

# Tayfur Abu Yazid al-Bistami

## May Allah Be Well Pleased With Him

"I have planted love in my heart  
and shall not be distracted until Judgment Day.  
You have wounded my heart when You came near me.  
My desire grows, my love is bursting.  
He has poured me a sip to drink.  
He has quickened my heart with the cup of love  
Which he has filled at the ocean of friendship."

*Attributed to Bayazid.*

### His Life

Bayazid's grandfather was a Zoroastrian from Persia. Bayazid made a detailed study of the statutes of Islamic law (*shari`a*) and practiced a strict regimen of self-denial (*zuhd*). All his life he was assiduous in the practice of his religious obligations and in observing voluntary worship.

He urged his students (*murids*) to put their affairs in the hands of Allah and he encouraged them to accept sincerely the pure doctrine of *tawhid* (the Oneness of God). This doctrine consisted of five essentials: to keep the obligations according to the Qur'an and Sunnah, to always speak the truth, to keep the heart free from hatred, to avoid forbidden food and to shun innovations (*bid`a*).

### His Sayings

One of his sayings was, "I have come to know Allah through Allah, and I have come to know what is other than Allah with the light of Allah." He said, "Allah has granted his servants favors for the purpose of bringing them closer to Him. Instead they are fascinated with the favors and are drifting farther from Him." And he said, praying to Allah, "O Allah, You have created this creation without their knowledge and You have placed on them a trust without their will. If You don't help them who will help them?"

Bayazid said the ultimate goal of the Sufi is to experience the vision of Allah in the Hereafter. To that effect he said, "There are special servants of Allah who, if Allah veiled Himself from their sight in Paradise, would implore Him to take them out of Paradise just as the inhabitants of the Fire implore Him to release them from Hell."

He said about Allah's love for His servant, "If Allah loves His servant He will grant three attributes that are the proofs of His Love: generosity like the generosity of the ocean, and favor like the favor of the Sun in its giving of light, and modesty like the modesty of the Earth. The true lover never considers any affliction too great and never decreases his worship because of his pure faith."

A man asked Bayazid, "Show me a deed by which I will approach my Lord." He said, "Love the friends of Allah in order that they will love you. Love his saints until they love you. Because Allah looks at the hearts of His saints and He will see your name engraved in the heart of His saints and He will forgive you." For this reason, the Naqshbandi followers have been elevated by their love for their shaikhs. This love lifts them to a station of continuous pleasure and continuous presence in the heart of their beloved.

Many Muslim scholars in his time, and many after his time, said that Bayazid al-Bistami was the first one to spread the

Reality of Annihilation (*fana'*). Even that strictest of scholars, Ibn Taymiyya, who came in the 7th Century A.H., admired Bayazid for this and considered him to be one of his masters. Ibn Taymiyya said about him, "There are two categories of *fana'*: one is for the perfect Prophets and saints, and one is for seekers from among the saints and pious people (*saliheen*). Bayazid al-Bistami is from the first category of those who experience *fana'*, which means the complete renunciation of anything other than God. He accepts none except God. He worships none except Him, and he asks from none except Him." He continues, quoting Bayazid saying, "I want not to want except what He wants."

It was reported about Bayazid that he said, "I divorced the lower world thrice in order that I could not return to it and I moved to my Lord alone, without anyone, and I called on Him alone for help by saying, 'O Allah, O Allah, no one remains for me except You.' At that time I came to know the sincerity of my supplication in my heart and the reality of the helplessness of my ego. Immediately the acceptance of that supplication was perceived by my heart. This opened to me a vision that I was no longer in existence and I vanished completely from myself into His self. And He brought up all that I had divorced before in front of me, and dressed me with light and with His attributes."

Bayazid said, "Praise to Me, for My greatest Glory!" And he continued saying, "I set forth on an ocean when the [earlier] prophets were still by the shore." And he said, "O My Lord, Your obedience to me is greater than my obedience to You." This means, "O God, You are granting my request and I have yet to obey You."

He said, "I made four mistakes in my preliminary steps in this way: I thought that I remember Him and I know Him and I love Him and I seek Him, but when I reached Him I saw that His remembering of me preceded my remembrance of Him, and His knowledge about me preceded my knowledge of Him and His love towards me was more ancient than my love towards Him, and He sought me in order that I would begin to seek Him."

Adh-Dhahabi quoted him in many great matters, among which were "Praise to Me, for My greatest Glory!" and "There is nothing in this robe I am wearing except Allah." Adh-Dhahabi's teacher Ibn Taymiyya explained, "He didn't see himself as existing any longer, but only saw the existence of Allah, due to his self-denial."

Adh-Dhahabi further relates, "He said, O Allah, what is your Fire? It is nothing. Let me be the one person to go into your Fire and everyone else will be saved. And what is your Paradise? It is a toy for children. And who are those unbelievers who you want to torture? They are your servants. Forgive them."

Ibn Hajar said, in reference to Bayazid's famous utterances, "Allah knows the secret and Allah knows the heart. Whatever Bayazid spoke from the Knowledge of Realities the people of his time did not understand. They condemned him and exiled him seven times from his city. Every time he was exiled, terrible afflictions would strike the city until the people would call him back, pledge allegiance to him, and accept him as a real saint."

Attar and Arusi relate that Bayazid said, when he was exiled from his city, "O Blessed city, whose refuse is Bayazid!"

One time Bayazid said, "Allah the Most Just called me into His Presence and said to me, 'O Bayazid how did you arrive in My Presence?' I replied, 'Through *zuhd*, by renouncing the world.' He said, 'The value of the lower world is like the wing of a mosquito. What kind of renunciation have you come with?' I said, 'O Allah, forgive me.' Then I said, 'O Allah, I came to you through *tawakkul*, by dependence on You.' Then He said, 'Did I ever betray the trust which I promised you?' I said, 'O Allah forgive me.' Then I said, 'O Allah, I came to you through You.' At that time Allah said, 'Now We accept you.'"

He said, "I stood with the pious and I didn't find any progress with them. I stood with the warriors in the cause and I didn't find a single step of progress with them. I stood with those who pray excessively and those who fast excessively and I didn't make a footstep of progress. Then I said, 'O Allah, what is the way to You?' and Allah said, 'Leave yourself and come.'"

Ibrahim Khawwas said, "The way that Allah showed to him, with the most delicate word and the simplest explanation, was to 'leave your self-interest in the two worlds, the *dunya* and the Hereafter, leave everything other than Me behind.' That is the

best and easiest way to come to Allah Almighty and Exalted, the most perfect and highest state of affirming Oneness, not to accept anything or anyone except Allah the Most High."

One of the followers of Dhul Nun al-Misri was following Bayazid. Bayazid asked him, "Who do you want?" He replied, "I want Bayazid." He said, "O my son, Bayazid is wanting Bayazid for forty years and is still not finding him." That disciple of Dhul Nun then went to him and narrated this incident to him. On hearing it Dhul Nun fainted. He explained later saying, "My master Bayazid has lost himself in Allah's love. That causes him to try to find himself again."

They asked him, "Teach us about how you reached true Reality." He said, "By training myself, by seclusion." They said, "How?" He said, "I called my self to accept Allah Almighty and Exalted, and it resisted. I took an oath that I would not drink water and I would not taste sleep until I brought my self under my control."

He also said, "O Allah! it is not strange that I love You because I am a weak servant, but it is strange that You love me when You are the King of Kings."

He said, "For thirty years, when I wanted to remember Allah and do dhikr I used to wash my tongue and my mouth for His glorification."

He said, "As long as the servant thinks that there is among the Muslims someone lower than himself, that servant still has pride."

They asked him, "Describe your day and describe your night." He said, "I don't have a day and I don't have a night, because day and night are for those who have characteristics of creation. I have shed my self the way the snake sheds its skin."

Of Sufism Bayazid said: "It it to give up rest and to accept suffering."

Of the obligation to follow a guide, he said: "Who does not have a sheikh, his sheikh is Satan."

Of seeking God he said, "Hunger is a rain cloud. If a servant becomes hungry, Allah will shower his heart with wisdom."

Of his intercession he said, "If Allah will give me permission to intercede for all the people of my time I will not be proud, because I am only interceding for a piece of clay," and "If Allah gave me permission for intercession, first I would intercede for those who harmed me and those who denied me."

To a young man who wanted a piece of his old cloak for *baraka* (blessing), Bayazid said: "Should you take all Bayazid's skin and wear it as yours, it would avail you nothing unless you followed his example."

They said to him, "The key for Paradise is '*La ilaha ill-Allah*' (witnessing that there is no god except Allah)." He said, "It is true, but a key is for opening a lock; and the key of such witnessing can only operate under the following conditions:

- 1) a tongue which doesn't lie nor backbite;
- 2) a heart without betrayal;
- 3) a stomach without haram or doubtful provision;
- 4) deeds without desire or innovation."

He said, "The ego or self always looks at the world and the *ruh* (spirit) always looks at the next life and *ma`rifat* (spiritual knowledge) always looks at Allah Almighty and Exalted. He whose self defeats him is from those who are destroyed, and he whose spirit is victorious over his self, he is of the pious, and he whose spiritual knowledge overcomes his self, he is of the God-conscious."

Ad-Dailami said, "One time I asked `Abdur Rahman bin Yahya about the state of trust in Allah (*tawakku*). He said, "If you put your hand in the mouth of a lion, don't be afraid of other than Allah." I went in my heart to visit and ask Bayazid about this matter. I knocked and I heard from inside, "Wasn't what `Abdur Rahman said to you enough? You came only to ask, and

not with the intention of visiting me." I understood and I came again another time one year later, knocking at his door. This time he answered, "Welcome my son, this time you came to me as a visitor and not as a questioner."

They asked him "When does a man become a man?" He said, "When he knows the mistakes of his self and he busies himself in correcting them."

He said, "I was twelve years the blacksmith of my self, and five years the polisher of the mirror of my heart, and for one year I was looking in that mirror and I saw on my belly the girdle of unbelief. I tried hard to cut it and I spent twelve years in that effort. Then I looked in that mirror and I saw inside my body that girdle. I spent five years cutting it. Then I spent one year looking at what I had done. And Allah opened for me the vision of all creations. And I saw all of them dead. And I prayed four *takbiras* of *janaza* (funeral prayer) over them."

He said one time: "If the Throne and what is around it and what is in it were placed in the corner of the heart of a Knower, they would be lost completely inside it."

Of Bayazid's state, al-`Abbas ibn Hamza related the following: "I prayed behind Bayazid the Dhuhr prayer, and when he raised his hands to say 'Allahu Akbar' he was unable to pronounce the words, in fear of Allah's Holy Name, and his entire body was trembling and the sound of bones breaking came from him; I was seized by fear."

Munawi relates that one day, Bayazid attended the class of a *faqih* (jurisprudent) who was explaining the laws of inheritance: "When a man dies and leaves such-and-such, his son will have such-and-such, etc." Bayazid exclaimed: "O *faqih*, O *faqih*! What would you say of a man who died leaving nothing but God?" People began to cry, and Bayazid continued: "The slave possesses nothing; when he dies, he leaves nothing but his own master. He is such as Allah created him in the beginning." And he recited: "*You shall return to us alone, as we created you the first time*" [6:94].

Sahl at-Tustari sent a letter to Bayazid which read: "Here is a man who drank a drink which leaves him forever refreshed." Bayazid replied: "Here is a man who has drunk all existences, but whose mouth is dry and burn with thirst."

## His Death

When Bayazid died, he was over seventy years old. Before he died, someone asked him his age. He said: "I am four years old. For seventy years I was veiled. I got rid of my veils only four years ago." The 39th Sheikh of the Golden Chain, Sultan al-Awliya Sheikh `Abdullah Daghestani, referred to this saying in his encounter with Khidr ؑ, who told him, as he was pointing to the graves of some great scholars in a Muslim cemetery: "This one is three years old; that one, seven; that one, twelve."

Bayazid died in 261 H. It is said he is buried in two places, one is Damascus and the other is Bistam in Persia. The secret of the Golden Chain was passed from Bayazid al-Bistami to **Abul Hassan al-Kharqani**.