

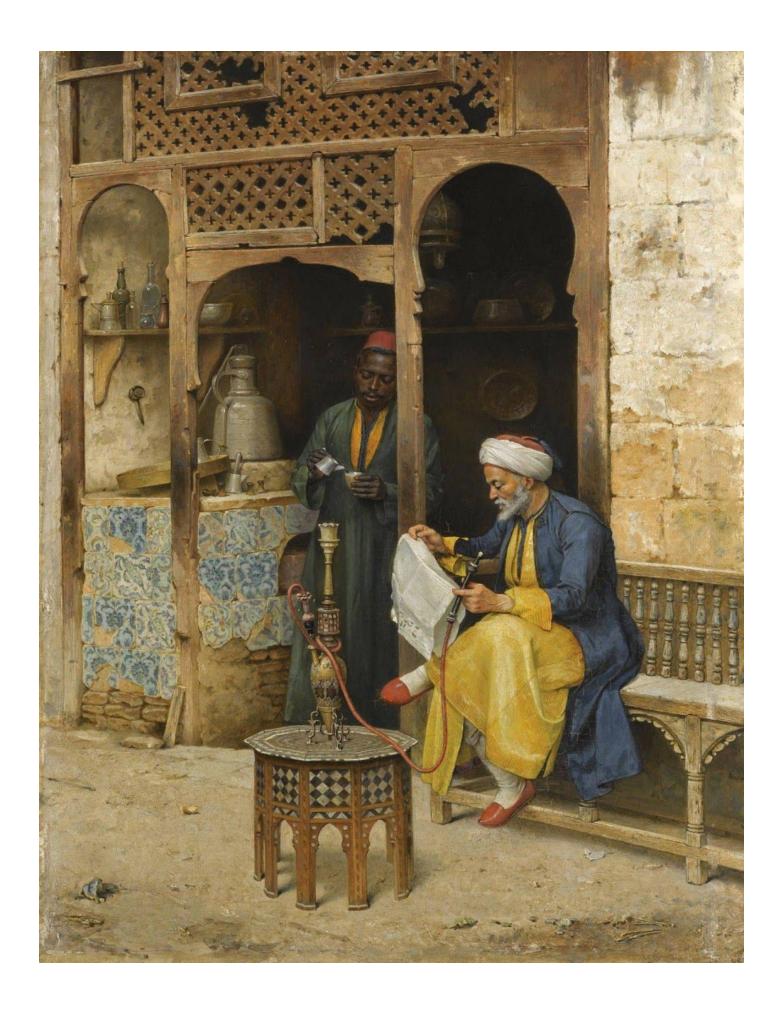




I don't know about the town wherein you live, but in my town of birth many a coffee-house sells other stimulating stuff than coffee. The dervish who will visit the coffee-house in the following story, lives in a far away town, in times long forgotten. The story has nothing to do with you and me except when your name is such that you are very much praised.

The main character is not a dervish, although a dervish appears in the story. This dervish will visit someone, whose name is Ahmad. Who is Ahmad? He is a hardworking young man and has taken over the coffee-house of his father after his death. Ahmad has a beautiful face and has beautiful manners. Beauty is a mystery in itself. Allâh is beautiful and He loves Beauty. You can imagine that many people like it very much to meet this young and attractive Ahmad.

Yâ Qawîy is a dervish *dhikr!* Where is the dervish of this story? Is he someone who likes to drink strong *qahwa* in the coffee-house or will he visit Ahmad for another purpose?





The Coffee-House

The coffee-house of Ahmad consists of a huge room made warm by felt carpets, fur-lined covers and brightly coloured pillows. In winter, a *bukhârî* - a traditional stove - is burning and this stove has been transported all the way on the back of a camel. Local people and travellers enjoy a water-pipe, a *hookah*: Fire in its belly, tears on its outside!

In the coffee-house, a supply of water is permanently on the boil in copper *samovars*. Next to excellent strong coffee, pots of warming black tea or refreshing green tea, await the traveller. It is in such places that news is exchanged and that you can hear the storytellers and singers.

A storyteller may draw our attention by saying: "Yakî bûd wa yakî na-bûd...

There was a Persian *shâh* who wanted to know what he could say on each occasion that always would be true. He summoned four dervishes, one from each border, of his mighty throne, to write words always true. These dervishes meditated intensely for a night and a day and found these words:

În ham mîgozarad These things, too, shall pass away!

A Sufi troubadour may suddenly produce the following words, written by some shaykh or pir:

> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me, If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, Absent thee from felicity a while, And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, To tell my story.

In the East storytelling is an art. These storytellers have a wonderful memory. They will tell stories of love and romance. They will tell stories about kings and their court. They will tell stories about dervishes visiting coffee-houses.

The stories narrated by them have a marvellous flight of imagination. The stories serve as a change from the day's exacting duties to night's sweet rest and repose. They constitute an innocent diversion and a recreation. As a matter of fact, the stories are meant to divert the attention for the time being from the affairs of state, domestic worry or from some lurking tension. The stories are told in the night and they also serve as an aid to sleep.

At this very moment a gypsy visits the coffee house of Ahmad, hoping to sell some semi-precious stones. She starts loudly explaining the inward significance of several of these objects:

Silver and gold: truthfulness

and sincerity

Ruby and quartz: wisdom

Pearl: knowledge of unity

Emerald: piety

Turquoise: worship

Amber: austerity

Sapphire: moderation

Diamonds: conjecture and

penetrating scrutiny

Enamel: assiduity in

understanding

Glass: tenderness of heart Bezoar: antidote to spiritual

poison

Porcelain: Cognitions in

certitude

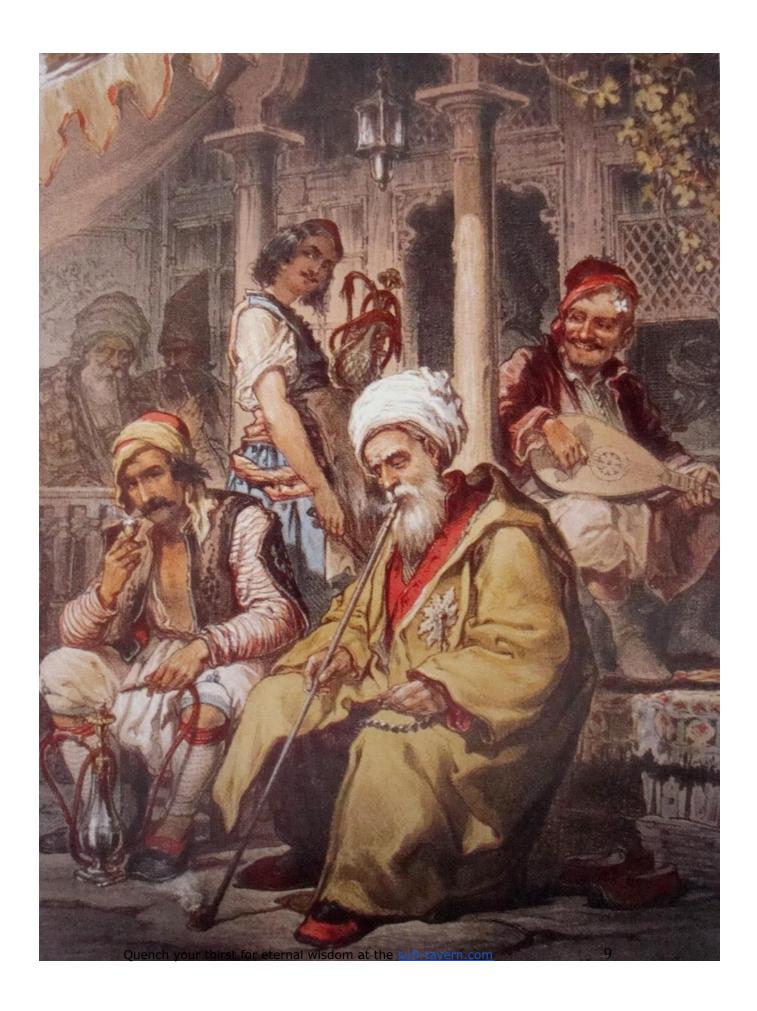
Lodestone: loving-kindness

She tries to sell a rather costly ring in the coffee-house. It symbolises the cosmos. A central red ruby signifies the sun, which is surrounded by six other stones, each in an orbit around the Sun:

- The white moonstone, of course, represents the Moon
- The yellow citrine represents Mercury
- Venus is represented by the green emerald
- Mars is represented by the red garnet stone
- Jupiter is represented by the blue topaz
- Saturn is represented by the black quartz

Because no one wants to buy this ring, Ahmad serves a free meal and a cup of coffee to this gypsy.

When she leaves, she turns to Ahmad and says: "You are a kind man. You'll never see me again, but a dervish will come and he'll bring you a present on my behalf".





The Dervish Appears...

The dervish appears the next day! Ahmad doesn't like to work, closes his coffee-house and makes a long walk in the mountains just because he feels like it. Suddenly he sees a dervish walking in front of him. The dervish gives him a sign to follow him.

The two of them are now very high in the mountains. Ahmad wants to say something to the dervish, but the dervish gives him a sign to be silent and listen! Ahmad sees the grass in the valley below them moving in the wind. He is listening and then he truly perceives: *The grass is singing!*

The dervish immediately turns to Ahmad, saying: "Beware of dervishes bearing gifts!"

He gives Ahmad a Stone, but continues by saying something about the sound of the singing grass:

"Every sound in the world is a celebration of Allâh. That is, strangely enough, even true of sounds consisting of ugly words. Such words are ugly words *and* such words are praising Allâh.

You've heard a certain manifestation take place on earth, because a life-giving wind made the grass dance with joy. Let's return to your coffee-house, because a violent wind will cause a change in the weather".

When Ahmad and the dervish are sitting in the coffee-house, a thunderstorm has started in the mountains. The dervish explains that something has changed the wind into a burning wind:

"The lightning bolt is adjacent to the fire element. The air gets ignited by an intense movement, when a violent wind splits the lower clouds. We are now hearing the thunder, which is another praise of Allâh, at present taking place in the sky. An angel, called thunder, is a heavenly creature made from air, just as human beings are mostly consisting of water. The sound that you and I call thunder is in fact the praise of Allâh by that angel".

The dervish, sipping from his coffee, proceeds by telling Ahmad more about his gift, the Stone:

"The Stone is called *Iksîr*. The Stone has two colours: yellow and black. When you look at its top, the outer part is yellow. It surrounds an inner circle that has a black colour".

The dervish explains this to Ahmad:

"The Stone shows the union of the opposites of light and dark. As you can see, it has a ring of golden sunlight, standing for awareness, and the black lunar world, which points to forgetfulness. The Sun represents the spirit, $r\hat{u}h$, and the Moon the soul, nafs, so the task

depicted in this Stone deals with perfecting the receptivity of the soul to the spirit. The Stone is a two-oneness, contained in the outer circle that can be understood as a symbol of the individual adept. The adept is able to contain and bear the separate-united opposites of his or her inner wholeness".

Ahmad looks rather puzzled when hearing this explanation. The dervish of course knows that Ahmad is as yet unable to realise the paradoxical truth of his words.

The dervish happens to see beyond his present state and is aware of Ahmad's potential for inward growth:

"When the gypsy showed the ring in your coffee-house, you were unaware of the *sinâ'a ilâhîyya* – the Divine Art that had created it. The seven stones point to seven heavenly bodies, to seven subtle faculties and to seven levels of spiritual development".

Ahmad still experiences egoistic fire of bodily drives and dark fantasies like every youth. Spiritual development is not something that interests him.

"What is the practical use of this Stone?" says Ahmad.

"That is a good question," answers the dervish!

"First of all you should never forget that we are possessed by what we would possess; held in bondage to earth and vested things by the attachments we form for them, even if it would be so sacred a thing as a Philosopher's Stone or something as insignificant as a coffee bean! Secondly you should try to be as sincere as possible when using the Stone.

"Thirdly, when you hold the Stone in your hand, it will unveil to you the thoughts and the sincerity of the intentions of the person in front of you. When you are better able to listen, just like you were able to hear the singing of the grass in the mountains, you'll slowly grow in wisdom".

After drinking his coffee, the dervish says something rather peculiar to Ahmad:

"You have not learned any alchemy from me, but I've transformed you into an alchemical substance!"

At that very moment Ahmad takes the stone in his hand. When seeing the dervish taking to the road again, he somehow sees that this very dervish is walking the earth like one of the blessed. He also knows that he'll not see him again, but that other visitors will come to his coffee-house.

The dervish surely must have been joking when he mentioned something as insignificant as a coffee bean. Good coffee beans are similar to what the bottom is for a pizza! The best coffee beans come from Yemen and Indonesia; everyone knows that!

"How wonderful it would be to travel to the port of Mukhâ and export coffee to my coffee-house!" says Ahmad to himself.

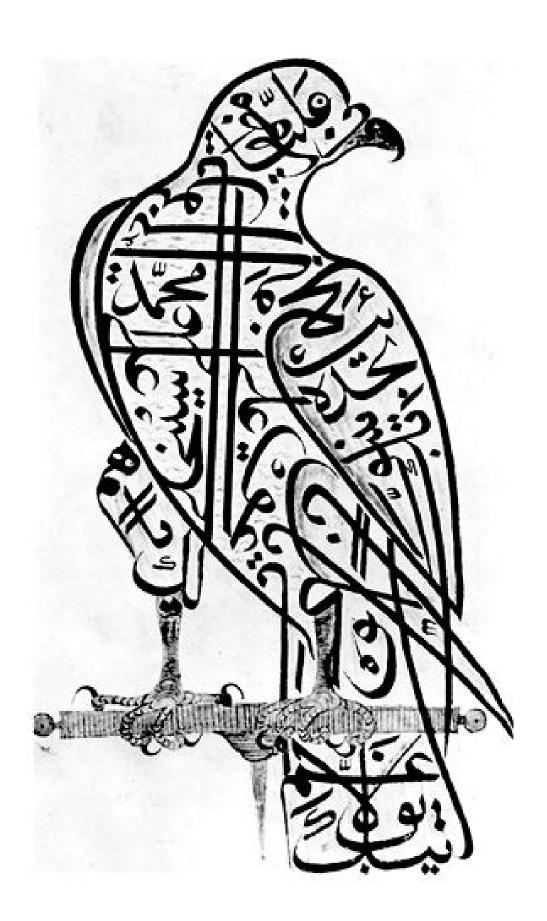
Coffee Beans

The history of coffee begins in Yemen, while Ethiopia, the huge country across the Red Sea from Yemen, lays claim to having originated coffee production in the 9th century based on a flimsy legend of a goatherd who chewed on the beans and got high. In Mukhâ, according to legend, a Sufi with the name Abu'l-Hasan 'Alî, the son of 'Umar ash-Shâdhilî, first brewed the bean into a semblance of what we now recognize as coffee.

This Shâdhilî Sufi became acquainted with coffee, when he resided at the court of Sa'duddîn, a sultan in southern Ethiopia. He died in 1418 in Mukhâ in Yemen. Coffee was taken up by Yemeni and Hadrami dervishes and its subsequent diffusion throughout the Arab world under Sufi auspices was rapid. In the *Safwat as-safwa fî bayân hukm al-qahwa* you can read about the *dhikr* repeated 116 times that you already know: *Yâ Qawîy...*

When you, dear reader, would visit the shady forests of Kafa in the Ethiopian highlands, you'd see wild coffee trees soar 18 metres that produce sparse, uneven-coloured fruits. Some say that merchants transported coffee from Ethiopia to Yemen as early as the 5th century C.E.

Yemenis were cultivating and selling their coffee by the early 10th century, while Arab traders, about 6 centuries later, were exporting coffee from the ports of Yemen throughout the Muslim world and into Europe.





A Falcon

As nothing much happens to Ahmad during several years, he is unaware that he, slowly but steadily, is changing. He feels more and more attracted to listen to the stories of travellers visiting his coffee-house.

One of them is an old man who tells him about a falcon he has seen in Valencia:

"It happened a long time ago, so it is also possible that I've seen this falcon in a dream. The falcon rose in the atmosphere, then pounced on a bird in the air and descended with it to her watching companions. I tried to approach its nest, but a violent wind made me afraid. Because of this hard wind, I decided to go away quickly, but only after securing something peculiar from nearby the falcon's nest. Here it is!"

The old man shows Ahmad a card with a painting of Guido Zibordi. Alongside this painting the number XXI is being mentioned, as well as the following words: The World, Il Mondo, Le Monde, El Mundo, Die Welt and Al-Jahân.

"Because of this violent wind, I am now here," the old man says.

He suddenly says to Ahmad:

"Beware of violent winds! Because of a violent wind, you'll leave your country in order to work with Zeno, the Alchemist. You'll meet him in a coffee-shop in Zürich".

Ahmad doesn't like to contradict this friendly old man, but thinks it highly unlikely that he'll meet the Alchemist. It is a pity that he has forgotten that he owns a stone, because he could have used it to know if this traveller is speaking the truth.

He, of course, cannot forget the name of Zeno and when travellers visit his coffee-house, he asks them questions about Zeno.

He thus learns that Zeno is a true globetrotter, who has made long journeys in Europe, Africa and Asia. He has been the major Hâkim, the sage and physician, at the Moghul court in Delhi.

Zeno appears to be familiar with such diverse fields as medicine, botany, astronomy, astrology, meteorology, climatology, mineralogy, alchemy, chemistry, physics, mechanics, anthropology, zoology, ethics, music, art, weaving, navigation, architecture, psychology, philosophy and esoteric thought.

[&]quot;I desired to see the world".

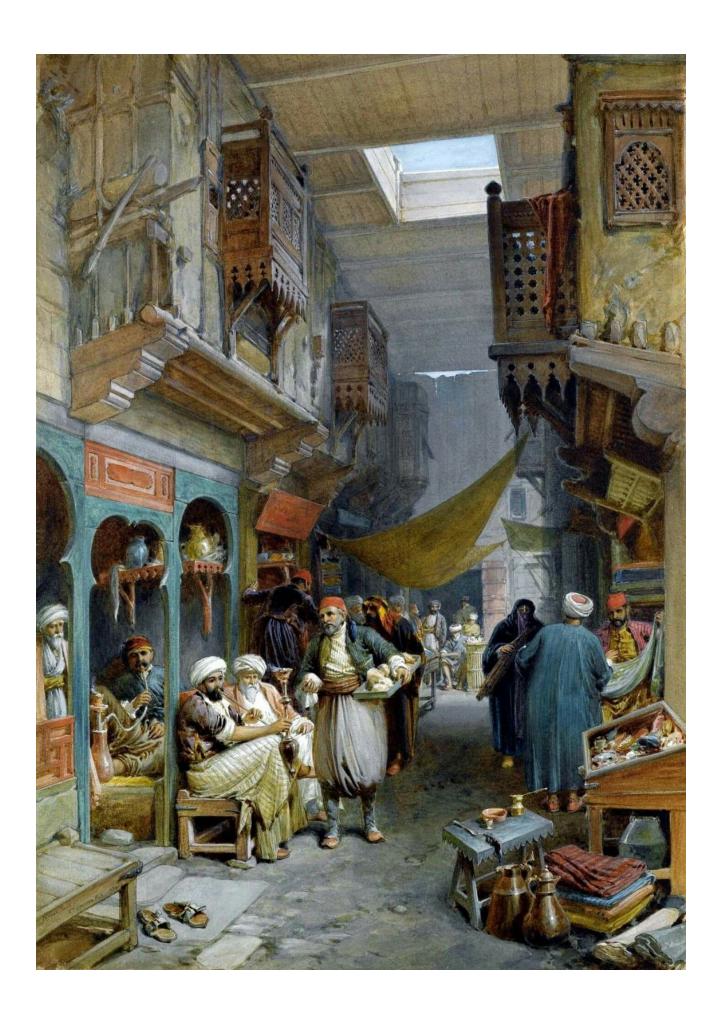
Zeno has received the name 'Abdul-Hâdî in ash-Shâm, where he received a four-edged cap and a dervish cloak from a Sufi master. Zeno is said to be fluent in Latin, Greek, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, and Kiswahili.

As a traveller, he holds fast to this motto:

Nec certam sedem, nec propriam faciem, nec munus ullum peculiare tibi dedimus, o Adam, ut quam sedem, quam faciem, quae munera tute optaveris, ea, pro voto, pro tua sententia, habeas et possideas.

I have given you no fixed place, nor your own face, nor any special talent, o Adam, so that you, in a way that you yourself think fit, will conquer and own your own place, your own face and your own talents.

Ahmad thus understands that this Zeno - or 'Abdul-Hâdî - is a man, who crosses boundaries, who likes to explore new worlds, who seeks out new civilizations. He appears to be a bold man, who travels to places where no man has gone before!





The Sleeper in the Cave

One day, Ahmad is enjoying himself by making a walk in the mountains. There is no wind throughout the heaven, but to his surprise he notices that the trees rock hither and thither with a mighty sound. Overhead, grey clouds rush eastwardly, until they roll over the fiery wall of the horizon, but there is no wind throughout the heaven.

Ahmad looks upward and sees a man standing upon the summit of a rock. The outlines of this person are unclear, but his features are the features of a saintly man. The rock is grey and on its front a word is written: *Retreat!*

Suddenly the heaven becomes livid with the violence of the tempest. A violent wind starts blowing and Ahmad finds shelter in a shady cave. He suddenly gets tired and falls asleep.

Ahmad's is sleeping for a long time in the cave. How long? Maybe 3 hours, or 5 hours or 7 hours...

During one of his dreams he visits the house of Master Zeno. He notices that Master Zeno has an impressive library: Hermes Trismegistus and the *Turba Philosophorum*, Jâbir ibn Hayyân's *Liber Investigationis*, and Artephius' *Key of Wisdom* all are there.

Ahmad sees a set of books containing the *De Adhaerendo Deo* and the *Paradisus Animae* attributed to Albertus Magnus, Raymond Lully's *Ars Magna et Ultima*, Roger Bacon's *Thesaurus Chemicus*, Fludd's *Clavis Alchimiae*, and Trithemius' *De Lapide Philosophico*, as well as the complete Latin translation and commentary regarding Muhammad ibn Umail's famous *Book of the Explanation of the Symbols*. There is a book of almost 400 pages about another Egyptian shaykh, who is called Dhû'n-Nûn.

But, then, the Master enters. He asks Ahmad:

"Do you think I have written books? Why blacken pages instead of whitening hearts? Go away!"

During a second dream, Ahmad shows with some pride the Stone he has received from the dervish. He asks the master to guide him on the path leading to the Philosopher's Stone.

Master Zeno answers him:

"The path *is* the Stone. In case you don't know what I mean, you still have understood nothing. Go away!"

In a third dream Ahmad asks Master Zeno to teach him the Science of Alchemy, for through it Ahmad intends to win both this world and the next:

"When the two worlds have clasped hands together, I'll have joined the Beloved forever".

Master Zeno replies:

"Your thought is still far from the truth". He proceeds by telling a story of Alexander and Plato:

Plato, that teacher to the whole world, had in the first place made it his task to invent the means of making gold, and so to turn copper into gold. He produced an Elixir and with a little Alchemy he could manufacture a large quantity of gold. Gold and dust became equal in value to him, because it was so easy to produce gold.

Then he said to himself:

"Reflect, O Heart, how to make an Elixir of your own essence! I've produced it from common ingredients during the past fifty years, but these ingredients are not superior to your own spirit. Now, if you want to be wise, stake both worlds upon the discovery of this new Elixir".

After many years in solitary retreat, Plato produced such an Elixir that both worlds were illuminated with its light. All between the Moon and the Fish were annihilated for him and Divine Mysteries were revealed to him.

One day, Aristotle came to visit him, accompanied by his student Alexander. They waited for a long time, but the sage breathed not a word. At last Alexander said:

"Speak some word of Wisdom, because we have travelled a long way to see you!" Plato, that master of all time answered: "In the end, our only capital is silence, and since silence is our everlasting capital, assume that everlasting colour in order that you too may remain".

After this story, Zeno advises Ahmad thus:

"Plato was guided by Wisdom. If you know nothing of this world-illuminating Alchemy, learn from Plato. Why prepare the alchemy of silver and gold, using copper as an ingredient? Turn your body into a soul and your soul into a heart, for this is the way for true men and women to practise Alchemy!"

"Go away!" Zeno adds.

"We will never meet in person!"

As he all the time receives the order to go away, Ahmad's longing to meet Zeno becomes even stronger, but Zeno tells him:

"Sell your coffee-house and travel to Alexandria in Egypt in order to meet shaykh Muhammad ibn Umail".

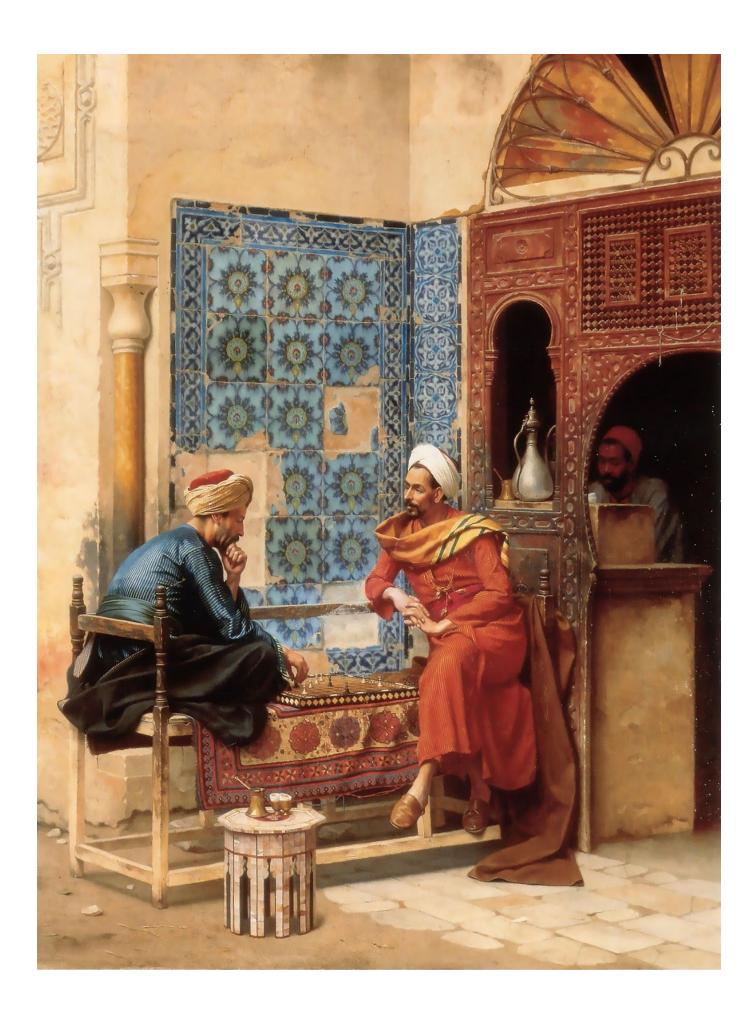
When he leaves the cave, Ahmad again becomes uncertain. Why should he sell his coffee-shop and become a lonely stranger in a land far away? Things are made easy for him, and such things often happen in stories.

The saintly man he has seen before he entered the cave, descends from the summit of the grey rock and tells him why he should leave:

"Go to Alexandria! You'll learn to become a healer and will even become the successor of shaykh Ibn Umail. Don't become proud when that happens. When healing takes place, don't declare: "I have done this!" Such a remark is metaphorical in one respect and true in another. The force by which you act, is not yours in essence. If it belonged to you by essence, you would also have power in essence. It would follow that you are the creator of your acts and that power emanates from you by your self-same essence, not from another".

"You are not the true Healer of Wounds. You are the agent and when the agent says: "I have done this, I have arranged thus," it is in this respect a metaphor. On the other hand, the true sense of such a remark is that the healing activity clearly emanates from you *ad extra* by the force, which is a gift accorded by the Creator. Remember that it is always possible that this healing capacity will be removed from you, if He so chooses!"







Alexandria's Lighthouse

Seven weeks later Ahmad anchors in Alexandria. The town strikes him as charming with its broad streets and well-built houses. There are also fields of orange and lemon trees nearby, which give off a wonderful, heady perfume.

He still is an ignoramus and has never read that Ibn Khaldûn has said: "A scholar's education is greatly improved by travelling in quest of knowledge and meeting the authoritative teachers of your time".

Ahmad also doesn't know that of the dozens of international ports Ibn Batûta has visited during his travels, Alexandria impressed him as among the five most magnificent. There is not one harbour but two, the eastern reserved for 'Îsawî ships, the western for Muslim. They are divided by Pharos Island and the colossal lighthouse, which looms over the port and can be seen many miles out to sea.

A lighthouse is an inspiring symbol. It points to the bestowal of light. It offers guidance and safety to the seafarer. A certain Yûsuf ibn ash-Shaykh has been fascinated by the lighthouse of Alexandria.

According to some legends, the lighthouse was more than 650 meters high; that its marble cladding was so bright that a tailor could thread a needle by its light at midnight; that its beacon could be seen as far as Istanbul; or that it costed 23 tons of silver to build - almost twice the cost of the Parthenon in Athens.

Yûsuf ibn ash-Shaykh's *Kitâb Alif Bâ'* (= the Book of the Letters A and B) is more factual. Because of his description, the lighthouse of the city founded by Alexander the Great remains to this day a symbol of the very idea of travel. Yûsuf was a Spanish architect and a builder who erected 25 mosques and built 50 wells in his native Malaga. He is known to have made a pilgrimage to Makkah in 1165. His book contains a very precise description of the lighthouse of Alexandria.

A lighthouse is called in Arabic *manârah*, which means a place of fire that is used for illumination. The English word "minaret" has been derived from *manârah*.

Shaykh Farîduddîn 'Attâr uses the symbol of minaret (now the tower of a mosque) in order to point to lust, name, fame, habit, cherished possessions and self-projection. It symbolizes self-promotion in any form, or in terms of any rank or station, so that you establish yourself as a worshipper of form or self:

Tâ madrasah o menârah wirân nashud In kâr-e-qalandari ba-sâmân nashud

The religious school and minaret need to be destroyed, Before the work of a free spirit can succeed. To return to the actual lighthouse of Alexandria, its destruction started in 1323 because of an earthquake. Ibn Batûta visited Alexandria in 1326 just three years after the earthquake that toppled it, and pointed out that already "one of its facades was in ruins". When he visited the city again in 1349, the lighthouse "was such a total heap of rubble that it was not possible to get into it anymore, nor even to go up to its door". It was replaced by a small watchtower that stood until 1480, when over its ruins a fortress has been built. This fortress still guards the port of Alexandria to this day.

The above description would imply that Ahmad arrives in Alexandria before the first visit of Ibn Batûta to this city. But, what is time? There is the time that can be found at the horizon of ordinary human experiences and there is the time that is to be experienced in the familiarity of our own soul.

Ahmad of course searches for something familiar and to his relief he soon sees a coffee-house. He takes a seat opposite a soldier. This man tells him that he prefers to drink coffee.

"When drinking alcohol in a tavern", the soldier says, "unfortunately, alcohol sometimes brings out the worst in people. If you find yourself facing a bar fight, there are several things you can do to survive it in one piece. The best is to run away. I have not always done so, however!"

The soldier shows Ahmad some scars, not one of them stemming from a war, but from fights in a wine-house. A very nasty cut needed the immediate help, but Hâkim ibn Umail has done a good job, the soldier informs him.

"Ibn Umail? Do you know where he lives?"
You'll not be surprised that Ahmad enters the clinic of Hâkim ibn
Umail about an hour later.

He notices a young man of about 18 years old, who with a broom is sweeping the floor of the clinic.

"My name is Muhammad," says the young man, "and your name is Servant, because you're taking over my job this very moment." He hands over the broom with a smile.

"Why should I do so? Why should I accept the commands of a young man?" Ahmad says.

"How old do you think I am?" asks Muhammad.

"You probably think that I'm 18 years old, but in fact I'm 81 at present. My name is Muhammad ibn Umail at-Tamîmî. I'm looking younger than my actual age, because I lead a life wherein I never worry. I'm breathing slowly and in a gentle way, and there is more, but let's stop about breathing exercises... I'll tell you what the dervish meant when he told you that you had not learned any Alchemy from him. He said that he had transformed you into an alchemical substance. I'll tell you after you'll be able to clean the floor of my clinic in such a way that I'm satisfied therewith".

Ahmad agrees to do so, but, when taking the broom into his hands, he doesn't realise that to clean floors properly so that the Hâkim is content will take him several years.



Fermentation

After a period of 1001 days of service, the Hâkim explains to Ahmad the meaning of the curious words of the dervish:

"Your physical body is the result of a marvellous alchemical process. The dervish visiting your coffee-house brought about a transformation, by means of *takhmîr*, a kind of 'fermentation'. This transformation has taken place in your spiritual human body. You know that your ordinary human body is composed of four elements:

- 1. The soul (*nafs*) of earth
- 2. The heart (*qalb*) of water
- 3. The innermost, secret being (sirr) of air
- 4. The spirit $(r\hat{u}h)$ of fire

"Earlier visitors to your coffee-house stimulated you to be of service and to be kind to others. The visiting dervish added the light of spirituality thereto, transforming baser qualities into more refined ones. The base and indolent nature of your ego got somewhat transformed by the purifying light of the presence of the dervish. Your passionate heart changed. Its desires moved towards spiritual inclinations. The nature of your innermost, third faculty opened itself more and more towards the symbolic meaning of the Sufi poems you've so often heard when you prepared coffee. The light of spirituality (*nûr-i-rûhâniyyat*) revived the zeal and enthusiasm of your spirit. The Alchemy of the dervishes consists of perfecting the seven levels of your spiritual body".

"Your physical body consists of the elements fire, air, water and earth. The Divine name al-Qâbid, the Constrictor, faces the creative process for the element of fire. The Divine name al-Hayy, the Alive, faces the creative process of air. The Divine name al-Muhyî, the Creator of Life faces the creative process of water and the Divine name al-Mumît, the Creator of Death faces the creative process of earth".

"The name al-'Azîz, the Incomparable and Unparalleled One, faces the creative process of the minerals. The name ar-Razzâq, the Provider, faces the creative process of the plants. The name al-Mudhill, the Abaser, faces the creative process of the animals. The name al-Qawîy, the Strong, faces the creative process of the angels. The name al-Latîf, the Subtle, faces the creative process of the jinn, and to end with human beings, the name al-Jâmi', the Assembler, faces the creative process of the human being".

"But before you'll learn more about those matters," the Hâkim says to Ahmad, "you'll receive a new task... Let's take a walk in the nearby jungle. We'll go to the lonely spot in its midst. Let's walk in silence, but observe your thoughts during our walk".

Ahmad's first thoughts:

"How to understand all of this? I don't know if I can accept this explanation!"

These are some of Ahmad's observations during their walk:

"Apart and together we walk along a sharply turning and cut out path in the nearby jungle. Our steps are united, because these steps go in unison over the crackling softness of the yellow and yellow-orange leaves that mat the unevenness of the ground. Our steps are also going separately, because of our differences of opinion. We have in fact very few things in common except for our walking in unison over this path".

The two of them arrive finally at the lonely spot. Ahmad receives a large quantity of food and water. Muhammad ibn Umail presents him with a booklet called *Treatise on the Human Body*. He has to study it during 40 days.

Ahmad opens it when he is alone. He read about the earthly body getting transformed into a living soul, when the Soul of all souls descends into the soul:

'Eshq az lâ makân nozul konad Dar del-e-'âsheqân nozul konad

Love has descended from the placeless, And it has descended into the heart of the lovers.

Roft dar wai bedeh ke shâh-e-jahân Andar in khâkdân nozul konad

Sweep it clean, so that the King of the World, May descend into this dustbin of yours!

Jân shawad jomla qâlab-e-khâki Jân-e-jân chun ba-jân nozul konad

The earthly body gets transformed into a living soul, When the Soul of all souls descends into the soul.

Ganj râ chun kharâb mî-bâyad Dar del-at 'eshq az ân nozul konad

Your inward storehouse must be in ruins, Before love may descend into your heart.

To berun raw ze dar ke tâ shah-e-'eshq Andar in khân-o-mân nozul konad

You have to go out, so that the King of love May enter and descend into your abode.

Hich kas râ momân dar in manzel Tâ kase bikasân nozul konad

No one is allowed to stay in this abode, Until a friendless, destitute person descends therein.

Chun del az ghair-e-dust khâli shod Lotf-e-haqq ân zamân nozul konad

As soon as my heart gets empty from others than the Friend, At that very moment the divine kindness may descend therein.

Bâdshâhist dar del-e-tangam Ke agar dar jahân nozul konad A King rules in my contracted heart, If He descends into this world,

Har do 'âlam shawad chu gard o ghobâr Jomla dar lâ makân nozul konad

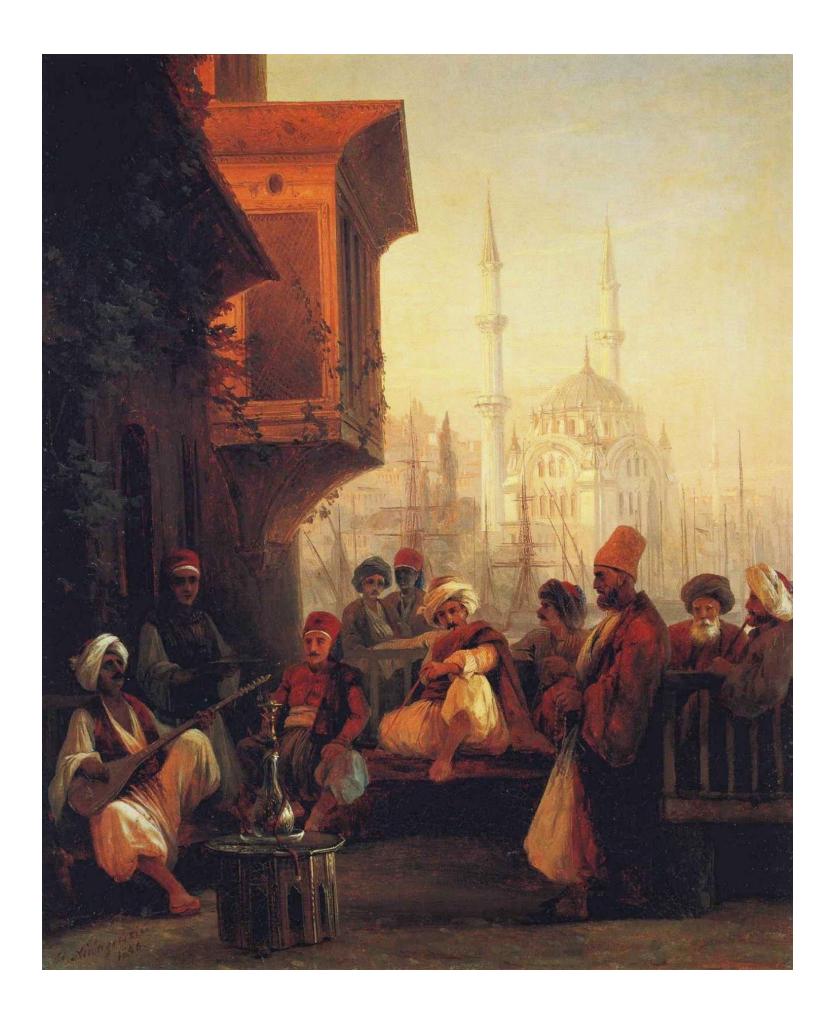
Then this world and the next will be annihilated, And all will descend and return to non-existence.

Chist del shâh-bâz-e-'âlam-e-qods Kai dar in âshiyân nozul konad

How is it - heart - that the royal falcon of the sacred world Makes its descent into you as its nest?

Chu mo'in khâk-e-âsetâna-ye-ust Ham dar ân âsetân nozul konad

Mo'în is like the dust on His threshold. He'll cross this threshold, when He makes His descent.





Trans-substantial Motion

During his meditations, Ahmad receives a number of insights regarding this *ghazal*:

The universe is constantly in motion and in a state of change. Matter is not static; there is trans-substantial motion throughout the world of matter. There is a movement towards the Creator, a movement that is spiritual and an innate turning towards Him. Form and matter of a created being become themselves the matter of a new form. This process goes on continuously. The body passes through a multitude of states, from the mineral state to the vegetal state, to the animal state, and to the state of a living and speaking body, from being a perishable body in this world to a subtle body of the Inter-world or even a spiritual body.

Substantial motion is a gradual transformation occurring in the very inner structure of things. Thus, a thing or substance, which is now in a certain ontological state, is undergoing a continuous and gradual inner transformation until it reaches a new ontological state. The whole process of this inner transformation is in reality a series of passing away and recreation by God.

The Treatise on the Human Body goes on with a description of an Egyptian Sufi alchemist with the curious name 'Lord of the Fish': Shaykh Dhû'n-Nûn in seeking the public's blame, is nothing less than the light of resurrection's acclaim, the demonstration of detachment and dignity, the sultan of realisation and unity, and the spiritual axis of his age. During his life, everyone was skeptical about him. So thoroughly did he conceal himself that no one was aware of his true level of attainment until his death.

Ibn al-Jallâ, disciple of shaykh Dhû'n-Nûn, makes it clear that the alchemy of his master is not of a material kind:

"His alchemy is the one of the person, who says his night prayer in Baghdad and his morning prayer in distant Mecca".

It is not certain that the chain that connects the following Sufis to and beyond the famous alchemist, Jâbir, is authentic:

Sayyid as-Sûfiyya Sahl at-Tustarî Dhû'n-Nûn al-Misrî Isrâfîl al-Maghribî Jâbir al-Ansârî as-Sahhâbî 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib.

Shaykh as-Suhrawardî however, states that:

"The leaven of the Pythagoreans passes in Islam to my brother Akhmîm [Dhû'n-Nûn] and to Sahl at-Tustarî".

The description of shaykh Dhû'n-Nûn ends with a symbolic story. He is walking along a road and then sees a blind, little bird in a tree. He wonders how and where this helpless creature gets food and water.

Immediately, the bird flies down from the tree, strikes its beak against the ground and two bowls appear: one of gold with sesame seeds and one filled with water. The bird eats the sesame seeds, drinks the rose water and flies back to the tree. The two bowls vanish.

This miraculous event is in fact dealing with the transformation of his 'soul-bird'. Dhû'n-Nûn now feels attraction to the path of inward transformation and experiences the confidence to trust in God.

Ahmad continues to read in *The Treatise on the Human Body*: A young man is constantly disparaging the Sufis. One day, shaykh Dhû'n-Nûn gives him a ring and asks him to go to the baker and pawn it to him for one dinar. The young man takes it to the baker, returns and says: "He won't take it for more than one dirham".

"Take it to the jeweler," shaykh Dhû'n-Nûn says, "so he can price it".

The young man takes it and the ring gets priced at two thousand dinars. He brings the ring back to shaykh Dhû'n-Nûn who tells him: "Your knowledge of the Sufis is like the baker's knowledge of this ring".

When turning the page, Ahmad is reading *The Treatise on the Human Body*, he notices a number of short poems. He decides to read and study one of them each day during his stay of 40 days in the jungle. The first one is a quatrain in Persian and deals with the deep inward knowledge (*ma'rifat*) of the Alchemy (*kîmiyâ'*) of human happiness:

Free yourself of impurity; it is purity that you should seek!

This purity of your soul, from us you should seek!

If you seek human happiness, O friend,

From those mastering their heart, Alchemy you should seek!

The next day Ahmad reflects on the meaning of the following lines dealing with the alchemy of loving kindness (*mihr*):

Through the alchemy of your loving kindness my face turned into gold, By your subtle and loving kindness, dust turned into gold.

Ahmad in a similar way keeps himself occupied during his meditation. At the end of his stay he reads about an elixir:

Baptize my unproductive heart with the elixir l'm seeking. Bring me the dust that in front of the Beloved's door is lying.





Two Spirits in a Single Body

Shortly afterwards, shaykh Ibn Umail returns and the two of them, once again, are walking the path through the jungle in order to go back to Alexandria. Ahmad, once again, observes his thoughts during that walk:

"Our steps are going in unison. We are hearing a very soft sound of leaves falling in the jungle. The jungle, two walkers and I, uncertain of which one I am. Who are we? Are we two people or two forms of one man? You and I are inseparable:

He am I whom I love, He whom I love is I, Two spirits in one single body dwelling. When you see me, then you see Him And when you see Him, you see Us". After their returning to the clinic, shaykh Ibn Umail suddenly turns to Ahmad with this question:

"What is the colour of the *lapis philosophorum*, the Philosopher's Stone?"

Ahmad has a look at his own Stone, tucked away in his pocket, and to his surprise he notices that its colour has changed. He immediately answers:

"Red!"

The Hâkim asks him to study sulphur (*kibrît*), that is both white sulphur and red sulphur (*kibrît al-ahmar*) by means of the books in the library of the clinic. Ahmad starts with the *Kitâb at-Tadbîrât al-Ilâhiyya*, a book of almost 140 pages written by a Sufi from Andalusia. He understands that red sulphur is a symbol that points to the material capable of transforming silver into gold.

The Sufis appear to use 'red sulphur' as a technical term indicating the excellence of the spiritual level of a friend of God (*walî*). Some equate this level with attaining the *maqâm al-muhammadiyya*, the station of Muhammad (s.a.w.). This implies to become an inheritor of the Prophet. This attainment is accompanied by a complete revelation of the true nature of reality.

Ahmad continues with a book written by Muhammad ibn Umail himself, the *Kitâb Hall ar-Rumûz* (Book of the Explanation of the Symbols).

He reads some hard to understand lines, because they consist of all kinds of opposites:

"And it is its sediment, and the Sun, and the fierce body. It is [also] the Moon, the furnace, the white sulphur, the sulphurs and the red sulphur. They name it with all of this when it is white".

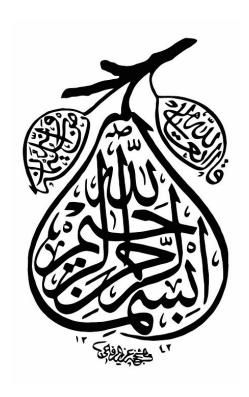
When Ahmad speaks about these lines with the shaykh, he is told: "The *Stone* can indeed only be described by using several kinds of opposites. It is the sediment *and* the furnace, meaning the contained *and* the container, it is the sun *and* the moon, and finally it is the female white sulphur *and* the male red sulphur. The Stone is the soul and the spirit, yet at the same time it is also the body, from which all originates. I've tried to point to a wholeness in my book that words can never express".

The shaykh continues in a more understandable way by explaining: "The different sulphurs need some detailed reflection. Sulphur (*kibrît*) is found in nature as a hard, inflammable yellow rock. Master Zeno, whom you've met in your dreams, would say that the word he uses, is supposed to have derived from a Latin term with the meaning 'burning stone', the equivalent thereof is 'brimstone'. It was already known in Mesopotamia and here in Egypt. In Greece it is described by Aristotle, who named it Divine, pointing to the different colours that appear on it when heated. Pure sulphur was used for religious purposes, for disinfection, bleaching of textiles and as an externally applied remedy".

"Red sulphur," Ibn Umail explains, "is the fiery soul that, when solidified and dried, is named white or whitened sulphur. In my *al-Ma' al-Waraqî*, I've written that the white sulphur is the spirit in which lies the soul; with white sulphur the soul is extracted from its body. The soul is the red sulphur".

"When writing about these material substances, I don't write about these material substances. They are symbols that can be seen differently by different people in different stages of development. Some may see red sulphur for instance as the fiery substance of desirousness or compulsion that has to be contained in the work of psychological transformation".

"Shaykh Ibrâhim is one of those people who have realised a deeper level than the mere psychological. He mentions the lightning action of the spirit. He sums up his insight by repeating the adage: "Make of your body a spirit and of the spirit a body. The purified bodily consciousness plays, according to this Sûfî, the role of a 'fixative' or support for a higher state of the spirit. You need to purify your body of passionate fevers of your lower self and then you may reach a certain contemplative state. Red sulphur or *kibrît al-ahmar* can therefore be seen as a symbol referring to the permanent activity of the Spirit".





More Study and More Training

Ahmad continues with his study and training. He understands that books can create an awareness of things he was ignorant about. He continues by sweeping the floor in the clinic, he helps with cooking the food in the kitchen and at times he even is a guardian at the door of the clinic. He watches that no one steals the shoes of his patients. Yes, 'his' patients, because he gets more and more involved in the healing work of shaykh Ibn Umail.

How does this story end? What happens to the Stone in Ahmad's pocket? How about the spiritual jewel of the Philosopher's Stone?

Ahmad realises something extremely precious. He receives the experience that there are jewels inside of him that influence him. The finest of these jewels, he discovers, is in the centre of his own heart. It

is here that the essence of being is hidden. It is a store of power and energy. He finds out that in this dark and hidden place many a mystery is kept. Ahmad knows that, although others can't see it, it sees what is beyond the eye. It is the eye of the heart.

That 'black' spot, that centre of each human being, dear reader, is constantly being watched by every aspect of your consciousness: Your senses, your feelings, your mind are watching that spot in the heart in order to see, to hear and to 'touch' reality. When your heart starts to shine with the *dhikr-Allâh* as a result of sincere contemplation, meditation and devotional activities, Divine Truth is reflected in it on the surface of that spot, for that spot, in fact, doesn't so much belong to your bodily kingdom, but to the Divine Kingdom. An intense light is then generated from it. This light reaches the deepest corners of your being.

Red sulphur is an element that has been created from those who are nearest and most loyal to Him. Red sulphur is an element of great powers and great value. Ahmad finds out that he ultimately has discovered it in the Divine Kingdom. Ahmad, the former owner of a coffee-house, remains in the shadows cast upon him. The noises of everyday life prevent him from being heard.

Do you the think that his story has nothing to do with you and me? Ahmad has a name that means that he is 'praiseworthy'. He is in no need of our praise. He has been one of those 'drawn near'. He doesn't even know that this is the case, but his life demonstrates its reality.

How about Ahmad's Stone? Some say that Ahmad has left it behind in the jungle near Alexandria. Others say that it has become part of the Crown of Alexander. We know that Ahmad has become that kind of jeweller, who no longer needs any stones.



The End

