

‘Azīz Maḥmūd Hudayī (1543–1628)

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Hudayi was born in Koçhisar (which today is Şereflikoçhisar) in 1543, a town near Ankara. However, he grew up in Sivrihisar, a town in Eskişehir. After his initial education there, he moved to Istanbul to continue his learning at the Küçük Aya Sofia mosque. Whilst there, he attended the spiritual gatherings of Nureddinzade Muslihuddin Efendi (d.1573), of whom he says in his *Tezakir* that “the late Bali Efendi of Sofia (d.1553) was the master of my master”. Bali Efendi is famous for having written an excellent commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, while Nureddinzade wrote a famous commentary on Sadr al-din al-Qunawi’s *Nuṣūṣ*.

Hudayi was a very obedient student and followed his teacher when he left Istanbul to teach at the Edirne Selimiyya Madrasa, acting as his assistant. Later he became a judge in the sharī‘a courts of Egypt, then in Damascus, where he stayed for two to three years. This was a very important post, second only to the governor of Damascus. He was known for his very good Arabic writing; his *tafsir al-Qur’ān* is still extant, and was said by one of his students to have been written directly from inspiration. In 1573 he was promoted to be judge in Bursa, whilst his teacher Nureddinzade became a Mevlevi judge (a name given to the experienced professors of law).

When his teacher died in the third year of his Bursa duty, Hudayi was 36 years old, and became a *murīd* of Hazreti Uftade. The story of how he came to this is well known: it involved a fish-seller who was taken on hajj in a week under the *himma* of Uftade’s disciple, Eskiçi Dede, whereas it normally takes at least six months. The case came up at Hudayi’s court, and it prompted a spiritual crisis in him, similar to that of al-Ghazali. Eventually he went to Eskiçi Dede and asked to become his pupil, but the latter refused and sent him on to Uftade. Hudayi’s subsequent climb up the hill to visit Uftade in his house led to his being taken on as a disciple on three conditions: that he give up his wealth, that he give up his job, and that he give up his ego. To show his commitment, he was asked to sell liver in the market-place in Bursa – a very low-status job, which was a humiliation for a man who had been one of the most important people of the town.

He was also set to clean the toilets of the tekke. One day whilst he was engaged in this, he heard the drums beating to announce the arrival of the new judge of the town. He found himself sad at this, at which point he saw his own egotism clearly and decided to clean the toilets with his beard in order to master his *nafs*. When Uftade saw this, he elevated him. He was an excellent pupil and reached his aim in

three years, becoming the khalifa, or best student, of his master. In fact, Uftade told him that he had reached such a state of perfection that he would surpass his master.

There are several stories of his excellence as a pupil. For example: all the students were sent to slaughter a chicken where no-one could see them. At the end of the day, only Hudayi returned with his chicken still alive. Asked why, he answered that he could find no place where God did not see him. Another story tells how they were all sent out to pick a flower, and Hudayi returned with only one dead bloom. This time, he explained, it was because all the other flowers were engaged in mentioning the Names of Allah and he could not interrupt them.

At the age of 39 (1580), Uftade sent him back to his homeland for guidance. After six months, he returned to Bursa to visit his master, but found that Uftade had died a few days earlier. At this point he took over the leadership of the order. He went to the Balkans for a few years with his family, and then returned to Istanbul, settling in the Ayasofia area and teaching at the Kuçuk Aya Sofia. Here he attracted many disciples and followers, amongst whom were members of the Ottoman royal family. The Sultan wanted to endow a *waqf* for him, but he wanted to build his own, so eventually he bought land in Uskudar and set up his own lodge. He continued to preach at the Fatih Mosque, but in 1599 he gave this up and started preaching only in the tekke in Uskudar.

He had good relations with several sultans: Murad III (1574–95), Mehmet III (1595–1602) and Ahmed 1 (1603–17). He was especially close to Ahmed, and the story is that the relationship began with a dream. When Ahmed first came to power, the Ottoman Empire was in conflict with Austria, and Ahmed had a dream in which he was fighting the King of Austria in a wrestling match. The king defeated him by wrestling him to the ground, and pushed him down on his back. He sent the dream to many wise men by letter, and although many gave interpretations, Ahmed was not satisfied with any of them. Then Hudayi interpreted it as follows: the most powerful part of a man is his back, the most powerful part of the world is the ground. So the meaning of the dream is victory, and Ahmed should not be afraid to go to war.

This was a very risky interpretation since defeat for Ahmed would entail dire consequences. However, he was victorious, and became Hudayi's disciple. The apartments attached to the mosque at Uskudar were built for the Sultan to visit; there was a mosque below where he prayed, and it became clear in the conversation that Ahmed visited the tekke often. On one occasion, when Hudayi met them at the shore, the Sultan got off his horse and asked Hudayi to get on it and precede him. Hudayi did so for a few minutes, then stopped and said that he had only done it because Uftade had prophesied that this would happen and he wanted to experience the truth of it. Hudayi was greatly honoured by Ahmed: he was the first person to lay a foundation stone in the Blue Mosque, and gave the *khutba* at the opening

ceremony. When Ahmed died in 1617, Hudayi was invited to wash the body but he pleaded old age (he was then 74 years old) and sent Şaban Dede instead. He went on to advise two more sultans, Osman II (1618–22) and Murad IV (1623–40). He gave the sword to one of the sultans (probably Murad IV) during his inauguration at Eyup, which is the ultimate honour.

Hudayi died on 1 October 1628. He gave up material wealth and position for God, but God gave all of it back to him. By the time he died, he was extremely wealthy and powerful. His tekke was one of the most important in Turkey, with 170,000 disciples and 60 khalifas.

Although he began his discipleship in the Helveti way, Hudayi became a Jelveti, which means that his order was centred on the principle of being among people, not in seclusion. Ibn ‘Arabī says in the *Futūḥāt* (II, 484) that after the disciple has reached perfection by cleansing himself from material encumbrances, he does not need seclusion any more, since even in the company of people one can be alone with God. In that sense, the pupil experiences every sound from the creation as a Divine address made to himself. In this respect, *jalwa* is better than *khalwa*. Hudayi said that *jalwa* was the prophetic way, as all the prophets were in *jalwa*, i.e. acting in public.

Hudayi wrote many books, none of which are yet translated into English, and in them he makes many references to the teaching of Ibn ‘Arabi and his followers. [There is a book now in the little library in Uskudar, the Selim Aga, but originally in the tekke library, which is a collection of 11 works by Ibn ‘Arabī in Hudayi’s own hand dated 1599]. His master Uftade was known to have been an Uwaysi student of Ibn ‘Arabī’s – meaning that he was taught directly by him after his death.

The sign above the doorway to Hudayi’s tomb says:

This burial place is where the pure souls gather together, who come
here with courtesy (*adab*),
Oh my heart, if you want to benefit from the Divine taste, you will
surely get your portion when you enter through the door of Hudayi.

The tekke was closed in 1925 and its assets and library dispersed. It was reopened in 1985 and is now set up as a charitable foundation (*waqf*), which provides for the poor of the area. They feed 3–4,000 people a day, provide medical care and medicines, coal and clothing, houses for elderly people, student hostels and Quran schools. Some of the land around, which was originally part of the *waqf* but was sold off when the tekke was closed, is now being reclaimed. There are also charitable foundations in other places, such as Bangladesh, and there is now a Hudayi village which was set up in southern India after the tsunami.

Hudayi's prayer: the story is that one day when Hudayi and Sultan Ahmed were walking in Uskudar forest, Ahmed said: "Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani promised that on the Day of Judgment he would save a certain number of people. Why don't you make a promise like this?" Hudayi replied:

Those who follow my path, those who visit my tomb and recite the *Fatiha*, are ours. May they not drown in the sea, and not experience poverty in their old age. May they only die after saying their testimony of faith. May they know the time of their death and inform their relatives.