

# Kashf-ul-Mahjub alive!

By Muhammad Hanif

There is a shrine in Lahore that attracts the rulers and the ruled alike. This practice has persisted for last many centuries. The man lying in the shrine been embraced by both Muslim and non-Muslim communities including the Hindus and the Sikhs and the Parsees. Even after the passage of 967 years, his fame has risen everyday, evermore. Even after his demise, he is revered as a saint, and his tomb is a place of seeking spiritual blessings. The people of the sub-continent fondly remember him as Ali Hujwiri, chiefly through his masterpiece, *Kashf-ul-Mahjub*. The book brought the author everlasting reverence and fame.

According to R A Nicholson (1945), Hujwiri was born in the last decade of the tenth century, or in the first decade of the eleventh century in Ghazna, now in Afghanistan.

Apart from *Kashf-ul-Mahjub*, according to his own statement, Hujwiri was the author of another nine books, none of which have survived. R A Nicholson has mentioned them by name. *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* was written in Lahore, in response to the request of a certain God-seeker Abu Saeed, a relative or fellow-townsmen of the author. During the composition of the book, the writer admits that he was hindered by the lack of the books which were left in his hometown. Still he-making use of his encyclopedic knowledge-managed to produce a book which excelled Imam Abul Qasim al-Qushairi's (1072) great work on Sufism *ar-Risala al-Qushairiyya*. Al-Qushairi was a Hujwiri's contemporary.

*Kashf-ul-Mahjub* deals with the complete system of Sufism, setting out and discussing its principles and practices. An early orthodox work on tasawwuf in Persian, *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* cites other mystic writers and their works. The work sheds light on the history, ideology and practice of Sufism. The author offers the traveller on the Path (*salik*) universal and timeless advice on belief, contemplation, generosity, spiritual courtesy, prayer, almsgiving, companionship, love and purification from foulness. In

addition, he helps one distinguish false spirituality and false guides from the real, a discernment just as significant today as then.

This classic text contains brief biographies of the eminent saints of the past and the present, including Fudail bin Iyaz, the robber who becomes a great spiritual director; Ibrahim bin Adham, the prince who renounces everything when the divine call found way to his heart; Malik bin Dinar, who is awoken to the spiritual reality by a voice from the unseen; and Habib Ra'i, whose sheep are looked after by his wolf. The book is a rich store of anecdotes. Stories built around the venerable saints' lives arouse the interest of the reader. Their words of wisdom help one in inner awakening.

An important theme that runs through the book is strictly practising the outward observances of Islamic injunctions. A great upholder of the sacred law, Ali Hujwiri explains clearly that no God-seeker-not even one who attains the supreme degree of spiritual advancement-is above the commands of the Qur'an and Sunna. A true Sufi is, in the eyes of Ali Hujwiri, only the one who has held fast to the embrace of the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him), and has observed the outward forms of devotion which are incumbent on every Muslim; he must follow the path of the inner spiritual truth of mysticism and Shariah Law; never should they be separated from each other. "The Law without the Truth," says Hujwiri, "is ostentation, and the Truth without the Law is hypocrisy. Their mutual relation may be compared to that of body and spirit: when the spirit departs from the body, the living body becomes a corpse, and the spirit vanishes like wind. The Moslem profession of faith includes both: the words, 'There is no God but Allah,' are the Truth, and the words, 'Mohammed is the Apostle of Allah,' are the Law; anyone who denies the Truth is an infidel, and any one who rejects the Law is a heretic."

*Kashf-ul-Mahjub* is a powerful and persuasive piece of writing. The authenticity of the book appeals equally to spiritualists and formalists; its material comes from the primary sources of Islamic law. Hundreds of Qur'anic verses plus traditions elevate the rank of the book. What the Qur'an preaches and the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) demonstrates through his character, an aspirant to Sufism puts into practice.

R A Nicholson, an eminent English Orientalist, writes in the preface of *Kashf-ul-Mahjub*: "It ... has the merit ... of bringing us into immediate touch with the author himself, his views, experiences, and adventures, while incidentally it throws light on the manners of dervishes in various parts of the Moslem world. His exposition of the Sufi doctrine and practice is distinguished not only by wide learning and firsthand knowledge but also by the strongly personal character impressed on everything he writes."

The name *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* (which means the raiser of the curtain of heedlessness) itself explains the function of the book. It has always been recommended by scholars and Sufi masters as a guide for developing positive personality traits. Awliya Allah have paid homage to the book in different words: it a guide for the novice and beacon light for master-sailors; comprehensive advice; a unique book and a perfect guide; instrumental to the discovery of a perfect guide. In her book "Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries", Anna Suvorova holds that Allama Iqbal's verse 'The fame of the Truth was exalted by his words', probably alludes to *Kashf-ul-Mahjub*.

On certain issues, the author quotes earlier authors and analyzes their ideas before giving his own opinion. His commentary on such occasions reveals the depth of knowledge which the Lord granted him. Many moral lessons of mysticism come from the writer's own experience on the path of enlightenment. Also, in order to illustrate his point, at times he relates stories of contemporary and past Sufi masters. A few moral and faith-inspiring stories from *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* are quoted below. We must allow the venerable mystic to speak directly to the reader, to instruct.

On the rules of companionship, he gave the following anecdote. It is related that a man prayed, while he was circumambulating the Ka'ba, "O God, make my brethren good!" When asked why he did not implore a blessing for himself in such a place, he replied: "I have brethren to whom I shall return. If they are good, I shall be good with them, and if they are wicked, I shall be wicked with them."

Here is another story which tells us the fruit of sincere obedience to Allah: a devout servant of God Almighty cares so much about others.... A man came to the

house of Imam Hasan bin Ali and said that he owed four hundred dirhems. Imam Hasan handed him the required amount and entered the house, weeping. People asked him why he wept. "I have been negligent in making inquiry into the circumstances of this man, and have reduced him to the humiliation of begging," came the humble answer.

Abu Sahl never put alms into the hand of a dervish, and always used to lay on the ground anything that he gave away. "Worldly goods," he said, "are too worthless to be placed in the hand of a Moslem, so that my hand should be the upper and his, the lower."

All the three preceding stories from *Kashf-ul-Mahjub* are very much relevant to our turbulent time. In recent years, some fanatics have emerged who, in the name of religion, do away with the lives of others. What to talk of murdering peaceful citizens, the above mentioned friends of Allah, His favourites, who do not like even to hurt the dignity of others! Their lives are devoted to the betterment of humanity at large. Undoubtedly, they have done a great service to the cause of Islam-which is why the common Muslims consider them the champions of faith. Islam's message consists of peace, harmony, love and tolerance, and this was the basis of spreading Islam in the sub-continent and the whole world over. Sufi saints and their works are an embodiment of this message.