The Knower of Allah,
Rabia al-Adawiyya, *may Allah be pleased with her*

The Knower of Allah, Rabia, the daughter of Ismail al-Adawiyya, the Mother of Goodness, the Witness of the Love of Allah, the daughter of Ismail al-Adawiyya of the people of Basra where she was born, of the tribe of Amiq, was a well-known righteous woman. The mastery and nobility of her perfected bondsmanship is well-known, because she was one of the most outstanding holy people of her time. She died in the year 135 H./752 C.E., and her tomb is in Jerusalem on the Mountain of Olives.

There are many stories about Rabia's bondsmanship, her devout ascetic life, and the miracles which were given to her. She wrote many poems, and many of her sayings were recorded. Among them, "Be as silent about your good deeds as you are about your misdeeds."

Rabia is rightly considered to be one of the most famous of the people of the Sufi Path of Islam. She reached a high degree in its knowledge. Her profound, subtle, and detailed insight into the heart was sought after by a number of the great Sufis of her time. If we look back to the end of the first century of the hijr, we see that people had begun to be increasingly drawn into the material world with its competitiveness and corruption. Their faith was declining and asceticism had almost disappeared.

Some of the Muslims were alarmed by this submersion into the delights of the material world, the intrigues of government, and the people's preoccupation with business and money-making matters. They kept themselves free for their Lord, searching for pure drinking-places, and avoiding the concerns of the material world and its attractions.

In the midst of this tumult and the glitter of the castles and the might of the kings, the inner Path of Islam was spreading under the guidance of such a teacher as Hasan al-Basri, may Allah be pleased with him. Many men and women followed him, putting their efforts into learning to curb and control the self and the soul and in purifying their bondsmanship with the created to their Lord the Creator.

Rabia al-Adawiyya, may Allah be pleased with her, was a leader in this field. She opened the gates of Divine Love in a volcanic eruption of deep meanings and noble values. On the Path of the love and knowing, the Sufi Way flowed out and progressed rapidly. At the same time, by the second century of the hijr, Basra had become a great center where money, luxury, and pride flourished. Houses of pleasure, castles with slaves, and competitiveness were spreading everywhere. Because of this, the true believers withdrew into isolation living in huts, spreading across the outskirts of Basra. No one knew that in one of these humble dwellings was a poor man who lived and worked on a boat, ferrying people from one shore of the Tigris to the other. He was a God-fearing man, far removed from the pleasures of the material world. His soul was full of faith, always worshipping Allah; his tongue never tired of His Remembrance. He was known as the slave. This slave of Allah spent his whole day on his boat, and his nights in prayer and worship. He scarcely had time for his wife and his three daughters. Yet he was content, asking for Allah's forgiveness, not expecting anything, nor desiring anything from the world. One dark night, he returned home to find his wife in labor, struggling in pain, and there was not a single drop of oil in the house to light a lamp for her. His three daughters stopped weeping when the silence was broken by the crying of their fourth daughter, who had just come into the world in complete darkness.

The slave was hoping that Allah, his Lord, would bless him with a son who would be able to help him with his work, but nevertheless he thanked Allah. He took the girl and named her Rabia, meaning the fourth, but at the same time he seemed worried and sad.

Since half of the night had passed, he went to bed. After he had fallen asleep, the Prophet Muhammad, prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, came to him, and said to him, "Do not grieve, for the child just born is a noble woman, and the mediator for seventy of my people."

The child Rabia grew up in their simple hut in the midst of a family suffering from a desperate degree of poverty and hunger. But together with their poverty and deprivations, Rabia took on her father's religion of contentment, faith and reverence for Allah. Her soul grew as she learned from him how to read the Qur'an, to recite it by heart in reverence and to understand its deep meanings.

Since her early childhood Rabia al-Adawiyya, may Allah be pleased with her, was always alone; sadness and grief surrounded her and lived inside her. Above all, when she was only a young girl, she tasted the bitterness of being an orphan. Her father, the slave, died, and his wife followed him soon afterwards. Rabia and her sisters were alone, and had lost the feelings of affection, love and protection. The four orphan girls remained afraid and lonely. Their days were full of troubles and their nights full of fear and tears.

They had to face life alone. Rabia's sisters decided to remain in their home, and Rabia took on her father's work with the boat. All day long she ferried people from one shore of the River Tigris to the other. She became wellknown as Rabia al-Adawiyya. However, her days were full of sadness and fear because she became the victim of all kinds of apprehensions. She was always full of a deep sorrow, so that when she went home, she would spend her nights weeping without knowing the reason for her tears. Voices and anxieties came into her self and her soul, making her weep with such intensity that she would be lost in a deep, dark ocean without any shore and without any hope.

One day when she returned to her hut, tired and exhausted, she closed her eyes and fell into a deep sleep. She saw a strong bright light shining on all existence which then entered her body, absorbing it completely, entering her heart and soul, pouring into every drop of her blood, so that she saw all her senses drowning in this light. She awoke trembling and amazed, alternately laughing and weeping. This vision was repeated several times during the day.

One day when she was in the boat, she heard a voice singing close to her ear, but when she turned around she did not see anyone. Yet the singing continued, and was more beautiful than any woman's singing voice accompanied by an instrument. The middle of the night is the time of the height of the beauty of recitation. What a delight! Allah hears the beautiful voice trembling in humility, sees the cheeks dusty from sleeping on the earthen floor of the simple hut, and the heart bonded in love to Allah, saying, "O my Lord, and O my Support; I am occupied with You because of the weight of my sins."

Rabia began to repeat the words of this song in deep faith and surrender, and continued her worship in the Light which surrounded her, so that never in all her life afterwards did she need a lamp to see with during the night.

At this time it had not rained in Basra for many months. There was a severe drought and a famine; prices rose very high and the means of living diminished. Group after group of people began to leave to look elsewhere for their means of livelihood. Among those who left Basra were Rabia's three sisters, leaving her alone as they scattered in the land. From that day onward, Rabia did not hear anything more from them. But she did not remain alone for very long. A thief caught hold of her and sold her for six dirhams as a slave to one of the merchants of Basra.

She now entered into the humiliation of slavery, but surrendered to this and endured the suffering. She carried out all the work and heavy labor that she was asked to do. But when the night came, she would free herself from the bonds of slavery, even from the bonds of the material world, and swim in the world of the spirit, drowning in her prayers and invocations.

One night her master, the merchant, heard her praying and talking, and got up and went to see what she was doing. What he saw and heard filled him with amazement. Rabia was praying and prostrating in the darkness, but above her head was a lamp floating freely in space, giving her its light as she repeated the words: “O my Lord, you know that my heart only longs to obey You, for the light of my eye is under Your service. If I were able to, I would not stop one moment calling upon You, but You have left me under the mercy of a cruel being from Your creation.”

Full of fear and apprehension, the merchant left her door, and in the morning called her to give her back her freedom. This was how Rabia was freed from slavery.

From this time the stories of Rabia’s life take on different variations. Some say that she worked by playing the nay in dhikr circles; others say that she took to the path of human desires drowning herself in the seas of sin, and then turning in repentance to Allah in worship, prayers and reading the Qur’an.

During the time Rabia was singing and playing the nay and in contact with men there is no doubt that her youthfulness and feelings dulled her insight. She was drawn into the lights of society and its various attractions, and came to know again and again the love of the human being, which is naturally born when a man and a woman come into close contact with each other. This was Rabia’s case because she was young and beautiful and in circles of entertainment where she spent nights of intimacy. There was no separation between night and day; singing, and playing instruments and drinking. But was her soul satisfied with this state and with this behavior?

Surely from time to time Rabia looked at herself with shame at this life drowned in desires. She could not find the strength to change it and to save herself from drowning. She was lost and confused. Her heart yearned for love, and her lack of experience of love made her blind to the path. Her way was veiled by the love of desires and misleading, which was a distraction from the love which she truly longed for.

In this way, she was torn apart by the two sides of her material and spiritual nature. When she repented, her state was a mixture of renunciation, asceticism, and deprivation. She took a hut West of Basra, far from the prosperous life of the city. Here she had only a small clay jug, a camel-hair mattress, which was both her bed and her prayer rug, and a shroud. She had only the clothes which covered her body, but carried the shroud so that it was always before her eyes reminding her that death might come to her at any moment.

This was the way in which Rabia, may Allah be pleased with her, returned to Allah and left her bad habits. It was a returning of one who is thirsty and eager to drink from the love of Allah and to be annihilated in it. Her worship and deep love became a symbol for all times. Most worshippers pray asking for paradise or out of fear of the fire, but Rabia’s praying was different.

O Lord, if I were to worship You out of desire
For Your Paradise, then deny it to me.

But if I worship You through Your Love,
Then do not deny me Your Everlasting Beauty.

And she would say:

Your Love now is my richness and my blessing,
For it purifies the Eye of my heart which is filled with dust.

May You be pleased with me. This is the longing of my heart,
And the source of all my happiness.

At times when she sat in rememberance, she would drown in repentance and, in asking for forgiveness from her Beloved, saying:

O Beloved of my heart, I have no other than You,
So forgive today my sins.

My hope, my peace, and my happiness
Is that my heart has said it cannot love other than You.

Rabia was renowned for her love, her worship, and her annihilation in the complete Love of Allah. This was the life of the lover to whom Allah gave the ability to write her name with letters of Light in the history of divine passion, which has touched and moved so many people. She tasted the Love – the love of desires and the love of the spirit, and was overwhelmed between them, letting the Divine Love overcome her until she was her longing and yearning.

It was said that once when someone said to her, “I have committed many sins, but if I repent, will Allah forgive me?” Rabia answered, “No, but if He forgives you, then you will repent.”

This answer came from her own knowing of surrendering herself to Allah, so that He would be able to do whatever He wanted with her, and from her acceptance of whatever He, Glory be to Him, would make of her life in complete surrender to His Will.

Therefore, she had no thoughts like others had about divine justice or freedom of decision, for she knew that the grace of repentance did not come from herself but from Allah alone. Her approach to worship and repentance was that of a yearner who realized the time she had lost through years of living in sin.

She punished her body so as to put a barrier between it and any connection to human beings, looking upon this death as the only completion of a life which is solely for praising God, and asking for His forgiveness. But even in this love, sadness would touch her, because she would feel the existence of a need to ask for forgiveness for her shortcomings in love, and for not being firm in denying her sins, and in not being worthy of Allah. She would say, “Our asking for forgiveness needs forgiveness.”

She would stay awake all night in prayer and worship, and spend her days fasting for Allah, in thankfulness and acknowledgement of His Abundance and His Oneness. Her worship was always touched by the purity and clarity of her feelings, and of yearning to be united with her Exalted Beloved. When night came she would hurry to Allah and pray to Him:

O Lord, the stars are shining, and the eyes are sleeping,
The kings have shut their doors.

Each lover is alone with his beloved.
And I am alone with You.

And also she would pray, saying:

O Lord, the night has gone and the daylight has come.
Have You, O Lord, accepted my night of prayer?

For if You have accepted it, or refused it,
I swear by Your Generosity that this is my state,

I could not leave it, nor could my love

For You be diminished.

It was as though Rabia had a sickness for which the only remedy was being able to see His love and to be with her Beloved Who was Allah every moment of every day and night. She was like an aggrieved lover; this was the might of her love. She swore to Allah that she would love Him, even if He were not to accept her love. Being a true and truthful lover, she did not care if her Beloved had the same feelings because her love came from her love for Allah for His Own sake, not for any other purpose. How great then was her answer when she was asked about her faith, and she said:

If I worship Him out of fear of the Fire,
Or out of love for His Garden,

I would be like a hireling.
But I worship Him out of love and longing for Him.

Her expression of worship influenced Islam during her life. She expressed her love in words and poems. Her sorrow was not the usual human sadness, but became the yearning in the Islam of the People of the Path of Allah. Her truthful way of expressing love and sorrow influenced all Sufi poems and writings. In this Rabia al- Adawiyya became a symbol of the melancholy lover.

When she was once asked about the secret of her continual sorrow and weeping, she answered, “What a pity! My sickness is not of the kind that can be cured by doctors. Its only remedy is in seeing Allah. The only thing that helps me to carry my sickness is my hope to reach my desire in the Other World.” If we want to understand Rabia’ s love we need to recite her famous poems – the verses in which she described her love for the Divine Essence.

I came to know love when I came to know You.
I cut off my heart from all other-than-You

When I began to call upon You,
You, Who sees all that is hidden in the hearts.

Yet we do not see You.
I love You with two kinds of love:

The love for the sake of loving,
And the love because You are worthy of nothing but love.

For the love for the sake of loving
Is in the remembering of only You,

But the love because You deserve the love,
Is Your unveiling for me Your Veil,

So that I may see You, and the praise
Which is in this and that is all of it for You.

She said:

The longing for proximity is a fever,
For the fire of Your love has come upon me, Your light.

Not that I am moved to complain about the love,
For I am content with all that You give me in Your love.

Rabia, may Allah be pleased with her, made a distinction between two kinds of the Love. The first love, the love of desires, manifests in love for Allah because of all the blessings He gives in keeping the heart occupied with His Remembrance and nothing else. The second love is the love for Allah only for His sake without reason. Through that love she was raised to a lofty spiritual existence whose essence was the completion of asceticism based upon the fear of punishment. In this she also revealed to worshippers a new kind of asceticism based on the fear for Allah, without asking for anything in return except the taste of His Divine Essence.

This, without doubt, was the highest manifestation of the Love. It raised up the signs of annihilation to the highest degree of reverence. This was the way in which she called upon her Exalted Beloved:

O You, my happiness, my hope, my pole;
O You, my intimacy, my pillar and my goal,

You are the soul of my heart,
You are my hope.

You are to me, my intimacy,
My longing for You is my nourishment.

In this poem Rabia revealed her inner self, and the burning thirst she felt for the Holy Divine Essence of the Love in which she found endless happiness, fulfillment, and the Truth of life. The greatest reason and meaning to Rabia of this passionate love was to see the Face of Allah and His Eternal Beauty. The true meaning of expansion lay in the heart of her asceticism, which was in the perfection of the renunciation of the material world, and the withdrawal from its pleasures, so that her heart would have space only for bondsmanship which has its true life in the love of Allah, the longing to see Him in every moment, and to be always before His Eyes.

In this, Rabia was outstanding and courageous amongst the ascetic sufis of her time. She was also most noteworthy for having lifted love to the Highest Essence, and of speaking intimately of her love for Allah – a mighty word, which came from the deepest folds of her heart.

The Sufi Path which Rabia took in asceticism and in walking as a Sufi was long and hard, full of difficulties. It is a path on which a Sufi keeps walking, but without ever reaching to its end, because there is no end to reaching and no end to walking and no end to Allah.

For that reason it is demanded of whomever wants to reach the goal of this Path that they should devote themselves to purifying their soul, so that it can influence their mind and body to kill their desires, moods, and base longings.

After that it is important to turn away from the material world, not stopping with its humanity, but going deeper into the education of the soul (ruh), the self (nafs), the heart, and the mind, so that the human being is free from animal nature and pure in spirit. By this I mean that the lover becomes pure and free for Allah to do as He wants, and so becomes worthy of being annihilated only in Him.

Rabia walked on this difficult Path without caring about its hardships and without self pity. She used to pray until her eyes dried up, and she fasted until the color of her skin darkened. In this way she was led from one prayer to the next, gaining an enlightened spiritual station through all that she lost on the material, bodily level. This brought light to her heart, and insight to her mind. She lost her self in the annihilation in the Holy, Exalted Beloved, ridding herself of everything except Him.
She freed herself of all material existence, and cut herself off from contact with feelings for the outside world, being only concerned with Allah. Thus she reached an existence absent from the world of the senses, swimming in the world of the Love – in the Everlasting World of the Essence, and its overwhelming magnificent lights. Her body became a stranger to her – a body which she ignored and had no knowledge about, like a corpse with which she had no contact.

Once when a thorn entered her eye, she said that she only felt it when she had finished her prayer, because her Beloved always enlightened her spirit during prayer and meditation. An important matter, which stirred up narrow-minded people against her was how she interpreted the following verse of the Qur'an in which the Exalted One says, "Wherein are those of modest gaze, untouched before them by people or jinn." [Q55:56].

The interpreters of Qur'an, at that time, described the meaning of "gaze" in this verse as the taking of virgin girls which Allah promised to his obedient worshippers. This was a materialistic interpretation which thus brought its meaning closer to the people of the material world. When Rabia heard someone reciting this verse, she recalled the material and sensual interpretation given to it by the interpreters of that time, and her pure soul revolted against it. She felt a great aversion to their understanding, and her noble sense of goodness was angered by it. She then said, in a mocking way, "Poor one; the people of Paradise with the matter of their wives!" With this mocking remark she uncovered all those who were attached to the outer, worldly meaning of the People of Paradise as wanting nothing other than to follow their sensual pleasures. But those who were considered to be interpreters [of the Qur'an] insisted upon this meaning, that the people of the Garden were only busy with their pleasures.

As for marriage, Rabia saw that it was unnecessary because it would occupy and distract her from walking towards Allah. Her life, completely devoted to Him, prevented her from considering marriage. Nevertheless this did not prevent some men from asking for her in marriage.

Among those men were also ascetic slaves. For example, Abd al-Wahid ibn Zayd, a distinguished and highly gifted scholar, who when he asked her if she would marry him, she shunned him and would no longer speak to him until he apologized to her, after which she allowed him to come to visit her only once more.

The Emir of Basra also asked her to marry him, but she refused him in a letter in which she said, "It brings me no happiness that you should become my slave, and that I should be owned by you, and that you should keep me occupied, away from Allah, even for a glance."

Rabia's attitude and personal view of marriage was that marriage was for those who were concerned with the affairs of the material world; she had become as nothing to being a self and existed only through Him. The one who wished marriage with her needed to ask the One Who owned her for her hand. She lived in the shadow of His command. It was a point of view which became general amongst the Sufis of her time – being so absorbed in their worship of Allah.

For this reason the Imam Hasan al-Basri, may Allah be pleased with him, said. "My guiding line is that of being an ascetic and not an indulgent child." The knower of Allah, al-Malik al-Dinar, was heard to say, "A man does not reach the pinnacle of being a Sufi until he is able to leave his wife as though she were a widow."

These sayings reveal the extent of asceticism in which these early Sufis were living. Their only concern was to attain Allah's Acceptance and Contentment with them.

Thus, we hear of Rabia in her secret conversations with Allah, saying, "O my Lord, I seek refuge in You from all beings that occupy me from You, and from there being any obstacle between You and me.

"O Lord, I have never listened to the sound of animals, or the movement of trees, or the murmur of water, or the song of birds, or the sitting in the shadows, or the sound of the wind, or the echo of thunder, but I have seen them as a sign of Your Oneness showing me that there is nothing like You.

"The eyes are sleeping, and those who are unaware have forgotten, but sinful Rabia remains before You. Maybe it is Your looking upon her that keeps her from sleeping and being intent upon Your service, and Your Glory, and Majesty.

"I will not cease from serving You, night and day until I meet You. Oh Master, You, the Ever-Near, come closer.

"Through Your Majesty the whales swim in the vast oceans, and for Your Holy Might the waves face each other.

"Before You the darkness of night and the light of day prostrates, the planets rotate, the oceans rise, the moon gives light, and the stars radiate. You are All-Capable because You are Allah, the Exalted One, the Subduer, the All-Mighty."

Even though Rabia was beautiful, she refused marriage. This was not something normally favorable to Islam. She knew of the obligations of the Religion, and the hadith of the Prophet, the prayers and peace of Allah be upon him, and the fiqh, and of tafsir (interpretation), but she brought to light a new kind of love in the Sufi Path. She knew of nothing but Allah, loved none but Him, and was totally absorbed in work for Him only. She had no desire for anything, and no aim but His Contentment with her.

For forty years she did not raise her eyes towards the sky, out of humility towards Allah, Exalted is He. When she was offered marriage, she answered, "Marriage is necessary for those who have choice, but I am not free to choose. I am for Allah and under His Orders."

There is nothing of value in the world for someone who has joined her thoughts and faith only with the hereafter where she would meet Allah, Exalted is He. She no longer concerned herself with the world, and kept her shroud in front of her eyes so as to be able to see it every day. Each time she prostrated in prayer she wept so that her prayer rug was wet with tears. For thirty years she repeated in prayer, "O Lord, You have drowned me in Your Love so that nothing will ever distract me from You."
Rabia worshiped Allah with all her being, and felt Him with her wherever she was, so that when she was once asked, "Do you see the one Who you worship?" She replied, "If I did not see Him, how could I worship Him?"

Rabia truly walked in the special way in the Love of Allah, and had a clear influence on the Sufi Path after her. Love for Allah became the way for purifying the heart and the soul, seeking Him Alone, and leaving all else. As she, may Allah be pleased with her, said, "O my Lord, burn with fire a heart that loves You, and a tongue that mentions Your Name, and a slave who fears only You."

In this way she transcended the material world. In a wider circle of existence she discovered all the caves in her heart, and no longer walked towards Allah from fear of His Fire or desire for His Garden, but she said, "If I worship You for Your Love, then give me the greatest reward – that of seeing Your Face, O You of Majesty and Nobility."

Her love transcended all purpose, because she no longer thought of the garden or the fire or of reward or punishment. She was face to Face with the Essence of Allah alone. She said, "O Lord, make the fire for Your enemies, and the garden for Your beloveds, but for me there is only You."

This created a new image of life in this world and in the hereafter, bringing together all that passes away with the Eternal, and in so doing, a bridge was built upon which the righteous could travel from all times to Pre-Eternity. She used to say, "Eat the bread of this world but do the work of the other World."

When Rabia was eighty years old she was like a skeleton, almost falling down when she walked. When her time came to die, she called her servant companion and said to her, “O woman, do not disturb me in my death, but wrap me in my dress.” Her dress was a long gown of rough wool which she would wear during the night. As she had requested, her servant wrapped her body in this dress and in a another woolen wrapper which she used to wear, and buried her on the Mountain in Jerusalem in the year 125 H./752 C.E. May Allah have mercy upon this knower of His, Rabia al-Adawiyya, the Mother of Goodness.

Rabia, may Allah be pleased with her, lived all her life in accordance with a line which had no end or alteration. It came from the depths of her heart, and ended with her Lord, the Creator. In her heart she lived the fullest life a heart can live; in her soul, the purest life that a soul illuminated by the Light of Allah can have. She drank from the Spring of Divine Love until she was satiated. Her state was that of intimacy and proximity, of insight and contentment, and of a knowing commitment. She had lived in the ecstasy of sensibility, but not of passionate excitement.

She was constantly sinking down and rising up in the Presence of the Truth, and was always in intimate conversation with Him, in His Remembrance, in her obedience to Him, in her proximity, and in her contemplation. She lived all the time in struggle to reach the deep knowledge of Allah, and under the shelter of His Words, “As for those who strive hard in Us, We shall surely guide them to our Paths. And verily Allah is with those who do good [for Allah’s sake].” Then Allah gave her His Path and enlightened her Way and filled her to overflowing with His Mercy and Blessings and many good things.

Allah, Exalted is He, purified Rabia’s soul and chose it for His Righteous Path, for His Longing, His Love and His Light. He gave her victory with the struggle in life against evil, the devil, and his temptations. She became like a complete nation for Him, and left behind her a deep spiritual heritage, and writings of high quality which were enlivened by an overwhelming Light. She was a leader in the Sufi Path of Islam, and a Mistress of its Way in revealing its sources, and widening its horizons. Truly Rabia’s station was that of the Deep Love.

In her early years she had been worried and confused, knocking at many doors, feeling for the door – the Door which would open for her, and the Path on which she would walk. In her heart she was a true believer and her soul was full of longing. But there was a rebellion in her body against the signs that would bring her to the Straight Path, and which would calm her heart and soul, which were veiled by clouds of confusion and pain.

She trusted Allah and He opened His Door for her – the Door of His remembrance and intimate conversation which was to be her Path. Light began to show her the outlines of the Path, and everything became clearer. She was then able to seek Allah’s Guidance and that which was pleasing to Him.

This hope in her Lord remained with her most of the time, as she began to listen to and to hear the melodies of Existence, after which she would weep filled with deep faith, yearning, and supplication. Her tongue would speak for her when in these lofty states, imprisoned in pain, she would say, “I will endure all pain, and will be patient. But there is a pain which is much greater than this; a pain in my soul which prevents me from being patient with my self, which puts fear into my mind and my heart, and that is, ‘Are You content with me, O Lord?’ For this alone is my goal.”

No bodily or earthly pain distressed her, but she was tortured and suffered from a Hidden pain. She wanted and asked for reassurance and faith in her station with Allah. Was He really content with her?

She surmounted these states, which in time changed from worry and concern to reassurance. Allah honored her, freed her, and lifted her up among people. In a state of complete wakefulness she would hear whispers announcing pleasant words and a happy resting place which gladdened and lightened her heart.

In spite of having reached this station Rabia remained haunted by the picture of the Fire of Hell, and fears of torture in the hereafter still disturbed her. She loved Allah and worshiped Him alone, but was this love enough to save her from the Fire on the Great Day of Power and Fear? “A Day that, when you see it, every nursing mother shall forget the child she was nursling, and lost is every child carried in the womb of those who are carrying it, and you will see the people drunk, and yet they are not drunk, but the fear of the Punishment of Allah is intense.” [Q22:2].

Then she would sigh in intimate conversation saying, “O Lord, You burn in the Fire the heart that loves You, and a tongue that remembers You, and a slave that fears You.” But she came to realize that the Fire with its fuel and heat carried no fear or worry. And she gained knowledge of what Paradise contained of pleasure for the self, and joy for the eyes of the true believer and lover. For she knew with certainty that she, Rabia, worshiped Allah not out of fear of the Fire, but she said, “If there were no fire and no garden, no one would worship Allah, and no one would fear Him.” Then she would glorify Him saying, “O Lord, give the Fire to Your enemies, and the Garden to Your beloveds, but I only want You, and always the meeting with You.”

Rabia had many states, for sometimes the Love would overcome her, and sometimes it would be fear, and sometimes happiness. Then she would say, “My Beloved has no beloved like Him, and no other can have a share of me. My Beloved is hidden from sight and my presence, but He is never away from my heart.”

In one of her intimate conversations, she said, “I have put You in my heart, the one Who converses with me, but I give my body to those who want to sit with me. For he who sits with me finds happiness in it, but I belong to the Beloved of my heart.”And in a state of fear she said:

My food is little and I have not much,
So should I weep for the little I have,

Or to weep for the distance in front of me?
So burn me in the Fire,

O Purpose of my hope, for where is my hope
If not in You, and where is My fear?

And in a state of ecstasy she said:

O You, my happiness, my hope and my support,
My intimacy, my readiness and my aim,

You are the soul of my heart,
You are my Intimate Conversations.

You are to me my Intimacy,
And my longing for You is my food.

If it were not for You, O my Life and my intimacy,
I would not have been born in this spacious land.

Your Love is now absolute for Me.
You are the clarity for the eyes of my thirsty heart,

That You should be content with me,
For, O Hope of my heart, my happiness has begun.

In the same way she would send out her song which carried the Eternal Truth, as she talked with the Greatest Beloved, Exalted is His Majesty:

My desire is that You should be content with me

Even when people are angry with me.

My desire is that what is between You and me, remains forever,
And that what is between me and the world is destroyed.

If I could reach to You then all would be easy for me,
For all that covers the Earth is only earth.

When Rabia was in her mihrab she would always call to Allah to drown her in His Generous Outpouring, and include her in His Noble Mercy; always asking with a humble heart, and with complete and unshakable certainty in Him.

Rabia, may Allah be pleased with her, was a leader in the Love of Allah – the Love which includes all happiness and its loftiness, faith and abundance, and which includes the love for everything in existence – all creatures, since they are created by Allah, Exalted and Mighty is He.

She knew that there is no separation between the lover and the Beloved, but only that there are words that come from longing, and a depiction that comes from tasting. Whoever tastes, knows, and whoever describes it is He Who is the Describer; for how can one describe someone in Whose presence one is absent, but in Whose existence one is present, and in Whose sight one is melted, and in Whose separation one is confused, and in whose happiness with Him one is bewildered in the passionate love?

Fear keeps the tongues silent, and experiencing prevents the cowardly from seeing the pure ones, and jealousy blinds the eyes with illusions, and wonderment shuts out the minds from Destiny.

In the Presence of the Beloved there is constant astonishment and a necessary confusion, and hearts made mad in Love, and secrets untold, and annihilated bodies. As Rabia said:

My Cup, my Wine and the drinking Friend are three,
And I am longing in the Love to be the fourth.

My Cup of delight and happiness, my Cupbearer
Rotates continuously on the Path.

When I look I only see Him, and if I am present
I only see Him with Himself.

O You my Supporter, I love Your Beauty.
And by Allah! my ears hear no other than You.

How long I have been in my burning and attachment to You,
My eyes overflowing with tears,

Nor do my tears cease, nor does my description of Him remain,
For I cannot stop my painful tears.

One of the stories related about Rabia, may Allah be pleased with her, and her blessing tells of how: “One day a thief entered her house and looked around her room, but could not find anything to steal except a water jar. He was about to leave when Rabia said to him, ‘Do not go away without taking something.’ The thief was surprised by her words and replied, looking around him, ‘But there is nothing here except this water jar. What should I do with that?’

“Rabia said, ‘Take the jar, and go into that room and make ablution, and then pray two raku’ and you will leave with something.’

“This was the first moment of light in the thief’s life, and he did what Rabia told him to do. He took the water jar, made ablution, and then stood up to pray.

“When Rabia saw him standing there, she realized that Allah’s Mercy would make him repent. She raised her hands to the heavens and said, ‘O Master and Lord, this man came to my door, but he did not find anything with me, so I have let him stand at Your Door. So do not deny him Your Mercy.’

“Then she looked at the thief to see what was happening to him and what effect the prayer would have on him. She was happy to see him absorbed by his prayer until the dawn came. He tasted the sweetness of belief for the first time and felt something of intimate conversation. He was like a sick person who has suddenly been cured of a dangerous illness. He felt goodness and healing in his whole body, and felt its beauty and its sweetness.

“This was the case of the thief who had entered Rabia’s house bringing with him his devil who had been whispering evil into his self, but Allah’s Mercy took him away from his evil clutches.

“When Rabia went to him at dawn she found him in prostration and in bitterness and sorrow saying, ‘If my Lord would not have said to me, are you not ashamed to disobey Me? You hide the sins of My creation, and you come to Me in disobedience. Then what strength would I have when He chastises me and punishes me?’ Rabia asked him, ‘How was your night?’ The thief answered, ‘Good. I have stood before my Lord in my lowliness and insignificance, and He has accepted my excuse, and has healed my wounds and has forgiven me my sins, and He has given me what I have asked of Him.’

“Then he left Rabia’s house, but with another heart than the one he had entered with, and another self than the self he had before he met Rabi’a. He was completely changed, as if he had been reborn. The thief in him had died, and for the first time sorrow for the time he had lost had taken him over.

“Rabia lifted her hands to the heavens and said, ‘O Master, O Lord, this man stood before Your Door for one night, and You accepted him. But I have been standing before You since the moment that I first knew You, have You accepted me also?’

“Rabia was called to, ‘O Rabia, because of you We accepted him, and because of you We brought him close.’

“She then bowed her head to the ground in shame before Allah, and said, ‘How can I explain my thanking my Master and Lord for what He has felt to honor me with? I am the weak creature. Does she deserve all that blessing from her Generous Lord?’

“Then she stood up to pray, and tears ran down her cheeks in thankfulness.”

It was also related that once when she went to make the Pilgrimage to the ka`bah, she had a small donkey with her for carrying her belongings. On her journey, and in the middle of the desert, the donkey died. One of the men in their caravan said to her, “Our animals will carry your belongings for you.” But she replied, “I wasn’t depending upon you when I started out on my journey, but I was depending upon Allah, Exalted is He. So please continue on your way without me.”

The caravan then continued and after they had left, Rabia called to Allah saying, “Is this the way the kings go about with their weak, helpless slaves? You have asked me to visit Your House, and I have answered what You asked of me, but now you tell my donkey to die on the way, and You leave me alone.”

The moment she had finished voicing her complaint, the donkey shook itself and stood up. She put her belongings on it, and continued her journey until she overtook the caravan.

One day some righteous people visited Rabia, and as was her habit, she talked to them about worshipping Allah. She asked one of her visitors, “Why do you worship Allah?” He replied, “Because I fear the fire.” Then she asked the same question to another one of them, who said, “I worship Him out of fear of the fire and longing for the garden.” But Rabia then said, “How poor is someone who worships Allah, the All-Mighty, hoping for the garden, or from fear of the fire!” She was silent for few moments, then said, “Then if there were no fire or garden, you would not worship Allah, Exalted is He!”

The two visitors looked at each other without saying anything, and then they asked her, “And you, why do you worship Allah?”

She said, may Allah be pleased with her, “I worship Him for His Own sake. Is it not enough, for all the blessings He has given me, that He wants me to worship Him?”

With this Rabia, may Allah be pleased with her, made clear the station of worship which she had reached. She worshiped Allah out of love for Him, longing for Him, and in acknowledgement of His Graces and Blessings upon her, by which He ordered her to worship Him. She worshiped Him with her heart, her tongue, and all her senses. She worshiped Him while awake and while sleeping, because her heart was imbued with His Remembrance, and her breath was used for supplication and humble prayers. She prayed to Him as a person who expects to meet Him any moment, because every call to prayer reminded her of the Call on the Day of Resurrection, and this reminded her of the state of the Day of Congregation and Reckoning.

This witness of the Love of Allah, who walked the Path to Allah and His knowing, announced to all seekers how they could walk as she did, so that they might come out from their existence, from the World of the Kingdom (al-mulk), to the World of Dominion (al-malakut), to the World of Omnipotence (al-jabarut), to the World of Allah (al-lahut), so that through their walking they might reach all the meanings of the Truth.

Peace be upon you, O Rabia, from the day you were born until the day you left this world of the senses to be in the World of Meanings. May the holy spirits of these Lovers be ever circling in the World of the Truth in proximity to Allah, their Lord. And may Allah be content with them, and they with Him. This is for those who fear Allah.

Copyright © Sidi Muhammad Press 2018 All Rights Reserved.