

The Wisdom of the Hikam

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From the *Hikam* of Ibn Ata'illah al-Iskanderi
amplified by Ibn 'Ajiba's commentary

Iqadh al-Himam

Compiled by
Abdalhaqq Bewley

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Authors: Shayhk Ahmad ibn ‘Ata’illah al-Iskanderi and
Shayhk Ahmad ibn ‘Ajibah
Compiled by: Abdalhaqq Bewley

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ وَ كَلَّمَ اللّٰهُ عَلٰی سِیْدِنَا
مُحَمَّدٍ وَ اٰلِهِ وَ صَلَّوْا وَسَلِّمُوا

Introduction

Over a period of several years I have regularly used sentences from the *Hikam* of Shaykh Ahmad ibn Ata'illah al-Iskandari together with the commentary on them from *Iqadh al-Himam* by Shaykh Ahmad ibn 'Ajiba as the basis of short discourses given during weekly gatherings of *dhikr* in Bradford. It is these that make up the text of this volume. It is not a complete translation of the *Hikam*, since only about half of the sentences are included, nor is it a complete translation of Ibn 'Ajiba's commentary on the sentences that are included, since some abridgement has taken place, owing to time constraints, and occasionally short passages from other sources have been introduced. Nevertheless over time a significant body of work has built up and it seemed worth publishing what there is because, as far as I know, there is as yet no English translation of *Iqadh al-Himam* and there was enough of Ibn 'Ajiba's brilliant and magisterial commentary on the sentences of Shaykh Ibn Ata'illah's *Hikam* available to make publication definitely worthwhile.

It is possible that a translation of the whole of the *Iqadh al-Himam* will be brought out at some point but that is unlikely to happen in the near future. In the meantime it is hoped that this present compilation will give readers access to a substantial portion of the sublime wisdom inherent in Shaykh Ibn Ata'illah's incomparable *Hikam* as expounded and illuminated by the scintillating commentary of Shaykh Ibn 'Ajiba in his *Iqadh al-Himam*.

Abdalhaqq Bewley

1

مِنْ عَلاَمَةِ الإِعْتِمَادِ عَلَى الْعَمَلِ ،
نُقْصَانُ الرَّجَاءِ عِنْدَ وُجُودِ الزَّلَلِ .

1: A sure sign of reliance on action is a loss of hope when you slip up

The word “reliance” means to lean on something and depend on it, while the word “action” refers to a movement of either the body or the heart. If an action accords with the *shari’a*, it is called obedience and if it contravenes *the shari’a*, it is called disobedience. The people of this science divide action into three categories: actions of the *shari’a*, actions of the *tariqa*, and actions of the *haqiqa*; or you might say, actions of Islam, actions of Iman and actions of Ihsan; or actions of worship (*ibada*), actions of slavehood (*ubudiyya*) and actions of absolute slavehood (*ubuda*), which is in fact pure freedom; or actions of the people of the beginning, actions of the people of the middle and actions of the people of the end. *Shari’a* is to worship Allah, *tariqa* is to direct yourself towards Allah,

and *haqiqa* is to witness Allah; or you might say *shari'a* is to put the outward right, *tariqa* is to put the inward right, and *haqiqa* is to put the secret right.

The limbs are put right by three things: repentance (*tawba*), fearful awareness (*taqwa*) and going straight (*istiqama*); the heart is put right by three things: sincerity (*ikhlas*), trueness (*sidq*) and tranquillity (*tuma'nina*); and the secret is put right by three things: watchfulness (*muraqaba*), witnessing (*mushahada*) and direct knowledge of Allah (*ma'rifa*); or you might say, the outward is put right by acting by what is commanded and avoiding what is forbidden; the inward by ridding it of base characteristics and adorning it with noble characteristics; and the secret, which in this instance means the spirit (*ruh*), by humbling and breaking it, until it becomes disciplined and able to take on courtesy (*adab*), humility and good character.

When we talk of actions here we are only referring to those actions that enable the purification of the limbs, heart and spirit to be accomplished and the necessary ones for each of them, in this context, have already been specified. Awareness and gnosis of Allah, on the other hand, are the fruits of purification and inner refinement. As the secret is purified, it fills up with awareness, gnosis and illumination.

It is not valid to go on to a further spiritual station until the previous one has been fully realised. As the Shaykh says elsewhere: "He who has a radiant beginning will have a radiant end." So you should not undertake the actions of *tariqa* until you have fulfilled the actions of *shari'a* and accustomed your limbs to performing them. This is done

by sincere repentance through fulfilling all its conditions, by fearful awareness through carrying out all its elements, and by going straight in its fullest sense, that is by following the Messenger ﷺ in his words, actions, and states.

Once the outward has been purified and illuminated by the *shari'a*, you may move from the outward actions of the *shari'a* to the inward actions of the *tariqa*, which involve purifying yourself from the attributes of the normal human condition as will be discussed in due course. When you have freed yourself from these attributes of humanness, you will be adorned with the attributes of spirituality (*ruhaniyya*), which entails maintaining correct *adab* with Allah when His *tajalliyat* – His self-manifestations – arrive. When that happens, the limbs are relieved of their tiredness and all that remains is good *adab*. One of the people of full realisation said, “He who arrives at the reality of Islam will not flag in action; he who arrives at the reality of Iman will not be able to act by other than Allah; and he who arrives at the reality of Ihsan will not be able to turn to anyone except Allah.”

In travelling through these stations, the seeker (*murid*) should not rely on himself nor on his own actions, state, or strength, but should rather rely on the bounty of his Lord, His gift of success, and His guidance and direction. Allah says in the Qur'an: “*Your Lord creates and chooses whatever He wills. The choice is not theirs,*” (28:68) and: “*If your Lord had wanted to, He would have made mankind into one community but they persist in their differences, except for those your Lord has mercy on.*” (11:118) The Prophet ﷺ said,

“None of you will enter the Garden by virtue of his actions.” The [Companions present] asked, “Not even you, Messenger of Allah?” He replied, “Not even me, unless Allah envelops me in His mercy.”

The hallmark of reliance on Allah is that you feel no lessening of hope when you commit disobedient actions and no increase of it when you do good actions; or you might say that heedlessness does not augment your fear nor does wakeful awareness augment your hope. For such people, fear and hope are always in equal balance because their fear arises from witnessing the Divine Majesty and their hope from witnessing Divine Beauty. Allah’s Majesty and Beauty are unchangeable, never increasing nor decreasing, so what stems from them never changes either, unlike in the case of those who rely on action. When their good actions are few, their hope is diminished and when their good actions are many, their hope is increased. This is because of their associating something else (*shirk*) with their Lord and the sheer fact of their own ignorance. If they were to be annihilated to themselves and attain going on by their Lord, they would be relieved of their toiling and gain gnosis of their Lord.

What is indispensable is a perfect shaykh, who will take you from the toils of your lower self to a place where you will find rest in the witnessing of your Lord. The perfect shaykh is the one who relieves you of toil, not the one who burdens you with it. “He who directs you to action, has tired you out and he who directs you to this world, has defrauded you, but he who directs you to Allah has been

true to you,” as was confirmed by Shaykh Ibn Mashish رحمته الله. Being directed to Allah is being directed to forget the lower self, for when you forget yourself, you remember your Lord. Allah Almighty says: *‘Remember your Lord when you forget’* (18:24), i.e. when you forget Him. The cause of tiredness and toil is remembering the lower self and worrying about its concerns and portions; anyone free of that, finds nothing but rest.

The words of Allah: *“We created man in trouble”* (90:4), refer specifically to the people of the veil (*hijab*), or you might say, people whose lower selves are still alive. As for him whose lower self has died, the Almighty says of him: *“If he is one of Those Brought Near, there is solace and sweetness and a Garden of Delight”* (56:88), meaning that he will have the solace of reunion, the sweetness of beauty, and the Garden of the delight of perfection. The Almighty says: *“They will not be affected by any tiredness there”* (15:48) i.e. toil. Rest, however, can only be reached after much toil and victory can only be achieved after hard pursuit of it, for *“The Garden is surrounded by things which are hateful to you.”*

We read in the book *Solving the Riddles*, “Know that you will not attain to the stages of nearness until you have climbed six steep slopes. The first is weaning the limbs from opposing the *shari‘a*; the second is weaning the self from its usual comforts; the third is weaning the heart from human frivolities; the fourth is weaning the self from its natural turbidity; the fifth is weaning the spirit from any echoes of sensory experience; the sixth is weaning the intellect from all illusory imaginings. When you reach the

top of the first slope you overlook the sources of the wisdom of the heart; from the top of the second you see the secrets of direct Divine knowledge; from the top of the third, you see indicators of the intimate converse of the *malakut*; from the top of the fourth, the shining lights of the higher stages of proximity; from the top of the fifth, the lights of the vision of the landscape of love; and from the top of the sixth, you descend into the meadows of the Holiest Presence, and there you withdraw by the ethereal subtleties of intimacy you witness in them from the gross densities of sensory experience. When Allah desires to single you out and make you one of His select few, He will give you to drink a draught from the cup of His love, a drink that will increase your thirst, a drink whose savour will increase your yearning, whose proximity will intensify your quest, and whose headiness will augment your restlessness.”

Some excellent scholars have found difficulty in squaring up Allah’s words, “*Enter the Garden for what you did*” (16:32) with the words of the Prophet ﷺ, “None of you will enter the Garden by his actions.” The solution to this apparent paradox lies in the fact that the Book and the *Sunna* alternate between the *shari’a* and the *haqiqa*, or you might say between clarifying the *shari’a* aspect of something – its outward appearance – and its *haqiqa* aspect – its inner reality. The same thing may have its *shari’a* aspect defined in one part of the Qur’an and its *haqiqa* aspect in another and the same applies to the *Sunna*. Alternatively, the Qur’an may define the *shari’a* aspect of a particular thing in one place with the *Sunna* defining its *haqiqa* aspect, and

vice versa. The Messenger ﷺ acts as an explainer of what Allah reveals, as Allah makes clear when He says: “*We have sent down to the Reminder to you so that you can make clear to mankind what has been sent down to them...*” (16:44) So Allah’s words: “*Enter the Garden for what you did*” give the *shari’a* aspect for the people governed by Divine Wisdom, who are the people of *shari’a*; while the words of the Prophet ﷺ: “None of you will enter the Garden by his actions” give the *haqiqa* aspect for the people governed by Divine Power, who are the people of *haqiqa*.

Similarly, the words of the Almighty: “*But you will not will unless Allah wills*” (81:29) provide the *haqiqa* aspect, while the words of the Prophet ﷺ: “When one of you does a good action, a good action is written for him,” provide the *shari’a* aspect. In short, the *Sunna* qualifies the Qur’an and the Qur’an qualifies the *Sunna*. So everyone must have two eyes: one looking to the *haqiqa* of things and the other to their *shari’a* aspect. If someone finds that the Qur’an talks about the *shari’a* aspect of something in one place, he will know for certain that its *haqiqa* aspect is defined elsewhere in the Qur’an or *Sunna*; and, likewise, if he finds that the *Sunna* talks about the *shari’a* aspect of something in one place, he will know for certain that its *haqiqa* aspect is defined elsewhere in the *Sunna* or the Qur’an. So it is clear that there is no contradiction whatsoever between the *ayat* and the *hadith*.