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“The Tradition of Moroccan Islamic Suffi Saints”

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The existence of Saints, to whose shrines and mausoleums are paid frequent visits by various sorts of pilgrims, is well established in the North African country of Morocco. Saints from Jewish, Christian and Muslim confessions are, up to nowadays, venerated by believers who make yearly pilgrimages to their mausoleums. Traditions of ethnic groups from all three faiths that represent the existing ‘religions of the Book’ are still kept as they have been practiced for centuries by Moroccan Jews, Christians and Muslims. Various cults and values have thus been perpetuated through the ages. Hundreds of shrines are scattered all over the Moroccan landscape. Most of these venerated Saints are very ancient. However, very scarce are contemporary ones. And this is of the peculiarities of the selected target of this presentation: Sheikh Sidi Mohammed Lahbib El Bouchouari, Imam of the Mosque of Tanalt.

I. The Context :

Morocco is located in North Africa. Its geographically diversified landscape (mountains, deserts and fertile plains) is about twice the size of California. Its population of 30 million inhabitants is mainly made of Muslim Arabs and Berbers, peacefully living for many centuries with minorities of Jews and Christians.

This land of peace and tolerance has grown to firmly adopt the “Sunni” rite as conveyed, since the 8th century, by the Malekite School of thought. The introduction of this rite in Morocco by Darras Ibn Ismail El Fassi, in the 9th century, found in the newly built “Al Qaraouine” mosque (867 a.c.) an ideal

cradle for the development and expansion of the teachings of Islam, as based on the “Coran” and the “Sunna” (teachings of the Imam of Medine, Malik Ibnou Anas Ibnou Amer El Asbahi, who had compiled all the relevant and authentic “Hadiths” of the Prophet in his book “Al Mouattaa”). Malekism thus served as a factor of religious and legal unity, facing potential penetration from the east of other religious teachings considered as heretic: i.e. “chiism” and “Moatazilism”. The Moroccan southern “Souss” region, where Sheikh Mohammed El Habib later grew up, further developed stronger Malekite roots when, in the mid eleventh century, the “Souss” Imam Waggag Ibn Zellou Ellamti assigned his student, Sheikh Abdallah Ibn Yacine Al Jazouli, as a predicator and teacher of “Coran” and of the Tradition of the Prophet to the southern Berber tribes. Sunni Malekism was therefore due to be more deeply rooted within the local traditions and religious understanding and interpretation of Islam. All prevailing schools of thought in the region were to further perpetuate such a trend.

Parallel to this tendency of irreversible religious penetration, based on the sole veneration of ‘Allah’ (God) and on the belief in the teachings of His Prophet, local traditions paradoxically still allowed for the veneration of large numbers of Saints. Practices ranged from respectfully pious prayers and invocations of almighty God, for the rest and blessing of the Saint’s soul, to miscellaneous practices of ignorance, which at times reached states of heresy (1). Among these intermingling varieties of attitudes, three levels of statuses of saints can be outlined:

1. There were saints with a national reputation as statutory Saints whom the followers invested with a “Baraka” linked with their direct links as descendents of the prophet. Among this category are most members of the royal dynasties who governed the country since the Sultan Moulay Idriss of Zerhoun and his son the Sultan Moulay Idriss Al Azhar, founder of the Islamic city of Fez. Mausoleums of both Saints are still venerated by pilgrims who come in to pray, meditate and invoke God in yearly “Moussems” of the “Chorfas” Idrissi descendents from all over the country.

2. There were also saints who were considered as such because of their mystical doctrinal teachings as “Suffi” founders of religious orders. Their sanctuaries are still venerated in spectacular processions of pilgrims (2). Lives of these saints and their disciples are abundant of legends and miraculous achievements.

3. There were, finally, saints to whom local populations vowed due respect, mostly for their piety, pacifism, human generosity and, in a few cases, miraculous curing of various physical, mental and soul sicknesses and diseases.

Among all these practices, “Suffism” has been most influential on large portions of the population. Islamic mysticism generated in the 7th century, basically as individual ascetic experiences allowing a direct communion with God. Its spiritual dimension mainly called upon retreat, reflection, meditation and prayer. Most “Suffi” Saints would generally establish their residence in specifically retrenched areas, away from the temptations of material life. Their “Medersas” and “Zaouias” would mainly serve as spaces for Islamic education of rural populations. Each isolated tribe would have a mosque, and within it, would have a “Medersa” in which “Coran” and “Hadith” would be taught to the children of the village, and beyond them, according to the personal qualities and scientific prevalence of the practicing “Fqih”, to visiting “Tolbas” who would come in as scholars seeking knowledge through his teachings. Some of these instructors grew progressively into becoming living references, religious authorities and recognized “Oulemas”. Most of them were not necessarily linked to “Zaouias” or religious orders. However, two major “Suffi” orders initially stemmed out as prevailing nation-wide references: these are the orders of Moulay Abdelkader Jilali and Moulay Abdessalam Ben Mchich

(1140 – 1223). Many subsequent orders also later developed in more contemporary Morocco. Needless to mention that French colonialism greatly encouraged their development in the 20th century. These are mostly:

- The **Zaouia Tijania**, named after its rigorist founder, *Sidi Ahmed Tijani*, who preached the return to Islamic orthodoxy and condemned the visits to the tombs of saints. Yet, most of the adepts of his school from Morocco, Mauritania and West Africa (mainly Senegal and Ivory Coast) still come in as pilgrims to his mausoleum in the medina of Fes;
- The **Zaouia Cherkaouia**, in Boujaad, named after the *Sheikh Sidi Bouabid Mhamed Cherqui*, who had reached the acknowledged status of “Qotb” during his lifetime in the 16th century;
- The **Zaouia Boutchichyia Kadiriya**; founded in the 12 century by Moulay Abdelkader Jilali, whose sanctuary is very famous in Baghdad;
- The **Zaouia Naciria**, named after Sidi Mhamed Ou Hmad Bennacer Edderaï and located in Tameghroute, near the Zagora Oasis;
- The **Zaouia Ouezzania**;
- The **Zaouia Kettania**;
- The **Zaouia Lhansalia**;
- The **Zaouia Derkaouia**, a very orthodox order, founded by Moulay Larbi Addarkaoui (1760 – 1823);
- And many other **Zaouias**.

The *Sheikh Sidi Mohammed El Habib El Bouchouari* was actually born and raised in a family spiritually affiliated with the **Zaouia Derkaouia** (3), even though the teachings of his ascetic “Suffi” School were based on a conciliation of all paths of the existing “Zaouias” that are based on the “Coran” and the “Sunna”.

II. A Sample of Saints and Pilgrimage Rituals:

1. **The Mausoleum of a Former Sovereign: Moulay Idriss Al Azhar of Fes:** This Sultan reigned over Morocco between 803 and 829 as the second sultan of the first reigning dynasty: the Idrissides. He is the founder of the historic city of Fes (809) where he was later buried in 829. Ever since, pilgrims from all over the country, and most particularly from the Idrisside family, have been annually honoring his memory through a one week ceremonial procession during the month of September. During these exclusively religious ceremonies, lectures are organized in various schools and cultural centers; representatives of professional corporations of various handicrafts of the city cross the tiny streets of the Medina in long and slow processions to bring their presents to the Mausoleum; huge candles are lit, bulls are sacrificed and various religious orders sing, dance and implore almighty God’s mercy and benediction. Students of “Coranic” schools process with their handwritten “Coranic” scriptures. Other visitors exhibit huge dolls representing outfits of newly married brides. Skilled embroiderers of the city annually prepare a gold embroidered material specially fitted to cover the saint’s tomb; this symbolic and valuable present is carried around the tiny streets of the Medina, before reaching its final destination in the Mausoleum at sunset. During the night, multiple “Oulemas” proceed to collective recitation of the “Holy Coran”.

2. **The Mausoleum of a Rural Saint: Moulay Abdallah Amghar of Doukkala:** His annual “Moussem” is held in August, in an Atlantic village, south of the historic city of El Jadida. It lasts one week and draws about one hundred fifty thousand visitors. Beyond the ritual visit of the pilgrims to the

Mausoleum, where verses of “Coran” are collectively recited and prayers are made for the rest of the soul of the Saint, and beyond the no less ritual offerings of bulls and goats, one of the main other attractions of the “Mousssem” is the “Fantasia”: about 800 cavaliers, from various tribes of the Doukkala region and elsewhere, compete every day in colorful contests of skilful horseback riding.

3. **The Mausoleum of an Urban Saint: Sidi Abdallah Ben Hassoune of Sale:** Every year, on the eve of the Aid Al Mawlid (the Prophet’s birthday), long processions of candle makers cross the streets of the Medina of Sale, carrying huge and skillfully decorated chandeliers of candles through the “souks”, into the Mausoleum of the Saint of the city, where they will hang them over his tomb. The descendents of the Saint then spend the whole night praying and imploring God inside the mausoleum. This custom is said to be linked with a tradition of travelers who would bring candles to this Mausoleum on the eve of every one of their travels.

It thus appears that, despite the wide variety of local rituals, one common practice in the visits of Mausoleums of Saints lays in prayers and recitation of “Coran”. This, at least, is mainly what the pilgrims to the “Medersa” of *Sidi Mohammed El Habib* have been known for. NO other practice than pure prayer is allowed in their pilgrimages.

III. **Sidi Mohammed El Habib El Bouchouari of Tanalt:**

The “Souss” region is known for the entrepreneurial peculiarities of its population (4). Hard workers and skilful tradesmen, the “Souss” Berbers are also authentic devout believers and profoundly pious practitioners who strictly, but tolerantly, comply with the teachings of Islam. Within their communities, religious sciences are meticulously transmitted from generation to generation, even in the remotest villages. Mosques, “Coranic” schools and theological “Medersas” are commonly frequented. And so are the hundreds of “Zaouias” and Mausoleums that are scattered all over the region.

Among the most recognized saints of the region are some who are said to be from Christians or Jewish confessions, such as *Sidi Daniel* (Christian Saint buried in Taghmoute, Tata), *Sidi Aghezou Benhamou* (Jewish Saint buried in Taliouine), *Sidi Daoud Benbarikh* (Jewish Saint buried in Taroudant) and *Sidi Him Bentou* (Jewish Saint buried in Essaouira). Nowadays, their Mausoleums and shrines are still the object of veneration from local Muslim tribes and of frequent visits and occasional pilgrimages from foreign descendents. Local “Sunni” tolerance has firmly allowed such inter religious marks of respect and veneration. Islam has, in these aspects, proven to be a real religion of tolerance and of acceptance of others: *هول! لزنأ امب لوسرلا نمأ من ربه و المؤمنون كل آمن بالله و كتبه و رسله* *“The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one (of them) believeth in Allah, His angels, His Books, and His Messengers. “We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His Messengers”*, [Al Bakara, Verse N° 285]. In an other verse of the Coran, it also clearly stated: *قل يا أهل الكتاب تعالوا إلى كلمة سواء بيننا و* [*Say: O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partner with Him*], “Sourate Ale Imrane”, Verse N. 64; as is also stated in an other verse :

قل ءامنا بالله و ما أنزل علينا وما أنزل على إبراهيم و إسماعيل و إسحاق و يعقوب و الأسباط وما أوتي موسى و عيسى و النبيون من ربهم لا نفرق بين أحد منهم و نحن له مسلمون *Say: “We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Musa (Moses), 'Isa (Jesus), and the Prophets, from their Lord: we make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allah do we bow our will (in Islam).* [Sourate Ale Imrane, verse N° 84] ; in the Sourate Al Bakara, it is also stated :

قول ءامنا بالله و ما أنزل علينا وما أنزل على إبراهيم و إسمتعل و إسحاق و يعقوب و الأسباط وما أوتي موسى و عيسى وما أوتي النبيون من ربهم لانفرق بين أحد منهم و نحن له مسلمون *Say ye: "We believe in Allah, and in the revelation given to us and what was revealed to Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub, and the Tribes, and that given to Musa (Moses) and 'Isa (Jesus), and that given to all Prophets, from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them, and we bow to Allah (in Islam).* [Sourate Al Bakara, Verse N° 136] ; and finally, in Sourate Achoura, Verse N° 13, the same belief in Nohe, Abraham, Jesus and Moses is confirmed.

Muslims thus, have grown to believe in Mohammed, in Jesus, in Moses and in other Prophets; they also believe in the teachings of Coran, but also of the Torah and the Bible. In practice, tolerance and acceptance of other religions of the Book has been a constant must for the Muslim believer.

Furthermore, and despite the evident local conservatism regarding gender issues, consecration of female saints has also been adopted. Due respect and annual pilgrimages are also owed to such Saints as *Lalla fadma Bent Mohammed El Hilalia*, known as Taallat and whose shrine is in Chtouka, *Lalla Mammasse Ali*, known as Talmest and whose shrine, near Tanalt, was visited annually by *Sidi Mohammed El Habib*, *Lalla Taaza Essemblalia* (Tiznit) and *Lalla Meryem Bent Yahya*, who is buried further south in the tribe of Haha.

It is within this cultural context of tolerance and diversity that the target of our present research has evolved. The focus of our present discussion is thus a contemporary Muslim, Berber, "Suffi" Saint of the High Atlas in the North African country of Morocco. His full name is *Sidi Mohammed El Habib El Hassani El Idrissi*, commonly known as *EL BOUCHOUARI*. He was born in the mountainous Moroccan southern "Souss Massa" region, at the extreme limits of the Sahara desert. His birth date has been estimated to be 1868. He grew up as an orphan during most of the second half of the nineteenth century and served as an ascetic "Imam" through most of the twentieth century, until he died, in 1977, and was buried, in the mountainous village of Tanalt. His "Coranic" Medersa, which is located in the peak of a very difficultly accessible highland, has been a pilgrimage destination for hundreds of thousands of Muslim believers who sought parts of his knowledge during his lifetime and still seek, nowadays, some sort of "Baraka" through the visit of his modest shrine.

One might primarily wonder about the possible reasons that made this initially simple, humble and poor person the object of such a worshipping attention from hoards of faithful adepts and unconditional disciples. This man lived lonely, unmarried, with no children and no wealth or signs of well being whatsoever. Yet, whole tribes, families and individuals constantly came to him for multiple reasons. Their descendents still suffer the burden of the difficultly accessible mountainous roads that lead to his retrenched Mausoleum. Amongst the deeply incusted religious beliefs in which the Moroccan Islamic community in general and the "Souss" Berber ethnic groups, in particular, have grown to live with, one might just simply settle on a primary metaphysical explanation. *Sheikh El Habib* would just be considered, like many other individuals, as an elected choice of God whose blessings made of him a pious subject. Various Coranic verses allow for such a belief; and there is strong conviction among the believers that it is the case. Among the mostly referred to verses ("Ayates") of the Holy Coran are: *ذ لك فضل الله يوتيه من يشاء و الله ذوا الفضل العظيم* [*That is the grace of God; which He bestows on whom He pleases; and within God lays the greatest grace*] "Sourate Al Joumoua", verse N. 4, and "Sourate Al Hadid", verse N. 21. And: *ذ لك فضل الله يوتيه من يشاء و الله م-ي-ل-ع عس او* [*That is the grace of Allah, which he will bestow on whom He pleaseth; and Allah encompasseth all, and He knoweth all things*] "Sourate Al Maida", Verse N. 54. And *قل إن الفضل بيد الله يوتيه من يشاء والله واسع عليم* [*Say that all*

bounties are in the hands of Allah; He granteth them to whom He pleaseth; and Allah careth for and He knoweth all things] “Sourate Ale Imrane”, Verse N. 73.

Within this approach, there will be no room for searching explanations other than within the will of God. Interpretative explanations may solely be confined in a Godly given “Baraka”:

قل اللهم مالك الملك توتي الملك من تشاء وتنزع الملك ممن تشاء وتعز من تشاء وتذل من تشاء بيدك الخير إنك على كل شيء قدير... وشئت نمقزرتاء بغير حساب

[Say: O God, Lord of the Kingdom, Thou endow with the reign whomever You pleaseth; and Thou strippst off Power from whom Thou pleaseth; Thou dignify whom Thou pleaseth; and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleaseth; in Thy hands is all Good; verily, over all things, Thou hast Power... Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleaseth without measure] “Sourate Ale Imrane”, Verse N. 26 and 27.

As the “Baraka” is entrusted by God into some chosen individual, there is no way either to discuss the choice or to consider any possibility of contesting the use of such “Baraka” by that individual. He fulfils the requirements of the attributed dignity by adopting an exemplary behavior. He thus lives up to its challenges. And the adepts render the grace to him with all the honors due to his noble gestures and behavioral model. It is a given wisdom:

يؤتي الحكمة من يشاء و من أوتى الحكمة فقد أوتي خيرا كثيرا

[He endows wisdom to whom to whom He pleaseth; and, he, to whom wisdom is granted receiveth indeed overflowing benefits] “Sourate Al Bakara”, Verse N. 269.

Sidi Mohammed El Habib just happens to be one of these models. Professor Jihada Al Houssine Baamrani qualifies him as a respected and beloved personality who lasted long enough to become a unique living encyclopedia (5). Fquih Mohammed El Mokhtar Soussi also refers to him as “an illuminated, wise and learned Suffi who was known for his modest attitudes, concise speech and extended knowledge. He was loved by all” (6). While the mostly known Saints have lived in remote centuries, mainly during the medieval period, one of this Suffi saint’s peculiarities is that he has been a contemporary messenger who has been peacefully disseminating the teachings of Islam within the borders of his limited region. Neither he nor his adepts have allowed themselves to venture into the slippery paths of politics, nor have they been tempted by any potentially aggressive attitude that their leadership positions might have encouraged them to venture into, as it has, unhappily been the case elsewhere in modern times. Hundreds of contemporary theologians who have been his students and apprentices are still perpetuating the peaceful trends of his teachings. Thousands of graduates from his Islamic Tanalt “Medersa” are still functioning as moderate, knowledgeable Imams all over the Souss region and, in a few cases, even in some of the Casablanca mosques. The peaceful teachings of his school of thought focus on the presentation and on the preach of Islam as a religion of tolerance:

كنتم خير أمة أخرجت للناس تامرون بالمعروف وتنهون عن المنكر

[Ye are the best of peoples evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong] “Sourate Ale Imrane”, Verse N. 110.

The genealogic origins of Sidi Mohammed El Habib El Bouchouari link him directly to the Prophet Mohammed, through the descendents of his daughter Lalla Fatima Ezzahra, spouse of the Imam Ali Ibnou Abi Talib and mother of El Hassan, who is himself the ancestor of the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Idriss Al Akbar. Sheikh El Habib scarcely left his retired village of Tanalt. When he did in his youth, it was mostly for further learning, in Al Qaraouyine (Fes), Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Istanbul or Mecca: after memorizing, at the age of 12 years old, the entire sixty “Hizbs” of the Coran (about 600 pages), learning the “Hadith” through various respected local scholars, he also traveled to the

intellectually glittering capitals of the Middle East for further learning accomplishments. During his adulthood, he accomplished, on foot, the pilgrimage (الحج) and the “Omra” (قرم-علا) to Mecca [This happened three times in his life: 1912, 1934 and 1949]. Otherwise, he spent all his adult life as the acting Imam of various mosques in the Soussi Ait Baha region; the longest and most recent stay has been in the Tanalt mosque where he was the key instructor of the Medersa in which were taught such subject matters as Islamic theology (Coran and Hadith, within the Sunni interpretation and according to the Malekite rite), mathematics, astrology and linguistics. He, himself, taught courses of “Fiqh” (الفقه), logical reasoning (المنطق), “Attafsir” of Coran as well as Hadith (الحديث), mostly based on the “Sahih Al Boukhari” (صحيح البخاري), “Sahih Muslim” (صحيح مسلم) and the “Moattaa” (الموطأ) of the *Imam Malik Ibnou Anass*. He was said to have repeatedly studied the “Sahih” Al Imam Al Bokhari: more than fifty times during his lifetime, since he read it over entirely along with his students every month of Ramadan (7). He also set the behavioral pattern for his lifetime disciples. His living ascetic model, built on simplicity, total availability and tolerance, made of his “Kubba” a pilgrimage destination of various favor and healing seekers. He, himself, was much in favor of praying God and expressing wishes at specific rituals to be accomplished in Mausoleums of saints: he was quoted (8) as having handwritten the following recommendation of the “Allama” *Sidi El Hassan Echarhabi*: “That person who, with sincere intentions (النية الصادقة), reads near the tombs of saints 70 times الفاتحة [The ‘fatiha’] of the Coran, plus three hundred times the Sourate الإخلاص [‘Al Ikhlas’], plus ten times each one of Sourate الفلق [‘Al Falaq’] and Sourate الناس [‘Annass’], and then pronounces prayers on the Prophet one thousand times and expresses his wishes, would not leave his place until these wishes are totally satisfied with the will of God”.

Witnesses among his former students refer to him as “a source of knowledge who sacrificed most of his life for the mission of teaching the word of God and the Sunna of His Prophet, along with his nightly prayers until dawn for the sake of the benefits of eternal life” (9). In his teachings, he tried to constantly adopt a synthetic approach to all prevailing paths of existing Suffi Zaouias: mainly the “Naciria”, the “Derkaouia” and the “Ahmadia”/“Tijania”. He fought separatism of approaches and preached union of conviction around the word of God, based on the Ayate:

« And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves » [Sourate Ale Imrane, Verse N° 103] ; and on the Ayate: The believers are but single brothers: so make peace and reconciliation between your brothers; and fear Allah, that ye may receive Mercy], “Sourate Al Houjourate”, Verse N. 10. Sheikh Lahbib refuted confrontation and rejected violence.

He became the main reference for the regional tribes who often came to him for religious and temporal “Fetwas” (فتوى). His advice was sought for social and familial matters as well as for economic and commercial successes (10). Numerous interviewed sources acquiesce to the established fact that his use of Coranic verses proved successful in his approach to various matters brought to him by his disciples.

After his death, his high standard training of Imams has been maintained on site, as have been disseminated some of his “Karamats”. They are solely based on the use of the “Holy Coran” and the reference to the “Hadith” as a source of inspiration and support for solving various kinds of inextricable situations. It remains evident, however, that the success of the whole process of the school of thought of *Sidi Mohammed El Habib* is based on the profound belief in the teachings of Islam and on the achievable miracles of the “Holy Coran”: ما فرطنا في الكتاب من شيء [Nothing have We omitted

from the Book], “Sourate Al Anaame”, Verse N. 38. The religious teachings are thus instrumentally used to help ease difficult situations of requesting members of the congregation, both regarding daily matters and religious metaphysical concerns.

Sidi Mohammed El Habib was frequently consulted by groups and individuals. His “Fetwas” advices and arbitrations were conclusive and generally binding to those who sought them. His noble and pure positions often raised his words beyond all doubts (11). Fields of consultation were extremely diversified. And so were the “Fetwas” which generally took the form of recipes of “Coranic” recitations that the requesting party had to comply with for the fulfillment of his/her wishes. Coranic verses remain the basic tool in such processes which are themselves based on the teachings of various “Ayates”; the ‘Holy Coran’ effectively urges for its constant use by believers:

- الذين آمنوا وطمئن قلوبهم بذكر الله ألا بذكر الله تطمئن القلوب [Those who believe and those whose hearts find quietude in the remembrance of Allah; for without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest and quietude], “Sourate Arrad”, Verse N. 28.
- وإذا قرأ القرآن فاستمعوا له وأنصتوا لعلكم ترحمون [When the Coran is recited, listen to it and feel it, that ye may receive Mercy], “Sourate Al Aaraf”, Verse N. 204.
- ولقد جنناكم بكتاب فصلناه على هدى ورحمة لقوم يؤمنون [For, We had sent unto them a Book explained on the bases of knowledge and Mercy on those who believe], “Sourate Al Aaraf”, Verse N. 52.
- قل إنما أتبع ما أوحى إلي من ربي هذا بصائر من ربكم وهدى ورحمة لقوم يؤمنون [Say: I but follow what is revealed to me from my Lord; these are illuminations from your Lord, guidance and Mercy on those who believe], “Sourate Al Aaraf”, Verse N. 203.
- ما كان حديثا يفترى ولكن تصديق الذي بين يديه وتفصيل كل شيء وهدى ورحمة لقوم يؤمنون [It is not an invented tale, but a confirmation of what goes on, a detailed presentation, a guide and a Mercy on those who believe], “Sourate Youssouf”/Joseph, Verse N. 111.

Thus, orientations were dispensed by the Suffi Saint to worshipers for approaching aspects of daily life as well as for handling religious interpretations. Among these were the solutions to their social and family issues, as well as for the nurturing of commercial and business successes. These may vary according to the nature of the wish: overcoming difficult situations, requesting decent sources of income, seeking happiness, imploring fertility, and so forth...Other requests, related to the curing of physical and mental diseases were also met with satisfactory advices.

a. The Fulfillment of Wishes:

In all cases, it remains evident that all prayers and request are solely addressed to God who is, and remains, the only source of grace, mercy and favors. In Islam, there is, and should be no intermediary in religious practices between God and His subjects. Each person concerned by a given request, should primarily remain a strong believer (مؤمن). He/she must also believe in the possible benefits of the Coran, as well as in the potential outcomes of one’s endeavor. He/she, then proceeds to the ritual prayers and invocations of God, followed by the formulation of the requests, as recommended to him/her by the Suffi saint. The requesting worshiper undertakes his ablutions. He/she then sets himself/herself in a position of prayer. Various ‘Ayates’ repeated different numbers of times at different

prayers, along with diverse verbal formulas of thanks to God and praise to his Prophet, generate the requested outcomes.

Thanks to some of these prayers, for example, seemingly sterile women have been able to generate offspring and give birth to children, after previous failures of all medical attempts. In his approach to this kind of situation, the Saint asks each partner of the couple to read 33 times the ‘Ayate’ *ربّ لا تُذرنِي فرداً و أنت خير الوارثين* [Lord! Leave me not without offspring, thou art the best of inheritors], “Sourate Al Anbiaa”, Verse N. 89, after each of the five daily prayers, which are also carried out with chosen ‘Ayates’, along with specific *دعاء* [invocation] of variable contents.

Other types of prayers and invocations are also advised; for example, and in order to overcome situations of difficulty, the requesting party is invited to accomplish a specific ritual after the “Dohr” prayer (noon); he/she will start by accomplishing his/her ablutions; then, he/she will undertake a prayer in two *ركعات*: in the first one, he/she will read the “Fatiha”, the “Sourate Al Ikhlass” and the first two verses of “Sourate Al Fath”:

إنا فتحنا لك فتحاً مبيناً ليغفر الله لك ما تقدم من ذنبك و ما تأخر و يتم نعمته عليك و يهديك صراطاً مستقيماً و ينصرك الله نصراً عزيزاً [We have verily granted thee a manifest victory; that Allah may forgive thee the sins of the past and those to follow; that He fulfils His favors to thee and guide thee on the straight way; and that Allah may give thee dear fulfillment], Verses N. 1 & 2; in the second *رَعَكَر*, he/she will renew the reading of the “Fatiha”, the “Sourate Al Ikhlass”, followed by “Sourate Acharh” *حَرشِلَا*, and then by appropriate prayers which will allow the introduction of the wished requests to be satisfied by the grace of God.

Another common form of direct consultation of God in Islamic practices, and on which the Suffi’s adepts often call upon, is the *إستخارة* [Istikhara]: a form of facilitation of choices in crucial moments of decision making. It is accomplished in various ways according to the common practices favored by the Suffi Saint; among these, one may start by performing his/her ablutions before undertaking a two *ركعات* [Rekaat] prayer with specific “Sourates” immediately followed by the consultation of the Holy Book; the reading of relevant passages of the Book will orient the person to whether the planned activity is worth undertaking or would preferably be avoided. Another common style of effectively productive *إستخارة* Consists in invoking God during the last *رَعَكَر* of the last prayer in the night, while accomplishing the *سجدة* [Sejda], one hundred times *أستخر الله برحمته* [I implore God’s Mercy for enlightening my choice], followed by the *دعاء الإستخارة* [request of facilitation]. It is reported that the Imam *Ali Ibnou Abi Talib*, gender of the Prophet, used to frequently accomplish this ritual after some of his night prayers (12).

b. The Curing of Sicknesses and Diseases:

Here again, the call upon “Coranic” verses is determining. Six “Ayates” are frequently referred to in the search of effective results. And here again, the notion of *إيمان* (Imane: Belief) remains a prerequisite for the success of any such initiative on the part of the Saint, or of any of his followers. These commonly used “Ayates” are:

- *و ننزل من القرآن ما هو شفاء و رحمة للمؤمنين* [We send down of the Coran what is a healing and mercy to those who believe], “Sourate Al Israe”, Verse N. 82.
- *يا أيها الناس قد جاءكم موعظة من ربكم و شفاء لما في الصدور و هدى و رحمة للمؤمنين* [O mankind! There hath come to you an admonition from your Lord and a healing (from the Diseases) in your hearts and a guidance and mercy for those who believe], “Sourate Younouss/Jonas”, Verse N. 57.

- قل هو للذين آمنوا هدى وشفاء [Say: It is a guide and a healing to those who believe], “Sourate Foussilate”, Verse N. 44.
- وإذا مرضت فهو يشفين [And when I am ill, It is He who cures me], “Sourate Achouaara”, Verse N. 80.
- ويشف صدور قوم مؤمنين ويذهب غيظ قلوبهم ويتوب الله على من يشاء والله عليم حكيم [He heals the breasts of those who believe, and alleviates the pain of their hearts; He places mercy on whom He wishes; Allah knows and detains wisdom], “Sourate Attaoubah”, Verses N. 15.
- يخرج من بطونها شراب مختلف ألوانه فيه شفاء للناس إن في ذلك لآية لقوم يتفكرون [Is issued from within their bodies a drink of varying colors wherein is healing for humans; verily in this is a Sign for those who give thought], “Sourate Annahl/The Bees”, Verse N.69.

During his lifetime, *Sheikh Sidi Mohammed El Habib* was a strong believer in the healing capacities of the Coran. Various letters sent by him to different recipients, who had solicited his help in curing diseases, testify of some of the curing capacities of Coranic verses as applied in specific situations (13). In this, as in many other fields, he followed the Tradition of the Prophet about whom are reported different situations of efficient curing of people through the use of the Holy Coran. In the “Mousnad” of Imam Ahmed *مسند الإمام أحمد*, *Abou Kaab* has been quoted as saying that, while he was once with the Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم*, a ‘Bedouin’ came to him with his sick brother that the Prophet examined; he then read over him the “Fatiha” and four “Ayates” from the beginning of “Sourate Al bakara”, and one “Ayate” from “Sourate Ale Imrane”, and a few more “Ayates”, until he finished with Sourates “Al Falaq” and “Annasse”.... And the man stood up as if he had never been sick. Many other examples of such situations are reported by the Hadith.

Nowadays, various people have witnessed relief situations from sicknesses thanks to the healing *الكرامات* [“Karamates”] of *Sheikh Mohammed El Habib* or, of some of his studious disciples. Physical and mental sicknesses are frequently cured by “Tolbas” from his Medersa in cases where modern medicine has proven inefficient. The wide variety of reported cases may need another independent scholar investigation and research. Yet, modesty remains a key word in the culture shaped by Sheikh El Habib and his followers. Pilgrimage to his Mausoleum in the month of April still has all the appearances of a period of contemplation during which verses of Coran are recited collectively and individually by the thousands of visitors who join the local Tanalt “Tolbas” in their meditations; prayers are performed and God is implored for the rest of the Soul of the Holy Suffi Saint.

Dr Hassan Rahmouni
Casablanca, December 2003.

(1) – In one of his revolted criticisms of such behaviors, the pious Alaouite Sultan, Moulay Slimane (1766-1822) has been quoted as writing once that: “*God has clarified for you the paths of Sunna so that you follow them...Reject the Moussems and the innovations of those who practice what is forbidden by the Book, the Tradition and the Community...All this is none but detestable innovation, reprehensible action, insult and contrary practice to religious laws. This is forbidden by the religion...The right path is that of the Coran and the Tradition of the Prophet. The right path does not imply rhythmic dances and other vicious practices. It must be forbidden for these ‘fraternities’(Aisaoua, Jbala, etc...) to meet and practice their rituals in mosques or elsewhere...*”[Quoted by Drague, in “Esquisse d’histoire religieuse du Maroc”, Ed. Peyronnet].

- (2) - The debate whether visits of tombs in general, and visits of saints' mausoleum in particular, is licit or not has been very lively. While some thinkers have been considering such activities as illicit in Islamic values, a few others have been underlining some of the Prophet's Hadiths in which he has been quoted as saying:
 كنت نهيتكم عن زيارة القبور فزوروها فإنها تزهّد في الدنيا و تذكر الآخرة « I had ordered you earlier not to visit tombs ; you ought to visit them because they inforce piety and remind you of eternal life » [quoted by Ibnou Messaoud] and also as saying :
 زوروا القبور فإنها تذكركم في الآخرة « Visit the cemeteries because they will remind you of eternal life » [quoted by Abi Hourayra].
- (3) – العلم (Al Alam/ Moroccan Daily Newspaper of the Istiqlal Party), N. 19430, Thursday July 31, 2003.
- (4) – John Waterbury, “North for the Trade: the Life and Times of a Berber Merchant”, University of California Press, 1971.
- (5) – Jihada Al Houssine Baamrani, in الثقافة الشعبية بين المحلي و الوطني “*Attakafa Achaabia Baina Al mahalli Qua Louatani*» [Popular Culture Between Regional and National Aspects], the Agadir University Association, august 6, 1988, quoted by Sidi Abdellah Mohattaine Al Farissi, in “*Kitab Arrathaim Al jamila Fi Dikrayate Al Habib Al Jalila*’ كتاب الرتائم الجميلة في ذكريات الحبيب الجميلة [The Book of Beautiful Aspects of Lahbib’s Respectful Memories], Tikiouine, Annajah New Press, Casablanca, 1992.
- (6) – Fquih Mohammed El Mokhtar Soussi, in المعسول “*Al Maasoule*” [The Honeyed] & in رجالات العلم العربي في سوس [Rijalate Al Ilm Al Arabi Fi Sous] [The Men of Arab Science in sous], Agadir, 1937.
- (7) – Mohammed El Othmani, in علماء مجاهدون “*Oulamaa Moujahidoune*” [Militant Scholars], published in the Magazine كلمة “*Kalima*”, edited in Agadir, by the Association of Soussi Scholars, N.4, May 1972.
- (8) – “*Kitab Arrataim Al Jamila Fi Dikrayate Al Habib Al Jalila*”, كتاب الرتائم الجميلة في ذكريات الحبيب الجميلة, [The Book of Beautiful Aspects of Lahbib’s Repectful Memories], by Sidi Abdellah Mohattaine Al Farissi, Tikiouine, Annajah New Press, Casablanca, 1992, p.239.
- (9) – M’Hamed Semlali, in عم-ج-ملا “*Al Moujamaa*”, Script available in the Tanalt library.
- (10) – ر-ج-ملا (“Al Moharrir” / Moroccan Daily Newspaper of the Socialist Party), February 27, 1977.
- (11) – ر-ج-ملا (“Al Moharrir”), op.cit.
- (12) – كتاب الرتائم الجميلة في ذكريات الحبيب الجميلة “*Kitab Arrataim Al Jamila Fi Dikrayate Al Habib Al Jalila*”, [The Book of Beautiful Aspects of Lahbib’s Repectful Memories], by Sidi Abdellah Mohattaine Al Farissi, Tikiouine, Annajah New Press, Casablanca, 1992, pp. 231 – 243.
- (13) – Sidi Abdellah Mohattane Al Farissi, رسائل الشيخ الحبيب الساطعة في تقوية الروابط الإنسانية الجامعة “*Rassail Sheikh Lahbib Assatia Fi Taqwyiati Arrawabiti Alinsaniati Aljamiaa*” [The Stemming Letters of Sheikh Lahbib in the Reinforcement of the Unifying Human Links], Tikiouine, Annajah Editions, Casablanca, 1977, pp. 112 – 121.