

MOMENTS OF
ETERNITY

IN THE PRESENCE
OF THE SHAYKH

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H I C S A L T A P R E S S

3. *“A Good Car?”*

THE SHAYKH'S PRAISE
FOR AN OLD CAR

FOR OUR JOURNEY to the Shaykh, ‘Abdul Majid Schrade in Freiburg had let us use his old jalopy, an ancient Ford Transit, thus enabling our first visit to Cyprus and to the Shaykh. Originally he had planned to travel to Cyprus as well, but his wife Lutfiya did not agree to this. During our trip, the vehicle had given us all sorts of trouble.

The Turkish border guards had clearly been doubtful as to whether they should even let us into the country with this vehicle, as none of us were registered in the car papers. When we quoted German law at them, they countered neatly and succinctly, “German law is German law, Turkish law is Turkish law.”

But there had also been technical problems. The lever for the headlights, for example, which controls the selection of sidelights, dipped or full beam, did not lock into position for the dipped beam, but always reverted to the sidelight or full beam position, so when driving at night it had to be manually held in place with the left hand for the normal dipped beam position, leaving only the right hand to do both the steering and the shifting of gears.

After consulting with the owner of the car in Germany, we had decided to leave the jalopy on Cyprus as a present to the Shaykh, who would certainly get good use of it for driving out into the fields and orchards with his helpers.

And so it happened that one day when we had driven to a hilltop not far from Lefke — the sea was plainly visible — and were standing by the car, the Shaykh knocked the left front fender with his stick, and looking at me he asked,

“It’s a good car?”

I answered, “The engine is quite good, but it is very rusty,” to which the Shaykh replied,

“That doesn’t matter. It’s an old-fashioned car, like me, I’m an old-fashioned person!”

As he spoke these words, he gazed at me with his bright blue eyes in a way that made me forget everything around me and led me to believe that I was all alone with the Shaykh on this planet, or even in another world. *Mā shā’ Allāh!*

Many years later, my friend ‘Abdul Wadud Stannicki told me that he and no less than a dozen other people had been there with us at the time. But that is how the stupendous gaze of our Shaykh works, it can transport you directly into another world.

23. *“I Need Help From
the Other Side of the Table”*

SPAETZLE AND GOULASH
AND SPAETZLE AND GOULASH

WE WERE IN AUGSBURG at Shaykh ‘Alā’ud-dīn’s spacious apartment, the paper tablecloths were rolled out. I was sitting just at the point where the men’s row ended and the women’s row began. Lady Hagar sat next to me on my right. Pots and plates were brought, cutlery passed out, and the Shaykh sat down across from me, looked at me and called:

“I need help from the other side of the table.”

Then he and I distributed the food together. The meal consisted of spaetzle and goulash. First I spooned out the spaetzle onto the plate, then the Shaykh ladled on the goulash and sauce – hmm, very tasty! Since the noodles kept sticking to my scoop, I had to knock it against the plate so that they would fall into it. Sometimes the spaetzle also dropped onto the paper next to the plate, and I would call out, “*Astaghfirullāh!*” The Shaykh immediately emptied his goulash ladle over the plate, saying, “*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh!*”

In this way we filled the plates together, me piling on the spaetzle, the Shaykh ladling out the goulash,

in a lovely alternation of *astaghfirullāh* and *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*.

It is an honour and a privilege to dish out food and blessings onto the plates of our companions and to fill them with goodness, especially in the presence of our Shaykh, even interacting with him.

50. “*Doctor Salim,
Your Mind Will Run Away!*”

HOW EVERY PART OF CREATION PRAISES ITS CREATOR

ONE DAY our Shaykh gave a talk about the fact that all things, all creatures make *tasbīḥ*, that is, they praise their Creator.

Once the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, held up a handful of pebbles picked up from the ground, showing them to his astonished companions who were at that moment able to hear the *dhikr* of the stones. The *dhikr* of water is particularly impressive, he said, however, we only know a few types of water such as spring water, river water, lake water or water that comes out of the tap, but besides these there exist completely different forms of water.

“When you hear the *dhikr* of this water, Doctor Salim, your mind will run away!”

And he looked at me as he did so often when he was giving a *sohbet* in English. And, as was so often

the case, after the *sohbet* I needed to go home quickly and lie down, in order to digest the concentrated blessing of our Shaykh.

Al-ḥamdu li-llāh! – O Allah, bless our Shaykh and give him the best of everything in his present abode! – *al-Fātiḥa*.

56. „So Much Courage!”

A HOJA SHOULD NOT WEAR THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

A GAIN IT WAS RAMADAN and the Night of Power, *laylatu l-qadr* had come, and we had traveled in several cars from the Ziya Pasha Mosque, our mosque in Dali to the Hala Sultan Tekke to spend the holiest night of Ramadan at this very special place.

Years ago, as the local representative of the Shaykh, I had arranged with the Minister of Antiquities for this mosque, which is run as a museum, to remain open for us “until dawn”, so that we could celebrate this night of nights there, *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*.

A year ago the Greek Cypriot administration and the Islamic authorities of the Turkish part of Cyprus had appointed Shaykh Shakir to be Mufti for the Greek side of the island, and ever since he had presided over the festivities conducted here on a grand scale, and regularly busloads of Muslims

from the Turkish side were being brought there. Several Turkish television stations would sometimes broadcast live on this holy night at Umm Ḥaram bint Miḥān, the companion of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. “*Kandil mübarek!*”

I had just prayed two *raka‘āt* of *ṣalāt taḥiyyatu l-masjid*, the prayer of greeting when entering a mosque, when I looked up and saw a whole group of Turkish hojas, six or seven of them, who were so uniformly clad in the standard pre-wrapped plastic turban and identical beige nylon jubba that they appeared to have been produced by a factory assembly line. Nearly beardless, each one of them also wore a tie.

I knew that our Shaykh hated the wearing of neckties by Muslims, the secret sign of the cross of the Maltese, and I remembered the very first thing Shaykh Fariduddin did when he first met me many years ago as a newcomer to the *dhikr* circle of Shaykh Mustafa in Freiburg: with sweet, kind words he took the tie off the nattily dressed young man, may Allah sanctify his soul. Muslims adhere to the prophet’s word: “You will be counted among those people whom you resemble (in appearance and behaviour).” To wear the symbol of the cross around one’s neck as a Muslim, as an Imam who was to lead the *tarāwīḥ* prayer on the holy Night of Power, was simply outrageous!

Dressed in a large white turban and black jubba, I walked onto the stage, — *maddad, yā Sayyidī!* — and

the hojas jumped up respectfully to greet me, the *ak sakal*, the “whitebeard” that I had become.

I explained to them that with their knotted ties they had tied the symbol of Christianity around their necks and that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and give him peace, had said, “*man tashabba-ha bi-qawmin fa-huwa minhum.*” Please take off your ties on this holy night!

This caused some excitement among the Imams, one of whom wrapped his jubba around himself so that his tie was no longer visible, and they were undecided as to what to do.

Then Shaykh Shakir had hastily burst onto the scene and greeted me volubly, “Shaykh Salim, *as-salāmu ‘alaykum!*” He embraced me warmly with a brotherly kiss, and in effect he had thwarted my action. The hojas were relieved, for some people from among the congregation had come up and kissed my hand in a show of agreement. Then the *tarāwīḥ* prayer began.

After the prayer, the leading Mufti-Hoja spoke to me and explained that they applied the principle: “If the important matters are in order, one need not worry about the less important ones.”

In response to this, I took from my various pockets, one by one, a *tasbīḥ*, prayer beads, a *miswāk*, tooth stick, and a penknife, and as I showed these to him I explained,

“With us, it is exactly the other way around. We start with the small things, and the larger issues are build upon the lesser ones.” Then I grabbed his

necktie with both hands, and pulled on it in horizontally, and told him that after all such a thing was only good for leading sheep, goats or donkeys. Finally, hand and arm pointing north (towards Turkey), I said, “This is only the *sunna* of that one! ...” The Mufti countered my last remark with an emphatic “No, no, no!” which to me appeared to express that he knew exactly whom I had meant.

I had sent a written report of those events to the Shaykh. A few weeks later, after one of his evening Internet live-broadcasts, our Shaykh sent all visitors out of there room, only I was to stay behind.

When we were alone, I kissed his hands and he gave me a hug and said that he was very happy about what I had done at Hala Sultan in that *laylatu l-qadr*. “So much courage!” The Shaykh praised my “pluck”. He said that he was proud of me.

That reassured me, and made me very happy. For in the meantime, various people had complained that I had violated the honour of the hojas by making this scene at the Hala Sultan Tekke. That it had been bad *adab*, bad behaviour. And I had wondered whether they might even be right about this. But now it was clear that our Shaykh valued very much just what these people considered bad behaviour. *Al-hamdu li-llāh!*

Some months later we met the mufti at the car slot of Hala Sultan: without a tie, my commentary: “Oh, you look beautiful without a tie!” has been answered by his assistant saying “*man tashabbaha bi-qawmin fa-huwa minhum.*” – *Mā shā’ Allāh!*