjoying the long summer university vacation, I had come along for the ride.

It had been a long drive to Istanbul, and accordingly we had stayed at a good hotel to have a rest and to take a look around. I had spent hours each day, walking the streets and seeing the sights, visiting the mosques and the souk and the Topkapi museum, with money in my pocket, and food whenever I was hungry, and the luxury of a hotel room which had its own balcony and a lovely view out over the city. It had been very hot, with the ancient city full of people and humming with life. This time around I was travelling alone, virtually penniless and with nowhere to stay, and right now it was cold and dark, with snow gently falling with the wind. It was altogether a different city to the one that I remembered.

Fortunately, however, I had Khalid's address, and once we had arrived at the coach station, after passing swiftly through the almost completely deserted streets of the sprawling city, with its familiar looking mosques looming up grandly on the skyline, I set about finding where it was that Khalid lived. As it turned out, the house was not far away, and after asking for directions a few times, I found myself outside a relatively large house set in a small but attractive garden, which must have looked lovely in the spring and summer, although now it was completely bare.

It was still early, and I wanted to cause as little inconvenience as possible, so I decided to go on a walkabout, feeling cold and hungry and almost as bleak as my surroundings, wondering what would happen next. Clearly I had to keep moving, but I now had a choice. Either I could travel northwards almost immediately, up through Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and then head West, or I could

travel westwards into Greece and perhaps somehow get across the Adriatic to Italy and then head North.

I was not at all sure which way to choose, but as I tramped on thoughtfully through the streets of Istanbul, I became increasingly aware that if money was no object – which ultimately it never is, whether you have it or not – then I would prefer to travel to Athens, cross over to Italy by boat, and then visit the Vatican in Rome on the way back to England.

Before setting out on the Difficult Journey, I had been working with Colonel Rahim on a book about the history of Islam in Spain, a book that was eventually given the title of **Blood on the Cross**, and in the course of our research it had been necessary to study the history of the Mediaeval and Spanish Inquisitions, whose tremendously destructive power had been sanctioned and orchestrated by the mediaeval Popes from the Vatican. Having studied the Vatican's history from its very beginning, I was curious to actually see it with my own eyes, and to see what was at the heart of Roman Catholicism, and what better time to do so than on the present journey! However, right now I was in Istanbul, and Rome was a long, long way away.

By now, there were a lot more people about, and I decided that it was time to see whether or not Khalid was at home. In a few more minutes my circuitous route had brought me back to the house in the garden, and letting myself in through the gate, I walked up the path to the large strong door and knocked loudly three times.

The door was opened almost immediately by a kind-looking elderly woman whose hair was covered by a large shawl. She invited me in and sat me down and brought some tea and cakes for me to eat. Having established who I was and how I came to be in Istanbul, she smiled and said that Khalid was away, but would be back that evening, insh'Allah. In the meantime, I was welcome to stay as their guest for as long as I wanted. I thanked her with gratitude in my heart, moved by such natural and spontaneous hospitality.

As I sipped the hot sweet tea and devoured the cakes, for I was very hungry by now, she asked after Hajj Abdal-Adheem and Malika, and Hajj Isa and Hafsa, and to my surprise I learned that

they had spent one Ramadan as guests of the family. I replied that they had been very well when I had left England, but that that had been a long time ago!

After a while, she invited me to come and meet her husband, who was the Imam of the nearby mosque. He was ill in bed at the moment, crippled by gout, and she wondered if I might know of any cure for it. I immediately thought of Shaykh Al-Amin in El Obeid, one of the Shaykhs whom Abdal-Jalil and I had met in the Sudan who specialised in Qur'anic medicine. When we had visited him, he had asked me if I needed any cures, and without thinking I had asked him for some cures against the cold, which he had obligingly prepared for me, carefully writing them out on pieces of paper and neatly folding them into little self-sealed triangles that I was told not to unfold again. To 'take' the medicine, I was told, you had to set one of the paper triangles alight, and then breathe in the smoke. For the last two months, I had looked after them carefully, and I still had them, carefully stashed away in my camel-bag.

I fished out the envelope in which I had been keeping the cures, and after being shown into the room in which the Imam was lying, swathed in blankets and rugs, I chatted with him for a while before giving him three of the cures and telling him how to use them. The poor man did not look at all well, and although he constantly praised and thanked Allah, he was clearly in quite a bit of pain. I always wonder whether or not the cures helped to cure him, but as things turned out, I was never in Istanbul long enough to find out.

After about twenty minutes, my generous hostess, who had left the two of us talking, returned to the room to tell me that she had prepared some food for me. I asked the Imam's permission to leave him, and bidding him 'As-salaamu-alaikum', I re-entered the carpeted sitting-room to discover a huge bowl of steaming liver and kidney stew, accompanied by thick crusty bread, waiting for me on a large metal tray in the middle of the room. It did not take long to eat, for the last square meal that I had eaten had been the one that Aziz the driver had bought for me on the juma two days ago. As soon as I had wiped the bowl clean, my generous hostess took it away and then returned with it, filled to the brim once again. Gratefully I ate it all, knowing that the family was not rich by the

looks of things, and wishing that I had something more than my duas for them to give in return, may Allah bless them for their kindness, and give them the Garden.

After finishing the second bowl of meat stew, I no longer felt cold or tired, and now that I was filled with renewed vigour, I decided to visit the tomb of Ayyub Al-Ansari, the companion at whose house the Prophet Muhammad had stayed when he first arrived in Madina after making the Hijrah from Makka, may Allah bless him and his family and his companions and grant them peace, and who had been destined to die and be buried in Istanbul. Having found out roughly where the tomb is situated from my generous hostess, I thanked her warmly for all her help and generosity, promised that I would be back before maghrib, insh'Allah, and set out in search of my immediate goal.

I had quite a long walk ahead of me, but now that I had some food in my stomach, I was glad to have the exercise, and it was interesting to look about me as I walked. Although Ataturk had attempted to stamp out the practice of Islam in Turkey, at least the mosques were still standing, and even if they were no longer filled to capacity, at least they were still open. It was now time for dhur, and accordingly I stopped off at a small mosque to do the prayer, thankful that it had excellent toilet and wudu facilities. Having prayed dhur and asr in the beautiful cream marbled mosque that was virtually empty, I continued on my way, still considering which way I should go when it was time to leave Istanbul.

The more I thought about it, the more attractive the road to Athens and then to Rome appeared. Not only did it seem fitting that the wheel should turn the full circle, so that once more I would be back in the city of Athens from where, light years ago, Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had launched ourselves towards Africa on the way to Makka, but also I did want to visit the Vatican, so that I could compare the centre of European Christianity with the centre of Islam, from which I was now only just returning. Perhaps, I hoped, the money which Mustafa the courier had given to me in Kutahya would be sufficient to cover the coach fare to Athens. Insh'Allah I would find out tomorrow.

At last I reached the tomb of Ayyub Al-Ansari, set back in a little garden of its own and shaded by a very ancient oak tree that

still had some leaves clinging stubbornly to its branches. How extraordinary that he should end his days here, I reflected, and that I should be visiting him now. Were it not for the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, then neither he nor I would be here in Istanbul. How true the ayah of Qur'an is that states:

And no self knows what it will earn tomorrow.
And no self knows in what land it will die.

(Qur'an: 31.34)

Having done a little dhikr near his tomb, I made some duas to Allah, asking Him to give Ayyub Al-Ansari peace and light in his grave, and to give me a swift and sure onward journey along the road that was best for me in the present circumstances. I did not stay long, for the wind was chillingly cold, and the best way to keep warm was to keep moving. As I stepped out from the relative shelter of the small garden into the full force of the wind, I thanked Allah yet again for the greatcoat that He had given me through Aziz the driver. I still felt cold, but at least I was not freezing.

As I began to make my way back towards Khalid's residence, I made a detour so as to be able to revisit the famous Blue Mosque, and the Sofia Mosque nearby. I entered each of the two ancient buildings in turn and looked around, as I had done some seven years earlier, but with a greater depth of perception and understanding. As I looked around at the half-familiar walls, I could now read much of the Arabic calligraphy that graces their beautifully tiled and ornately decorated interiors, and it was easier to visualise what it must have been like when these vast mosques were filled to capacity with people doing the prayer and praising Allah, their vaulted domes echoing and resounding to the sound of thousands of voices reciting the Qur'an and doing dhikr.

Right now, however, at this time of year, both buildings were virtually empty, of either tourists or worshippers, and there was a silence in the air that reminded me of some half forgotten museum that is locked up most of the time because very few people visit it.

Ma sha'Allah. Nothing lasts:

Say: O Allah, King of Dominion,
You give kingdoms to whom You wish,
and You take away kingdoms from whom You wish,
and You give power to whom You wish,
and You humiliate whom You wish.
All good is in Your hands.
Surely You have power over everything.
You make the night pass into the day,
and You make the day pass into the night,
and You bring forth the living from the dead,
and You bring forth the dead from the living,
and You provide for whom You wish without reckoning.

(Qur'an: 3.26-27)

I would have liked to have prayed two rakats in each of these mosques, but since I had already prayed asr, I was unable to do so, since Muslims are not permitted to worship Allah in this way once they have prayed asr, until it is time for maghrib. Instead I simply made a dua, asking Allah to fill them with Muslims once again, so that they were as full as they were now empty.

By now it was beginning to grow late, and I headed back towards Khalid's residence, which was in the old part of town. Some of the buildings were very old indeed, and there were sometimes large ruined walls that looked as if they dated back to the days of the Roman, and perhaps even the Greek, Empires. So much for the gloria mundi, I thought. It does not last for ever, and you cannot take it with you when you die! Certainly a great deal had taken place in this city, for it has always been at the cross-roads between North and South, and West and East, and ancient Barbarism and early Christianity, and mediaeval Christianity and Islam, and modern Barbarism and Islam.

I arrived back at the house shortly before maghrib, and knocked at the door, and there to greet me was a smiling Khalid, whom I had not seen for over two years, since the days when he had been a student in London. Khalid greeted me warmly, and after praying maghrib, we visited his father who was still immobilised in bed, and then tucked in to yet another lovely meal that Khalid's mother had kindly prepared, chatting about old times, and the future, and the friends that we had in common. I did not realise it at the time,

but this was the last meat I was to eat until I arrived back in England. After spending a peaceful evening together, as Muslims usually do, it was decided that Khalid would accompany me to the coach station the next day to ensure that I caught the right bus. Having prayed isha together, a bed consisting of rugs and eiderdowns was prepared for me on the carpet, and soon I was fast asleep.

✿ ✿ ✿

We were all up early the next morning for subh, and after a quick breakfast, I bid the Imam and his generous wife good health and farewell, and then Khalid and I headed out into the cold morning, and the nearest travel agents office. My heart sank when I saw the prices mounted on the display board. I did not have nearly enough for the fare to Athens. I would just have to catch a bus to the outskirts of the city and then start hitching, just as I had done so many times before in my past travels around southern Europe, although this was a little different, for it was winter and not summer, and certainly not the weather for sleeping out in the open without a sleeping bag.

"It doesn't matter," said Khalid with a smile, reading my mind. "You pay what you can and I'll pay the rest. I want to help you. Where do you want to go?"

"Athens," I replied, finally making up my mind.

✿ ✿ ✿

Ten minutes later, we were on our way to the coach station, and two hours later I was on the coach to Athens, with Istanbul already receding in the distance and becoming just another memory in the action replay video of my life.

I gazed out of the window at the changing winter landscape, filled with fresh hope, and grateful for the sincere generosity that Khalid had displayed towards me. Only the saying of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, that Allah is between the hand of the giver and the hand of the receiver, prevented me from feeling embarrassed or even guilty about being so helpless and utterly dependant on the generosity of others, which is not other than the generosity of Allah manifested through His

creation. And yet I was nevertheless aware that the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, had also said:

> **"By Him in whose hand my self is, to take your rope and gather firewood on your back is better for you than that you come to a man to whom Allah has given some of His favour and ask him, so he gives to you or refuses."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 58.2.10)**

And I was also aware that the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, also said, when mentioning sadaqa and refraining from asking, that:

> **"The upper hand is better than the lower hand. The upper hand is the one which expends, and the lower one is the one which asks."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 58.2.8)**

And I was also aware that:

> **Yahya related to me from Malik from Zayd ibn Aslam from Ata ibn Yasar that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, sent a gift to Umar ibn al-Khattab, and Umar returned it. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Why did you return it?" He said, "Messenger of Allah, didn't you tell us that it is better for us not to take anything from any one?" The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "That is by asking. Provision which Allah gives you is different from asking." Umar ibn al-Khattab said, "By the One in Whose hand my self is, I will not ask anything from anyone, and anything that comes to me without my asking for it, I will accept."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 58.2.9)**

I had tried to emulate Umar throughout my travels, but it had not always been easy – especially when it came down to the nitty gritty, and my need appeared to be great – and I was also aware

that even if I did not succumb to my anxieties and actually ask anyone for anything out loud, sometimes my mere presence or appearance was tantamount to doing so.

At the present moment all that I could was to keep going, and to do without asking others, or drawing attention to myself, as much as was possible, trusting that Allah would provide for me from where I did not expect. I was completely at the mercy of my Merciful Lord, Allah the Merciful the Compassionate.

✿ ✿ ✿

The coach sped swiftly through the grey afternoon, for we were now on a main highway, and I relaxed back in the warmth and comfort and temporary security of this leg of the journey, singing quietly away to myself and feeling like an intrepid traveller. Alhamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! Insh'Allah I would be in Athens tomorrow morning! And travelling from Madina to Athens in ten days was not bad going!

After about two hours, we stopped for a meal-break at a roadside cafe, and since I had a little change left over after the purchase of the ticket – for Khalid had insisted that I keep some money to buy refreshments on the journey – I bought a couple of cheese omelette sandwiches to eat on the coach, and a large carton of that thick Greek yoghurt that only the Greeks seem to know how to make. As I made my way back to my seat near the rear end of the coach, I noticed a very thin English-looking man about half way down whom I had not seen board the coach. My heart prompted me to give him one of the sandwiches, but he was fast asleep, and after I had taken my seat, the first sandwich tasted so good that I could not help eating the second, and the yoghurt after that.

Later on, when we reached the border, there was a long delay on the Greek side of the border, while three men from Pakistan were questioned extensively by the customs officials, and eventually turned back. Most of the other passengers, including myself and the thin English-looking man, left the coach and took refuge in the small cafe that adjoined the customs building, and I and Peter, who was indeed from England, naturally greeted each other and fell into conversation.

It turned out that Peter was in more or less the same situation as myself. He had been travelling back overland from the Far East, and had run out of money in Istanbul. He now planned to leave the coach at Thessaloniki and to hitch northwards and then westwards – the option that I had considered but then rejected in favour of the route that I was now taking. Peter had not eaten for two days, and I wished that I had kept that sandwich for him, but it was too late now. All that I could really do was to give him some encouragement, for he did not look at all well. "Don't worry about it," I said. "You'll do it. Just trust in Allah. He will feed you and shelter you. Just remember that whatever help you receive is from Allah, so thank whoever helps you, and thank Allah."

My words were just as much for me as they were for him, and they seemed to do us both good. We chatted for a while, mainly about Islam and the Hajj, and when Peter said that he was not quite sure where to travel next, I immediately recommended Morocco. "It's lovely and warm there," I said, "and the people are so friendly and hospitable. There is something for everyone there. It all depends on who you are. There is evil there, and there is good there. Provided you go there with a good intention, you are sure to meet with good."

After a while, it suddenly occurred to me that I might as well try and change what little Turkish money I still had left in my pocket, for at this point the three men from Pakistan were still being questioned. Perhaps there would be enough to buy Peter and myself a coffee and cake each. I excused myself and went over to the little table where the money-changer was sitting. He looked at the money in my hand with contempt, muttered something under his breath, and tossed a few small coins at me, grossly overcharging me in the process. I almost threw them back at him, not wishing to be part of such a hostile transaction, but something is better than nothing, and I picked the few coins up, sensing the centuries of conflict between the Greeks and the Turks that was clearly still smouldering in the animosity that the money-changer had so openly displayed in such a trifling transaction.

✿ ✿ ✿

I suddenly realised that, once more, I was crossing the border between not only two countries, but also between two worlds. The

lands where the way of Islam is the social norm – no matter how eroded or ignored it is at times – now lay behind me, and the lands where idol worship is the social norm – whether what is idolised is tangible or intangible – now lay ahead of me.

This is not to say that there is no idol worship taking place in the Muslim lands, for there is; nor is it to say that there are no Muslims in the lands of the idol worshippers, for there are; but there is clearly a great difference between these lands, which is more than what can be ascribed to cultural and environmental factors; and there is clearly a great difference in their peoples, both in their inward and outward orientation and in their understanding of the nature of existence, which is more than what can be ascribed to ethnic or genetic factors.

When I returned to the table where Peter was sitting, it was to find him eating some cake and sipping at a large coffee. "Look what Allah has just given me," he said with a weak smile. I smiled too, and on going to the counter, discovered that I had just enough money to buy a coffee, with three small coins left over. "Subhana'llah," I thought to myself, "I'm returning to Athens with just as much money as we had when we left it five months ago!"

We barely had time to finish our coffees before it was time to continue our journey, and soon we were on our way again, minus the three men from Pakistan, speeding through the dark night. By now it must be Muharram, the first month of the new Muslim year, but the weather had been so grey and overcast for the last week that I had been unable to sight the new moon.

Although it was late, the coffee had woken me up, and I spent the next couple of hours doing dhikr and softly singing ex tempore travelling songs, as I often do when I'm travelling, keying in to the hum of the engine, and tuning in to the onward momentum of the journey, sitting cross-legged in my seat with my boots on the floor, gazing resolutely ahead or staring out of the window with my eyes only half-focussed, and above all, glad to be alive in spite of its being winter.

I was still singing softly when the coach stopped briefly near Thessaloniki to let Peter off into the freezing darkness of the night at what must have been the turn-off for the road north to Yugoslavia. He paused to wave me goodbye and wish me well. "Insh'Allah I'll hitch round to Morocco," he smiled weakly but bravely, and climbed down from the coach, a frail thin figure, caught in the glare of the headlights. I waved to him again, and made a dua for him. Peter might not be a fully-fledged Muslim, but he nevertheless trusted in Allah, and, as Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit always used to say, you never know the end of the story!

ATHENS

I awoke shortly before sunrise, to find that we were approaching the outskirts of Athens. Wasting no time, I faced roughly in the direction of Makka, did tayyamum with my tayyamum stone, and prayed subh quietly and yet audibly, sitting in my seat. Having done the prayer, I looked out at the cold grey city, with all the exhaust fumes of all the traffic smoking and clouding the air. It looked pretty bleak to me, and I wished that I had a nice warm room to go to, and a one-way ticket back to London in my pocket, and yet, as Shaykh Moulay al-Arabi ad-Darqawi once said, "If you knew the blessing in need, you would not need anything other than need."

Whenever you play it safe, you cut yourself off from so many blessings and so much mercy, without even realising it, and the false sense of security that you may feel, and the comfort that you may enjoy instead, are poor compensation. If Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had been going to wait until we had loads of money, I reflected, we never would have set out on the journey to Makka in the first place, and we never would have had had such an adventure; and even if we had managed to find all that money, it probably would have meant that we would have flown all the way there and back, and not met any of the people or visited any of the places that had made the Difficult Journey such a wonderful journey.

Nevertheless, the prospect of hitching back to England in this weather was not in the least bit inviting, especially since I was no longer in the Muslim lands, where hospitality to the stranger and the traveller is an integral part of their way of life. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed that this was the time to take up the offer of help which Colonel Rahim had made to me shortly before I had left London with Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa six months earlier.

Prior to our departure, I had spent more than two years with Colonel Rahim, serving him and working with him on three books – **Jesus, Prophet of Islam**, **Jesus in the Qur'an** and **Blood on the Cross** – and he had been like a second father to me, teaching me a

great deal both about people and about compassion. Before the three of us had set out on our journey, he had given me twenty pounds, which was all that he could afford, and had said, "If you get stuck along the way, and need any money, then just 'phone me and let me know."

We had tried 'phoning Colonel Rahim for help almost immediately after our arrival in Athens, but fortunately without success, for it had meant that we were able to experience what it was like to be part of the cheap labour force at the EV soft drinks factory, as well as being able to become better acquainted with the big-hearted Muslims of Athens.

This time around, however, the situation was different. I was travelling alone, and I just wanted to be able to return to England as swiftly as possible, hopefully to be in time to be present at the large gathering of dhikr that was to be held at Darqawi in Norfolk during the Christmas break. By the time we had rolled into the busy coach station of Athens, I had decided that this was indeed the time to ring Colonel Rahim, a decision that was confirmed as soon as I stepped off the coach, by the biting cold wind that tugged at my clothes. This was certainly not the weather to be out in the open out on the open road!

Slowly I made my way through the streets of Athens to the main telephone exchange, where it would be possible to make a reverse charges call, my camel-bag slung over my shoulder, and my dark greatcoat flapping in the chilling wind. Every now and then the sun was just visible behind a haze of cold white cloud, but it was like a painted decoration in the sky for all the warmth that it provided. I looked around me at the other hurrying figures, huddled and hunched against the cold. Was this the same city through which I had tramped with Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa a few months ago, sweating and thirsty and longing for an ice-cold drink by some cool swimming-pool? I shivered, and wished that it was summer again.

Eventually I reached the telephone exchange, grateful to be indoors for a while and sheltered from the wind, and soon, almost unbelievably, I was talking to Colonel Rahim as if he was just round the corner. It was strange to hear his familiar voice again for the first time in several months, and reassuring to learn that he would

go to the bank as soon as he had put the 'phone down and arrange to have fifty pounds sent to me that very morning. This time around I was careful to establish at which bank the money would be arriving, and then, having thanked Colonel Rahim for his timely help, I hung up and ventured back into the cold. The money probably would not arrive until tomorrow, and in the meantime I had to find somewhere to stay.

Naturally, I immediately thought of the Muslims' Cafe, where Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had spent so much of our time when we were not actually working at EV or sleeping. If I went there, perhaps I would meet Ibrahim or Ramadan again, and insh'Allah one of them would not mind putting me up for the night. I began the long walk to the cafe, memories of all the times that we had enjoyed there suddenly flooding back into my mind, and of course I imagined that everything would be exactly the same now as it had been then, as if I had only been away for six days at the most, rather than six months.

At last I entered the street in which the Muslims' Cafe was situated, and I quickened my step, wondering who I would find there, and then, as I drew nearer, I discovered that it was empty and deserted. There was no one there. It had been closed down. Ma sha'Allah.

For a moment I felt stunned, peering in through the windows at the empty room that had once been so full of life, and then, realising that there was no point in hanging about, I decided to try my luck at the youth hostel at which the three of us had first tried to stay back in the summer, but without success, because it had been full up. Perhaps now that the tourist season was over, there would be a room available in which they would be willing to let me stay until the money arrived from London. It seemed a little unlikely, but it was worth a try. I was feeling tired and cold and hungry, and I needed a good rest, if I was to remain fit and healthy.

As I trudged in the general direction of the hostel, feeling like a stranger in a strange land, I came across a street vendor selling little rings of dried bread. I pulled out my three small coins, and asked in sign language if they were enough to buy any. He glanced briefly at them, and shook his head. I shrugged my shoulders, and was just walking away, when he took pity on me, and called me

back, and gave me three of the dried bread rings in exchange for my money, with an understanding smile. Since he was a poor man himself, he knew what it is to be hungry. I thanked him warmly and then continued on my way.

At last I arrived at the hostel, and fortunately the lady behind the desk spoke good English. At first she seemed a little suspicious, as I explained my situation, and then to my surprise, she relented, and handed over the key to a room, on the understanding that I would pay her the next morning. I thanked her with all my heart, and a few minutes later, I was in a lovely clean centrally-heated room, with its own hot shower and clean linen and blankets on the bed. What luxury!

I stood under the strong jet of lovely hot water, soaping myself thoroughly and washing all my dirty clothes and socks. This could not have come at a better time! An hour later, I was draped in a blanket, with my newly laundered clothes draped over the radiator. How good it was to be clean again! And now it was time to eat. It was at this point that I decided to eat some of the dates that I had bought for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir. From now on, I was going to have three meals a day, and if the food did not come from anywhere else, then I would have seven dates for each meal.

Reluctantly I opened up the strong plastic bag in which the dates were stored, and picked out seven. They were large and chewy and delicious, and went well with one of the dried bread rings, and a glass of water. Then, after praying dhur and asr, with the bottom half of my ihram wrapped around my waist, and with a blanket draped round my shoulders, I crawled in between the deliciously clean white sheets and fell fast asleep.

When I awoke, it was dark, and still I felt tired and sleepy. It was strange to be completely alone in a room by myself, for I had become accustomed to constantly being in the company of others. The room was silent except for the muffled sound of the traffic outside. Silently I did wudu, prayed maghrib and isha, ate another dried bread ring and seven dates, and then went back to bed and back into another deep dreamless sleep, grateful that I was not out there somewhere in the cold, trying to hitch a lift along the open road.

I awoke again early the next morning, refreshed and alert and relaxed. As always, hardship had been followed by ease – which meant that there was probably more hardship just around the corner! After having another long hot shower, I prayed subh, devoured the last of my dried bread rings and seven more dates, put on my lovely dry clean clothes, skipped lightly down the stairs, collected my passport, and set off in search of the bank to which Colonel Rahim had said he would be wiring the money.

I found the bank just as it was about to open, and was one of the first to stride through its ponderous plate-glass doors, full of optimism, and wondering if I would be able to catch a ferry to Italy that afternoon. But the money had not arrived. I waited until eleven o' clock, for I had to return to the hostel by mid-day, but still the money had not arrived, the clerk apologetically explaining that it sometimes took several days for money transfers from England to be completed.

Feeling a bit deflated, I returned to the hostel and explained the situation to the lady behind the desk. Would it be possible to stay another night? This time she shook her head. The answer was 'No'. Resignedly I went back up to that lovely warm room, collected my camel-bag, and returned to the desk. "Thankyou, for allowing me to stay last night," I said. "I promise to come and pay you what I owe you as soon as my money arrives." And so saying, I turned and stepped out into the winter cold once again, hoping against hope that this time around the money would actually arrive.

As I walked down the street away from the hostel, I was not sure quite where to go next, but decided to try the Muslims' Cafe again, just in case there happened to be someone around. As it happened, there was. A young Sudanese man who was passing by recognised me and asked me to come with him. The Muslims' Cafe had closed down because the authorities had refused to renew Muhammad's licence, but there was now another cafe not far away where all the Muslims now congregated.

I followed my guide through the streets of Athens, and after a short walk we arrived at the cafe at which the Muslims now gathered. As I walked in through the entrance, it was like stepping back into Cairo. There was the Divine Name of Allah and the name of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, on the wall

for all to see, with Arabic music blaring out of the jukebox, and a few familiar faces, including the old woman who always sat by the window doing dhikr with a silver-beaded tasbih forever moving slowly through her fingers, and several new faces, to greet me and make me welcome and congratulate me for having successfully, insh'Allah, done the Hajj. The sense of relief that I felt was instant.

Everyone crowded around me to ask how my journey had been, and moments later a large bowl of my favourite – foules mesdames, with olive oil and tahini and ground cumin sprinkled on top, and a side-salad and bread to go with it – was placed before me. Hungrily I tucked in, trying to divide my time equally between eating and answering questions. After a while, everyone went about their business, and I was left to sit and wait, getting up only to pray dhur and asr in a back room once it was after noon.

I stayed there for the rest of the day, hoping that Ibrahim or maybe Ramadan, who had both been so kind to Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and myself on the outward journey, might chance by and be able to put me up for a night or two, but they did not, and indeed it turned out that all the people whom we had come to know best during the summer had either left altogether or were not in Athens at present.

As I sat there and waited, it made me realise just how like the sea existence is. The sea is always there, but it is always changing. Its waves only last for a short time. They come, and they go, sooner or later for ever, only to be replaced by more waves, and then more waves, and then more waves, and that is how it has always been and always will be, until the sea dries up and vanishes.

Eventually evening came, and after retiring briefly to the back room to pray maghrib and isha, I returned to my chair at the corner table to find that the cafe was rapidly filling up, now that another working day was over. I was soon joined by a man whom I had not met before. His name was Fowzi, which means 'the one who is successful', and he was bright and cheerful and spoke relatively good English. He ordered us both tea and cake, and then lit up a cigarette with obvious enjoyment. "I only smoke after sunset," he explained, "so the first cigarette of the day always tastes really good! Would you like one?" And he held his packet of cigarettes out towards me.

I had not smoked a cigarette since the day I had embraced Islam, which was now over four years ago, but right then I really felt like smoking one, and I accepted his offer. It tasted awful, like the first cigarette I had ever had, and like my first cigarette it made me feel giddy and nauseous, but like my first cigarette I finished it. Although Fowzi offered me more cigarettes during the course of the evening, I declined.

As the evening wore on, everyone chatting about this and that, I felt more relaxed and contented, feeling the pulse of life in the cafe beating all around me, although every so often I could not help wondering where I would be spending the night. Eventually it began to grow late, and the cafe began to empty, and soon only Fowzi and two other men who had joined us earlier on in the evening remained. It was only at this point that Fowzi asked me where I was staying. Briefly I explained my situation. "It's alright," said one of the two other men, "you can stay at my place for as long as you like."

Gratefully I accepted his invitation, and having said goodnight to Fowzi and the other man and the proprietor, I followed Husni – for this was his name, meaning 'the one who is good' – through the cold night to his cold flat, which he shared with a man called Abdal-Ghani.

Like many of the immigrant workers from North Africa, Husni, who was from Egypt, was not paid very much for the long hours that he worked. Although he earned a great deal more than what he could have earned in Egypt, by the time he had paid his rent and travel costs, there was barely enough left to live on, and he was back to square one, surrounded in the main by people who did not take kindly to Muslims with dark skins, and I could not help wondering why he preferred this life to the one that he had left behind him.

On his wall was a caricature cartoon of two men who looked alike and who were dressed alike in checked suits. The first man was plump, and his clothes were in good condition. He had shiny black shoes, and an expensive cigar between his fingers. He was rubbing his hands together in delight at the sight of a safe full of paper money, and looking very pleased with himself. The second man was thin, and his clothes and shoes were very much the worse

for wear. He was wringing his hands in dismay at the sight of a safe that was completely empty, and looking extremely worried. The message of the cartoon was clear.

Husni saw me studying the cartoon and pointed at the man who had nothing. "Why are we Muslims always like this?" he asked.

"It is because our wealth awaits us in the akhira," I replied. "Insh'Allah we are not people of this world. We are people of the Garden, which is what we are promised if we follow in the footsteps of our Prophet, salla'llahu alayhi wa sallam. He said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, 'O Allah, I was born amongst the poor, and let me live amongst the poor, and let me die amongst the poor.' He said that he did not fear for his community on account of their poverty, but on account of their wealth, lest it might destroy them as it destroyed other communities before them. At the end of each day he had no money. He said, salla'llahu alayhi wa sallam, 'O Allah, withhold from me one day so that I call on You, and give to me one day so that I thank You.' If there was any good in being very rich, then Allah would have given him and us more wealth. Look at the men in this picture! They are both poor! The fat man is worshipping his money and not thanking Allah for his good fortune, so he is on shaky ground; and the thin man is also worshipping money even though he has none, and he is not turning to Allah in his need, so he is on shaky ground too! Alhamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! If we hold to the deen, then we are rich! And if we love the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, then we will be poor, for he said to the man who said that he loved him, 'Then prepare yourself for poverty, for it will come to the one who loves me more swiftly than a flood comes to its destination.' Allah is the Rich and we are the poor, and if we worship Him then He will feed us and clothe us and shelter us."

"I know," said Husni, shrugging his shoulders resignedly, "I know all this, but I do wish we could have just a little more."

And right at that moment, I could not help agreeing with him. It is one thing to be patient in spite of one's impatience, but quite another thing to be patient with patience, in which exalted state it is possible to be completely and utterly content with whatever happens, simply because the self no longer has any desire other than

what Allah desires, in every moment, and even where physical comfort is concerned, let alone peace of mind. As much as I longed to acquire such a sublime inward state, I did not have it, and although I did not want to want what I wanted, I wanted some more money just as much as Husni!

✿ ✿ ✿

Having spent a warm night snuggled up in the blankets that Husni had kindly provided for me, I awoke at dawn to find Husni already dressed and ready for another day's work. We prayed subh together and ate a simple breakfast of tea and bread, before Husni hurried off to work, but not before giving me a key to the flat so that I could come and go as I pleased.

After resting until it was nearly time for the banks to open, I made my way to the bank once again. Still the money had not arrived! I was advised that it would be better to come back the next day, which was Friday, the last working day of the week. I left the bank feeling dispirited, as if I was going to be stuck in Athens for ever, and slowly walked along to the park where Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had spent most of our first day in Athens, the day on which I had been stung on the forehead while we were doing the prayer. We had been so hot and thirsty that day, but now I was shivering with cold, and most of the trees whose thick foliage had once shaded us were bare.

I sat down on a park bench and could not help wondering whether or not anything had gone wrong. One small administrative error, and the money might not arrive. Or perhaps Colonel Rahim had sent the money to a different bank to the one that I had been trying. I huddled up in the cold, with a constricted heart and a busy mind, worrying needlessly but unable to help it, knowing that Allah was aware of my need and would satisfy it, but incapable of being truly patient until help arrived.

I looked up for a moment, and my attention was immediately caught by a young boy about thirty yards away. He had caught a pigeon and was holding it carefully up against his chest in his two hands, smiling lovingly and gently smoothing its ruffled feathers with his thumbs. At first it struggled to fly free, but then gradually began to calm down as it submitted to his gentle caress.

What struck me most about this extraordinary sight was the boy's face. Not only did it look like the face of a kind old man, but also, stranger still, it was almost exactly the face of Khalifa Ibrahim, the muqaddem of Shaykh al-Fayturi in Cairo, who had welcomed Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and myself when we had only been in Cairo a few days, and who had calmed our hearts, shortly before we had begun the long journey down the Nile to the tomb of Shaykh Abu'l Hasan ash-Shadhili in Humaysara, and beyond into the Sudan.

I was so struck by the similarity that I almost called out to him, but at that very moment he suddenly threw the bird up into the air with a joyful upward sweep of his arms, and with a look of love and delight lighting up his face. My heart leapt as the bird soared up into the air and I too forgot my worries and smiled with delight as it flew swiftly away into the light of the sun. When I looked down again, the boy with the old man's face was nowhere to be seen.

It had all happened in a few brief moments, and yet I now felt completely different. My mind flashed back to the days we had spent in Cairo. We had travelled far and fast from Athens to Cairo, and then we had paused there for a while, as we readjusted to a world that was very different to the one that we had just left, penniless, and yet determined to travel straight ahead and not to turn back. When the right time had come for us to continue our journey, then the necessary help had arrived – not when we wanted it, but when Allah wanted it – and we had set off on the next leg of the journey.

Instinctively I realised in my heart that the same thing was happening again, only the other way around. I was like the pigeon in the boy's hands. I had come far and fast from Madina to Athens, from the land of the muminun to the land of the kafirun, and right now Allah was just giving me the breathing space to rest and readjust, before releasing me into the next stage of the journey. The reality of my situation was that, as always, I was utterly dependant on Allah, not on Colonel Rahim, or his money. If Allah wanted to help me by that particular means, then nothing would stop Him doing so, and if He wanted to help me by some other means then He would do so.

By now it was after mid-day, and although it was very cold, I found a tap and did wudu and prayed dhur and asr. There was no angry park attendant around to try and stop me this time, and no insect to sting me on the forehead, although the cold hard grass had a sting of its own. After completing the prayer, my heart completely at peace again, I decided that since I was here in Athens, I might as well make the most of it and take a look around. There must be absolutely thousands of people dotted around the world who would have loved to have won a short winter break in Athens, and I just happened to be the one who had been given the winning ticket! Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah, I had stopped worrying.

After all the wide open spaces that I had enjoyed for the last few months, it felt a little cramped and claustrophobic to be in the middle of a large city once again, and I decided to make for the high ground on which the Acropolis stands. I followed more or less the same route that Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had taken in the summer, although it was now very different. There was hardly a tourist to be seen, and thirst was certainly not a problem.

When I finally emerged out near the top of the hill on which the Acropolis stands, it was to find the ruin deserted. After wandering around for a while and viewing what was left of the old relic at my leisure, I found a comfortable block of marble which was sheltered from the wind and sat down cross-legged to reflect and view the view. Down below, the city of Athens sprawled out, trying in vain to climb the surrounding hills, but only half-succeeding, while above my close-shaven head the winter sky grew gradually darker as the sun dropped lower and lower behind the clouds. After a while an educated-looking man who had clearly not spent all his life staying at home passed by, and after greeting each other we talked for a little while.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"From England," I replied, "although I was born in Zambia, and lived there for the first sixteen years of my life."

"That's funny, you don't look very English, or Zambian!"

"I'm just returning from doing the pilgrimage in Makka," I explained.

"You have just been on the pilgrimage to Makka?" he repeated. "Then you must be blessed!"

"Yes," I smiled contentedly, "I must be. I must be one of the most fortunate people alive. Why don't you go sometime?"

He did a small doubletake. "Well, I'd have to become a Muslim if I was going to do that, wouldn't I?"

"Yes," I replied, "you would have to embrace Islam, and it would be the best thing that you'd ever have done in your life."

"Well, I'm not so sure about that," he said, smiling at my directness. "Anyway, I wish you well," and so saying he gave me a wave and continued on his way.

By now I was feeling the cold, and rising to my feet I walked briskly up to the top of a nearby hill, on which another ruined temple was perched. It was very nearly time for maghrib, and I was suddenly filled with the desire to call the adhan. The Prophet Muhammad once said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, that every stone that hears an adhan being called will bear witness to this on the Last Day, and it somehow seemed appropriate that all the stones that made up the ruins that surrounded me should do this for me, especially since they had spent much of their time listening to the voices of idol-worshippers.

I stood facing in the direction of Makka, and gave a loud adhan, although there was no one around to hear it, and then, using the bare earth to do tayyamum, I prayed maghrib and isha on a flat piece of marble, before making my way swiftly back through the winter dusk towards the twinkling lights below, and the warmth and life of the new Muslims' Cafe.

It was Thursday night, laylat'al-jumua, and as I sat in the crowded cafe, surrounded by men who were mostly from either Egypt or the Sudan, relaxing after another long day in the factory, it seemed hardly possible that only two weeks earlier I had been sitting in the Rowdah near the Prophet's tomb, may Allah bless

him and grant him peace, singing from the Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib to my heart's content. Life changes so quickly.

Although it was not a night of concentrated dhikr, it was nevertheless a night filled with baraka, and there was nowhere else in Athens that I would have rather been. I spent most of it chatting to Fowzi and his friends, who made me welcome and fed me and bought me cups of tea and coffee to drink every so often. Fowzi again continually offered me his cigarettes, and this time I smoked two, finding them enjoyable and relaxing.

I could hear faint alarm bells ringing in my awareness, for I did not want to start smoking regularly again, but I ignored them, for in these particular circumstances I saw no harm in it. Smoking is definitely makruh, and best avoided altogether, but I had never come across a specific ayah in the Qur'an, or a hadith, stating that it is haram. The fact that I was smoking at all, however, did remind me of the saying of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, that a man becomes like the company he keeps, and therefore he should be careful about the company that he does keep.

My companions that evening may not have been the wisest or the most devout of people on the face of the earth, but I am sure that they were amongst the most friendly and the most human. They welcomed me and fed me, and one of them gave me shelter, and they were people who believed in Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and I pray still that they will be among the people of the Garden, along with all the other myriads of people who have helped me on my way along life's journey.

The evening passed quickly, in a haze of warmth and friendly talk, and soon it was time to say goodnight and to return with Husni to his flat. On our return, I met Abdal-Ghani, the man with whom Husni shared the flat. He was eating a tasty-looking kebab and immediately offered me half of it. "Is the meat halal?" I asked. He shook his head with a smile. "Then, thank you very much, but no thank you." He smiled again and carried on eating. As much as I enjoyed meat, I had no desire to eat it if it was haram, and although it is permissible to eat or drink something haram if that is all there is, and you do not want it but that is all there is, and it is a matter of

life or death, I certainly was not in such dire straits at that particular moment. It was late, and we were all sleepy, and soon we were all fast asleep.

✿ ✿ ✿

I awoke the next morning with fresh optimism. It was the day of the jumua, the 'id of the week, and insh'Allah something good would happen on it. Ever since I had decided to return via Athens, I had been looking forward to praying in the small mosque that Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had helped to establish during our summer visit, in the basement of the Muslims' Cafe, hoping that by now it would be thriving, but of course it had had to be abandoned when the cafe was closed down, and so now there was nowhere to have the jumua prayer, and I would have to pray dhur instead. Ma sha'Allah. At least we had tried.

The day began much as the day before it had done. We prayed subh, and had a simple breakfast, and then Husni dashed off to work, while I waited until the banks were about to open before setting out in search of my provision. By now I was becoming quite a familiar figure at the bank, and as I approached the counter, the clerk was already shaking his head. "I'm sorry, Mister Thomson," he said, "there is still nothing for you."

"Are you sure?" I said. "Would you please just make one more check for me."

"Certainly, sir, but I'm sure there's nothing here for you." The clerk began to check half-heartedly through the details that were being printed out on a ticker-tape machine. I was just about to turn and leave, when suddenly he stiffened. "Just a moment sir, it's just arrived this minute!" And he tore off the tape and waved it in the air to prove it. I breathed a sigh of relief. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah, and thank you Colonel Rahim. It was time to be on the move again!

✿ ✿ ✿

Fifteen minutes later I was striding purposefully out of the bank with money in my pocket once again. Forty minutes later I had a ticket to Bari in my pocket and only half the money. I could in fact have just afforded a bus ticket all the way back to London, but I had decided against it. This was my chance to visit Rome, and it might never come again!

The coach to Patrai, from where the ferry to Bari was due to depart, left at four o' clock that afternoon. There was just enough time to do all that I now had to do, which involved a good deal of walking. My first port of call was the youth hostel, where I paid a very surprised lady behind the desk for the night that I had spent there. I could not help smiling as I left the building. She must have thought that I had been pulling a fast one, and that I would never keep my word! Little did she know that I knew that, as the old timer pointed out in the film called **Jeremiah Johnson**, you cannot cheat the mountains. You cannot cheat Reality.

My next stop was Husni's flat, where I prayed dhur and asr, and picked up my trusty camel-bag. Finally, I called in briefly at the new Muslims' Cafe to thank everyone for their hospitality. Since most people were at work, there was hardly anyone there, other than the proprietor and the old lady who always sat by the window doing dhikr with the silver-beaded tasbih moving slowly through the fingers of her right hand. I left my messages of thanks to everyone, especially Fowzi and Husni, with them, together with the key to Husni's flat, and then departed swiftly for the coach station, my last sight of the cafe being the old woman sitting patiently at the window, smiling 'Ma Salaama', with the silver-beaded tasbih continuing to move slowly but surely through her fingers as she continued with her dhikr.

PATRAI

I managed to catch the coach to Patrai with minutes to spare, filled with anticipation and excitement at the prospect of being on the move once more, free at last from that feeling of being stuck and unable to move. I knew that by travelling this way – rather than playing it safe and buying a ticket on the Magic Bus all the way back to London – I was going to run out of money again before I arrived back in England, but insh'Allah by then I would be within hitching distance of Dieppe or Calais, and surely Allah would open a way for me across the Channel, as He had already done before in the past.

Not only did I wish to visit the centre of the institution which, in the Name of God and in the name of Jesus, peace be on him, had waged such incessant and ruthless war on the Unitarian Christians and the Jews and the Muslims – both before and during and after the mediaeval Crusades – but also I wished to visit the tomb of a Shaykh who, I had been told, is buried in Rome, and who was one of the human links in the particular chain of transmission of knowledge and wisdom – which is only one out of sixty-three – that stretches through the ages from the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, through to my guide and teacher, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit. I did not even know the name of this particular Shaykh, but I felt a close affinity to him, and hoped that somehow, insh'Allah, I would be guided to the spot where he is buried.

As my thoughts flew ahead to consider what lay in the future, the coach to Patrai did its best to catch up with them in the present. We were out of Athens in good time, and after winding up into the hills that surround it, the sprawling city was at last out of sight for good, and we were out on the open road, chasing the sun towards the West. I sat and relaxed, silently repeating the prayer on the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, for Shaykh Abdal-Qadir had once said that I should do this during all the times that I was not involved in any other acts of worship.

My stay in Athens had done me good, and I was now beginning to feel more and more like a seasoned traveller, now that country after country and situation after situation had passed me by. The cloudscape that topped the mountainous countryside through which we were passing was dramatic and stormy, and colourful, whenever the sun broke through, and of course now that I was back in a nice warm coach once more, it was easier to admire the view. Gradually it grew darker, until the time of maghrib had come and gone, and then suddenly – for I had had no idea how far we had to travel – the dark mass of the Aegean sea was visible ahead of us, and shortly afterwards we had arrived at our destination.

The transition from coach to ferry was a swift one, and after a minimum of customs formalities, I found myself on board a ship again, memories of the trip from Piraeus to Crete and Alexandria flashing through my mind, as I sniffed in that distinctive salty sea air once again. How good it was to be aboard, and bound for Italy!

Having watched the ferry leave the port, the few twinkling lights of the harbour and the town gradually dwindling away into the darkness, I suddenly felt very hungry and thirsty, for I had not really had time to stop and eat anything throughout the whole day. Subhana'llah, what a jumua it had been! I had not even had time to buy some food to take with me, which I normally do on such journeys, for I have always found that food on public transport is usually highly expensive and rarely very nutritious. There was only one thing for it. I would have to treat myself to a meal at the cafeteria.

There was a bit of a queue when I arrived at the self-service restaurant, and as I waited for my turn to be served, the first two people to join the queue after me turned out to be from Syria. Having purchased our food, which was fish and chips, we sat down together to eat it. During the course of the meal, it transpired that they would be driving all the way to Milan once they had disembarked at Bari, and would be only too happy to give me a lift as far as Rome. It was a great relief to know that the next stage of the journey was taken care of, and having finalised the arrangements, I bid them goodnight, found a quiet corner to pray maghrib and isha, and then fell fast asleep in one of the reclining seats to which

foot passengers were entitled, as the ship steamed slowly through the night.

✿ ✿ ✿

The next morning we stopped off briefly at Corfu to drop off and take on passengers and cargo, the island looking beautiful and green and peaceful in the sparkling winter sunshine, and then we were on our way again, each moment bringing us a little closer to our ultimate destination. I stood at the rails of the ship, and breathed the fresh sea air in deep, marvelling at the vast expanse of the sea and the vast stretch of the heavens. What an amazing world it is we live in, and what an amazing thing it is to be alive!

During the course of the morning, I met a German couple who were in a little difficulty. They were driving back to Germany, but had nearly run out of money, and did not know what they were going to do about petrol once they did. I pulled out what money I had left and insisted that they accept half of it. At first they tried to refuse, pointing out that if they accepted it, then I would not have enough money to get back to England myself.

"Ah, but you don't understand," I explained. "Even if I kept all of this money, I still wouldn't have enough to get back. I'm giving you this money as an insurance for myself. The Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, once said that whatever you give in the Name of Allah will be repaid by Allah ten times over. These drachmas are worth about fifteen pounds sterling, so if I give them to you, Allah will give me the equivalent of a hundred and fifty pounds, which should see me back to England nicely. So I'm giving you this money in the Name of Allah just as much for my own sake as for yours. So please accept it. Bismillah!"

They accepted it gratefully, not quite sure whether to believe me or not, and probably thinking that I was a little odd, but then perhaps they had not seen this principle repeatedly working time after time, not only during the last six months, but also for the last four years, as I had. As Allah once said, on the tongue of His Messenger in a Hadith Qudsi, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, **"I am in the expectation of My slave."**

✿ ✿ ✿

The rest of the voyage passed uneventfully, and I tried to rest as much as possible, for I did not know when I would next have the chance again to do so. There were hardly any people on board, so it was quiet and peaceful, and I managed to doze off and on in between visits out on deck, where the chill wind soon reminded me that I still had very little hair on my head.

We arrived in Bari during the afternoon, after I had prayed dhur and asr. As the ship slowly approached the dock side and the mooring cables were despatched over the side and secured to the heavy iron bollards that stood firmly near the murky harbour water's edge, I looked anxiously amongst the other passengers for the two men from Syria. They must have had a cabin, for I had not see them again since the meal we had shared the previous evening, and the last thing I wanted to see was the two of them driving off into the sunset without me!

BARI

I need not have worried, for everyone had to present their passports to the customs officials in Bari while they were still on board the ferry, and once we were all gathered in one of the ship's lounges for this purpose, I soon spotted the two Syrians and re-established contact with them. Having arranged to meet them on the dockside after they had driven off the ferry, I was off the ship like a shot as soon as my passport had been stamped, wishing the German pair a good journey en passant, and minutes later the two Syrians' battered looking car emerged from the depths of the ferry.

The back seat of the car was crammed with a haphazard assortment of clothing and shoes, both men's and ladies', but they pushed it all to one side and made enough room for me to squeeze in, and after a quick once over by more customs officials and their sniffer dogs, who found nothing to bark about, we were on our way, streaking up the motorway in the late afternoon sun and heading North.

The car was very noisy and conversation was virtually impossible, so I gazed out of the window at the new countryside that now surrounded us. It was the greenest and the most fertile that I had seen since leaving the deserts of Arabia, and as I stared out at it in wonderment, my mind drifted back to the last time that I had travelled through Italy.

It had been in the summer, and after visiting Stromboli – whose barren crater I had climbed to witness the raw power of the still active volcano flinging red hot boulders up into the still night air every so often beneath, as chance would have it, a total eclipse of the moon – I had spent a month or two walking up through the Italian countryside, following mountain paths and minor roads, as I retraced in reverse the route that my father had once taken during the war after escaping from the P.O.W. camp in Fontenallato.

It all seemed a long time ago now, and I could not help smiling as I recalled the anxiety that I had experienced about running out of money before reaching England. In those days I never would have dreamed of travelling without money, and all my journeys

were roughly planned in accordance with how much money I had at the time, but then in those days I had not yet learned how to trust in Allah!

✿ ✿ ✿

As darkness fell, I realised that the car did not have any headlights, but curiously enough I did not feel unduly perturbed. Muhammad, who was the shorter of the two men, and very plump, adopted the strategy of driving right in front of the car behind, so that its headlights lit up the road ahead of us – except on the bends of course – and driving just fast enough in front of it so that its driver did not want to overtake us. At the same time he recited from the Qur'an very loudly and very clearly, and at great speed, pausing every so often to take a giant swig of Coca-Cola from a giant family size bottle which was wedged between the two front seats. It was a precarious way to be travelling, but I had no intention of asking them to stop the car and let me out. Sometimes you have to live a little dangerously!

✿ ✿ ✿

I must have dozed off as we hurtled up the motorway, for suddenly I was aware that the car had come to a halt by the side of the road, and Muhammad was tugging at my sleeve and telling me to wake up. "This is the turn-off for Rome," he said. "Do you want to come with us to Milan, or do you want to get out here?"

I looked out of the window. We seemed to be in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of a very dark night, and what little traffic there was, was travelling very fast indeed. These were not the best of hitching conditions, to say the least. I had somehow imagined that they would be dropping me off in the centre of Rome itself, but of course they were keeping to the main by-pass that linked up directly to the motor-way leading to Milan. Nevertheless, there was no doubt in my mind as to where I wanted to go. "I'll get out here," I said. "I must visit Rome." The two men shrugged their shoulders, and after thanking them for their kindness and wishing them a safe journey, I stepped out into the darkness with my camel-bag over my shoulder, and off they sped further into the night.

It had been cosy and warm in the car, and the chill of the night woke me up almost immediately. After about ten seconds, I real-

ised that it was a very, very cold night. The grass verge was covered in a deep frost, and I could feel the cold stealing rapidly into my body. A few cars shot past my lifted thumb, and I could see that I was highly unlikely to catch a lift before it was light. Within minutes I was shivering uncontrollably, as I hopped from foot to foot and hunched my shoulders in a vain attempt to keep warm, and it was not long before I came to the conclusion that if I did not find some shelter soon, I could quite easily freeze to death.

Fortunately the lights of a service station were visible about half a mile away, and I trotted down the road towards them, hopping back onto the grass verge with a crunch of crushed frost and sticking my thumb out whenever a car flashed by, but to no avail. No one was going to stop for me on this stretch of road at this time of night!

I arrived at the service station, shivering violently and with my teeth chattering, and with a few half-remembered words of Italian and some shaky sign-language, I asked the attendant if I could shelter in his office – which had a large radiator against one wall – until it was light. To my surprise, he shook his head, looking hard and stony-faced, but beckoned me to follow him, which I did.

The attendant led me round the outside of the building and into the foul-smelling toilet area, pointing down to the far end wall at a small radiator which just fitted in the space between the urinal and the door to one of the toilets opposite it. The floor next to the radiator was covered in urine and muddy shoe-prints, the place still felt like an ice-box, and the stink in the place was almost unbearable. I looked at him incredulously. "I'm a human being, you know," I said in my best pidgin Italian, "not an animal." The attendant just shrugged his shoulders, as if to say 'Take it or leave it', and walked off back round to his warm office.

I hesitated, unsure what to do. I could not stay in that toilet, and I could not survive in this cold. Slowly I began to walk back round to the office, hoping that I could persuade him to change his mind. Just at that moment, a car drew up by one of the petrol pumps, and the attendant walked briskly over to it to see to the driver's needs. Without even pausing to think about it, I walked swiftly into the office, closed the door, and sat down on the floor cross-legged with my back pressed against the lovely hot radiator.

I felt awful, and just let my head hang down on my chest, as the warmth slowly began to seep back into my shivering body. "Please Allah," I begged silently, "please let me stay here."

When the attendant returned to the office, he gave me a look, and then shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Thank God he was going to let me be! I now felt extremely tired, and after a while, once I was warm again, I dozed off, waking momentarily now and then, but soon dropping off to sleep again. What a life!

During one of my waking moments, I realised that I had not yet prayed maghrib and isha, and accordingly the next time that the attendant was out of the office, I fished out my tayyamum stone from my greatcoat pocket, repeated the qadqamati's-salat, did tayyamum, and then did the two prayers sitting down. Not only was I very tired, but also I did not want to draw attention to myself by doing the prayer standing up, for I was back in a land where the sight of someone doing the Muslim prayer often arouses fear, or excites anger, or attracts ridicule, and right at that moment, I did not have the strength to deal with any of these.

I was finally awakened by a hand gently shaking my shoulder. It was the attendant, and in his other hand he had a paper banknote. "The cafe next door is open now," he said. "Go and buy yourself a coffee with this." And he handed me the money. I accepted it gratefully, thankful that his heart had softened and that he had taken pity on me, not only for my sake, but also for his, for it is a grave misfortune indeed to have a hard heart.

The eastern sky was just beginning to pale as I walked into the cafe and ordered a large cappuccino. There was exactly enough money to buy a small sponge cake as well, and I ate my welcome breakfast slowly, savouring each mouthful, and feeling the warmth of the coffee pass down my gullet and into my stomach and then out through the rest of my body, every inch of the way. By the time both cup and plate were empty, I felt a whole lot better, and after returning to thank the attendant for his generosity, I set out on my way once more.

The sun had not quite yet risen above the horizon into the clear sky, so I walked down the road a little, figured out which way Makka was, and then, after doing tayyamum, I prayed subh, my

hands and forehead aching from the cold of the cold white grass that was still covered in frost. After completing the prayer, I thanked Allah for having brought me so far, and asked for a good visit to the Vatican and a swift onward journey. Then I retraced my steps back to the exit road that led out from the service station onto the motorway, and began to hitch, hoping and praying for just one kind heart behind the wheel of a car that was going to Rome.

ROME

My prayer was answered almost immediately, as a smartly dressed driver in a flashy red car drew up to a halt beside me. He was not going right into the centre of Rome, but would drop me off in the suburbs at a bus-stop from where there was a frequent service to the main train station.

It did not take long to reach the outskirts of Rome, and although I had had two uncomfortable nights without much sleep, I was in good spirits. It was a clear crisp bright winter morning, and miraculously I was in Rome already!

True to his word, the man dropped me off at the bus-stop and pointed at an approaching bus. "You're in luck! That's the one you want! Quick, or you'll miss it!" Clutching my camel-bag in one hand, and waving at the bus-driver with the other, I thanked the man for his kindness and clambered aboard the bus which pulled out back into the road almost immediately. It was only then that I realised that I did not have any Italian money on me, only Greek drachmas, and it was Sunday.

When the conductor reached me, I had hardly started to try and explain that I would change some money at the station and pay him then, when a woman on the bus graciously paid my fare for me, dismissing my thanks with a big smile. I smiled back, realising yet again that it is impossible to distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims solely on a geographical or genealogical basis. How close to the reality of Islam some people are, even though they know little about it on an informational level, and how far from the reality of Islam some people are, even though they speak Arabic and are surrounded by Muslims.

I spent the rest of the journey to the railway station looking out at Rome through the bus window. What amazing places these cities are – so many bricks, so much wiring and piping, so many machines, so many different lives, so many hearts beating, so many different stories, all inter-woven and inter-linking – and how dif-

ferent each one is, for all their similarities. Subhana'llah! What a creation – and what a Creator! Beyond description.

Once I had arrived at the train station, I changed all the money that I possessed into Italian lira at a bureau de change that fortunately happened to be open and then, just as I was about to start looking for the Vatican, I noticed another bureau that issued cut-price tickets for students. It was worth a try. I entered the office and explained to the friendly young lady behind the desk that although I was not a student in the formal sense of the word, and did not have a student card, I was studying Islam full-time. Could she give me a cut-price ticket on a train going into France? The lady gave me a lovely smile and said of course she could! Where did I want to go, and when did I want to leave?

I explained that I wished to visit the Vatican first, and that I would purchase the ticket on my return to the station in the afternoon. Having ascertained that she would remain in the office until five o' clock that afternoon, I bid her arrivederci and mille grazie for the time being, and followed her straightforward directions on how to reach the Vatican, picking my way through the relatively empty streets of Rome, with its ancient buildings towering all around me. I plodded along purposefully in my rubber boots, feeling yet again like a stranger in a strange land, and wishing that there was somewhere where I could wash my feet, and that I had a clean pair of socks to put on, for my toes were beginning to itch, and it felt like I was just starting to develop athelete's foot.

As it happened, the Vatican was not far away, and it was easy to find. I walked across the great open courtyard, which was virtually empty, and slowly mounted the giant steps which lead up to the Vatican's massive doors, passing through them into the mighty vaulted building that had been built on such a large scale that it made me feel small and insignificant as soon as I entered it.

My first impression of the place was that it was like some glorified art gallery, rather than a place where God is glorified, for everywhere I looked there were paintings and statues, doubtless intended to remind whoever beheld them of God, and Jesus and Mary, peace be on them, and the disciples, may Allah be pleased with

them – but somehow only reminding me of the actual works of art themselves, and of the artists who had fashioned them. Leonardo da Vinci's 'Madonna and Child', for example, only served to make me marvel at his expertise, and to wonder at how he had managed to achieve such a life-like effect from cold marble. The detail was so intricate that it immediately demanded my attention and so absorbed me that for a moment I forgot the One who had created Leonardo da Vinci and everything that he had done. I paused, recalling the well-known incident in which A'isha, one of the wives of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, had bought a cushion which had pictures on it:

> **When the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, saw it, he stopped at the door and did not enter. She recognised disapproval on his face and said, "Messenger of Allah, I turn in repentance to Allah and His Messenger. What have I done wrong?" The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "What is the meaning of this cushion?" She said, "I bought it for you to sit and recline on." The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Those who make such pictures will be punished on the Day of Rising. It will be said to them, 'Bring to life what you have created'." Then he said, "The angels do not enter a house in which there are pictures."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 54.3.8)**

Since the research that I had recently done into the history of Christianity was still fresh in my memory, I recalled that it was this issue that had caused the split between the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches in the eighth century for all the Unitarian followers of Jesus, peace be on him, at that time had maintained that Jesus had never repealed the second commandment, which I had memorised as a child, and whose words now came back to me, echoing down through the years:

> **Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth below, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them,**

nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.

(Bible: Exodus: 20.4-6)

As I looked around me, it seemed to me that the whole building was filled with graven images that were constantly being worshipped by the scores of tourists who filled the place, busily gazing at these priceless worthless works of art and snapping away at them with their cameras. Their fashionable clothes contrasted strongly with the stereotyped uniforms of the monks and nuns who were to be seen here and there, some of them kneeling in prayer on the hard stone floor. Even this, I reflected, was a perversion of the original teaching of Jesus, peace be on him, as the Qur'an so clearly states:

And certainly We sent Nuh and Ibrahim,
and placed the prophethood and the scripture
among their offspring.
Among them is he who is rightly guided,
and many of them are evil-livers.
Then We caused Our Messengers to follow in their footsteps,
and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow on,
and We gave him the Ingil,
and We placed compassion and mercy
in the hearts of those who followed him.
And it was they who invented monasticism
We did not ordain it for them –
only seeking the pleasure of Allah,
but they did not observe it with true observance.
So We give those of them who believe their reward,
and many of them are evil-livers.

(Qur'an: 57.26-27)

✿ ✿ ✿

As all these first impressions and my initial reactions to them filled my awareness, a priest came up to me and asked me to remove my woollen tarbush. I was surprised – for God is present,

without any limitation, neither included nor excluded by time and space, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden, and if you remember that He is always present wherever you are, closer to you than your jugular vein, so that you are always in the presence of your King, then your reverence for Him can no longer only be reserved for certain places, or restricted to certain times – but I did as I was asked, my head immediately feeling the cold, for my hair was still no more than a furry patch of bristles after the complete head shave that I had been given in Makka only four weeks previously.

I began to walk slowly around the building, not really liking what I saw, but curious to see what was there nevertheless. As in any art museum, so here in the Vatican, my attention was continually being directed from one object or image to the next, and accordingly it was for ever being attracted out at the world around me, rather than in at the heart within me, tending to create an overall impression of diversity and multiplicity rather than one of unity.

The Vatican was so different to both Makka and Madina, in so many ways. The whole feel of the place was completely different for a start, even when I closed my eyes and shut out all the distractions. There was none of the deep peace, or the sublime tranquillity, or the baraka, that pervades the Haramayn and frees your heart from the forgetfulness of Allah, so that you have no desire to be anywhere else in the world, or to be doing anything else, because you are so completely inwardly still and at rest, and aware of the unified nature of all the diversity and multiplicity that surrounds you, of the Oneness of Existence, which in Arabic is referred to as Tawhid.

Another difference which struck me was that whereas the sheer size of the Vatican tended to overwhelm and intimidate me, the spaciousness of the Haram in Makka and the intimacy of the Prophet's Mosque in Madina had filled me with awe of Allah and love for His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

Although the Ka'aba itself is massive when you are close to it, and although the covered part of the Mosque that surrounds it on all sides is very grand and majestic, the fact that the vast area between the two is open to the sky means that you are continually aware of the dome of the heavens above you, a far more awe-in-

spiring creation than any dome of bricks or stone and mortar made by man.

Similarly, the open courtyard in the Prophet's Mosque means that you are never far from the natural world that surrounds you, while the areas that are roofed over are built in such proportions that they are beautiful and relaxing and not belittling, and since there are no paintings or statues in either of these places, but only soothing patterns, there are no vivid distractions.

Above all, however, it was the people who filled these places that were so different. There is an ayah in the Qur'an that says: **'Be with the truthful ones.'** (Qur'an: 9.119). When the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, was asked, 'Who are the truthful ones?', he replied, 'They are those who, when you see them, remind you of Allah.'

In Makka and Madina, I had been continually reminded of Allah by thousands and thousands of people whose chief concern was the remembrance and worship of Allah. Here in the Vatican, there were very few people who had that effect on me, and indeed of all the people who were present, there were very few there who actually appeared to be even outwardly involved in the worship of God.

Perhaps it was because there were so many different focal points here, different altars, different statues, different paintings, which left everyone pointing in different directions, whereas in Makka there is only one focal point, the Ka'aba, which is also the same focal point for those who live in Madina, and indeed for any Muslim living anywhere in the world, which means that all the Muslims point in the same direction, wherever they are.

Only God is aware of what is inwardly in the hearts of people, and perhaps I had become so accustomed to the Muslim form of worship that I was unable to recognise any other form of worship, or the sincerity that lay behind it, and yet I could not help feeling that there was something missing, and that no matter how sincere the intention was behind the forms of worship now being followed in the Vatican – forms which were largely based on what people had innovated, rather than on the original pattern of worship that Jesus, peace be on him, had so nobly embodied and established

amongst the Tribe of Israel – they simply could not be as spiritually nourishing and satisfying as the pattern of worship that had been so nobly embodied and established by the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

As I walked around the Vatican, overpowered and overwhelmed by the sheer size and vastness of its marble columns and the rich decoration that covered its walls and domed ceilings, I continually repeated the dhikr of **'A'udhu bi'llahi min ash-shaytani'r-rajim – Bismillahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim' – 'I seek protection in Allah from the outcast shaytan – In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate'**, for I felt ill at ease in such a place. It was part of a world to which I had never belonged, and to which I had no desire to belong. I was well aware that in a way I should not really be there at all, but, as always, I preferred to see things with my own eyes, rather than to read about or hear other people's descriptions of them. Besides which, I had a message to deliver:

Making my way to the entrance of the vault in which all the popes are buried – including the ones who had been the driving force behind the persecution of the Unitarian Christians and the Jews and the Muslims both before and during and after the Crusades – I waited for the right moment, when nobody else was close by, and then gave a quiet adhan which I hoped would be clear and penetrating enough for the spirits of the dead popes, and at least some of the stones that form the Vatican, to hear. Then I spoke softly into the grille set in the door that separated them from me, repeating the words that the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, had spoken to the dead Quraysh after the battle of Badr: "Have you discovered what your Lord promised to be true? For I have found what my Lord promised me to be true." I paused, trying to imagine their present state, and then added, "Now you know!", knowing that they could hear me, even though they could not answer.

There seemed no point in staying any longer. I had confirmed the truth of what the mediaeval popes had so vehemently rejected during their lifetimes, and of which by now they must be fully aware. I took one final sweeping look around the vast monument,

and then, truly grateful that I was a Muslim and not a Roman Catholic, I headed for the giant doors and stepped out into the fresh air and down the wide deep steps to the huge courtyard below, hastily donning my tarbush as the cold air enveloped my unprotected head. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! I had wanted to visit the Vatican, and I had!

✿ ✿ ✿

I still wanted to visit the Shaykh who, I had been told, is buried in Rome, but I had no idea at all where his tomb is. For all I knew, he might be buried in an unmarked grave in the small garden overlooking the Vatican that I had just spotted. I climbed up the steps that led to it, and decided to treat myself to a lunch of seven Madina dates, for by now I was growing very hungry again.

As I slowly chewed on my nourishing lunch, silently reciting Surat'al-Ikhlas before popping each date into my mouth, I reflected on what I had been told about the Shaykh. Apparently he had spent much time discussing the nature of existence with that group of Jesuits who specialise in the study of Islam, in order to be able to devise ways in which to subvert it. Since they were at least aware of the basic teachings of Islam, it had been easier for the Shaykh to point out to them that they are in fact true, and to draw their attention to the contradictions and shortcomings inherent in their own dogmas and theology, as well as the advantages of actually following the existential way of life and pattern of worship of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, rather than the one that they were following. I was unaware of whether or not the Shaykh had met with any success, but whatever the outcome, I was sure that he must have enjoyed himself.

I smiled as I recalled the story of the two Jesuit priests who, after spending a great deal of time studying the teachings of Islam, finally came to visit the Shaykh of Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib, at his zawiyya in Meknes, in Morocco. After they had been given food to eat and mint tea to drink, Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib had asked them if he could be of any help to them, knowing exactly who they were and why they had come. "Do you want to know about the Shahada?" he asked. "Or the Salat? Or the Zakat? Or Ramadan? Or the Hajj?" mentioning the five pillars on which Islam is based. "Or," he had

continued, "Allah? Or His Angels? Or His Messengers? Or His Books? Or the Last Day? Or the Garden and the Fire? Or the Decree of both Good and Evil?" mentioning the main elements of Iman. "Or what true Sincerity is?" mentioning Ihsan.

"Oh no," they had replied, "we know all about all of that. There is just one thing which we do not understand. What do you mean by the term 'nafs'? What is the 'nafs'?"

Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib smiled. "The 'nafs'," he said, "is what prevents you, after all that you have learned about the teachings of Islam, from putting your heads on the ground before your Lord!"

I smiled again as I pictured the meeting between them, and then began to recall other stories about this wonderful man, whom I loved, even though I had never met him. Such as the time that the French governor of Morocco came to visit him:

"I have been governor here for a long time now," said the governor, "and still I do not understand Islam. Why is that?"

Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib looked at him. "Islam is like a ksar," he said, "like one of those square hard-baked mud-brick fortresses that you see in the desert. From the outside they look like nothing, but within there is life! – Food and water and animals, and a whole community of people living their lives, with babies being born and old people dying and children growing up and marrying. Islam is like that. The Salat, the Zakat, Ramadan, the Hajj, each of these pillars of Islam is like a wall of a ksar, and the entrance to the ksar is the Shahada. If you do not enter the ksar, you will not know what is going on behind its walls. If you do not say the Shahada and embrace Islam, you will never understand it!"

I recalled also the story of the time when a thief climbed in through the window of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib's room, not realising that the Shaykh was resting there in the semi-darkness.

"Welcome!" said Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib. "Marhaban! Please help yourself. You are welcome to take whatever you like! And while you are here, please have some tea with me."

And so saying, he had summoned one of his wives to bring them some tea. The tea was made and brought, and while they were drinking it, a meal was prepared for the unexpected guest. When the food was placed before the would-be thief, he could control himself no more, and burst into tears, and became the follower of the man who had shown him such kindness.

The tears came to my eyes as I relived the story in my imagination, and, like the thief, I was overcome by such a clear demonstration of compassion and kindness.

✿ ✿ ✿

Having finished my lunch, and realising that I should be on way, I made dua to Allah for the Shaykh who is buried in Rome, and thanked Allah for bringing me to Rome so directly, and, as always, asked for a swift onward journey, protected from the evil of the places that I would be passing through, and exposed to their good, and with meetings with those whom Allah loves. Although I had not knowingly visited the tomb of the Shaykh, it was as if I had been there by intention, and now that the reason for my wanting to come to Rome had been fulfilled, it was time to leave. I stopped only long enough to do tayyamum and pray dhur and asr in the quiet garden overlooking the Vatican, and then, having planted the date-stones from Madina in some of the flower-beds, I made one last dua, asking Allah to plant the deen of Islam in Rome, before returning back through the winter sunshine to the train station.

✿ ✿ ✿

The friendly young lady at the bureau that issued cut-price student tickets was still there behind the desk when I returned, and, true to her word, she gave me a student ticket, which effectively meant that I could travel twice as far as I otherwise would have been able to with the money that I had available. We worked out that the furthest I could go was Chalon, which is well into France and not too far south of Paris, and fortunately there was a train leaving in about an hour's time. Gratefully I exchanged nearly all of my money for the precious ticket, and having bid her goodbye and thankyou, I went out in search of food.

✿ ✿ ✿

Since it was a Sunday, there were very few shops open, but I managed to find one little store that was, where I bought a large round loaf of bread and a small tin of sardines. I had just enough money left to buy a small coffee at the station cafe, and having done so, I opened the tin of sardines and tore off a large piece of bread, for by now I was ravenous.

To my dismay, I saw that it contained myriads of opaque flecks, which probably meant that the dough had been prepared with animal shortening – since vegetable shortening remains clear once it has cooled down – which was bound to be from an animal that had not been slaughtered in a halal manner. I hesitated, but then decided to eat it. I had lost a lot of weight during the last month, the weather was cold, and I would soon be hitching out in the open. I had to eat something to stay healthy. I had reached the situation where it is halal to eat something haram when there is nothing else available.

Unwillingly but hungrily I ate the bread and sardines. It tasted odd and I did not enjoy it, but I did feel better with something more than dates in my stomach, and once I had washed everything down with the coffee, I felt much stronger and warmer inside.

The loaf of bread that I had bought had been a large one, and although I kept picking off little pieces and feeding them to the pigeons, there were still three quarters of it left when the time came to board the train. For a moment I debated on whether or not to throw it away, but decided to keep it, now that I was penniless again. I had hitched through France several times before in the past, and it had often taken ages before someone had stopped to give me a lift. If this was going to be the case this time around, then it might take two or three days to cross through France, and the bread might turn out to be all the food that there was for me to eat.

I boarded the train, and fortunately, although it was crowded, I found a seat in a small compartment that seated ten, facing the direction in which we would be travelling. Soon we were on our way, with the usual clanking and groaning of steel against steel, and I relaxed back in my comfortable seat, gazing out at the poor part of town, which always seems to end up with its back to the railway, and trying not to look too conspicuous.

I must have looked an odd sight, even when I had taken off my large black Turkish greatcoat. I was still wearing my woollen tarbush from Madina, and the black rubber boots that I had bought in Halab. My pale blue suit was now somewhat crumpled and a little grubby, for I had been wearing it ever since I first put it on some two weeks previously. The floppy Sudanese underwear that I was wearing under my grey jersey and trousers probably made me look a little bulky in unexpected places, and since I had not had a proper wash since my first night in Athens – for there had only been extremely cold water in the taps at Husni's flat – I probably did not smell too good either. Somehow I did not really blend in too well with the other respectable middle-class well-dressed frequently-washed travellers in the compartment.

To make matters worse, the athelete's foot that I had sensed was developing between my toes was now very itchy indeed. My feet were right next to the outlet vent of the compartment heater which was on full, and since they were encased in thick socks and rubber, they were beginning to sweat and itch more and more each minute. My socks had been on my feet almost continuously since we had landed in Italy, for I had had no opportunity to do wudu or to wash them since leaving the ferry at Bari, and although I longed to take my boots and socks off and let my feet have some air, I feared for the well-being of my fellow passengers! How I wished that I still had the sandals that I had abandoned in the mud and the rain in Halab!

I did my best to ignore my growing discomfort, as the train sped northwards and night fell. It was the first time that I had been on a train since Abdal-Jalil and I had travelled on Sudan Railways on our way to Nyala and the Jebel Murra, and the contrast was striking to say the least. Everything here was so prim and proper and in its place. Nothing was really permitted to hang loose in any way, whether it be clothes, or inward attitude, or the expected time of arrival at the next stop. I was, nevertheless, very grateful to be on the train. It was taking me towards my desired destination efficiently and swiftly, and although it was very cold outside, it was very warm inside.

I tried to relax and go to sleep, knowing that this might be my last chance to sleep in warmth and shelter for some time, but my

toes were on fire, and at last it was too much. I had to do something about this intolerable itching. Quietly I eased myself out of the compartment, for everyone else appeared to be asleep now, and found the toilet. Fortunately it was a clean one. Wedging myself between the narrow walls so that the rocking of the train would not make me lose my balance, I washed first my socks and then my feet in the small hand-basin, wringing out the socks as tightly as I could, before putting them in my jacket pockets.

Once I was back in my seat, my feet felt much cooler without any socks on, but only to begin with. Within a few minutes my toes were burning and itching again, and finally it was too much. Slowly but surely I eased my feet out of their rubber torture chambers, hoping that no one would notice now that the lights were dimmed and everyone was asleep.

The effect was dramatic to say the least, as everyone twitched violently but then pretended that nothing had happened. First one passenger and then another offered me some perfume or cologne, which I graciously accepted, wiping it on to my beard and breathing in their fragrance. Perhaps I did not quite realise how awful my feet smelt, for I was developing a cold after my spell in the cold the night before, and my sense of smell was diminishing rapidly as a result. All I knew was that I could not possibly put my feet back into those boots, for both boots and feet needed to dry out, and since everyone was far too polite to say anything, I simply sat there as if nothing had happened. Eventually one of the passengers plucked up the courage to open the window ever so slightly, and after several almost visible sighs of relief all round, we all settled back to sleep, and I especially, now that my feet were no longer on fire. I must have slept very deeply, for I was completely unaware of when or where we crossed the border into France, and indeed it seemed to be quite by chance that I awoke to the sound of a station public address system announcing that we had arrived in Chalon.

CHALON

Grabbing hold of my camel-bag and great-coat, and slipping on my rubber boots, I beat a hasty retreat out of the compartment and down the corridor, just managing to hop off the train before it continued on its way. It was bitterly cold outside, but at least I felt rested and ready for action, and the prospect of walking out of Chalon, after having been seated for the last twelve hours or so, was an appealing one.

Pausing only long enough to put on my socks, which were fortunately now dry – for I had surreptitiously unrolled them and hung them over the tops of my boots once everyone in the compartment had gone back to sleep – I set off through the deserted streets of Chalon, following the road signs for Paris. The first light of dawn was just visible in the east, and although the sky was cloudy and the roads and pavements wet with recent rain, it was dry for the time being. I still had not prayed maghrib and isha for the night that was now ending, and although it was now time for subh, I kept walking. It was just too cold to stop. Insh'Allah I would make them up when it was humanly possible to do so.

I had soon reached the outskirts of town, and now that I was on the open road, I started to sing, for I was in good spirits. Alhamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! I was in France already! It was like stepping back into a time-warp, for so many of my journeys in the past had culminated in my hitching back through France with little or no money. It always seemed to be a country that I never had time to visit at my leisure, but simply travelled through as quickly as possible.

The sky was now visibly lighter, and I had walked two or three miles, just sticking my thumb out whenever I heard a car approaching from behind, but not bothering to look round or stop when I came to a good stopping place, and I was just beginning to feel that enough was enough, when a rather battered looking Citroen which already appeared to be filled to capacity screeched to a halt ahead of me. My heart lifted with hope and expectation, and I ran as quickly as I could towards the stationary vehicle.

The car was indeed filled to capacity, but somehow everyone in the back seat squeezed up a little more until there was just room for me, sandwiched in between a young Frenchman who had just hitched from Yugoslavia in three days and a very proper English civil servant who had just been on a working holiday in Switzerland, picking carrots! Everyone was in good spirits, and as we joked and talked about our experiences on the open road, it transpired that everyone in the car had been hitching to Paris except for the driver, who, having done a lot of hitching himself in his careless carless days, was now only too happy to repay some of all the kindness that had been shown to him, by being kind to us.

The car was going all the way to Paris itself, and as we sped northwards, we all chatted away in a mixture of English and French, everyone glad to be alive and on the move. By the time we had reached the Paris suburbs, the young Frenchman who had just hitched from Yugoslavia had very kindly invited me to his home to have a wash and a meal, and as soon as we had all been dropped off to go our separate ways, the two of us caught the metro, and after a short ride and a short walk, we were soon climbing the stairs that led to the flat which he shared with his mother, who was out at work. Gratefully I entered the beautifully decorated flat, feeling a little dazed. This time three days ago I had been penniless in Athens in Husni's bare little flat, and now here I was in Paris. Subhana'llah!

PARIS

"Right!" said my host, "You can have first shower. There's plenty of hot water, so take as long as you want, and use whatever shampoo or soap that you want. I'll just find you a towel."

"I'm afraid my feet are pretty smelly," I said, as I hesitantly began to remove my boots, for the flat was spotlessly clean, and I did not wish to make it dirty.

"It's alright, take them off," laughed my host. "Mine are probably just as bad. It's unavoidable when you're hitching a long way in cold weather."

The lovely hot shower that followed was as good as the lovely cool wash in the river that Abdal-Jalil and I had enjoyed in Nyertati after crossing the desert between Nyala and the Jebel Murra. Eventually I emerged, with my body and my socks thoroughly washed, and with a clean set of floppy Sudanese underwear on under my suit and jersey. I felt wonderful!

While my host was having his shower, I made up the three prayers that I had missed, and since it was now after mid-day, I prayed dhur and asr. And then I just lay back and relaxed, truly grateful for my unexpected good fortune. It seemed that nothing could stop me now!

After a while, my host emerged, shining with cleanliness like myself, and then it was time to eat! There was a lot of food that was halal in the kitchen, and half an hour later we were contented and replete, sipping large cups of real coffee, and savouring the distinctive taste of a French cigarette each, for once again I had been unable to say 'No' to the packet of Gaulois that my host offered me. As we sat there and relaxed, clean and well-fed and warm again, it was sheer bliss.

I was interested to see that there were several intricately hand-carved wooden screens and hand-beaten brass trays from Morocco in the flat, and I asked my host if he had ever been there. He had not, but his grandparents had worked there when Morocco was

under French colonial rule, and it was they who had originally purchased these extremely fine examples of craftsmanship.

"You must go there," I said. "Some of the finest people in the world live there. It was while I was travelling in Morocco that I decided to embrace Islam, not because of what the people there said to me, but because of the way they behaved. You may not realise it, but you are a Muslim. Everything that you have done for me is what the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, described as being the best aspect of Islam – greeting those you know and those you don't know and feeding the guest. You must find out about Islam, because it is true, but find out about it from those who know, who really know, because there are many Muslims who are not wise, and whose understanding of Islam and of life is limited, even though they are very sincere. Find out about Islam from the wise! If you really want to meet them, then Allah will guide you to them – and you will only really want to meet them if that is what Allah wants for you. If you can, read **The Book of Strangers** by Ian Dallas, and it will give you a taste of what I have been saying. You must understand me, I do not talk like this to everyone I meet. I'm only saying all this because I know that you are a Muslim – and you don't know yet, and you should!"

My host smiled and then looked at me seriously. " I'll see what happens, and I'll remember what you've said. In the meantime, would you like me to give you a lift out of Paris to Beauvais a little later on? Or would you prefer to catch a train now? It's just that we will have to wait until my mother returns with the car."

Naturally, I accepted his offer of the lift, and in due course, after his mother had returned from work and we had all had a cup of tea together, we set out for Beauvais just after the worst of the rush-hour was over. Shortly after leaving the flat, my host pointed to a huge factory complex over to our left, with a wry glance. "That is where I start work next week. The work is awful, but the pay is quite good, which means that I won't have to wait too long before I can travel again."

My mind flashed back to the EV soft drinks factory in Athens, where Abdal-Jalil and Mustafa and I had worked during that long hot summer. "Don't stay there too long," I said, "or it'll drive you crazy and old before your time. It's a trap." Then I smiled. "But if

you really have no other alternative, then when you've saved enough, go to Morocco!"

Soon we were flashing through a series of underpasses and overpasses, with cars hurtling past us on either side, and I fell silent so that my host could concentrate on his driving, marvelling at all the tail-lights and head-lights on the move around us, weaving moving patterns of light down the long tunnels, like the beginning of the film called **Solaris**. And then, suddenly, we were out of it, and driving through the northern suburbs of Paris. It was quieter now, and the sky was darkening into dusk and the start of a new day. We lit up another Gaulois each and chatted away, as the houses gradually faded away into fields, and then all too soon we were in Beauvais, and through Beauvais, and just north of Beauvais, and it was time to say goodbye.

My perfect host shook my hand and smiled. "Well, it shouldn't be too difficult from here – but then you know what hitching in France is like!" Then he handed me his half-empty packet of cigarettes, a box of matches, and a ten franc note. "Please, take these. They will help to keep you warm!"

I accepted them gratefully, and wished him thankyou and goodbye once again. "Remember!" I said, "You are a Muslim! Find out!"

He smiled cheerfully at me, and then with a wave he was gone, may Allah give him the best of both worlds, and a place in the Garden.

BEAUVAIS

Although it was dark now, I felt so confident that a lift would soon come my way, insh'Allah, that I immediately started hitching. I had been dropped off at an ideal hitching place, where there was lots of room for a car to stop, and where the traffic was not too fast. My passage from Rome to Chalon and then on to Paris had taken place so swiftly and with such ease, that I assumed Allah was whisking me back to England as quickly as a poor man could travel. I was wrong. Two hours later I was still standing in the same spot, and beginning to feel very cold.

I decided to take a prayer break, and made my way into the field that adjoined the road. There was an open-sided barn partially filled with hay in one corner of the field, and finding a dry patch beneath its rusty roof, I did tayyamum and prayed maghrib and isha. Perhaps now that I was up to date with my prayers, the lift would come, I thought, although the possibility of my catching the ferry from Calais that night was now looking increasingly unlikely.

Two hours later I was still standing in the same spot, and I was very cold. There was a way-side cafe a little way back along the road, and now that there was no need to hurry, I walked back to its welcome warmth and consoled myself with a large hot coffee and a bar of chocolate and a cigarette. How right my Parisian host had been!

I felt a little uneasy about the cigarette whose smoke curled gracefully and effortlessly up into the air from between my fingers. This was the third one that I had smoked in twelve hours, and from past experience I knew how easy it is to smoke just one, and then just one more, and then another and another, until smoking is no longer an occasional pleasure, but rather a very damaging and expensive habit that you cannot do without, without becoming more and more tense and ill-tempered as your craving grows.

Although smoking tobacco is not specifically forbidden by any ayah of the Qur'an or saying of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, it is definitely makruh – which is to say that it is not actually forbidden but that it is most certainly disliked – and I was well aware that the Prophet had advised everyone to leave what is doubtful in favour of what is not doubtful.

I was also aware that there are some who say that even though smoking tobacco is not expressly prohibited, it is nevertheless haram by analogy and inference, since the Qur'an enjoins Muslims only to eat and drink what is good for them, and forbids them to commit suicide, which in effect is what happens if someone smokes and dies from an illness that has been caused by it.

I was also aware that smoking is a habit that flourishes wherever there is anxiety, and that the comfort that it gives is like the security and solace that a baby seeks at its mother's breast, so that in some way those who smoke are in fact reverting back to the days of their infancy and their infantile feeding pattern, whether they know it or not.

And yet in spite of what I knew, I could not put that cigarette out. In my present hour of need and discomfort, it helped me to relax, and although I felt a little guilty to be smoking after just having done the Hajj – as if it was not fitting that I should now be indulging myself in such a distasteful form of self-gratification, after having been so recently blessed and honoured – I nevertheless enjoyed it and felt better for it, consoling myself with the words of advice that Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib had once given to a man who had tried to give up smoking but could not: "If you have to smoke, then take it like a medicine."

✿ ✿ ✿

After I had been in the cafe for twenty minutes, I felt much better, and decided to try again. Although it must be nearing midnight, all it needed was just one kind heart, at the wheel of a car that was heading in the same direction as myself, and then I would be on my way again. I knew from past experience that the lifts you receive are not without meaning, and that sometimes you have to wait a while, not for the lift, but for the person who is giving you the lift, so that a meeting can take place which is both beneficial

and necessary for either one or all concerned. Perhaps even now my next meeting was only five minutes away, and although there was no point in hurrying for a meeting whose exact timing was only known to Allah, I picked up my camel-bag and stepped back into the cold outside and returned to my hitching spot, where I stamped my feet and danced from foot to foot, singing songs like Bob Dylan's **Mr. Tambourine Man,** and **Like a Rolling Stone,** and **A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall,** and then switching over to some Diwan and a hadra, before flipping back to an impromptu hitching song whose words and melody soon came and went for ever, never to be heard by anyone else ever again, and then on to whatever Qur'an I knew by heart, reciting it without any inhibition, because there was only Allah and the angels, and the jinn if there were any around, to hear me in the middle of that dark and windy night.

Two hours later I was still standing in the same spot, and I was now very cold indeed. To make matters worse the wind had risen and it had started to rain. In spite of all my duas, none of the cars that only very occasionally swept past had stopped, and every time some distant village clock had chimed the hour, I had still been there to hear it. Finally I was driven by the wet and the cold to take shelter in the open-sided barn, burrowing into the prickly hay in a vain attempt to keep warm, but without success, for the keen wind still managed to find its way past the dry stalks and reach my shivering body.

After twenty minutes, I was back at the roadside, dancing about in the wind and the rain as I tried to brush away the pieces of straw that clung to my clothes, hoping against hope that someone would take pity on me and stop, as I called on Allah by some of His most beautiful Names: **'Ya Karim, Ya Razaq, Ya Wahab, Ya Mujib'** – **'O Generous, O Provider, O Bestower, O Answerer'** – over and over again. I had once read a dua of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, in which he had asked Allah to purify him with rain and ice and snow, and out of love for him, I had made that dua myself. After the last two weeks, however, I had had enough of the cold in all its forms, and I now found myself asking Allah to protect me from the rain and the ice and the snow. "Please Allah," I begged, "enough is enough. I am only human. Please don't give me more than I can bear." Yet again I was being reminded of

how weak and helpless we all are in whatever Allah decrees. He does what He wants, and we are like dust before the wind, and the wind and the dust are inseparable.

The night and the cold and the rain seemed to go on and on for ever, and then, long after I was past caring, the sky began to lighten in the east, and a few birds began to sing, and it was dawn. I found a large clear puddle of fresh rainwater, and did wudu, no longer feeling the cold, and then stood under a large dripping tree whose branches half-sheltered the pavement below. No one was about to see me pray subh, and strangely enough it was very sweet. I was so cold and wet that I felt warm and dry, and when I went into sajda, with my forehead resting on the clean cold wet asphalt, and the sound of raindrops all around me, I felt perfectly at peace and at one with my surroundings.

A little later on, the cafe down the road opened up, and I shuffled in thankfully, the first customer of the day, purchasing a large hot coffee and another bar of chocolate with my remaining five francs, and puffing away on yet another cigarette that I did not really want or enjoy, as I gradually thawed and dried out. Although my Turkish greatcoat now felt twice as heavy as usual, it had protected my body from the rain very well, and only the collar of my jacket and the bottom half of my trouser legs were really wet.

After half an hour, I felt much better, although I was a little dizzy from exhaustion and exposure to the elements and lack of sleep, and once more I returned to my hitching spot, not really expecting a lift for a good while, but feeling good, and grateful to have survived the night. After five minutes, a car stopped, and soon I was on my way again, fanned by a deliciously hot car heater.

The man who had stopped for me was only going up the road twenty miles or so, but at least it was progress, and as I soaked in the warmth from the car heater, he explained that he would not normally have been passing this way. A relative of his had just died, and he was going to the funeral. Ma sha'Allah.

Soon I was back out in the cold again, and after hitching for about an hour without success, I began to walk, dazed and tired and sleepy. What was going on? Why wasn't Allah giving me a lift? And although I was perfectly well aware of the fact that every

atom in existence is always in its place and precisely where it should be, it began to seem to me that there was something wrong somewhere.

I walked on down the road that headed north. There was a fine chilling drizzle in the air, and my face and ears tingled as the wind plastered them with fine rain-drops. It was hard to believe that less than four weeks ago I had been sheltering from the heat of the desert sun at this time of day. It had all happened so quickly. Perhaps Allah was giving me a chance to re-acclimatise. This was the kind of day I had sometimes longed for in the burning heat of the Sudan, and now here it was! I tried not to fight it but to enjoy it, nor to wish that I was somewhere a lot further south but to blend in with it and accept it. How green the fields were and how moist the air. What an amazing world it is we live in, for there are so many worlds in it and within it and beyond it.

After drifting along the road in the drizzle for a while, I suddenly needed to go to the toilet very badly, and accordingly I branched off the road into an adjacent field in order to find a sheltered spot. At the far end of the field was a small cow-shed, which protected me from the wind and hid me from the road simultaneously. There was even a nearby drinking-trough filled to the brim with clean rain-water, from which I filled my Sudanese brique, glad to have the wherewithal to wash my private parts once I had done the business, for I hate not being able to keep the whole of my body clean.

I am still amazed by those people who will run for a cloth or a tap if they spill some food or drink on their clothes, in order to keep them clean, and yet who express horror at the very idea of using water to clean away any traces of urine or shit from their private parts after they have been to the toilet, in case they get their hands dirty, preferring to put up with smelly soiled underwear instead!

I cleaned my private parts thoroughly, using lots of water, aware as ever that the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, once said that whoever does the prayer while wearing soiled underwear will be punished in the grave for displaying such disrespect towards Allah. Having a clean bottom is the basis of being pure and benefiting from the prayer, for if you

do not ensure that your private parts are thoroughly clean before you begin your ghusl or wudu, then they are incomplete. If your ghusl or wudu are incomplete, then your prayer is incomplete. If your prayer is incomplete, then your life transaction is incomplete, and if your life transaction is incomplete, then how will you be able to repay what you owe to Allah after you have died?

Although I was thorough in cleaning my private parts, it was not only in the hope that my next prayer would be acceptable – for I was perfectly well aware that the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, had said that even he would not enter the Garden because of his actions, but only by the grace and generosity of Allah – but also quite simply out of the desire to be comfortable and clean.

I was doing my best to follow in the Messenger's footsteps, not only because I wanted to do what is pleasing to Allah, and not only because I wanted to end up in the Garden and not the Fire, but also because it was a way of life that I had recognised and enjoyed as soon as I had encountered it and begun to follow it, and which had proved to be better than any other way of life that I had previously come across or experienced.

I was doing my best to follow the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, not primarily out of fear of or hope in Allah, nor primarily out of fear of the Fire and hope for the Garden, but simply out of love for Allah and His Messenger, and with the knowledge and certainty that Allah is very Forgiving, and displays His mercy and compassion to whomever He wants, no matter what they may have or have not done:

> **Yahya related to me from Malik from Abu'z-Zinad from al-A'raj from Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "A man said to his family that he had never done a good action, and that when he died they were to burn him and then scatter half of him on the land and half of him on the sea, and by Allah, if Allah destined it for him He would punish him with a punishment which He had not punished anyone else with in all the worlds. When the man died, they did as he had told them. Then Allah told the land to collect every-**

thing that was in it, and told the sea to collect everything that was in it, and then He said to the man, 'Why did you do this?' and he said, 'From fear of You,Lord, and You know best.'" Abu Hurayra added, "And He forgave him."

(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 16.16.52)

It is related that once just after Uthman ibn Affan had done wudu, he said:

"By Allah, I shall tell you something which I would not tell you if it were not in the Book of Allah. I heard the Messenger of Allah may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, 'If a man does wudu, and makes sure he does it correctly, and then does the prayer, he will be forgiven everything that he does between then and the time when he prays the next prayer.'"

Yahya said that Malik said, "I believe he meant this ayah: 'Establish prayer at the two ends of the day and in some watches of the night. Good actions take away wrong actions. That is a reminder for those who remember.'" (Qur'an: 11.114).

(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 2.6.30)

And it is related from Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

"A muslim slave (or a trusting slave) does wudu and as he washes his face every wrong action he has seen with his eyes leaves with the water (or the last drop of water). As he washes his hands every wrong action he has done with his hands leaves with the water (or the last drop of water). And as he washes his feet every wrong action his feet have walked to leaves with the water (or the last drop of water) so that he comes away purified of wrong actions."

(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 2.6.32)

Having done wudu, I returned to the road and walked on a while before stopping at what seemed to be an ideal hitching spot. It was at the top of a hill, with room at the side of the road for a car to stop safely, and a sharp bend up ahead that meant any approaching car would already be slowing down. Surely someone would stop here and give me a lift to Calais!

Two hours later I was still standing in the same spot. I certainly seemed to be in the doldrums today. It was already early afternoon and nothing seemed to be happening. I considered my actions and intentions. Was there anything that I was doing that was holding me back? The only two doubtful elements in my present situation that I could perceive were the bread which probably had haram fat in it – and which I had not touched since that afternoon meal in Rome – and the cigarettes that my Parisian host had given me the night before.

Acting on impulse, I pulled the remains of the bread out of my camel-bag and the crumpled packet of cigarettes from my jacket pocket and hurled them into the bushes. I was still in wudu, so finding a grassy patch a little way away from the road, I prayed dhur and asr, and then turning to Allah in my need, I asked yet again for a swift ongoing journey. I had done all that I could. The rest was up to Allah.

Having returned to my hitching spot, I consoled myself with a meal of seven Madina dates as the cars continued to pass me by. No matter how hard I tried to accept the situation and to be content with whatever Allah decreed for me, I still continued to feel a little anxious and irritated, and the fact that I did feel this way irritated me still further, until finally I lost my patience altogether. Swinging my camel-bag across my shoulders, I began to stride down the road. If no one was going to give me a lift, then insh'Allah I would walk to Calais, even if it killed me.

Almost immediately my feelings of anger and frustration left me, now that I was doing something positive, and my tired body was filled with fresh energy. Soon I was singing along with the rhythm of my stride, my left arm swinging out with a thumb-up every time I heard a car coming up behind me, and even the burning and itching that had begun to return to my toes with increasing intensity ceased to bother me. It wasn't such a bad life after all!

I had only been walking for about twenty minutes, when what I had only just ceased to expect – after having almost continually expected it for the last eighteen hours – happened. A large plush-looking saloon car suddenly swerved over onto the grass verge ahead of me and stopped. I ran towards it as the rear door swung open, and panting my thankyous I clambered in, to be greeted by an exquisitely tailored couple who looked as if they had just driven out of a Frederico Fellini film.

The husband was dressed impeccably, in clothes that were tastefully discreet and distinguished, while his wife was wearing a beautifully finished dress and hat that were the epitome of elegance and style and the best that money could buy. They must have been in their late fifties, but there was a timeless quality about them, as if they were the personification of all that is civilised in European culture.

The difference in our respective circumstances could hardly have been more marked, and yet it was immediately clear that they did not think that they were any better than me, and I did not envy them. Despite the differences in our outward appearance, we were fellow human beings, and kindred spirits. As the husband pulled out back into the flow of traffic, his wife welcomed me aboard with a beautiful smile and apologetically explained that they were only going a few kilometres down the road before they would be turning off, but they hoped that this would be at least some help. I was just saying that every little bit helps, and that I really was most grateful for their having taken the trouble to stop, when her roving eye alighted on the car ahead and immediately her face lit up.

"Regardez!" she exclaimed, pointing with an aristocratic finger at the little Morris Minor ahead of us. "C'est une voiture anglaise!"

I nodded in agreement, but with none of her excitement, for I had already seen a great many of them during the course of my life. "Oui, c'est vrai," I replied without much interest as I glanced briefly at the dumpy little car ahead and the long hair of its driver's head that could just be seen through the car's small rear window.

"Oh how romantic!" she said delightedly in perfect French. "We will stop this car for you and its beautiful driver will give you a lift

all the way across to England and on the way you will fall deeply in love with each other and marry and live happily together for many years! Oh how romantic!" Giving me a radiant smile, she laughed with joy at the very idea of it and clasped her hands dramatically to her heart before turning to her husband and tapping him excitedly on his sleeve. "Vite, vite, mon cheri! Stop her at once! Stop the beautiful young lady who will take our friend to England!" And she turned round towards me again, giving me a lovely isn't-life-such-fun smile, with her eyes sparkling with amusement and the excitement of the moment.

Her husband who had remained completely unperturbed during this sudden flurry of excitement obligingly pulled out and accelerated until we were level with the unsuspecting driver. Fortunately there was no oncoming traffic, and as we cruised alongside the little Morris Minor like a police car in disguise, my self-appointed match-maker swiftly wound down her window and urgently signalled to the driver with a gloved hand that was clearly accustomed to being obeyed, to pull into the side of the road and stop.

To my surprise the Morris Minor obediently began to slow down and soon drew into the side of the road, with our car stopping directly behind it. My benefactor swiftly and elegantly descended from the car and immediately tackled the startled driver who had just emerged from the Morris Minor, pausing only for a fraction of a second as she realised that the driver was in fact a man, and not the beautiful young brunette whom she, and I, had imagined.

"Listen!" she said, "You must help our friend here. He needs to get to England immediately. You must give him a lift, do you understand? You are going to Calais aren't you?"

"Yes," he said, looking a little taken aback and probably only meaning that he was going to Calais.

"Good!" she said triumphantly. "That's settled then! I knew you would say yes! She turned to me and lifted her eyes to the heavens as if to say, 'Sorry about that – I thought I'd found the perfect match for you there!' and then bid me farewell. "Bonne chance! And have a good journey! I'm sure you will be very happily married!"

And then with a beautiful smile and a wave, they were gone, leaving the two of us still standing there by the roadside, slightly mesmerised by the swiftness with which the recent rapid chain of events had unfolded. "Thankyou," I said. "That was all rather sudden, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was," he replied a little curtly, cramming all the luggage that had been occupying the front passenger seat on top of all the luggage that was already piled up on the back seat. "Hop in!"

As we drove along steadily northwards and talked, we found that we both had much in common, and the atmosphere gradually became more relaxed as we chatted about this and that. It turned out that he was not actually crossing over to England, but he did have to go to Calais, and would gladly drop me off at the Ferry Port.

The only obstacle now was the fact that I did not have any money to pay for the ticket across the Channel, and I could not help wondering whether or not he would mind lending me the money to buy it. I hesitated, and then took the plunge, explaining that I had no money on me at all, and that if he would kindly lend me the money to pay for the fare across to England, and give me his address, then I would send him the money back as soon as I could.

"I'm sorry," he said rather abruptly, "but I don't have enough money on me to be able to do that."

"That's alright," I said cheerfully. "I'm sure I'll find a way across!" Now that I was on the move again, my confidence and trust had been fully restored, and I was certain that, having brought me this far, Allah was not going to leave me stranded in Calais for the rest of my days.

As we drove on, it began to grow dark. It was time for maghrib. Of course since I was travelling I could delay the prayer and do it later, but I had discovered in the past that if you are stuck, and the time for the prayer arrives, and you do the prayer, then usually you cease to be stuck soon after. Accordingly I asked my compan-

ion if he minded my doing the prayer while we were driving along. There was no need for him to stop the car and let me out, as I could do it sitting down.

My companion replied that he did not mind in the least, and having aligned myself in the direction of the Ka'aba in Makka as best I could – facing it the long way round the earth – I did tayyamum using my tayyamum stone, and then prayed maghrib and isha, quietly reciting the Qur'an out loud in the first two rakats of each prayer, and making what movements were possible in the circumstances in order to indicate the different positions in the prayer – standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting – that are more clearly delineated and recognisable when there is enough room to do the prayer in its complete form.

No sooner had I ended isha with my 'As-salaamu-alaikum' than the deep silence that had filled the car while I was doing the two prayers was broken by my companion. "Actually I do have enough money on me to be able to help you," he said. "Please accept this." And he handed me a hundred franc note. "There's no need to pay it back to me," he continued. "Just spend the same amount on someone else who is in need when you meet them and can help them."

"Thankyou," I said, accepting his generous gift and marvelling at the baraka that there is in doing the prayer in its time, and preferably at the beginning of its time, "Insh'Allah, I will." And, ma sha'Allah, I eventually did.

We drove on through the night, talking about life and what we were doing in it. My companion was very much concerned with economic development, and accordingly I recommended **The Lathe of Heaven** by Ursula Le Guin to him, for the book contains a brilliant critique of those who create havoc in the name of putting everything right, and I was very much aware that not all development can be equated with real progress, especially if its foundations rest on usury, a means of creating illusory wealth at the material and spiritual expense of other people which ultimately corrupts and destroys the fabric of those societies that rely on it, and which has always been expressly forbidden by all the prophetic teachings, including those of Moses and Jesus, peace be on them, and espe-

cially that of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him:

Those who live on usury cannot stand up
except as those who stand up after shaytan
has knocked them down with his touch.
That is because they say:
'Surely trade is just like usury.'
And Allah has permitted trade,
and He has forbidden usury.
So whoever withdraws from it after
a warning from his Lord has reached him
may keep whatever he has from the past,
and his affair is with Allah.
And whoever returns to it,
they are the people of the Fire.
They will be in it forever.
Allah has blighted usury
and He has made giving fruitful.
And Allah does not love
all those who reject and do wrong.

(Qur'an: 2.275-276)

It was impossible to even begin to talk critically about usury with my companion, for it was clear that he had been educated from an early age to accept it and then to rely on it, and to regard it as a normal and necessary part of everyday life. As he had matured and become established in his career in the financial world, he had come to regard the international banking system, and the stock and money exchanges, and the futures markets, and the building society and insurance systems, as institutions that were not only an integral part of today's modern society, but also, more significantly, institutions whose continued existence was vitally necessary if mankind was to progress satisfactorily into the twenty-first century – and yet he could not help admitting that a great deal of human as well as environmental hardship is often caused during the course of economic development, even if he was unable to put his finger on the root cause of that hardship.

Just when our conversation had reached the point where it could go no further, we found ourselves driving through the streets of Calais, and suddenly, miraculously, I was standing outside the Ferry Port, with the fare to England in my pocket, wishing my companion fare well and fare forward, and thanking him once again for his kindness. I had nearly reached my destination, and insh'Allah I would now be able to reach Darqawi in time for the gathering of dhikr. Somehow, by the grace and generosity of Allah, my intention in Madina had been translated into action, and in the process I had most certainly experienced the truth of the Prophet's words, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when he said:

> **"Travelling is a portion of the torment. It denies you your sleep, food, and drink. When you have accomplished your purpose, you should hurry back to your family."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 54.15.39)**

And in the process I had most certainly experienced a little of what it is like to be one of the very poor, for, as it is related from Abu Hurayra, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> **"The very poor are not the people who constantly walk from person to person and are given one or two morsels, and one or two dates." They said, "Who are the very poor, Messenger of Allah?" He said, "People who do not find enough for themselves and other people are not aware of them to give sadaqa to them, and they do not start begging from other people."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 49.5.7)**

CALAIS

When I entered the ticket office, it was to find that the last ferry to Dover that day was due to leave in ten minutes. I had just made it, by the grace of Allah! I purchased my ticket, pocketed the change, walked onto the ferry, and off we sailed, sliding slowly past the silent cranes and the massive steel girders, and the solid harbour walls that looked as if they had always been there to keep the sea at bay, with the deserted warehouses and the other more lively buildings in the town itself gradually diminishing in size as we headed out towards the darkness of the open sea.

I made straight for the cafeteria, for I was hungry and thirsty and light-headed from lack of sleep, and bought myself a coffee and some chocolate, wishing now that I had not thrown away the cigarettes, relishing the warmth and sweetness of my little snack. There was just enough money left to buy some fish and chips, and I decided to wait for this treat until I was ashore in Dover.

By the time I had made my way up on deck, the lights of Calais were already receding well into the distance, a little cluster of twinkling radiance caught between the darkness of the sea and the darkness of the sky. The wind was fresh and cold, tinged with the scent of the sea, and I lifted my face to it, feeling it tugging at my beard and tarbush, with my dark great-coat and trouser-legs flapping loudly, and no one else up on deck to taste the dark beauty of this winter's night.

I stood in the darkness, watching and listening to the white bow wave of the ferry that bubbled and boiled along the length of the ship and then subsided into the trailing white wake that stretched out behind it, with the deck vibrating beneath my feet from the powerful thrust of the engines that lay hidden somewhere far down below in the depths of this amazing craft, and as I stood there beneath the heavens, in the middle of the sea, in a place that was neither here nor there, some old familiar lines from the **Four Quartets** of T.S. Eliot surfaced from the depths of my memory:

Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past
Into different lives, or into any future;
You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus,
While the narrowing rails slide together behind you;
And on the deck of the drumming liner
Watching the furrow that widens behind you,
You shall not think 'the past is finished'
Or 'the future is before us'.
At nightfall, in the rigging and the aerial,
Is a voice descanting (though not to the ear,
The murmuring shell of time, and not in any language)
' Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;
You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding, or those who will disembark.
Here between the hither and the farther shore
While time is withdrawn, consider the future
And the past with an equal mind.
At the moment which is not of action or inaction
You can receive this: "on whatever sphere of being
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death" – that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.
O voyagers, O seamen,
You who come to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.'
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
On the field of battle.
Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.

(Four Quartets of T.S. Eliot)

Despite a certain degree of imprecision in the meaning of these words, they had always inspired me whenever I read or recalled them, and, like Alfred Tennyson's Ulysses, they had always awakened an awareness in me that life is very special, and had aroused

a longing in my heart to be for ever on the move, to travel everywhere in the world and to find out everything, so that eventually I would arrive at the certainty and knowledge that T.S. Eliot indicates towards the end of his masterpiece:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

(Four Quartets of T.S. Eliot)

And although my exploration had led me eventually to Islam, and to the revelation of the Qur'an, and to the realisation of just how limited the words of people are in comparison to the words of Allah, the Lord of the worlds and the Creator of everything, I had always remained fond of this particular poem, even though it had ceased to be my bible a long time ago. Even now these words evoked a meaning that belonged specifically and solely to my present situation, and I was sharply aware of all the beginnings and endings, and endings and beginnings, that had recently filled my life and probably lay ahead.

As I stood up there on the deck with my face tingling from the cold of the wind, in a place that was neither here nor there, I realised just how much I had changed during the last six months. After all that I had seen and experienced, life would never be the same again, and now that the Way Back was drawing to its close, I could not help feeling a little wistful. It was a journey that I wanted to continue, in spite of the hardship that I had experienced along the way, and although I knew that it was all just a part of my whole life's journey, I was fully aware that the Difficult Journey and the Way Back had been one of the most significant journies in my entire life. There would never be another journey quite like this one, even if I tried to travel it again at some point in the future.

I could see that all the journies I had ever made, or ever would make, insh'Allah, were only echoes of the Hajj. The journies might involve different people and different places and different conditions and different events, but in essence they were all the same journey, and the essence of my particular journey through life was the journey which I had been on for the last six months, and which was now drawing to its close, with the Hajj at its heart.

During this time, I had been a free spirit in a free world, possessing very little but with the whole world in my hands and at my feet, forever on the move, forever helpless, forever utterly dependent on Allah – and I prayed to Allah that I would never lose this freedom and this awareness that are only tasted by those who know that they are helpless and at the mercy of Allah every moment of their lives, whatever their situation may be.

DOVER

All too soon, the lights of Dover appeared and grew closer, until we had docked and all the passengers had disembarked. It was the 23rd of December 1977, and exactly three weeks to the day since my meeting with the Turkish man in the Rowdah in the Prophet's Mosque in Madina. "How long will it take to travel to England overland?" he had asked. And without pausing to think about it, I had said the first thing that came into my heart. "About three weeks," I had replied. I smiled as I recalled my reply. It had become a reality. Allah had brought me safely back to England as surely as He had taken me to Makka in time to do the Hajj, and to Madina to visit His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and on his family and on his companions and on all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

Having passed through customs in a routine manner, with my sword and dates still undetected, I headed straight for the nearest fish and chips shop and spent the last of my money on a tasty feast, marvelling at the fact that I could understand all the conversations going on around me that were in earshot. It was the first time in many weeks that this had been the case, and for a while the barrage of information that now assailed my ears was quite overwhelming. I had returned to the English speaking world.

As I hungrily downed the hot tasty food, I considered my next move. The gathering of dhikr at Darqawi in Norfolk was not due to commence until the 25th of December, which meant that I had up to thirty-six hours to reach there. However there was one other outstanding matter that I needed to deal with, and as always there is no time like the present.

During the coach journey between Madina and Kutahya, the memory of a lady who had been my girlfriend for a while at university, in the days long before I knew anything about Islam, had unexpectedly awakened in my heart with startling clarity, and eventually I had decided that I would visit her once I had returned to England, insh'Allah, for if she was interested in accepting Islam,

then it seemed to me that there was a possibility that we might marry. I was now back in England, and the desire to see her again after all these years was still in my heart. There was only one way of establishing whether or not the possibility of our marrying was a real one or not, and that was to see her and talk it over with her. Although I had never visited her in her home town, I still remembered her address, and by the time I had finished my meal, I had decided that I would visit her, insh'Allah, before going to Darqawi, if the lifts were kind to me and took me in her direction. Then I would know for sure, one way or the other.

Although I had hardly slept at all during the last forty-eight hours, a fresh surge of adrenaline filled me with energy as I walked up through the steep streets of Dover. The buildings seemed both familiar and strange at the same time, and there was that typically English smell of coal-fire smoke in the air that I had not smelt for what seemed ages. I strode up and out of Dover, and although it was around midnight by now, I had only been hitching at the start of the main road to London for about five minutes, when a lorry stopped for me, and in no time at all, I was fast asleep in the lovely warm cab of a lorry that was going all the way to London.

LONDON

I came to my senses about an hour later, feeling refreshed and wide awake, and as if to confirm what was in my heart, I discovered that the driver intended to drive straight through London and on to Potters Bar or Hemel Hampstead or thereabouts. I told him that this was ideal, for I was heading for Cannock in Staffordshire, which was straight up the M1 from there.

We drove through London in the early morning hours, when the vast city is at its quietest. It appeared to be virtually deserted, and the seemingly endless arrangement and combination of bricks and concrete and tar and metal and plastic looked unreal and ghostly in the synthetic light of the street lamps. John Lennon's familiar voice was singing away about Christmas and the New Year over the radio, followed by all the other usual sentimental Christmas hits, and as I listened to them, I realised how completely meaningless Christmas had become to me. It had never particularly filled my heart with peace or joy, and now that I had been a Muslim for over four years, it had ceased to have any significance for me whatsoever. Whatever good it had in it – such as gathering together with relatives and friends and exchanging gifts – could be enjoyed at any time of the year, and preferably when there was a genuine desire to do so, rather than out of any feeling of obligation or the need to conform.

I was not in the least bit interested in eating more than usual and getting drunk in honour of the ancient winter solstice festival, to which the celebration of Jesus's birth had been attached, and although I was perfectly well aware of the miraculous nature of his conception and birth, I was also perfectly well aware that this did not mean that he was the son of God. Moreover, since I was doing my best to follow the Prophet who had come after Jesus, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on both of them, the celebration of the birth of Jesus was as unnecessary to me as the celebration of the birth of Moses is to those who claim to be following Jesus, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on all the Prophets and Messengers.

After the extraordinary celebration of life in which I had participated both before and during and after the Hajj, the rites and ceremonies that usually accompany the celebration of Christmas simply had no appeal to me, whether they were concerned with the worship of God, or the company of people, or feasting, and I could not help feeling that anyone who genuinely enjoyed the Christmas festivities would find that they enjoyed the Muslim festivities even more, and yet social conditioning runs deep.

Although I longed to tell the driver of the cab all about Islam and the Last Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, he was completely immersed in the culture into which he had been born, and although he was not particularly happy with it, he had accepted it for what it is, and was not looking for any better alternative. When he finally dropped me off about half a mile away from the M1, I thanked him for his kindness and wished him a merry Christmas.

It was early dawn by now, and having found a quiet place off the road to do the prayer, I prayed subh, and then walked along to the approach road to the motorway. It was cloudy and overcast and cold, although not as cold as it had been in Europe, and I was quietly confident that the coming day would be a good one.

I had not been standing at my hitching spot for long, when I was joined by a tramp who had just spent the night sleeping rough beneath the shelter of a concrete bridge. We were both feeling a little the worse for wear, and accordingly I decided that it was high time we both had some breakfast. Pulling out the bag of dates from my camel-bag, I selected seven dates for each of us, and handed over his share with a quiet 'Bismillah'. The tramp accepted them a little hesitantly, for he had not eaten dates before, and began to chew on his first one thoughtfully.

"These dates come from Madina in Saudi Arabia," I explained. "The Prophet Muhammad said that the roots of the palm trees on which they grow are in the Garden."

"Garden?" the tramp queried. "Which garden are you talking about?"

"It's one of the two places everyone ends up in after they die," I replied. "Either we go to the Garden, or we go to the Fire, depending on how we've lived in this world."

"Oh," he said thoughtfully, "I think I'd prefer to go to the Garden in that case. What d'you have to do to get there then?"

I paused. This hardly seemed the place or time to go into a lengthy explanation about the way of Islam. "Well," I said, choosing my words carefully, "basically you have to worship the One Who created everything in existence – and not anyone or anything else – and be kind to people and animals and even insects."

"Ah, you mean God, don't you? Yes, I worship God ... and I try to get on well with everyone I meet ... Looks like I'll be going on to the Garden then, doesn't it?" He looked at the last of his dates appreciatively before putting it carefully in his mouth. "Yes, I hope I go to the Garden ... It's definitely the place to go, isn't it?"

The two of us talked for a while longer, for it was still early and there was hardly any traffic about. It turned out that my companion had spent the last few years travelling up and down the M1. It was his motorway, and he knew it well. Some years back he had been knocked down by a car one night somewhere down South, and had lost his memory. He did not know who he was or what he had done before, but it did not really matter, because he was perfectly happy travelling the M1. "Aye," he mused, in his strong northern accent, "you've got to keep plodding!"

By now it was light, and we decided to split up and hitch separately, since we had different destinations and objectives. Bidding each other goodbye, we started hitching with a distance of about thirty yards between us, and it was not long before he, and then I, clambered into our respective cars and sped up the motorway. Two lifts later, I was in Cannock.

CANNOCK

I found my way to the house quite easily, my heart fluttering slightly now that I was actually standing outside her front door. I knocked and waited, three times. No one opened the door. No one was in. I was just wondering whether I should wait around for a while or continue on my way, when a next door neighbour appeared and kindly invited me into tea. Gratefully I accepted her offer and entered her house, glad to be able to use the toilet and do wudu and warm up again.

As I sipped my mug of lovely strong sweet tea and munched the large piece of cake that the kind neighbour had given me, I caught up with all the news about my old university friend whom I had just popped into to see since I had happened to be passing by this way. Apparently she had done well and settled down, married a fellow who was quite well-to-do a couple of years back and now lived in Devon.

I was both disappointed and glad and relieved – disappointed because my tentative day-dreams had been decisively shattered, glad that things had worked out well for her, and relieved because at least I knew the score, which was much better than blindly wondering and secretly hoping. Now that I knew exactly where I stood, my heart was completely free again, and empty of any further longing for what had turned out to be impossible.

I finished my tea and cake, thanked my kind host for her hospitality and asked her to pass on my best wishes and congratulations. It was time that I was on my way, for I now needed to reach Norwich that evening.

✿ ✿ ✿

I walked back down the road the way I had come, wondering if I would now be able to reach Darqawi in time for the gathering of dhikr. Norwich was a difficult place to reach from here, for there was no direct road across the country at this point, and it would virtually be a miracle if there was anyone who could give me a

good through lift in that direction. Nevertheless, I would try, and insh'Allah by the grace and generosity of Allah, I would arrive.

As I walked through and out of Cannock towards my next hitching spot, a police car drew up alongside me and stopped. I could not help immediately feeling a little apprehensive, even though I had done nothing wrong, but the grinning officer who stuck his head out of the window was a friendly man.

"Where on earth have you been?" he asked.

"Why do you ask?" I asked, answering his question with another question.

"Well, just look at yourself!"

I looked at myself as best I could, at the woolly hat over the virtually bald head, and at the large dark Turkish great-coat that enveloped most of my body, and at the outlandish looking camel bag that hung from my right shoulder, and at the funny half-length rubber boots that most certainly had not been made in England. I did not exactly look like a typical Englishman, or a tourist. "Actually I've just been half way around the world," I smiled. "I've just been on the pilgrimage to Makka, and I've only just got back."

"It bloomin' well looks like it," said the officer, and having asked the usual routine questions reserved for vagrants, he gave me a smile and a wave and drove off. The memory of my last encounter with the police, at the foot of Mount Uhud, flashed across my mind's eye, and I grinned, light-headed with lack of sleep. What a life!

✿ ✿ ✿

After I had walked a mile or two, I arrived at what appeared to be the best road to travel down, and having found a good spot, I prayed dhur and asr a little way back from the roadside and then started to hitch, perched on the wooden fence that bordered the road.

Although I did not have long to wait, it was already late afternoon when a small van that was travelling very rapidly in my direction suddenly swerved off the road and screeched to a halt at my feet.

"Thanks for stopping," I said to the grinning driver, "I'm trying to get to Norwich."

"Aye! Well hop in then! I'm goin' to Newmarket!" said the driver in a broad Scottish accent. I hopped in and off we shot, a little erratically, for he was completely and utterly drunk. "Dinna worry!" he laughed lightheartedly, without a care in the world. "I'll get ye there in double quick time!" He leaned over to me with a broad grin as the car swerved momentarily towards the kerb and then straightened out again. "There's not many of us left ye know, if ye know what I mean!" he laughed, and I laughed with him, for I knew exactly what he meant. And then, suddenly feeling incredibly drained and tired, I asked if he minded if I went to sleep. "Certainly not!" he grinned. "Ye can climb into the back there and lie doon if ye want. There's a piece o' cardboard there ye can sleep on. See ye later!"

Gratefully I climbed back over the top of the passenger seat and stretched out on the thick cardboard. The hard corrugated metal floor beneath immediately filled my body with a million vibrations, but it could have been a feather-bed for all the difference that it made, and moments later I was deliciously fast asleep.

✿ ✿ ✿

I awoke to find that we had stopped. It was dark outside and my carefree benefactor was leaning back over his seat with a big grin on his face. "We're in Newmarket now," he laughed. The main road to Norwich is just up there, so good luck to ye and Merry Christmas! I think I'll just drop in at the pub up the road meself and have a wee dram or two to celebrate! It's me favourite pub!" He hopped out of the van and opened the back door for me to get out, and after I had thanked him, we shook hands firmly and went our different ways, each heading for his favourite tavern.

✿ ✿ ✿

The cold night air soon woke me up, for I was entering the land where the cold north-east wind blows in from across the North sea, and of all the winds I have ever experienced, it is one of the coldest when winter comes. Fortunately I did not have long to wait, and I had hardly set foot on the road to Norwich before an empty

coach rolled to a stop beside me and its front doors swung open with a hiss of compressed air. "I'm not really allowed to give lifts," said the driver with a smile, "but after all, it is Christmas Eve!"

An hour later, we were on the outskirts of Norwich, and since my objective was Wood Dalling Hall, the driver dropped me off on the by-pass at the point which was nearest to the turn off for Fakenham. I thanked him for his kindness and for following his heart and not the rule-book, and then began to walk down the deserted bypass beneath the harsh yellow neon lights in the direction of the turn-off. There might be a great deal of rain in these parts, but it was still a desert, and not nearly as beautiful as the Sahara. Still, at least it was not boiling hot right now, and although there were still several miles to go to Darqawi, with little chance of any more lifts at this time of night and in this neck of the woods, I was determined to walk the whole distance if necessary, for the gathering of dhikr was due to begin in the morning.

There was hardly a car on the road, for it was late, and, being Christmas Eve, most people were probably either in the pub or at home merrymaking. As I walked steadily down the road, for the turn-off was a good mile and a half away, I recalled the first poem that I had ever memorised, back in primary school in the middle of the African bush, where Christmas was in the rainy season and had an altogether different flavour to its English counterpart. I could only remember the first two stanzas word for word now, and in the silent night I now recited them out loud to myself, in my best Yorkshire accent:

Eddie, priest of St Wilfrid,
At the chapel of Manhood End,
Ordered a midnight service
For such as cared to attend.

But the Saxons were keeping Christmas,
And the night was stormy as well.
Nobody came to the service,
Though Eddie rang the bell.

I grinned to myself. It looked like things hadn't changed all that much down through the centuries. Anyway, insh'Allah one day they would all be Muslims!

✿ ✿ ✿

I was still about half a mile away from the turn-off to Fakenham, when to my surprise a Securicor van stopped in response to my up-turned thumb and the passenger door swung open. "I'm not really allowed to give lifts," said the driver with a smile, "but after all, it is Christmas Eve!" I climbed in and off we went, as I secretly marvelled at the power of Allah.

The driver explained that he was not taking the road to Fakenham, since he was bound for Saxthorpe, but since there was a road that branched off to Wood Dalling shortly before Saxthorpe, it was half a dozen one way and six the other; and I replied that that suited me fine. We chatted about Securicor for a while, and in no time at all we had reached my turn-off. I thanked him for his kindness and for following his heart and not the rule-book, and then began to walk through the darkness along the narrow country road.

It was a beautifully still and peaceful night, with a few stars twinkling through the dark patches of broken cloud above my head. Although the countryside was firmly in the grip of winter, I soon warmed up as I walked along in silence. This particular journey was almost at its end, and a new beginning awaited me. My mind flashed back through the past six months, and myriads of memories passed through in quick succession. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! What a journey it had been! I tried to savour its taste to the full, especially these last few miles and minutes, drinking in the quiet majesty and beauty of the night in which there was hardly a sound to be heard, other than the steady tramp of my footsteps.

WOOD DALLING

After what seemed like a couple of hours or so, I found myself outside one of the two driveways that lead to Wood Dalling Hall, the one that passes by the small gate-keeper's cottage and over a small stream. I walked slowly along the narrow road, suddenly feeling very small and insignificant, as I gazed about me at the splendour of the still, cold, Norfolk night, with the dark outline of the Hall standing out against the night sky, and paused by the little stream.

I still had not prayed maghrib and isha, and this would probably be my last chance for a while to pray out in the open, on the rich carpet of the earth, beneath the wonderful dome of the sky. Swiftly I did wudu in the small stream, shivering in the cold now that I was no longer moving, and then did the two prayers on the cold grass by the stream's banks. Tomorrow, I would be back to doing the full prayer at its appointed times, for now that my journey had reached its end, I could no longer do travelling prayers.

The prayers completed, I stayed a little longer, making duas to Allah, thanking Him for showering me so generously with so many blessings, and asking Him for the best of days throughout the remainder of my life. Then, hitching my camel-bag back over my shoulder, I walked the last few hundred yards up towards the Hall and up to the front door, my feet crunching on the gravel. The whole place was in darkness and in silence. Everyone was probably sound asleep, and yet I could not help singing out the shahada in a loud voice as the fuqara often do when arriving at a zawiyya after a journey:

La ilaha illa'llah!
La ilaha illa'llah!
La ilaha illa'llah!
Muhammad rasulu'llah!

Which means:

There is no god but Allah!
There is no god but Allah!
There is no god but Allah!
Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah!

I had only just finished, when the large door swung silently open, and the robed figure of Hajj Abdal-Aziz appeared. "Shshsh," he said, "everyone is sleeping. Come in. Welcome!" He led me over to the cushions in the corner of the large room nearest the wood-burning Jottle stove and sat me down. Now that I had arrived, I felt utterly exhausted and speechless, just as I had been when I had finally completed the Hajj.

Being a perfect master, Hajj Abdal-Aziz was a perfect servant, and within minutes he had brought me a large plate of liver and onions in thick hot gravy together with a large hunk of fresh bread. It was the first meat I had eaten since the meal that Khalid's mother had given to me in Istanbul, and I had little difficulty in eating it, while Hajj Abdal-Aziz kept me company. After sharing a cup of tea together, Hajj Abdal-Aziz brought me some bedding, and then with his warm smile, bid me goodnight.

✿ ✿ ✿

The adhan for subh broke clearly and cleanly through into my deep sleep of exhaustion, and I awoke to find that I was feeling stiff and bruised all over and extremely tired. During the last three days my legs had been subjected to such a combination of cold and exercise that they were now feeling numb and sluggish, and I had difficulty in standing up and walking.

Somehow I managed to do wudu, and then subh, standing in the long line of fuqara who had all been sleeping on the floor above. This was not the time to greet and talk to everyone, for immediately after the prayer we all sat in a large circle to recite the wird of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib. I let the dhikr wash over me and through me, for it was the best dhikr that I had experienced in six months. Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah! I was back in the company that I loved best, and with the Shaykh whom I loved best.

It was not always easy to be in such company – for each person was a mirror in which I saw my self, and the reflection was not always a pleasant one – but it was the best company that I had ever experienced. There are those who obey Allah out of fear – and they are like donkeys who move in order not to be hit; and there are those who obey Allah out of hope – and they are like traders who move in order to make a profit; and there are those who obey Allah

out of love – and they are like hidden pearls, protected and priceless.

After the wird was completed and the duas had been made, everyone came up and greeted me and welcomed me. There must have been about fifty fuqara there, for some had come a long way in order to be present for the gathering of dhikr. After I had said 'As-salaamu-alaikum' to everyone, including Muhammad Abdal-Bari and Uthman and Muhammad Qasim, who had all returned safely from Madina, and of course Mustafa Al-Alawi who had travelled with Abdal-Jalil and I as far as Omdurman, and who was now well and smiling, it was time for breakfast.

We all sat in small circles of five or seven to enjoy our simple breakfast of bread and butter and honey and tea, and during the course of the meal, I caught up on all the news of what had been happening, and to whom, unable to say very much about myself or my own journey, not only because I was still very tired, but also because there was so much that I could say.

Towards the end of the meal, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir entered the room, and as always, I was awed in his presence and afraid to speak to him. Suddenly my amazing journey seemed to be of little consequence, when faced with a man whose own journeying and wayfaring made mine look like the first determined yet limited forays of a small child.

Shaykh Abdal-Qadir greeted me warmly, as if I was the most special person in the whole world, and when I gave him the dates from Madina – the 'Sharabanas' – he smiled at their name, and accepted them graciously. As was his custom with sadaqa, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir gave most of them away almost immediately, completely detached from both the giver and the gift, and simply acting as the means by which the generosity of Allah was extended towards those for whom that generosity was intended.

✿ ✿ ✿

Later on in the day, when I was more rested, I was invited to Shaykh Abdal-Qadir's room, along with Muhammad Abdal-Bari and Umar Azmun and Abu Sulayman. Sayyedina Shaykh was lying on his simple bed, resting out of sheer exhaustion. I have never

seen anyone serve people as much as Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, and I have never met anyone who reminded me more of Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

"Well then, what happened?"

Shaykh Abdal-Qadir looked keenly at me and through me as he spoke, as if he not only already knew exactly what had happened, but also understood the meaning of what had happened, and was only asking the question so that I too would understand the meaning of what had happened more clearly for myself.

Muhammad Abdal-Bari and I both began to explain our actions simultaneously, both aware that the marriage which he had been asked to arrange had not taken place, while Shaykh Abdal-Qadir was compassion itself, shielding us both from each other's excuses.

"Hajj Muhammad Abdal-Bari gave up being the Amir after the Hajj was over," I started to explain.

"I don't blame him!" laughed Shaykh Abdal-Qadir. "No one in their right mind wants to be the Amir. It's an impossible task!"

"We arranged to meet Hajj Ahmad for a laylat'al-fuqara with Shaykh Al-Bukhari in Madina, but somehow we missed each other," Muhammad Abdal-Bari started to explain.

"These things can be arranged!" beamed Shaykh Abdal-Qadir, as if he knew all about the wonderful night of dhikr that I had enjoyed in the Rowdah that night.

Although nothing had been said explicitly, it was clear that there was no blame, and that everything had taken place exactly as Allah had intended, and after asking me a few questions about my journey back to England, and discussing what I intended to do next, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir brought the meeting to an end with the words that I have never forgotten:

"Right then, Hajj Ahmad, you do the flying, and I'll guide you in!"

And as I returned to the minza, feeling as always, inwardly light and illuminated after being in Shaykh Abdal-Qadir's presence –

for the inward state of a wali of Allah transforms those who sit with him, and even a glance from him is enough to change your inward state – I realised that Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit's words referred not only to the future but also to the past. It was I who had decided to accept Islam, but it was Shaykh Abdal-Qadir who had shown me what it is. It was I who had decided to go on the pilgrimage, but it was Shaykh Abdal-Qadir who had indicated the best route to take. It was I who had decided to return to Darqawi, but it had only been because Shaykh Abdal-Qadir would be there at the end of the journey to guide me further.

I had done all the flying alright, both there and back, and I could not have imagined a more interesting flight, but it had been Shaykh Abdal-Qadir who had guided me in, by the baraka and idhn of Allah and His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

The way there, the Difficult Journey – the Hajj itself – the Way Back, and now the Way Ahead, they were all part of one and the same journey, my life's journey, which had begun before I was born into this world and which would continue after I had died and had left it, the journey that we all make one way or another, willingly or unwillingly – from Allah to Allah – and I could not have wished for a better guide and flying instructor, Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, may Allah give him health and strength fi sabili'llah, on whose seal are engraved the following words from the Qur'an:

Ghufranaka rabbana
Wa ilayka'l-maseer.

Which means:

Forgive us our Lord
And to You is the journeying.

(Qur'an: 2.285)

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

And say: My Lord, cause me to land
at a blessed landing-place,
and You are the Best of all who bring to land.

(Qur'an: 23.29)

POSTFACE

As I sit facing Makka it is winter here in England. Outside, the winter gales are blowing and the rain is beating against the windows, but although everything seems bare and bleak I know that the earth is secretly preparing for new growth in the spring, and in the meantime it is lovely and warm here in this thick-walled country cottage, sitting by the fire with the cats stretched out and fast asleep.

It is more than thirteen years ago now since the night that I arrived back at Wood Dalling Hall, just in time for that gathering of dhikr, and now the men and women who were present there for those three days are scattered across the face of the earth, as are all the Muslims who did the Hajj that year.

Since then I have been on many journeys, travelling to many places and meeting many people, but of all the journeys I have ever made, the **Difficult Journey** and the **Hajj** and the **Way Back** still stand out the most clearly in my memory, and I remember the places and the people that I visited and met along the way almost as distinctly now as I did immediately after my return.

Each person has a different path to tread through life – the **Way Ahead** constantly stretches out unendingly beyond the horizon before each one of us – and each person's understanding of their own particular path is unique, but if you are able, then go to Makka and do the Hajj, and if you have already done so, then remember what it taught you, for it is a precious gift for those who want to understand, who really want to understand, the meaning of existence and the purpose of life's journey:

And I did not create the jinn and mankind
except to worship Me.
I do not seek any provision from them
and I do not ask them to feed Me.
Surely it is Allah Who is the Provider,
the Lord of Unbreakable Might.

(Qur'an: 51.56-58

Ahmad Thomson
Winter 1990

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

abd : man as slave of his Lord.

Adam : the first man, created from clay, peace be on him.

adab : correct behaviour inward and outward, inner courtesy coming out as graciousness in right action.

adhan : the call to prayer.

Adnin : the Garden of Eden.

ahlan wa sahlan : 'you are with your parents and at your home', the equivalent in Arabic of saying 'make yourself at home'.

ahl as-suffa : the people of the bench. The poor and needy amongst the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who lived on a verandah in a courtyard next to the house of the Prophet in the mosque in Madina.

ahlu'l-dhimma : non-Muslims living in Muslim territory and under the protection of Muslim rule by virtue of the fact that they have agreed to pay the jizya tax.

ahwal : plural of hal.

akhira : the next world, what is on the other side of death, the world after this world in the realm of the Unseen. See dunya.

alayhi sallam : 'on him be peace'.

al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah : 'praise to Allah and thanks to Allah'.

alim (plural - **ulama**) : a man of knowledge. In this context a man learned in Islam who acts on what he knows.

Allah – ta'ala : Allah – the Most High, the Lord of all the worlds. Allah, the supreme and mighty Name, indicates the One, the Existent, the Creator, the Worshipped, the Lord of the Universe. Allah is the First without beginning and the Last without end and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden. There is no existent except Him and there is only Him in existence.

amir : one who commands, the source of authority in any given situation.

Ansar : the 'Helpers', the people of Madina who welcomed and aided the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, when he made hijrah to Madina.

aql : intellect, the faculty of reason.

Aqsa : the furthest, in this context referring to the Masjid al-Aqsa, the mosque in Jerusalem which stands where the Temple of Solomon once stood.

Arafah : a plain 15 miles to the east of Makka on which stands the Jebel Ar-Rahma. One of the essential rites of the Hajj is to stand on Arafah, on or near the Jebel Ar-Rahma, between the times of asr and maghrib , making dua.

ard : the earth.

arif : the gnostic. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Gnosis, the central knowledge, for it is knowledge of the self, is a proof to the one who knows it and this is its glory and its supremacy over all others. By it its possessor knows the universe, how it is set up and its underlying laws in their action, their qualities and their essences. His knowledge of the Universe is his own self knowledge, while his knowledge of his own self is direct perception of his own original reality, the adamic identity. Everything he has comes from Allah. He never sees anything but he sees Allah in it, before it, after it. There is only Allah in his eyes as there is only Allah in his heart.'

arkan : the five indispensable pillars of Islam which are the shahada, the salat, the zakat, the fast of Ramadan, and, if you are able to do it, the Hajj.

arwah : plural of ruh.

asida : a thick pasty porridge made from durra.

asr : afternoon, and in particular the obligatory afternoon prayer which can be prayed at any time between mid-afternoon and a little before sunset.

as-salaamu-alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu : 'peace on you and the mercy of Allah and His blessing'.

astaghfiru'llah : 'I ask Allah for forgiveness'.

a'udhu bi'llahi min ash-shaytani'r-rajim : 'I seek protection in Allah from the outcast shaytan'. See shaytan.

awliya : plural of wali.

ayah : a sign, a verse of the Qur'an. There are 6,666 ayat in the Qur'an.

ayat : plural of ayah.

ayat al-kursi : the 'Throne' ayah, Qur'an: 2.255.

ayat an-nur : the 'Light' ayah, Qur'an 24.35.

ayn : the source.

✿ ✿ ✿

Bab As-Salaam : The Door of Peace. The name of one of the entrances to the Haram in Makka and of one of the entrances to the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad in Madina, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

badl (plural - **abdal**) : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The abdal are those exalted gnostics who by the perfection of their slavery to Allah remain in constant contemplation of His Presence. The proof of this station is when it is attested that he has been seen at the Ka'aba while others confirm his presence elsewhere. Thus the word badl means substitute for he appears to use a substitute body.'

Badr : a place near to the coast of the Red Sea about 95 miles to the south of Madina where, in the second year after the Hijrah, in the

first battle fought by the newly established Muslim community, the 313 outnumbered Muslims led by the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and helped by thousands of angels in the Unseen, overwhelmingly defeated 1000 Makkan idol-worshippers.

bani Adam : the tribe of Adam, mankind in a genetic sense.

baqa : going on in Allah. It is the state described in the sublime statement of Shaykh Ahmad ibn Ata'illah: 'O Allah, You have commanded me to return to created things, so return me to them robed in lights and the guidance of inner sight, so that I may return from them to You just as I entered in to You from them, with my secret protected from looking at them and my himma raised above dependence on them. For truly, You have power over everything.' Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The man of baqa is outwardly slave, inwardly free, outwardly dark, inwardly illuminated, outwardly sober, inwardly drunk. He is the barzakh of the two oceans – the shari'ah and the haqiqah. Separation does not veil him from gatheredness and gatheredness does not veil him from separation.'

Baqi : the cemetery of the people of Madina where many of the family of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and his companions are buried.

baraka : a blessing, any good which is bestowed by Allah, and especially that which increases; a subtle beneficent spiritual energy which can flow through things and people or places. It is experienced in certain places more strongly than in others, and in some places and objects overpoweringly so. Its highest realm of activity is the human being. Purity permits its flow, for it is purity itself, which is Light. Density of perception blocks it. It is transformative, healing and immeasurable. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Whoever denies baraka denies that Allah is the Living who does not die. To the Muslim, baraka is at the Black Stone, the Rowdah, on the Laylat al-Qadr. To the mumin, baraka is in the mosque, at the tombs of the awliya – without shirk or bida for there is no need to do anything to experience it – and in the presence of the salihun. To the muhsin, baraka is in every tree and every stone and every flower and every face and every star. Tabaraka'llah.'

baraka'llahu fi'k : 'may the blessing of Allah be on you.'

barzakh : an interspace.

bayt al-mal : the 'house of wealth', the treasury of the Muslims where income from the zakat and other sources is gathered for re-distribution.

Bayt al-Maqdis : the 'Pure House', a name of Jerusalem.

bid'a : innovation, changing the original teaching of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Bismillahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim : 'In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate'.

brique : a water container for use in the toilet and when doing wudu.

burnus : a hooded cloak.

✿ ✿ ✿

Dajjal : the false Messiah whose appearance marks the imminent end of the world, the antithesis of Jesus. The science of recognising Dajjal is very intricate and carefully delineated. The manifestation will appear both as a person, and as a certain historical situation, and as a series of cosmic phenomena. Dajjal will affect the masses and cause chaos.

Da'wud : the Prophet David, peace be on him.

deen : the life-transaction, submission and obedience to a particular system of rules and practices; a debt of exchange between two parties, in this usage between the Creator and the created. Allah says in the Qur'an, **'Surely the deen with Allah is Islam.'** (Qur'an: 3.19).

dhat : the Essence, being the Essence of Allah. Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib says in his Diwan:

Recognise the beauty of the Essence
in every manifest action.
Were it not for it,

the existence of the Existent
would not have been established.

dhalim : a person who is unjust and oppressive.

dhikr : remembrance, mention. In a general sense all ibada is dhikr. In common usage it has come to mean invocation of Allah by repetition of His names or particular formulae. The five pillars of Islam are its foundation. Recitation of Qur'an is its heart, and invocation of the Single Name, Allah, is its end.

dhikru'llah : remembrance of Allah, invocation of Allah.

dhimma : obligation or contract, in particular a treaty of protection for non-Muslims living in Muslim territory.

dhimmi : a non-Muslim living under the protection of Muslim rule.

Dhu'l-Hijjah : the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar, the month of the Hajj; one of the four sacred months in which fighting is prohibited.

Dhu'l-Qada : the eleventh month of the Muslim lunar calendar; one of the four sacred months in which fighting is prohibited.

dhur : noon, and in particular the obligatory mid-day prayer which can be prayed at any time between noon and mid-afternoon.

dinar : gold coinage; one dinar is 4.4 grams of gold.

dirham : silver coinage; one dirham is 3.08 grams of silver.

diwan : A collection of qasidas primarily concerned with the declaration of haqiqat, a description of the tariqah and confirmation of the shari'ah. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'From a linguistic viewpoint the writings in the Diwani Canon are set in a structural framework which, both thematically and verbally, contains an encoded message. This coding is manifest both in the specifics of its vocabulary – in a complex set of recurrent terms – in a series of metaphoric transfers which operate from the mithal (likeness) to the subject, as well as in the deep structure of the language which attempts to dismantle step by step the subtle awareness of the one following the signal, both through the signal itself and ALSO

the effect of the signal on the re-tuned sensibility of the subject. In short, the meanings and the effect of the meanings are geared to achieve a profound inward change in the perception and subtle awareness of the subject. One might say that this is surely the desired effect of any poem, say a piece by Lord Byron, but it is not the case. For, if we are to be precise, we must now abandon the word sensibility, for the matter at issue is not the feeling-life of the subject, indeed the allaying of emotion would be the most successful condition for taking in the deep effect of Diwani singing. It is said that the beginner is made turbulent by the singing of Diwan while the great are made serene. For what is desired from the Diwani activity, which is called in Arabic quite simply sama'a (or listening), is the descent on the heart of warid, or spiritual breakthrough; of drinking (shurb) and drunkenness (sukr). The wine of this intoxication flows in the singing of these Diwans. (For detailed analysis of these terms see: **The Hundred Steps** – Shaykh Abdal-Qadir As-Sufi Ad-Darqawi: Diwan Press 1979).

'Thus a whole technique is contained in the Diwani Canon in the same way that a spiritual technique is contained in the Koan collections like the Mumonkan and the Blue Cliff Record which has gathered the Koan literature of the Zen Masters. Both these methods aim at creating 'hayra' or bewilderment as a point of breakthrough from the prison of the rational mind, but the Diwani literature has in it, and we should say the sufic sciences have in them, a much richer transformative energy. That is to say, the Diwani technique opens the seekers to a flowing and delightful condition in which the most exalted and purest experience of Divine Love is known. It is this love between the slave and the Lord, between Majnun and Layla, the lover and the Beloved that is the purpose and only meaning of sama'a as a practice. And the practice of sama'a is based on the technical apparatus of the Diwans ... Any 'study' of these works in a university setting is futile. This is the wine-list. The tavern is elsewhere.'

djelaba : a long loose robe either with or without a hood.

dua : making supplication to Allah.

duha : the forenoon, and in particular the voluntary morning prayer of duha.

dunya : the world, not as cosmic phenomenon but as experienced. It derives from a root describing those grapes which appear on the vine but which when you stretch out to pick them prove to be out of reach. Dunya takes on its actuality through attachment. When the heart is liberated, dunya disappears and akhira – the next invisible world – appears. Dunya is vanishing and moving away, the next world is appearing and approaching.

durra : millet, sorghum.

fajr : dawn, first light, and in particular the post-dawn sunnah prayer.

fana : annihilation in Allah. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'It is the meaning-death, based on the cessation of the attributes, even life itself. It is arrived at by the most fine process of withdrawal from the sensory by the means of the Supreme Name until even the Name, the last contact with awareness, disappears. From the death of the Original Void the secrets and the lights emerge. The seeker will pass through the heavens, each with its own colour and meanings. Light upon light. Until the great tajalli which unveils the secret and INDICATES Allah.'

faqih (plural - **fuqaha**) : a scholar of fiqh who by virtue of his knowledge can give an authoritative legal opinion or judgement.

faqir (plural - **fuqara**) : the poor; these are the men of knowledge. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'There is no higher company. As they are the least of men and make no claims they are the elite and the two worlds are their property. With them is the maqam al-Mahmud, for the Messenger, blessings and peace of Allah be upon him, has said: "Look for me among the poor, for I was only sent among you because of them," and "Poverty is all my glory," and "Allah loves the poor."'

fard : obligatory acts as defined by the shari'ah. This is divided into fardun'ala'l-ayan which is what is obligatory for every adult Muslim, and fardun'ala'l-kifaya which is what is obligatory on at least one of the adults in any Muslim community.

Fatiha : 'The Opening', the opening surah of the Qur'an.

fatwah : an authoritative legal opinion or judgement given by a faqih.

fi sabili'llah : 'in the way of Allah'.

fidya : a ransom, compensation paid for rites missed or wrongly practised in ignorance or ill-health.

fiqh : science of the application of the shari'ah.

fitrah : the first nature, the natural, primal condition of mankind in harmony with nature.

fuqaha : see faqih.

fuqara : see faqir.

furqan : the faculty of being able to discriminate between what is valuable and what is worthless, between what is fruitful and what is unfruitful, between what is good and what is bad for your self and others. To embody the sunnah and follow the shari'ah is furqan. One of the names of the Qur'an is 'Al-Furqan'.

✿ ✿ ✿

ghawth : a qutb who heals. A granter of requests, his followers always range in their thousands. He is characterised by vast generosity.

ghayb : the realms of the Unseen.

ghusl : the full ritual washing of the body with water alone to be pure for the prayer. It is necessary to have a ghusl on embracing Islam, after sexual intercourse or seminal emission, at the end of menstruation, after child-birth, and before being buried, when your body is washed for you. It is necessary to be in ghusl and in wudu before you do the salat or hold a copy of the Qur'an. See tayyamum.

✿ ✿ ✿

hadd (plural - **hudood**) : the limits, Allah's boundary limits for halal and haram. The hadd punishments are the specific fixed penalties laid down by the shari'ah for certain specified crimes.

hadith : reported speech, particularly of, or about, the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

hadith qudsi : those words of Allah on the tongue of His Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, which are not part of the Revelation of the Qur'an.

hadra : presence. In this context, the invocation of 'Hayyu'llah' – 'the Living-Allah', usually done standing, which increases awareness of the Presence of Allah.

hady : an animal offered as a sacrifice on the Hajj.

haik : a large piece of cloth, usually woven from cotton or wool, that is draped over the head and about the body as a protective outer garment.

Hajj : the yearly pilgrimage to Makka which every Muslim who has the means and ability must make once in his or her life-time, and the performance of the rites of the Hajj in the protected area which surrounds the Ka'aba. The Hajj begins on the 8th of Dhu'l-Hijjah, the twelfth month in the Muslim lunar calendar. It is one of the indispensable pillars of Islam. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The root, HJJ means 'to struggle with', to make a spiritual journey'. It means 'Hajj' for it is its own root. 'An argument', 'a single Hajj, a year'. In the Hajj, a man or woman experiences life and the self within such a determined and patterned geometric activity that though there may be near to two million people, outwardly all engaged in the same practice at the same time, inwardly each has his own unique struggle with the nafs to surrender once and for all the fantasy of selfhood, and the fantasy of otherness on which the world and all its ravishingly beautiful and terrible commotion is based. The Hajj is 'a year', a complete cycle of existence.'

Hajj al-Ifrad : Hajj 'by itself', the simplest way to do the Hajj, in which it is not necessary to do an Umrah as well, or to sacrifice an animal or fast instead.

Hajj al-Qiran : the 'joined' Hajj, where the pilgrim does an Umrah and then does the Hajj, without changing out of ihram between the two. A person doing the Hajj al-Qiran must either sacrifice an animal or fast instead, three days during the time of the Hajj, and a further seven days after returning home.

Hajj at-Tamattu : the 'interrupted' Hajj, where the pilgrim does an Umrah and then changes out of ihram until it is time to change back into ihram to do the Hajj. A person doing the Hajj at-Tamattu must either sacrifice an animal or fast instead, three days during the time of the Hajj, and a further seven days after returning home.

Hajjat'al-Wad'a : the final 'Farewell Hajj' of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

hajrat al-aswad : the 'Black Stone', a stone which some say fell from heaven, set into one corner of the Ka'aba in Makka by the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, which the pilgrims, in imitation of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, kiss, so unifying all the Muslims throughout the ages in one place.

hakim : a wise man, particularly a doctor.

hal (plural - **ahwal**) : state. Your inward state is always changing.

halal : permitted by the shari'ah.

halwa : a kind of sweet. See tahnia.

al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah : 'praise to Allah and thanks to Allah'.

haqiqat: the realities. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Haqiqat, the realities, are the inward illuminations of knowledge which flood the heart of the seeker. It is the realm of meanings, as shari'ah is the realm of the senses. As the one is the science of the outward, the other is the science of the inward. There is no way to its experience but by submission to the fact of being human, being mortal, an in-time creature. Once shari'ah is submitted to, then the seeker on the Path realises that he has come from non-existence and is going to non-existence.'

Haqq : the Real, the Truth, Allah.

haram : forbidden by the shari'ah; also a protected area, an inviolable place or object. See Haram.

Haram : a protected area in which certain behaviour is forbidden and other behaviour necessary. The area around the Ka'aba in

Makka is a Haram, and the area around the Prophet's Mosque, in which is the Prophet Muhammad's tomb, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, in Madina, is a Haram. They are referred to together as the Haramayn.

Haramayn : the two Harams, of Makka and Madina.

hasan : an adjective describing a married person, from the noun hisn, a fortress. A person who has been made hasan by marriage (muhsan) has the full hadd punishment of death inflicted on them if they commit adultery.

hasbuna'llahu wa ni'm'al-wakil ni'm'al-mowla wa ni'm'al-nasir : 'Allah is enough for us and He is the best guardian, the best protector and the best helper'.

Hawwa : Eve, the first woman, the partner of Adam, peace be on them.

Hawd : the watering-place of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, whose drink will refresh those who have crossed the Sirat before entering the Garden.

Hayy : the Living, Allah.

Hijaz : the region along the western seaboard of Arabia, in which Makka, Madina, Jeddah and Ta'if are situated.

Hijr : the semi-circular unroofed enclosure at one side of the Ka'aba, whose low wall outlines the shape of the original Ka'aba built by the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him.

hijrah : emigration in the way of Allah. Islam takes its dating from the Hijrah of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, from Makka to Madina, in 622 AD.

hikma : wisdom.

himma : yearning. It is by the heart's yearning that the goal is reached. All human action is based on himma only the force is directed onto the illusory palimpsest of the world. Once the faculty is directed at the non-objective it reaches its goal which is not other than the source from which the himma has come.

howliya : a very large gathering of dhikr attended by several Shaykhs and their fuqara and anyone else who wants to be there.

hudud : plural of hadd.

❁ ❁ ❁

ibada : an act of worship.

Ibrahim : the Prophet Abraham, peace be on him.

Id : a festival. There are two main festivals in the Muslim year, on the first day of each of which Id prayers are prayed.

Id Al-Adha : the 'Festival of the (greater) Sacrifice', a four-day festival at the time of the Hajj; it starts on the 10th day of Dhu'l-Hijjah, the day that the pilgrims sacrifice their animals.

Id Al-Fitr : a three-day festival after the end of the month of fasting, Ramadan; it starts on the first day of Shawwal.

idda : a period after divorce or the death of her husband for which a woman waits before remarrying to ensure that there is no confusion about the paternity of children.

idhn : permission, given by the teacher to the student. It is itself a station of knowledge and a door to the freedom of the student. It is used not for existential matters, but for entering realms of knowledge and for adopting certain practices which are useless if adopted without it. Idhn is from Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

ihram : the conditions of clothing and behaviour adopted by someone on Hajj or Umrah.

ihsan : the state of being hasan; being absolutely sincere to Allah in oneself; it is to worship Allah as though you see Him, knowing that although you do not see Him, He sees you. It is the core of gnosis. You imagine that you are observing the cosmos as a subject. The reality is that you are being observed. When you discover that your watching and the being watched are not two realities but one and that your aspect in it is non-existent you have arrived.

ijtihad : to struggle, to exercise personal judgement.

ikhlas : sincerity, pure unadulterated genuineness. The one who has ikhlas is the one in whose sight there is always meeting with his Lord.

ila : a vow by a husband to abstain from sexual relations with his wife. If four months pass and the husband decides to continue to abstain, then the ila is considered a divorce.

ilm al-huruf : the science of the letters. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The root of the word in arabic means the cutting edge of a sword. It also means an edge, a rim, a brink. The letters are actions. The letters cut the undifferentiated stillness. They are edges, rims, brinks. They delineate. Make forms. They are therefore both the means to the deep coding of all animate forms and all inanimate forms.'

Ilya : a name for Jerusalem.

Imam : the one who leads the prayer, an eminent scholar.

iman : acceptance, belief, trust, in the Real, a gift from Him. Iman is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, the Last Day and the Garden and the Fire, and that everything is by the Decree of Allah, both the good and the evil.

Injil : the original Gospel which was revealed to the Prophet Jesus, peace be on him.

insan al-kamil : the 'perfect man'. Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib writes in the introduction to his Diwan: 'Allah the Exalted has destined for this noble path in every age one who sets right its deviations and manifests its secrets and its lights. He is the Shaykh who unites the haqiqah and the shari'ah with the idhn of Allah and His Messenger and all the perfected of Allah. He is the unique man of Muhammad of whom there is only one in every age. If there are numerous Shaykhs in his age, he rules over them all, whether they are aware of it or not. Many have laid claim to the station of uniqueness with falsehood and lies because they seek leadership and desire to possess this passing world. The pretender is unaware that whoever claims what is not in him is exposed by the witnesses of the test, since in their presence a man is either exalted or humiliated. True Shaykhs are satisfied with the knowledge of Allah and

depend only on Allah. All that emanates from them speaks of the baraka of Allah. He, may He be exalted, said:

"As for the baraka of your Lord – declare it."'

Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The Perfect Man is not perfect in any other way than that his gnosis is perfect and by it his life is preserved by Allah. On being asked if such a man was free from committing wrong actions, Imam Junayd gave the profound answer: "The decree is from before endless time."'

insh'Allah : 'if Allah wills it', 'God willing'.

iqama : the qadqamati's-salat, the call which announces that the obligatory prayer is just about to begin.

Isa : the Prophet Jesus, peace be on him.

isha : evening, and in particular the obligatory night prayer which can be prayed at any time between nightfall and a little before dawn.

Islam : peace and submission to the will of Allah, the way of life embodied by all the prophets, given its final form in the prophetic guidance brought by the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him. The five pillars of Islam are the affirmation of the Shahada, doing the Salat, paying the Zakat, fasting the month of Ramadan, and doing the Hajj once in your lifetime if you are able.

isnad : the written record of the names of the people who form the chain of human transmission, person to person, by means of which a hadith is preserved. One of the sciences of the Muslims which was developed after the Prophet Muhammad's death, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, is the science of assessing the authenticity of a hadith by assessing the reliability of its isnad.

istislam : greeting the Black Stone and the Yemeni corner of the Ka'aba during tawaf by kissing, touching or saluting with outstretched hand.

itikaf : seclusion, while fasting, in a mosque, particularly during the last ten days of Ramadan.

Jabarut : the source world, the world of divine light and power. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The kingdom of power. This is the kingdom of lights. Shaykh al-Akbar notes: "With Abu Talib it is the world of Immensity. With us it is the middle world." By this he indicates that the mulk is opposite the jabarut and it is precisely the realm of lights, the Divine Presence that creates the split between the two worlds on which creational reality is based. That means that Light is the barzakh, the inter-space between the visible and the invisible. In reality existence is one, the three kingdoms are one kingdom with one Lord. It is by the setting up of the limits and the barriers and the differences that the universal metagalactic existence is able to come into being. That which sets up barriers, and is the barriers, is none other than the One Reality in its sublime perfection unrelated to any form. The barriers are not realities in themselves yet without them nothing would be defined and no-one could define them.'

Jahannam : a name for Hell.

Jahiliyya : the time of Ignorance, before the coming of Islam.

Jahim : the fire of Hell.

jamra (plural - **jimar**) : a small walled place, but in this usage a stone-built pillar. There are three jamras at Mina. One of the rites of the Hajj is to stone them. Stoning the jamras is sometimes referred to as stoning the shaytans.

Jamrat Al-Aqaba : one of the three jamras at Mina. It is situated at the entrance of Mina which faces in the direction of Makka.

janaba : the impure state in which a person requires a ghusl before prayer is permissible again.

Jebel Ar-Rahma : the Mount of Mercy which is on the plain of Arafah and where it is said that Adam was re-united with Hawwa after years of wandering about the earth after their expulsion from the Garden of Adnin.

Jebel Murra : the 'Mountains of Time', situated in the far west of the Sudan.

Jibril : the archangel Gabriel who brought the Revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

jihad : struggle, particularly warfare to defend and establish Islam. Inwardly the greater jihad is the fight against the kufr in your own heart. Until your heart is purified, you are your own worst enemy. Outwardly the lesser jihad is the fight against the kufr around you.

jinn : unseen beings created of smokeless fire who co-habit the earth together with mankind. Some are Muslims, some are kaffirun, and some are the followers of shaytan, a'udhu bi'llahi min ash-shaytani'r-rajim.

Jinnah : the Garden, the final destination and resting place of the Muslims in the akhira once the Last Day is over. Jinnah is accurately described in great detail in the Qur'an and hadith.

jizyah : the annual tax paid by all adult males of the ahlu'l-dhimma who are guaranteed the protection of the Muslims in return.

jumua : the day of gathering, Friday, and particularly the jumua prayer which is prayed instead of dhur by all those who are present at the mosque to do the prayer.

Ka'aba : the cube-shaped building at the centre of the Haram in Makka, originally built by the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be on him, and rebuilt with the help of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace; also known as the House of Allah. The Ka'aba is the focal point which all Muslims face when doing the salat. This does not mean that Allah lives inside the Ka'aba, nor does it mean that the Muslims worship the Ka'aba. It is Allah Who is worshipped, and He is not contained or confined in any form or place or time or concept.

kaffara : prescribed way of making amends for wrong actions, particularly missed obligatory actions.

kaffir (plural - **kaffirun**) : a person who commits kufr, the opposite of a mumin.

karama (plural - **karamat**) : miraculous gifts and favours which Allah gives to His awliya. Miracles are events in the phenomenal world that imply a break in the causal chain.

Kawthar : it is said that it is a river in the Garden, abundant blessing, intercession, and the Hawd of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

khalifa (plural - **khulafa**) : someone who stands in for someone else; in this usage, the leader of the muslim community who stands in as the representative of Allah.

khalil : intimate friend, the kunya used to describe the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be on him, because he conversed with Allah.

khalwa : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Khalwa, retreat, is the withdrawal from the world in the concentrated act of invocation of the Supreme Name in order to arrive at the vision of the Face. Its guide is the Shaykh. It is at this maqam that the words of Shaykh Moulay Abdal-Qadir Al-Jilani must be obeyed utterly. Ignorant people misquote them implying a false social control of the Shaykh over the murid. This is not so. It is within the context of this maqam that he says: "Be with your Shaykh as a dead body in the hands of the washer."'

Khandaq : 'the Ditch'; in the fifth year after the Hijrah the Makkan idol-worshippers, assisted by the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadhir, Banu Ghatfan and Banu Asad, marched on Madina with an army of ten thousand soldiers. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, ordered a ditch to be dug on the unprotected side of Madina and to be manned constantly. The enemy were halted by this unexpected tactic, and then driven away by awful weather, mutual distrust and low morale, without any major engagement having taken place.

kharaj : taxes imposed on revenue from land or the work of slaves.

khayal : this means imagination, but not in the popular sense. Rather it is that faculty in the human brain which perceptually and experientially 'solidifies' and gives reality to the phenomenal world, both externally and internally.

khidma : service.

Khidr : the Prophet Khidr, peace be upon him. It is said that he is the prophet who has never died, and that he appears to people disguised as a person in need, in order to test their generosity.

khul : a form of divorce in which a woman seeking divorce returns her dowry, or part of it, or even more than it, as a ransom for her freedom.

Khulafa Ar-Rashidun : the rightly-guided khalifs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali, may Allah be pleased with all of them.

khutbah : a speech, and in particular a standing speech given by the Imam before the jumua prayer and after the two Id prayers. At the jumua there are two khutbas separated by a short sitting pause.

kiswah : The huge embroidered black and gold cloth that drapes the Ka'aba.

kohl : antimony powder used both as a decoration and as a medicine for the eyes.

ksar: a large walled fortress, found mainly in the deserts of North Africa.

kufr : to cover up the truth, to reject Allah and His Messenger, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Kufr means to cover up reality: kafir is one who does so. The kafir is the opposite of the mumin. The point is that everyone knows 'how it is' – only it suits some people to deny it and pretend it is otherwise, to behave as if we were going to be here for ever. This is called kufr. The condition of the kafir is therefore one of neurosis, because of his inner knowing. He 'bites his hand in rage' but will not give in to his inevitable oncoming death.'

kunya : a respectful and affectionate way of calling people as the 'Father of so-and-so' or the 'Mother of so-and-so'.

✿ ✿ ✿

labayk : 'at your service'; it is part of the talbiya.

la ilaha illa'llah : 'there is no god except Allah'.

layla : night; also one of the names used to indicate the Beloved.

laylat'al-fuqara : the 'night of the fuqara', meaning the gathering of dhikr attended by the fuqara with their Shaykh or one of his muqaddems, usually on the laylat'al-jumua.

laylat'al-jumua : the night before the day of the jumua, Thursday night.

laylat'al-qadr : the 'Night of Power', concealed in one of the odd nights in the last ten days of Ramadan; the night on which the Qur'an was first revealed by Jibril to the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and which the Qur'an itself describes as **'better than a thousand months'**. (Qur'an: 97.3).

li'an : mutual cursing, an oath taken by both the wife and the husband when the husband accuses his wife of committing adultery and she denies it. He makes three oaths that he is truthful and a fourth that the wrath of Allah will be on him if he is lying. The wife can free herself of guilt and thus punishment by avowing herself to be innocent three times and making a fourth vow that the wrath of Allah will be on her if she is lying. A couple who make li'an are automatically and irrevocably divorced and can never be remarried.

lubb : a core. This term is used in the Qur'an to indicate people who have great understanding in the core of their being, the heart.

luh : a writing board, commonly used by those who are learning the Qur'an by heart.

lutf (plural - **lata'if**) : subtlety, the all-pervading texture of the universe that cannot be grasped or defined. Its opposite is kathif, or thickness.

Madina : the City, often called Madina al-Munawarra – the Illuminated, or the Enlightened, City – where the revelation of the Qur'an was completed and in which the Prophet Muhammad died and is buried, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The first Muslim community was established in Madina al-Munawarra, and Allah says in the Qur'an that this is the best community ever raised up from amongst mankind. Their hearts and actions were illuminated and enlightened, may Allah be pleased with all of them, by Allah and His Messenger, and today Madina is still illuminated by

the presence of the arwah of those of them who are buried there, especially the Messenger of Allah, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and them.

maddrasah : a traditional Muslim place of learning based on memorisation and study of the Qur'an and the hadith.

madh-hab : a school of fiqh. There are four main sunni madh-habs, the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali madh-habs.

Magians : Zoroastrian fire-worshippers.

maghrib : the west, the time of sunset, and in particular the maghrib prayer which can be prayed at any time between just after sundown and before the stars appear in the sky.

mahdi : one who is rightly guided; also the name of the Muslim leader who will fight the Dajjal until the return to this world of the Prophet Jesus, peace be on him, who will kill the Dajjal and his followers by a miracle.

majlis : an assembly.

mahr : the dowry given by husband to wife on marrying.

mahram : a person with whom marriage is forbidden.

Makka : the city in which the Ka'aba stands, and in which the Prophet Muhammad was born, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and where the revelation of the Qur'an commenced.

makruh : disapproved of without being forbidden.

mala'ika : the angels, who are made of light and glorify Allah unceasingly. They are neither male nor female. They do not need food or drink. They are incapable of wrong action and disobedience to Allah. They do whatever Allah commands them to do. Everyone has two recording angels with them who record their actions and none of this escapes the knowledge of Allah.

Malakut : the angelic world, the kingdom of Unseen forms. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'This is both the kingdom of the source-forms of the creational realities, crystals, atoms, organisms, and the kingdom of the spiritual realities, the Lote-tree, the

Balance, the Throne and so on. It is the realm of vision as the mulk is the realm of event. As the characteristic of the mulk is fixity or apparent fixity so the characteristic of the malakut is flux and transformation or apparent flux. In fact one could say that the reality of the two worlds is opposite that, for indeed the solid forms are all in change, while the visions are all unfolding the fixed primal patterns on which all the visible world is based.'

mamnu'a : what is prohibited in acts of worship in the shari'ah.

ma'rifa : gnosis, the highest knowledge of Allah possible for a man or woman. It is to directly witness the Light of the Names and Attributes of Allah manifested in the heart. See arif.

maqam : a station. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The maqam is arrived at when the slave is established in a degree of adab in his khidma, service to Allah, and when he has acquired a firm place in certainty inwardly. Stations first manifest, fleetingly, as ahwal (plural of hal), then they become fixed in the murid. This is likened to dyeing cloth, so that it is dipped in the same colour and dried, dipped and dried, until the colour at a certain point becomes fixed. Once the dye is fixed the maqam is established.

Maqam Al-Ibrahim : The Station of Ibrahim. The place where the Prophet Ibrahim stood which marks the place of prayer following tawaf of the Ka'aba.

Maqam al-Mahmud : The praiseworthy station, of remembering and worshipping Allah in every waking moment, while others sleep.

marhaban : welcome!

Marwa : see Safa and Marwa.

Maryam : Mary, the mother of Jesus, peace be on her and him; the only woman to be mentioned by name in the Qur'an.

ma salaama : 'with peace'.

ma sha'Allah : 'what Allah wants' happens.

Masih ad-Dajjal : the anti-Messiah; see Dajjal.

Masih ibnu Maryam : the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, peace be on them. See Isa. The Qur'an states that he was a prophet – and not the son of God – and was not crucified.

masjid : a place of sajda, a mosque.

Masjid Al-Aqsa : the 'Furthest Mosque' in Jerusalem, which stands where the Temple of Solomon once stood.

Masjid Al-Haram : the 'Protected Mosque', the name of the mosque built around the Ka'aba in the Haram at Makka.

Masjid An-Nabiyyi : the 'Prophet's Mosque', the name of the mosque in which is the Prophet Muhammad's tomb, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, in Madina.

mawlana : 'our master', a term of respect.

mawqif (plural - **mawaqif**) : a standing or stopping place. There are two places where those doing the Hajj must 'stop', Arafah and Muzdalifah.

Mika'il : the archangel Michael.

mimbar : steps on which the Imam stands to deliver the khutba on the day of the jumua.

Mina : a valley five miles away from Makka on the road to Arafah, where the three jamras stand. It is part of the rites of the Hajj to spend the night before the Day of Arafah in Mina, and to spend three nights in Mina during the Days of Tashriq.

minza : a sitting room.

miqat (plural - **mawaqit**) : one of the designated places for entering into ihram for Umrah or Hajj.

Mi'raj : the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, from Makka to Jerusalem and then through the realms of the seven heavens beyond the limit of forms, the sidrat al-muntaha, to within a bow-span's length or nearer to the Presence of the Real.

miskin (plural - **masakin**) : the utterly bereft in poverty, the helplessly needy.

mithal : a likeness; a metaphor. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'It has a different texture of meaning in tasawwuf than it does in ordinary usage. According to this teaching there are different modalities of experiencing reality; one of these is by thinking about it, and that in turn has different forms or qualities. The use of abstract thought is a function of intellect. The use of analogue, however, is a higher mental operation and involves, as it were, an extra dimension. If you like, abstract thought is linear and diagrammatic or structural.

The mithal when used is like leaving the drawing explanation behind and constructing a hologram in space. This function in turn is superseded by a higher zone of intellection which calls, quite literally, for the invention of, as it were, a special language so that the mithal itself has to be extended into the active language structure. Then a kind of high, hermeneutic coding takes place. The outward expression of this is so fine that the 'song' in no way can even suggest the experience of the listener.'

Mizan : the Balance. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Its meaning is the justice and harmony of all creation and therefore of time/space and therefore of us and events. It is the meaning of the Garden and the Fire, of the balance between the matrices. It is what was called in the ancient Tao-form of Islam in China, yin/yang. It is the secret of the contrary Names. It is what we are born and die on, and which turns our acts and intentions into realities to be weighed on the Day of the Balance.'

muadhdin : someone who calls the adhan, the call to prayer.

mubashirat : good news, good dreams.

mudd : a measure of volume, one both hands cupped full, a double handed scoop.

mufsida : what invalidates acts of worship in the shari'ah.

Muhajirun : Companions of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, who accepted Islam in Makka and made hijrah to Madina.

Muhammad ar-Rasulu'llah : 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

Muharram : the first month of the Muslim year, which is based on the lunar calendar, and one of the four inviolable months during which fighting is prohibited, haram, from which its name is derived.

muhrim : a person in ihram.

muhsan : a person who has hasan.

muhsanat : the feminine of muhsan. As well as meaning a person guarded by marriage, it also refers to a chaste unmarried free woman, who is sexually protected, as opposed to an unmarried slave woman over whom her master has sexual rights.

muhsar : a person detained from the Hajj by an enemy or an illness.

muhsin : someone who possesses the quality of ihsan, and who accordingly only gives reality to the Real. Only the muhsin really knows what tawhid is. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once said: 'The difference between the kafir and the Muslim is vast. The difference between the Muslim and the mumin is greater still. The difference between the mumin and the muhsin is immeasurable.' This is not only in inward state, but also in outward action.

mujiza : an evidentiary miracle given to a Prophet to prove his prophethood.

Mulk : the phenomenal world, the universe. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The visible realm. The mulk is what is experienced in the sensory (hiss) and in illusion (wahm). Of its nature mulk is both solid, sensory and pure-space, illusory. This is now confirmed by kafir science. The amazing interlocking substantiality of Mulk veils most people from the meaning-realm onto which it opens the intellect, thus it is designated kingdom for it is a realm of reality, seemingly complete in itself. It is not real, but it is made WITH THE REAL, in the language of Qur'an. Thus to understand it we must penetrate its imprisoning solidity.'

Multazam : the area between the Black Stone and the door of the Ka'aba where it is recommended to make dua.

mumin (plural - **muminun**) : someone who possesses the quality of iman, who trusts in Allah and accepts His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and for whom the akhira is more real than dunya. The mumin longs for the Garden so much, that this world seems like the Fire by comparison. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'One who trusts that existence is inwardly as it is. He takes his evidence from inside himself. His first acceptance of the knowledge of existence is dependant on his accepting a fellow human being. Thus to be muslim you must be able to trust the other. When you are given certainty, that is, confirmation, you trust yourself and then you are mumin. A muslim is one who accepts his existence outwardly, and does not try to defy his cosmic situation. He is a frail boat within the ocean. The mumin allows to dawn on him that outwardness is only one dimension of existence, and that his inwardness must contain the other. He sets out to develop this capacity. He discovers the ocean within the boat. This takes him to the station of being muhsin, a man of ihsan. He then smiles and declares, "What a wonderful thing this is – the boat within the ocean and the ocean within the boat!"'

munafiq (plural – **munafiqun**) : a hypocrite; the hypocrites outwardly profess Islam on the tongue, but inwardly reject Allah and His Messenger, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and side with the kafirun against the Muslims. The deepest part of the Fire is reserved for the munafiqun.

Munkar and Nakir : the two angels who question your ruh in the grave after your body has been buried, asking, 'Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your Book? What was your Deen?'

muqaddem : The deputy of a Shaykh who has the idhn to act and teach on his Shaykh's behalf.

murid : the student of a Shaykh of instruction. Its root is irada, meaning will, for he must hand over his will to the teacher in order to discover who he is. Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib writes in the introduction to his Diwan: 'Murid is derived from will (irada) and it depends on sincerity (ikhlas). The true meaning of murid is one who has stripped himself of his own will and accepted what Allah wills for him, which is the worship of Allah ta'ala, for as He said, **"I have not created jinn and men except to worship Me."**

When the murid is weak in disciplining his self – since the inner rule belongs to the self and shaytan – he places himself under the rule of the Shaykh and in the protection of his power. He, in his turn, will help the murid to obey and worship Allah through his himma which operates by the idhn of Allah and through his words which are made effective by the gift of Allah. So a murid must cling to whoever of the Shaykhs of the age are well disposed towards him.' Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib also writes: 'The murid will gain a master in accordance with his own sincerity and strength of resolution. Allah is the one to ask for help.'

Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: "The Shaykh does not 'do' anything. He recognises those Allah loves. This recognition has wisdom in it for him and for you. Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawi of Fez, Allah be merciful to him, said: "One glance from the Shaykh wipes out a thousand wrong actions." This is very difficult for the people of thought-forms to understand and easy for the people of the states. This concerns the inner zone of the **lubb** or core of the human self's awareness. Its mithal is the sun's rays. If you sit in the sun you become sunburned. If you sit with the Shaykh you become purified , later intoxicated, and finally annihilated. As one who is first warmed, then burned and at the end blinded by the rays of the sun. In this zone is the innermost reality and the secrets of 'keeping company' . . . Your service to the Shaykh is a tremendous thing. Greater than it is his service to you. Wrong feelings against the Shaykh endanger the murid by confusion and the illusion that the nafs is other, and there is no other. Abu'l-Abbas al-Mursi, Allah's mercy be upon him, said: "The one who says 'why?' to his Shaykh will never be happy." Never forget the object of the contract with the Shaykh is to move you from ilmi nafsika to ilmi rabbika from knowledge of your nafs to knowledge of your Lord.'

Musa : the Prophet Moses, peace be on him.

mushrik (plural - **mushrikin**) : one who commits shirk.

muslim : someone who follows the way of Islam, not abandoning what is fard, keeping within the hudud of Allah, and following the sunnah, in what he or she is able. A Muslim is, by definition, one who is safe and sound, at peace in this world, and promised the Garden in the next world.

mustahab : what is recommended, but not obligatory, in acts of worship in the shari'ah.

mut'a : temporary marriage under strict conditions, allowed in the early days of Islam but later prohibited.

mutawwif : a resident of Makka who welcomes pilgrims to Makka, feeds them, shelters them and, if necessary, teaches them the courtesies and meaning of the rites of the Hajj and the Umrah.

Muzdalifah : a place between Arafah and Mina where the pilgrims returning from Arafah spend a night in the open between the 9th and 10th days of Dhu'l-Hijjah after praying maghrib and isha there.

nabi : a prophet, a rightly guided man sent by Allah to guide others. Altogether there have been one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets, beginning with Adam, peace be on him, and ending with Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and on all of them.

nabidh : a drink made by soaking grapes, raisins, dates and so on in water without their being allowed to ferment.

nafila : a voluntary act of ibada.

nafl (plural - **nawafil**) : a gift, from the same root as anfal, meaning booty taken in war; it means a voluntary act of ibada.

nafs : the illusory experiencing self. You as you think you are. When the nafs is impure, it is an illusory solidification of events obscuring a light, the ruh. When it has been completely purified, the nafs is the ruh. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Shaykh al-Akbar defines nafs as, "What is caused of the attributes of the slave." So it is that the self is imprisoned by the very elements it imagines liberate its actions. The more the self does the more it builds up an illusory continuity and history. Event consolidates the myth of the self. This is why Shaykh al-Kamil says that, "everything in the nafs is dreadful." It is irrelevant to imagine you can 'forge' a good nafs. It is a more terrible idol than the bad one. The nafs is the great idol which, while it sets up the other idols cannot smash itself. This is why one takes the Shaykh. His function is simply to serve as a

mirror self which will help one escape the deceptions of the self which are self-perpetuating.'

Nar : the Fire of Jahannam, the final destination and place of torment of the kafirun and munafiqun in the akhira once the Last Day is over. Some of those Muslims who neglected what is fard in the shari'ah and who did grave wrong action without making tawba will spend some time in the Fire before being allowed to enter the Garden, depending on the forgiveness of Allah Who forgives every wrong action except shirk if He wishes. Nar is accurately described in great detail in the Qur'an and hadith.

nasiha : good advice, sincere conduct.

nawafil : what is voluntary in acts of worship in the shari'ah.

nifaq : hypocrisy. See munafiq.

nikah : marriage.

nisab : the minimum amount of wealth of whatever kind from which zakat can be deducted.

Nuh : the Prophet Noah, peace be on him.

nur : light. The Qur'an states:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.

(Qur'an: 24.35)

nuri-Muhammad : the ruhani Light of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

'oud : a type of tree whose oil is used as a perfume, and whose wood is burned as a form of incense.

qabr : the grave, experienced as a place of peace and light and space by the ruh of the mumin who sees his or her place in the Garden in the morning and in the evening; and experienced as a place of torment and darkness and no space by the ruh of the kafir

who sees his or her place in the Fire in the morning and in the evening. After death there is a period of waiting in the grave for the ruh until the Last Day arrives, when everyone who has ever lived will be brought back to life and gathered together. Their actions will be weighed in the mizan, and everyone will either go to the Garden or to the Fire, for ever.

qadr : the decree of Allah, which determines every sub-atomic particle in existence, and accordingly whatever appears to be in existence. One of Allah's names is Al-Qadir, the Powerful, the One Who does what He wants, the One Who has power over everything. The Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, once said:

"Everything is by decree."

(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 46.1.5)

qadqamati's-salat : the call which announces that the obligatory prayer is just about to begin:

Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar.
Ash-shadu an la ilaha illa'llah.
Ash-shadu anna Muhammad ar-Rasulu'llah.
Haya ala's-salat.
Haya ala'l-falah.
Qadqamati's-salat.
Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar.
La ilaha illa'llah.

Which means:

Allah is greater, Allah is greater.
I bear witness that there is no god except Allah.
I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.
Come to the prayer.
Come to success.
The prayer has been established.
Allah is greater, Allah is greater.
There is no god but Allah.

qasida : a verse, in this context from the Diwan of one of the Shaykhs of Instruction. They contain the ultimate 'means' by which ma'rifa is approached. These have never been studied or translated in this society, where they have been brilliantly rendered meaningless by

pseudo-poetics, who have projected onto them an aesthetic value they never sought nor can tolerate. The whole science of Diwan method remains to be explored.

qiblah : the direction faced in prayer, which, for the Muslims, is towards the Ka'aba in Makka. Everyone has a direction in life, but only the Muslims have this qiblah.

qudrat : power, in the sense of determining one's existence. Qudrat is, in truth, with Allah.

Qur'an : the 'Recitation', the last revelation from Allah to mankind and the jinn before the end of the world, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, through the angel Jibril, over a period of twenty-three years, the first thirteen of which were spent in Makka and the last ten of which were spent in Madina. The Qur'an amends, encompasses, expands, surpasses and abrogates all the earlier revelations revealed to the earlier messengers, peace be on all of them. The Messenger of Allah said, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, that each verse of the Qur'an has an outward meaning and an inward meaning and a gnostic meaning. The Qur'an is the greatest miracle given to the Prophet Muhammad by Allah, for he was illiterate and could neither read nor write. The Qur'an is the uncreated word of Allah. Whoever recites the Qur'an with courtesy and sincerity receives knowledge and wisdom, for it is the well of wisdom in this age.

Quraysh : one of the great tribes in Arabia. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, belonged to this tribe.

quru : a woman's becoming pure after menses, used particularly in reference to the idda of divorce.

qutb : the Pole or axis of the Universe. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'This term is only understood by the one who has attained to it. An approximation would be to say that in him gnosis is complete inwardly so that outwardly his gnosis radiates as a sun over all the other gnostics. The proofs of the qutb are these: that he is surrounded by a circle of gnostics as a King is visibly recognisable by his Court, that the deen of Islam revives around him bringing life to the people, and thirdly that he names his successor before his death.'

rahma : mercy, the mercy of Allah.

Rajab : the seventh month in the Muslim lunar calendar, one of the four sacred months in which fighting is prohibited.

rak'a (plural – **rak'at**) : a unit of the prayer (salat - see below), a complete series of standing, bowing, prostrations and sittings.

Ramadan : the month of fasting, the ninth month in the Muslim lunar calendar, during which all adult Muslims who are in good health fast from the first light of dawn until sunset each day. During the first third of the fast you taste Allah's mercy; during the second third of the fast you taste Allah's forgiveness; and during the last third of the fast you taste freedom from the Fire. The Qur'an was first revealed in the month of Ramadan during the laylat al-qadr. Ramadan is one of the indispensable pillars of Islam.

rami : the act of throwing the small pebbles at the jamras in Mina.

raml : 'hastening' in the tawaf, a way of walking briskly, moving the shoulders vigorously, usually done during the first three circuits in a set of seven, but not in the remaining four.

rasul : a 'Messenger', a prophet who has been given a revealed book by Allah. Every Messenger was a prophet, but not every prophet was given a revealed book.

ratib: a wird.

Rowdah : the part of the Prophet's Mosque between his grave and the mimbar. He said, may Allah bless him and grant him peace:

> **"What is between my house and my mimbar is one of the meadows of the Garden, and my mimbar is on my watering-place (al-Hawd)."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 14.5.10)**

riba : usury, which is haram, whatever form it takes.

ridwan : the sublime serenity of dynamic contentment that fills the heart and remains.

rikaz : treasure buried in the pre-Islamic period which is recovered without great cost or effort. Zakat is exacted from such finds.

riwaya : a reading or transmission of the Qur'an or another text.

ruh : the spirit which gives life, formed from pure light; the angel Jibril.

ruhani : pertaining to the ruh.

ruku : bowing, particularly the bowing position of the prayer (salat – see below).

ruqya : recitation of verses of the Qur'an for treatment of, and protection against, illness.

✿ ✿ ✿

sa' : an hour, usually used to denote 'the Hour', when the world ends and the Last Day begins.

saa : a measure of volume, equal to four mudds.

sadaqa : giving in the way of Allah, a gift to another or others without any other motive than the giving. It is giving to the needy, in any form, including sharing wisdom, giving a helping hand, giving away clothing, food and money, and giving shelter. The smallest sadaqa is to come out to your brother or sister with a smiling face.

Safa and Marwa : two hills situated quite close to the Ka'aba. It is part of the rites of Umrah and the Hajj to walk seven times between the two hills, increasing your pace each time you come to a certain point, but not breaking into a run, and then slowing down again.

Safar : the second month in the Muslim lunar calendar.

sahaba : the Companions of the Prophet, may Allah be pleased with them.

sahih : healthy and sound with no defects; often used to describe an authentic hadith. The two most reliable collections of hadith by al-Bukhari and Muslim are both called Sahih.

sahur : the early morning meal taken before first light when fasting.

sajda : the act of making prostration, particularly in the prayer (salat – see below).

sakina : the presence of Allah sometimes made clear by a sign; also the feeling of peace of mind and security that comes from a heart at peace.

salafi : adjective from as-salaf, the 'early years', and used generally to describe the early generations of the Muslims, particularly the sahaba, the companions of the Messenger of Allah, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and them.

salat : the prayer, particularly the five daily obligatory ritual prayers of the Muslims which are called maghrib, isha, subh, dhur and asr. They consist of fixed sets of standings, bowings, prostrations and sittings in worship to Allah. The Muslim day begins at maghrib, because the first day of a new month is only determined when the new moon is sighted shortly after sunset. It is necessary to be in ghusl and in wudu before you do the salat. Salat is one of the indispensable pillars of Islam.

salih (plural - **salihun**) : a spiritually developed man. By definition, one who is in the right place at the right time.

salla'llahu alayhi wa sallam : 'may Allah bless him and grant him peace', meaning the Prophet Muhammad.

Samad : the Real in its endless effulgence of creative energy, by which the whole universe of endless forms emerge from the possible into the existent. It is the richness whose wealth is every form in creation. Allah is in need of nothing and everything is in need of Him.

samawati : the heavens.

sa'y : the main rite of Umrah and one of the rites of the Hajj. Sa'y is proceeding between the two hills of Safa and Marwa seven times.

sayyedina : 'our master', a term of respect.

Shaban : the eighth month in the Muslim lunar calendar, and one of the four sacred months in which fighting is prohibited.

shafaq : the redness in the sky after sunset.

shahada : to witness, to bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. The shahada is the gateway to Islam and the gateway to Jinnah. It is easy to say, but to act on it is a vast undertaking which has far-reaching consequences, in both inward awareness and outward action, in this world and in the akhira. Continual affirmation of the shahada is one of the indispensable pillars of Islam.

shahid (plural – **shuhada**) : a witness, a martyr in the way of Allah.

Sham : the territory north of Arabia which is now divided into Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan.

shari'ah : a road, the legal and social modality of a people based on the revelation of their Prophet. The last shari'ah in history is that of Islam. It abrogates all previous shari'ahs. It is, being the last, therefore the easiest to follow, for it is applicable to the whole human race wherever they are.

sharif : a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Shawwal : the tenth month of the Muslim lunar calendar.

shaykh : the one who guides you from knowledge of the self to knowledge of your Lord. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Without a Shaykh a man can not defeat his nafs. The more he fights himself the more powerful the self becomes. Attention confirms nafs. The activator of the nafs will either be outside or inside the nafs. If it is activated from inside this is the work of Shaytan, the whisperer, who instigates wrong action. That is why, following the word of Moulay Abdal-Qadir al-Jilani, the murid must make himself like a dead body in the hands of the washer in relations with the Shaykh. Abu Yazid, Allah's mercy on these great awliya', said: "He who does not have a Shaykh for a Master will have Shaytan as a Master." This is why, 'keeping company' is a necessary condition of the Path. How can the doctor heal the pa-

tient unless the patient is brought before him? At the heart of the matter, however, there is no rule over the murid. The murid must want what the Shaykh wants, in that is his cure. Murid is one who has surrendered his irada – his will – to the Shaykh in order to come quickly out of the fantasies of the khayal (the faculty investing the solid objects with their 'reality') and the kufr, the covering, that is the self.

"Fear Allah
and He will give you discrimination."

That means not by you but by Him. Then separation does not veil you from gatheredness and gatheredness does not veil you from separation.'

Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib writes in the introduction to his Diwan: 'Explaining the attributes of the teaching Shaykh, I said in one of my qasidas ending in ta':

'La ilaha illa'llah' banishes all temptations
along with the instructions of a Shaykh
who knows the Reality.

His signs are:
a light which shines outwardly,
and a secret which appears inwardly, with himma.

He elevates you with a glance even before he speaks,
and from this glance
comes a robe of honour.

By it I mean the secrets
which flow rapidly into the heart of the murid
who seeks the truth without shirk.

His doing-without among creatures is the staff of his journey,
and his occupation is
seeking isolation of the Beloved by vision.

His speech is by idhn
from the Best of the Community
upon whom the glorious truthful ones depend.

If you obtain the goal
of finding such a one
then set out and offer up the self without delay.

Do not consider anything
except what I have described here,
for it is enough and in it is every happiness.'

Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib also writes: 'There has always been agreement in this community of Muhammad that the first thing required of a murid once he has become aware of his state of distraction is that he should rely on a Shaykh of good counsel and guidance who knows the defects of the self, its motives, and the remedies for its ailments, and who has done with the putting right of his own self and its desires. He will give the murid insight into the faults of his self and draw him out beyond the perimeter of his senses. Whoever has no Shaykh to direct him will most certainly be directed by shaytan to the path of destruction.'

shaytan (plural - **shayatin**) : a devil, particularly Iblis (Satan), a'udhu bi'llahi min ash-shaytani'r-rajim. Shaytan is part of the creation of Allah, and we seek refuge in the perfect word of Allah from the evil that He has created.

shirk : the unforgiveable wrong action of worshipping something or someone other than Allah or associating something or someone as a partner with Him; the opposite of tawhid which is affirmation of Divine Unity. Shirk is idol-worship. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Idol-worship means giving delineation to the Real. Encasing it in an object, a concept, a ritual or a myth. This is called shirk, or association. Avoidance of shirk is the most radical element in the approach to understanding existence in Islam. It soars free of these deep social restrictions and so posits such a profoundly revolutionary approach to existence that it constitutes – and has done for fourteen hundred years – the most radical rejection of the political version of idolatry, statism. It is very difficult for programmed literates in this society to cut through to the clear tenets of Islam, for the Judaic and Christian perversions stand so strongly in the way either as, rightly, anathema, or else as ideals. The whole approach to understanding reality has a quite different texture than that known and defined in European languages, thus

a deep insight into the structure of the Arabic language itself would prove a better introduction to the metaphysic than a philosophical statement. The uncompromising tawhid that is affirmed does not add on any sort of 'god-concept'. Nor does it posit an infra-god, a grund-god, or even an over-god. Christian philosophers were so frightened by this position that when they met it, to stop people discovering the fantasy element in their trinitarian mythology they decided to identify it with pantheism in the hope of discrediting it. That they succeeded in this deception is an indication of how far the whole viewpoint has been kept out of reach of the literate savage society. Let it suffice here to indicate that there is no 'problem' about the nature of Allah. Nor do we consider it possible even to speak of it. No how, who or what or why. It is not hedging the matter in mystery. It is simply asking the wrong questions! The knowledge of Allah is specifically a personal quest in which the radical question that has to be asked is not even "who am I?" but "Where then are you going?"' See Allah.

shuhada : plural of shahid.

siddiq : a man of truth. Sincerity is his condition, not his adopted position.

sidrat al-muntaha : 'the lote-tree of the furthest limit', the place where form ends.

sirah : the historical study of the Prophet Muhammad's life, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

Sirat : the narrow bridge which must be crossed to enter the Garden.

Sirat al-Mustaqim : 'the Straight Path' of Islam.

siyam : fasting, from food and drink – and making love if you are married – during daylight, from the first light of dawn until sunset.

subh : morning, and in particular the obligatory dawn prayer which can be prayed at any time between first light (fajr - see above) and just before the sun rises.

subhana'llah : 'glory to Allah'.

Suffa : a verandah attached to the Prophet's Mosque in Madina where poor Muslims used to sleep.

sujud : the position of prostration, particularly in the prayer (salat – see above).

Sulayman : The Prophet Solomon, peace be on him.

sultan : king, ruler.

sunnah (plural - **sunan**) : a form, the customary practice of a person or group of people. It has come to refer almost exclusively to the practice of the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, but also comprises the customs of the First Generation of Muslims in Madina. It is a complete behavioural science that has been systematically kept outside the learning framework of this society. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said:

> **"I have left two matters with you. As long as you hold to them, you will not go the wrong way. They are the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet."**
>
> **(Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik: 46.1.3)**

surah : a large unit of Qur'an linked by thematic content, composed of ayat. There are 114 surahs in the Qur'an.

Surah Ya Sin : the heart of the Qur'an.

Surat'al-Fatiha : the opening surah of the Qur'an, the surah of both Opening and Victory:

Bismillahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim

Al-hamduli'llahi rabbi'l-alameen,
Ar-Rahmani'r-Rahim,
Maliki yawmi'd-deen.
Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'een.
Ihdina's-sirat al-mustaqim,
sirat alladheen an'amta alayhim
ghayri'l-maghdhubi alayhim wa la'dh-dhalleen.

Amin

Which means:

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Praise to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
the Merciful the Compassionate,
King of the Day of the Life-Transaction.
Only You we worship and only You we ask for help.
Lead us on the Straight Path,
The path of those whom You have blessed,
Not of those with whom You are angry,
and not of those who are astray.

Amen

(Qur'an: 1.1-7)

Recitation of Surat'al-Fatiha is an integral and essential part of the salat which means that every Muslim recites the Fatihah at least twenty times a day – and often many times more. It is thus the most often daily repeated statement on the face of the earth today:

Surat'al-Ikhlas : the surah of Sincerity:

Bismillahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim

Qul Huwa'llahu Ahad
Allahu's-Samad
Lam yalid wa lam yuwlad
Wa lam yakun lahu kufuwan Ahad.

Which means:

In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate

Say: He is Allah the One
Allah the Everlasting
No one is born from Him and He is not born from anything
And there is nothing like Him.

(Qur'an: 112.1-4)

The Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, said that Surat'al-Ikhlas is equal to one third of the

Qur'an. Its recitation gives you the freedom of action that only accompanies true sincerity.

Surat'al-Kahf : the surah of the Cave. It is said that its recitation is a protection against the Dajjal.

sutra : an object placed in front of a man praying so that people will pass beyond it and not 'break' his qiblah and concentration.

tabaraka'llah : 'blessed is Allah.'

Tabuk : a town in northern Arabia close to Sham. In the ninth year after the Hijrah, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, hearing that the Byzantines were gathering a large army to march against the Muslims, led a large expedition to Tabuk, on what was to be his last campaign, only to find that the Byzantine army had withdrawn back into its own territory.

tahajjud : voluntary prayers in the night between isha and fajr.

tahnia : a very sweet snack made principally from ground sesame seeds and honey or sugar and sometimes nuts; also called halwa.

Ta'if : an important town in the mountains, fifty miles to the east of Makka.

tajalli (plural - tajalliyat) : self-manifestation. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'The tajalli is the unveiling of a spiritual reality in the realm of vision. It is a direct-seeing into the nature of existence, a showing forth of the secrets of the One in the celestial and terrestrial realms.' And: 'A divine manifestation witnessed by the inner eye of the seeker. Outer experience is event, inner experience is vision. Mulk, the kingdom of outwardness, is the realm of event. Malakut, the kingdom of inwardness is the realm of vision. Jabarut, the kingdom of the source, is the realm of annihilation. Mulk is the realm of darknesses, malakut of lights, and jabarut of light upon light.'

takbir : the saying of Allahu akbar – Allah is greater. The prayer (salat – see above) begins with a takbir.

talbiya : the call that the pilgrims make to their Lord on the Hajj:

Labayk, Labayk, Allahumma Labayk.
La sharika lak, Labayk.
Inna'l-hamdu wa'n-ni'mata laka wa'l-mulk.
La sharika lak.

Which means:

I am totally at Your service, I am totally at Your service,
O Allah I am totally at Your service.
You have no partner, I am totally at Your service.
Surely the Praise and the Blessing are Yours and the Kingdom.
You have no partner.

tanzih:tashbih : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Tanzih is from NZH which means 'to keep something away from anything contaminating or impure'. It is to disconnect Allah from the forms, affirming that His Reality is beyond any association with the forms. It must be balanced with tashbih from ShBH meaning 'to make or consider something similar to some other thing' which affirms that He participates in the form-world, seeing is His and hearing is His.'

taqlid : garlanding sacrificial animals, especially hadys on the Hajj. In reference to fiqh, it means the following of previous authorities and the avoidance of ijtihad.

taqwa : being careful, knowing your place in the cosmos. Its proof is the experience of awe, of Allah, which inspires a person to be on guard against wrong action and eager for actions which please Him.

tarawih : extra night prayers in the month of fasting, Ramadan, in order to recite the Qur'an as fully as possible, or completely.

tarbush : a small round brimless hat, usually made from wool or felt, and either worn by itself or as the base of a turban.

tariqah : the Way.

tasbih : from the root SBH which means 'to swim', 'to glide through the stars', 'to glorify'; in this context a string of 99 beads and an 'alif', making 100, used to keep count when doing specified amounts of particular dhikrs, such as, for example, 20,000 'La ilaha

illa'llah'; or 1,000 'Surat'al-Ikhlas'; or 666 'Allah'; or 313 or 454 'hasbuna'llahu wa ni'm'al-wakil'; or 100 'astaghfirullah'; or 41 'Surah Ya Sin'; or 100 prayers on the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, such as, for example:

Allahumma salli ala sayyedina Muhammidan
abdika wa rasulika'n-nabiyyi'l-ummiyy
wa ala alihi wa sahbihi wa sallim.

Which means:

O Allah, bless our master Muhammad,
Your slave and Your Messenger, the unlettered Prophet,
and his family and his companions and grant them peace.

Generally speaking, such dhikrs need to be given with idhn by a Shaykh to his murid for them to be truly effective, for they are used like spiritual medicines. The Shaykh is the doctor and the murid is the patient. Only the Shaykh understands the nature of the illness and knows its cure, which varies from one person to another. However, no one needs idhn to recite the Qur'an, since we are commanded by Allah in the Qur'an to recite whatever is easy for us of it, and Allah also commands us in the Qur'an to ask blessings on the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and on his family and on his companions and on all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

tashahhud: to say the shahada. In the context of the prayer (salat – see above) it is a formula which includes the shahada. It is said in the final sitting position of each two rak'a cycle.

tashriq : the Days of Tashriq are the 11th, 12th and 13th of Dhu'l-Hijjah, the month of the Hajj, when the pilgrims sacrifice their hadys and stone the jamras at Mina. Since these are days of feasting, the Muslims are not permitted to fast during them.

taslim : giving the Muslim greeting of 'As-salaamu-alaykum' – 'Peace be on you'. The prayer (salat – see above) ends with a taslim.

tassawuf: Sufism. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Its preferred etymology is that it derives from suf, wool. Shaykh Hassan al-Basra said, "I saw forty of the people of Badr and they

all wore wool." This means that the sufi – tasawwafa has put on the wool. This is distinct from those who confirm the way of Islam with the tongue and by book learning. It is taking the ancient way, the primordial path of direct experience of the Real. Junayd said, "The sufi is like the earth, filth is flung on it but roses grow from it." He also said, "The sufi is like the earth which supports the innocent and the guilty, like the sky which shades everything, like the rain which washes everything." The sufi is universal. He has reduced and then eliminated the marks of selfhood to allow a clear view of the cosmic reality. He has rolled up the cosmos in its turn and obliterated it. He has gone beyond. The sufi has said "Allah" – until he has understood. All men and women play in the world like children. The sufi's task is to recognise the end in the beginning, accept the beginning in the end, arrive at the unified view. When the outward opposites are the same, and the instant is presence, and the heart is serene, empty and full, light on light, the one in the woollen cloak has been robed with the robe of honour and is complete. The Imam also said, "If I had known of any science greater than sufism I would have gone to it, even on my hands and knees."'

tawaf : circling the Ka'aba; tawaf is done in sets of seven circuits, after each of which it is necessary to pray two rak'as, preferably at or near the Maqam al-Ibrahim.

Tawaf Al-Ifada : the tawaf of the Ka'aba that the pilgrim must do after coming from Mina to Makka on the 10th of Dhu'l-Hijjah. It is one of the essential rites of the Hajj.

Tawaf Al-Qudum : the 'Tawaf on Arrival', the tawaf of the Ka'aba that the pilgrim must do on first entering the Haram in Makka. It is one of the essential rites of both the Hajj and the Umrah.

Tawaf Al-Wad'a : the 'Tawaf of Farewell', the farewell tawaf of the Ka'aba which every visitor to Makka should do before leaving. It should be connected directly to the trip of departure, and whoever stays on afterwards should do it again.

tawba : returning to correct action after error, turning away from wrong action to Allah and asking His Forgiveness, turning to face the Real whereas before one turned one's back.

tawhid : the doctrine of Divine Unity, Unity in its most profound sense. Allah is One in His Essence and His Attributes and His Acts. The whole universe and what it contains is One unified event which in itself has no reality. Allah is the Real. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit once wrote: 'Our Imam said, "It is a meaning which obliterates the outlines and joins the knowledges. Allah is as He always was. Tawhid has five pillars: it consists of the raising of the veil on the contingent, to attribute endlessness to Allah alone, to abandon friends, to leave one's country, and to forget what one knows and what one does not know." His greatest statement on tawhid, which Shaykh al-Akbar has called the highest of what may be said on the subject is, "The colour of the water is the colour of the glass." Commenting on this Shaykh Ibn Ajiba said, "This means that the exalted Essence is subtle, hidden and luminous. It appears in the outlines and the forms, it takes on their colours. Admit this and understand it if you do not taste it." Tawhid is itself a definition whose meaning is not complete for the one who holds to it until he has abandoned it or rather exhausted its indications and abandoned it for complete absorption in the One.' And: 'True tawhid is based on complete understanding and appreciation of the self. Until you know you do not exist you cannot know that only He exists. This idea is itself a veil over knowledge of this, and its final enemy.' The Prophet Muhammad said, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him, 'Whoever knows their self, truly knows their Lord.'

Tawrah : the Torah which was revealed to the Prophet Moses, peace be on him.

tayyamum : purification for prayer using clean dust, earth or stone, when water for ghusl or wudu is either unavailable or would be detrimental to health. Tayyamum is done by striking the earth or rubbing the stone with the palms of the hands and then wiping the face and hands and forearms.

Uhud : a mountain just outside Madina, much loved by the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, where three years after the Hijrah, the Muslims lost a battle against the Makkan idol-worshippers when some of them disobeyed the Prophet's orders. Many great companions, and in par-

ticular the uncle of the Prophet, Hamza, the 'lion of Allah', were killed in this battle.

ulama : plural of alim.

Ummah : the body of the Muslims as one distinct and integrated community.

Umm al-Muminin : 'Mother of the Believers', an honorary title given to the wives of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Umm al-Qur'an : 'Mother of the Qur'an', the opening surah of the Qur'an which is called Al-Fatiha; also said to be its source in the Unseen.

Umrah : the lesser pilgrimage to the Ka'aba in Makka and the performance of its rites in the protected area which surrounds the Ka'aba. You can go on Umrah at any time of the year.

✿ ✿ ✿

wa alaikum as-salaam : 'and on you be peace'.

wahy : revelation.

wajib : a necessary part of the shari'ah but not obligatory.

wali : a guardian, a person who has responsibility for another person; used particularly for the person who 'gives' a woman in marriage. Also someone who is a 'friend' of Allah, thus possessing the quality of wilaya.

warid (plural - **waridat**) : what descends on the awareness of the student while performing dhikr or sitting in the company of the Shaykh. Shaykh Abdal-Qadir once wrote: 'The warid is sometimes described as the unwinding of the talisman, for its effect is at the core of self experience and it is a kind of un-doing. The warid is the first stage of awakening. In the warid the experienced field of reality is at last tasted as being with less and less separateness. It is the first oncoming of gatheredness. The objects are recognised but can no longer be distinguished. Action may still be possible but not speech. It is as if the body's contours – not the intellect's – were the perimeter of one's vision, so that the room or place where you are

is part of your body which you can feel and recognise as shimmering and melting – that is, its melting and yours are one event. Here there is no compassion for the other, but compassion is itself the reality of the state, without other. This is the first hint that the self/universe is one cosmic situation. Anything can unlock it, a glance from the Shaykh, the action of another faqir, or a mithal sung in the Diwan.'

wasila : something which makes something else take place. Also the highest station with Allah on the Last Day, reserved for the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

wilaya : friendship, in particular with Allah. Wilayat, the condition of the wali, refers uniquely to the gnostic station of a person. The station of the wali is the station of knowledge of the Real by direct seeing. The greatest wali is like a drop compared to the ocean of the Prophet Muhammad, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him.

wird (plural - **awrad**) : A unit of dhikr constructed to contain in it certain patterns of knowledge and self awakening. They are medicines, and their recitation makes them effective in altering the self-form of the student. Some wirds can last hours, others only a few minutes.

wudu : ritual washing of the hands, mouth, nostrils, face, forearms, head, ears and feet with water alone so as to be pure for the prayer. You must already be in ghusl for wudu to be effective. You should ensure that your private parts and under-clothes are clean before doing wudu. Once you have done wudu you remain in wudu until it is broken by any of the conditions which make it necessary to have a ghusl, emission of impurities from the private parts – urine, faeces, wind, prostatic fluid, or other discharge – loss of consciousness by whatever means – usually by sleep or fainting – physical contact between man and woman where sexual pleasure is either intended or experienced, touching your penis with the inside of your hand or fingers, and leaving Islam. It is necessary to be in ghusl and in wudu to do the salat and to hold a copy of the Qur'an. See tayyamum.

wuquf : stopping at Arafah and Muzdalifah. See mawqif.

Yahyah : the Prophet Yahyah, peace be on him, often referred to as John the Baptist.

yaqin : certainty. It has three stages:

ilm al-yaqin – knowledge of certainty.
ayn al-yaqin – source of certainty.
haqq al-yaqin – truth of certainty.

The Raja of Mahmudabad defined them thus :

You are told there is a fire in the forest.
You reach the fire in the forest and see it.
You are the fire in the forest.

Yathrib : the ancient name for Madina al-Munawarra, the Illuminated City, before Islam.

yawm : a day.

Yawm Al-Arafah : the 'Day of Arafah', the 9th of Dhu'l-Hijjah. One of the essential rites of the Hajj is to pray dhur and asr together on the plain of Arafah and then to stand there, either on the Jebel Ar-Rahmah or as near to it as possible, between the times of asr and maghrib making duas to Allah.

Yawm Al-Jumua : the day of the jumua.

Yawm Al-Qiyama : the'Day of Standing', the Last Day, also known as 'Yawm Al-Ba'ath' – the Day of Rising; 'Yawm Al-Hashr' – the Day of Gathering; 'Yawm al-Qiyama' – the Day of Standing; 'Yawm al-Mizan' – the Day of the Balance; 'Yawm al-Hisab' – the Day of Reckoning; 'Yawm ad-Deen' – the Day of the Life Transaction; and 'Yawm al-Akhira' – the Day of the Next World. It will be followed by Eternity, either in the Garden or in the Fire, forever.

Yawm As-Sabt : the 'Day of the Sabbath', Saturday.

Yemeni corner: the corner of the Ka'aba facing south towards the Yemen.

Zabur : the Psalms which were revealed to the Prophet David, peace be on him.

Zakariyya : the Prophet Zacchariah, peace be on him, who looked after Maryam in the Temple of Solomon when she was a child, peace be on her, and who was the father of the Prophet Yahyah, peace be on him.

zakat : the wealth tax obligatory on Muslims each year, usually payable in the form of one fortieth of surplus wealth which is more than a certain fixed minimum amount, which is called the nisab. Zakat is payable on accumulated wealth, merchandise, certain crops, certain live-stock, and subterranean and mineral wealth. As soon as it is collected it is redistributed to those in need, as defined in the Qur'an and hadith. Zakat is one of the indispensable pillars of Islam.

zakat al-fitr : a small obligatory head-tax imposed on every responsible Muslim who has the means for himself and his dependants. It is paid once yearly at the end of Ramadan before the Id Al-Fitr.

Zamzam : the well in the Haram of Makka which has the best water in the world!

zahid : the one who does without. It does not mean ascetic. The one who is zahid no longer needs or desires the thing he does without, so his avoiding it eases his way and does not result in a struggle or denial.

zawiyya : a corner, the building used as a meeting place by the Shaykhs of Instruction.

zuhud : doing without. See zahid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Qur'an : the uncreated word of Allah.

The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an : A translation of the Qur'an into English by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall.

A Dictionary and Glossary of the Qur'an : John Penrice. Curzon Press 1979.

Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik : A translation by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Bewley. Diwan Press 1982.

The Foundations of Islam of Qadi Iyad : A translation by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Bewley. Diwan al-Amir Publications 1982.

Ash-Shifa of Qadi Iyad : A translation by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Bewley. Madinah Press 1990.

The Diwan of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib : Diwan Press 1978.

Diwans of the Darqawa : A translation by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Bewley. Diwan Press 1980.

The Meaning of Man of Sidi Ali al-Jamal of Fez : A translation by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Bewley. Diwan Press 1978.

The Darqawi Way of Shaykh Moulay al-Arabi ad-Darqawi : A translation by Aisha Abdar-Rahman Bewley. Diwan Press 1979.

Qur'anic Tawhid : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit. Diwan Press 1981.

The Book of Strangers : Ian Dallas. Victor Gollancz 1972.

The Way of Muhammad : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit. Diwan Press 1974.

The Hundred Steps : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit. Diwan Press 1979.

Self-Knowledge : Shaykh Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit. Diwan Press 1978.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Way Back is the sequel to *The Difficult Journey*, which contains the author's account of his journey to Makka and his description of the Hajj, the pilgrimage. *The Way Back* begins where *The Difficult Journey ends*.

Every year thousands and thousands and thousands of Muslims from all parts of the world make their way to the city of Makka in order to do the Hajj, which every Muslim is obliged to do at least once in their lifetime if they are able to do so. The pilgrims travel to Makka by every means available – by jet, by boat, by train, by coach, by car, by motor bike and scooter, by bicycle, and even sometimes by camel, on horseback, and on foot.

After the rites of the Hajj have been completed, the time comes, sooner or later, for all the pilgrims to continue on their way, and to return from where they have come. Many of these pilgrims take the opportunity to visit the city of Madina al-Munawarra on their way back, the Illuminated City, where the Prophet Muhammad and many of his companions and followers are buried, may the blessings and peace of Allah be on him and his family and his companions and all who follow him and them with sincerity in what they are able until the Last Day.

This is what the author himself did, and *The Way Back* begins with his description of the journey from Makka to Madina and his stay in this blessed city. The book then continues with an account of his experiences on the journey back to England, tracing his route up through Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey, and then across to Greece and over to Italy, up to France and finally across the Channel, describing many of the places that he visited and many of the people that he met along the way, and ending where *The Difficult Journey* first began.

This book will accordingly not only be of interest to those who love to travel, and to those who wish to understand Islam, but also, more specifically, to those who intend to visit Madina themselves, and to those who have already done so.