

## Rabi`a Al `Adawiyya رابعة العدوية القيسية

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

### **Her Biography**

One of first biographies of the early grandmasters and grand mistress of Sufism, the holy people of Allah(SWT) is that of Rabi`a Al-Adawiyya, or Rabi`a Al-Qaysiyya who was born in Basra, Iraq between the years 95 A.H. and 99 A.H. (about 717 C.E.). Her father's name was Isma`il who was a very poor and holy man of God.

The most reliable source of her biography stated that her father, Isma`il (RA) married and went to live with his wife on the edge of the desert not far from the town of Basra. After a while Allah (SWT), the Almighty, blessed him with a female child and Isma`il (RA) named her Rabi`a. Then they had another daughter whom the father named Rabi`a Ath-Thani (The 2<sup>nd</sup> Rabi`a), and when the third daughter was born, he named her Rabi`a Ath-Thalata (The 3<sup>rd</sup> Rabi`a), and yet again another daughter was born whom he named Rabi`a Ar-Rabi`a who was to become the famous beloved Saint of Allah (SWT).

Most of her biographers stated that the night Rabi`a (RA) was born there was not even a drop of oil in their house with which to anoint the navel of the new-born baby and no cloth in which to swaddle her. So in despair, Rabi`a's mother told her husband to go to their neighbour's house and to beg them for some oil so that she could light their lamp and anoint the child.

The father, Isma`il(RA) had made a promise never to ask a human being for anything, he would rather ask the owner and giver of all things. So he went out and put his hand on the neighbours' door and without knocking or saying anything to them, returned to his own house. "They will not open the door," he said.

Upon hearing this, Rabi`a's mother wept bitterly. Full of anxiety and feeling helpless in the matter, Rabi`a's father put his head on his knees and fell asleep.

While he was sleeping he dreamed that the Prophet (SAW), came to him and said, *"Do not be sad. The girl child which has just been born is a queen amongst women who shall be the mediator (intercessor) for seventy thousand of my Community (Ummat). Tomorrow you must go to `Isa Zadan, the Governor of Basra. Write this message on a piece of paper which you will take to him: Every night you send upon me a hundred blessings (Durood) and on Friday night four hundred. Last night was Friday night and you forgot me (without reciting salatil Nabiy). To set right your forgetfulness, give this man four hundred dinar (Equivalent to 2.8 Million Naira as of the time of writing this biography), which he has lawfully earned."*

When he awoke and remembered his dream Rabi`a's father burst into tears, but he got up straight away and wrote exactly what the Prophet (SAW) had told him to write, then took his letter and presented it to one of the Governor's chamberlains.

As soon as the letter reached the Governor and he had read it, he said to his Finance Minister, *"Give two thousand dinar (equivalent to 14 Million Naira at the time of writing this biography) to the poor people (In the kingdom)*

*immediately because I thank the Master for reminding me of my forgetfulness. Also give four hundred dinar to the old man (Rabi's' father) and say to him: I would like you to come to me so that I may see you. But I do not hold it proper for a man like you to come to me. I would rather come to you and rub my beard on the floor of your threshold. But I swear by Allah that whatever you need you may let me know about it."*

Rabi`a's father was overjoyed and took the money, thanking Allah and his Prophet (SAW), and he bought all that was necessary for his holy daughter.

As the four Rabi`a grew up, their father Isma`il(RA) worked, as he could, to make a living for his family in the desert. He brought them up with good moral upbringing and discipline as far as he could.

When the eldest daughter(The 1<sup>st</sup> Rabi`a) was about twenty years old and Rabi`a Ar-Rabi`a(RA) was about eleven years old, their father died, leaving behind him his wife and four daughters, all of whom were in need of his husband and fatherly care.

The mother, now finding herself alone and the life of the desert being very hard for them, decided to take her four daughters and set out for Basra a city where she hoped to make a better living for herself and her children, in order to take up fatherly responsibilities for her four daughters. Little did she know that fate await them on the road to Basra.

On their way to the city of Basra, they were attacked by a group of desert bandits and in the resulting fray the mother was killed, and each of the daughters was taken as a slave by these gentlemen of the high way. The four Rabi`a were separated never to meet again, each faced her destiny.

Our Rabi`a's master took her to Baghdad where he immediately set about using her in the way that was most profitable for himself. She was very beautiful girl that gets the admiration of any man that may see her, and she also had a lovely voice. Her master thought he would use these two qualities of her to make money in Baghdad, then one of the biggest city in the world; so he taught her how to sing and play the 'oud', he also made her dance and entertain people, and above all, to make money in this way for himself.

He sent her to weddings and celebrations where she would dance and sing, and the people would give her money for whatever they wanted from her. In this way she came to have many bad habits and ways, living a very low life amongst all sorts of people and not caring about anything that she did. This is the period when sayyida Rabi`a (RA) was known as a street dancer, her master cleaning away what her father has trained her on, in fact this made Rabi`a (RA) to forget her initial parental training. On this one of her biographers said: *Sayyida Rabi`a was exposed to street dancing where she gave her body to men, but never was her heart given to anyone for it is reserved for Allah alone.*

This continued until she was about thirty-six years old, when one day as she was singing at a wedding she found herself singing in a different way and different fashion. The content of the song totally not of the mundane, not having words to entertain men, rather words springing from her inner self to entertain Allah.

Songs were coming from her heart for her Beloved Who was her true Love because now Allah, the All-Mighty, had awakened Rabi`a (RA) from this life of street dancing and hopping from arm of men. This sudden spiritual awakening put sayyida Rabi`a (RA) in tears of regret of her life as street dancer, disobeying her beloved Lord and pleasing senseless men who came to her to settle their senseless lust. Like any saint, she entered state of *Taubah*. From that moment she left everything that she had been doing before (the life as street dancer), and she refused either to sing or to dance, or to play any music for anyone except for her Beloved God.

This made her master very angry because he could no longer use her to make money for himself. He began to ill-treat her, to beat her, and even to put burning charcoals on her body hoping that this would frighten her into returning to her former ways as a street dancer.

Sayyida Rabi`a(RA) refused everything that her master tried to do to her. She had begun to observe salat (prayer) all through the night, crying to her Beloved God to help her in her desperate state.

After all punitive and corporal efforts to make Sayyida Rabi`a(RA) come back to street dancing failed, her master, seeing that he could not influence her in any way, and because she was no longer of any use to him, decided to sell her. So he put a cord around her neck and took her to the slave market of Baghdad to sell her.

There a holy man took Sayyida Rabi`a(RA) to his home (He bought her), gave her food and simple clothes, and told her that he did not want anything from her, except that she could pray and be free in his house. He wanted to free her from the hand of lustful men that had initially derailed her life.

Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) thanked him with all her heart and said, "*If you want anything from me for the Face (countenance) of Allah, He will give you your reward, but if you want anything from me (lustfully) for yourself only, I have nothing to give you. I have everything that I need from my Beloved God and I do not need anything from any human being (As assistance).*"

The holy man replied that he would like to marry her in addition to his initial intention, and to free her from being a slave, but that he did not ask anything from her except what she wanted to give.

Sayyida Rabi`a(RA) thanked him for his kindness and consideration, and she said that she did not want to marry anyone, but was grateful for the way that he cared for her in her deep need(This is because marriage goes with love and sayyida Rabi`a(RA) cannot love anyone apart from Allah, even if she wanted to).

Once her new master got up in the middle of the night, and was attracted by the voice in which Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) was praying to her Lord. She was entreating in these terms:

*"Lord! You know well that my keen desire is to carry out Your commandments and to serve Thee with all my heart, O light of my eyes. If I were free I would pass the whole day and night in prayers. But what should I do when you have made me a slave of a human being?"*

At once the master felt that it was sacrilegious to keep such a saint in his service. He decided to serve her instead. In the morning he called her and told her his decision; he would serve her and she should dwell there as the mistress of the house. If she insisted on leaving the house he was willing to free her from the bondage.

She told him that she was willing to leave the house to carry on her devotions in solitude. This the master granted and she left the house.

In another narration, that night as her master peeped through her window when he heard her singing to Almighty Allah(SWT), he saw a circle of light on her head. In this way he knew Rabi'a to be a saint that should not be held as his slave. Another narration had it that, each time her master came to sleep will be disturbed and awoken by a strange voice instructing him saying: "**Free Rabi'a!**"

Rabia went into the desert to pray and practice Sufism. As she came to desert leaving her master's home, she said: "**All those while I have been serving men and I have seen what I can gain (in serving men), from now henceforth I will serve God alone!**"

Then Allah, the All-Mighty, sent a very holy person to Rabi'a (RA), many of her biographers say that it was Hasan al-Bastri (RA). Who said to Rabi'a (RA), "Do you desire for us to get married?" To which she replied, "**The tie of marriage is for those who have being. But here being has disappeared for I have become as nothing to myself, and I exist only through Allah for I belong wholly to Him, and I live in the shadow of His control. You must ask for my hand from Him, and not from me.**"

Hasan (RA) then replied, "**How did you find this secret, Rabi'a?**"

She answered him, "**I lost all found things in Him.**"

Hasan (RA) then replied, "**How did you come to know Him?**"

She said, "**You know of the how but I know of the how-less.**"

For Rabi'a's (RA) case was that she can't share her heart with anyone except her true love, Allah Himself who loves her better than anyone else. Anything that goes with taking away the heart, Rabi'a (RA) is not for that thing. She has lost her body to men already, but is ready to defend her heart which she has never given it to anyone except Allah. To understand the degree of this spiritual state of sayyida Rabi'a (RA) we referred to an event that occurred in her life, people asked her didn't she loved the prophet (SAW) then? Sayyida Rabi'a (RA) replied: "**My heart is full of God, I can't feel the presence of any other being in it.**"

Allah (SWT) said in His holy book:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَتَدْرُكُونَ أَنَّهُمْ قُلُوبُهُمْ مُتَّكِفَةٌ عَلَى عُرُشِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا يَمَسُّهُمُ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ تَوَلَّوْا وَكُنُوا مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ  
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَتَدْرُكُونَ أَنَّهُمْ قُلُوبُهُمْ مُتَّكِفَةٌ عَلَى عُرُشِ اللَّهِ فَإِذَا يَمَسُّهُمُ آيَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ تَوَلَّوْا وَكُنُوا مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

*“Yet of mankind are some who take unto themselves an object for worship which they set as rivals to Allah, loving them with a LOVE like that of Allah. Those who believe are stauncher in their LOVE for Allah....”* Qur’an 2:165

A Sufi started weeping when this verse was recited to him, we asked why he wept, he replied: *“Over my hypocritical soul! Which claimed loving Allah, yet loving others like the love deserved for Allah alone!!”*

In another narration by one of her biographers, Sayyidi Kabir Arabi(RA) he narrated the event of Sheikh Hasanil Basri(RA) as follow: that sheikh Hasanil Basri(RA) when he heard that sayyida Rabi’a(RA) refused to marry, he carry with him another pious man, the two visited Sayyida Rabi’a(RA). They were welcomed and they sat in one room and Sayyida Rabi’a (RA) in another with a curtain in between the two rooms. After exchange of pleasantries, sheikh Hasanil Basri(RA) introduced himself and introduced the other man and told Rabi’a(RA) that Islam does not allow woman to live single without marrying and because of that, he is introducing himself and the other man as suitors to her, let her choose one for husband. Sayyidah Rabi’a (RA) replied that she have some questions to make in order to find who will be her suitor out of the two. She asked who is most knowledgeable among them. The other man said it was sheikh Hasanil Basri (RA) who was his teacher too. She said, then her questions go to sheikh Hasanil Basri (RA) and the conversation goes as follows:

**Sayyida Rabi’a (RA):** When we all died and the day of judgement is established, I stood before Allah, do you know what will be my judgement?

**Sheikh Hassanil Basri (RA):** No I don’t know.

**Sayyida Rabi’a (RA):** When I came to cross *sirat* (Mystical Bridge) on the day of judgement, can I make it to the other side?

**Sheikh Hassanil Basri (RA):** No I don’t know.

**Sayyida Rabi’a (RA):** When the gates of paradise are opened the lucky ones will be permitted in and those who are not lucky will be thrown to hell fire, do you know to which group I will belong to?

**Sheikh Hassanil Basri (RA):** No I don’t know.

**Sayyida Rabi’a (RA):** Then why do you want to marry the woman you know very little about her destiny?

As you have no answer to this question, let me proceed. When sexual lust is created how many was implanted into the body of man and how many into the body of woman?

**Sheikh Hassanil Basri (RA):** This one I know. Nine parts are put into the body of a woman and one into the body of man.

**Sayyida Rabi’a (RA):** Then when modesty was created how many was given to man and how many to woman?

**Sheikh Hassanil Basri (RA):** Nine parts was given to man and only one was given to woman.

**Sayyida Rabi’a(RA):** Then me a woman having nine parts of sexual lust with only one part modesty controlling it have not yearn for a husband to marry, why you

having only one part of sexual lust with nine modesty controlling it will come asking me to marry you?

Sheikh Hasanil Basri (RA) and the other man had to leave without succeeding in getting the hand of Rabiá (RA) to marry.

Sayyida Rabi'a (RA) recited these lines of poem she composed on this matter:

***"I have made You the Companion of my heart.  
But my body is available to those who desire its company,  
And my body is friendly toward its guest,  
But the Beloved of my heart is the guest of my soul."***

That is to say, she can stay with people that like her, her friends and her visitors, her body stays with them, but her heart is not with them for one second, it is always with Allah whom she loved.

Sayyida Rabi'a (RA) never married nor did she have any children but as she, may Allah be pleased with her, said, ***"My peace is in solitude but my Beloved is always with me. Whenever I witness His Beauty He is my prayer niche (mihrab); toward Him is my qibla. Oh Healer of souls, the heart feeds upon its desire and its striving towards Union with You has healed my soul. You are my Joy and my Life to Eternity. You were the Source of my life; from You came my ecstasy. I have separated myself from all created beings, for my hope is for Union with You; for that is the Goal of my searching."*** She never accepts the hand of any man for marriage in spite of many suitors who came to her, including the prince of Basra, her hometown.

Not only did Rabi'a (RA) never marry but she also never had a Shaykh to guide and instruct her on Sufism. She received everything that she knew directly from Allah (The Most High) without the intermediary of any Shaykh. She only attended majlis session of few sheikhs prominent is the same sheikh Hasanil Basri (RA), who in one occasion when he noticed her absence delivered his majlis in a very low manner. One of his audience asked why today's majlis is so low not like the others. On that sheikh Hasanil Basri (RA) replied ***"The previous majlis are for an elephant (Rabiá) while today's one is for ants"***.

Sayyida Rabi'a (RA) later left Baghdad and returned to her hometown Basra where she remained for many years, until she finally travelled to Jerusalem where she died and is buried there. She, may Allah be pleased with her, had a long life and she continued, to her last days, to give everything that Allah inspired her to give to all who loved her, her wealth is always given out to people and she never used out of it except the little she ate, cloth and sheltered, because she was His special Light for them all.

She is often referred to as the first true Saint (waliya) of Islam and was praised, not because she in any way represented womankind, but because as someone said, ***"When a woman walks in the Way of Allah like a man she cannot be called a woman."*** The western world knows her as ***The Muslims' saint Theresa.***

Another writer also said that Rabi`a(RA) was "*That one set apart in the seclusion of holiness; that woman veiled with the veil of sincerity; that one enflamed by love and longing, lost in union with God; that one accepted as a second spotless Mary.*".

Sayyida Rabi`a(RA) used to say that she was always busy with her Beloved God all the time and she did not have any moment for anybody or anything else but Him. She also knew the meaning of what she said, for her Beloved Allah revealed Himself to her in every face around her. She said, "*The groaning and yearning of the lover of Allah will not be satisfied until it is satisfied in the Beloved.*" And Rabi`a (RA) was, for many people, that Beloved.

*As I compiled this biography I pray may I myself, you that is reading this biography and the retinue of her biographers I referred to their materials in writing this biography, be rescued by Allah; we are worst than street dancers, may He intervened in our lives and rescue us as He rescued Rabi`a(RA). May He make us to step on the paths of the like of Rabi`a (RA) in having His divine Love.*

### **Her Miracles and Sufism**

It is said that she, may Allah be pleased with her, once sent Hasan al-Basri(RA) a piece of wax, a needle and a hair, and said, "*Be like wax and illumine the world and burn yourself. Be like a needle and work naked. When you have done these two things a thousand years will be for you like a hair.*"

Another event in her life tells of how one day Sheikh Hasan al-Basri (RA) saw Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) near a lake. Throwing his prayer rug on top of the water, he said, "*Rabi`a come! Let us pray two ruk`u here.*" She replied, "*Hasan, when you are showing off your spiritual goods (miracles) in the worldly market, it should be things which your fellow men cannot display.*" Then she threw her prayer rug into the air and flew up onto it. "*Come up here, Hasan, where people can see us.*" she cried.

But seeing his sadness Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) sought to console him, so she said, "*Hasan, what you did fish can do (better), and what I did flies can do (better). But the real business is outside these tricks (miracles). One must apply oneself to the real business (serving Allah sincerely).*"

Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) once said that there are three kinds of men: The first believes that his hands and his sons' hands are all that is necessary to succeed in the only world they know-the material world. The second kind prays with his hands so that a reward will be earned in the next life. The third kind has his hands tied at the wrist, bound with love to serve without thought of return. (The compiler of this biography says the first is the atheist who desires nothing but the worldly pleasures. The second is an ascetic who fully works for the life after death. While the last is the one who desires none but Allah, he has no yearning for paradise for if he can't get the countenance of Allah paradise becomes hell to him; he doesn't care about hell, for if he can get the countenance of Allah, hell itself becomes paradise to him.).

Her blessed life and sayings became a source of deep inspiration and yearning (*himma*) for all those who were drawn to her and followed her, both in her time

and afterwards. This was because her love, manifesting directly from the Spirit and for the Face of her Beloved alone without any trace of self in it, brought a special fragrance from the deep Secret Love into the more austere teachings of those early Sufis. She was the Word which gave life to the hearts of those beloved people of Allah who followed after her in the same Line of the Love of God, as she had done. Particularly, this was the case later for Abu Bayazid al-Bistami(RA), Abu 'Husayn an-Nuri(RA), Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj(RA), and Abu Bakr ash-Shibli(RA), who, around their leader and Master Al-Junayd(RA), came to be known as The Baghdad School of Sufism.

A Sufi once said, *"The ascetics (the second group) regard the beauty of the Unknown (Allah) with the light of belief and certainty and they despise the world, but they are still veiled by a sensuous pleasure, namely-the thought of Paradise, whereas the true Sufi is veiled from both worlds by the sight of the Primordial Beauty and the Love of the Essence."*

One of the astonishing events in the blessed life of Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) relates how she set about making the Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca. She joined a caravan of other pilgrims and she had a small donkey on which she put her luggage for her journey. However, in the middle of the desert the donkey died. Some of the people in the caravan offered to carry her luggage for her, but she said to them, *"Go on your way for I must not depend upon you for help, but I trust myself to Allah."* So, seeing that they could not persuade her otherwise, the other pilgrims continued and Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) remained behind alone in the vast desert all around her. She prayed to her Lord, saying, *"O my God, do kings deal thus with a woman, a stranger who is weak? You are calling me to Your House (the Ka`ba) but in the middle of my way You have suffered my ass to die, and You have left me alone in the desert."* Hardly had she finished praying when her ass began to move, coming back to life, and finally it stood up. Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) put her luggage again on it and continued on her way. The person who related that said that he saw the same little donkey for sale in the market-place (later). In this pilgrimage other miracles occurred in Mecca, we will come to that later.

Once Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) fasted for a whole week, neither eating nor sleeping. All night she prayed and became very hungry. Then a visitor came bringing her a bowl of food. She accepted it and went to fetch a lamp. When she returned, she found that a cat had overturned the bowl of food. She then said to herself: *"I will fetch a jug of water and break my fast by drinking (only water)."* But by the time that she had fetched the jug, the lamp had gone out. She then tried to drink the water in the dark, but the jug slipped from her hand and broke into pieces. She lamented and sighed so much, as the story-teller said, "that it was to be feared that the whole house would be consumed with fire!" *"O Allah!" she cried, "What is this that You are doing with this helpless slave?"*

Then she heard a voice saying, *"Be careful lest you desire Me to bestow on you all worldly blessings, but take away from your heart the caring for Me, for care for Me and worldly blessings can never be together in a single heart. Rabi`a, you*

*desire one thing and I desire another. My desire and your desire can never be joined in one heart."*

She said then, *"When I heard this admonition I so cut off my heart from the world and curtailed my desires that whenever I have prayed during the last thirty years I have thought it to be my last prayer."*

A Sufi master once spoken about this state of Sayyida Rabiá (RA) where he said, *"This is the state of the Essence of the lovers of Allah in the station (maqam) of the Special of the special ones of the Sincerity, or Integrity (Al-ikhlas). These lovers are those who are nearest to Him and their Order is La ilaha illa 'llah. Their offering and trust is to be dying for the Truth and to kill themselves so as to live in Allah, and to be like wool in His Hands until they reach the station (maqam) of completion. Then they rest face-to-Face with their Mighty King."*

Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) thus, said:

*"Everyone prays to You from fear of the Fire;  
And if You do not put them in the Fire,  
This is their reward.  
Or they pray to You for the Garden (paradise),  
Full of fruits and flowers.  
And that is their prize.  
But I do not pray to You like this,  
For I am not afraid of the Fire,  
And I do not ask You for the Garden.  
But all I want is the Essence of Your Love,  
And to return to be One with You,  
And to become Your Face."*

It was told of Sayyida Rabi`a(RA) that she was seen one day carrying a brand of fire in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other, and that she was running very fast. When they asked her what she was doing and where she was going, she said, *"I am going to light a fire in the Garden (so that it will burn away) and pour water onto hell (so that it will extinguish) so that both these veils may disappear from the (their) seekers, and that their purpose may be sure, and that the slaves of Allah may see Him, without any object of hope or motive of fear. What if the Hope for the Garden (Paradise) and the Fear of the Fire (Hell) did not exist? Not one would worship his Lord, nor obey Him. But He is worthy of worship without any immediate motive or need."*

And she said:

*"I love You with two loves-a selfish love  
And a Love that You are worthy of.  
As for the selfish love, it is that I think of You,*

*To the exclusion of everything else.  
And as for the Love that You are worthy of,  
Ah! That I no longer see any creature, but I see only You!  
There is no praise for me in either of these loves,  
But the praise in both is for You."*

One of her biographers said that Rabi`a was the first person to teach about the necessity for truthfulness and sincerity in the lover's bondsmanship to the Beloved Who is Allah. She was one of those referred to as the spies of the heart for she often spoke out clearly against all who claimed to be lovers of Allah, but whose hearts were not always pure in intention and devotion. This was the case of those who could not unquestioningly surrender to the Will of the Beloved in everything. She said to them, *"You rebel against Allah, yet you appear to love Him. I swear by my faith that this is most strange. For if your love were truthful you would have obeyed Him, since the lover obeys the one whom he loves."* So that whenever someone said to her, *"Alas, for my sorrow (my sins),"* she replied, *"Do not lie, but say rather, 'Alas for my lack of sorrow,' for if you were truly sorrowful, life would have no delight for you."*

One of her companions, Sufyan al-Thawri (RA), asked her, "What is the best thing for the servant to do who desires proximity to his Lord?" She said, *"That the servant should possess nothing in this world for the Next, save Him."*

It was related how one day one of her followers said in her presence, *"Oh Allah, may You be satisfied with us!"* Whereupon Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) said, *"Are you not ashamed before Him to ask Him to be satisfied with you, when you are not satisfied with Him?"*

Then this was followed by the question to her, *"When then is the servant satisfied with Allah Most High?"*

She replied, *"When his pleasure in misfortune is equal to his pleasure in prosperity."*

Someone asked Sayyida Rabi`a (RA), *"What is Love?"* She, may Allah be pleased with her, said, *"Love has come from Eternity and passes into eternity, and none has been found in seventy thousand worlds who drinks one drop of it until at last he is absorbed in Allah, and from that comes His words: 'He loves them, and they love Him.'" (5:54). (The Arabic text shown below)*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Once when she was sick a number of people went to visit her. They asked her, *"How are you?"* She replied, *"By Allah! I know of no reason for my illness except that Paradise was displayed to me and I yearned after it in my heart; and I thank that my Lord was jealous for me and so He reproached me; and only He can make me happy again."*

She said:

***"O God, whatsoever You have apportioned to me of worldly things,  
Give that to Your enemies,  
And what You have apportioned to me in the Hereafter,  
Give that to Your Friends,  
For You suffice me."***

She also said:

***"O God, if I worship You for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell,  
And if I worship You in hope of Paradise,  
Exclude me from Paradise.  
But if I worship You for Your Own sake,  
Grudge me not Your everlasting Beauty."***

A biographer said, When Rabi`a was urged to speak, her words perfectly manifested her love, her belief and her faith, for she was so totally immersed in her Lord that she became a shining Light which attracted many people to her presence to drink from the same Spring from which she drank. She said, ***"If I will a thing and my Lord does not will it, I shall be guilty of unbelief."*** So that her faith came from her total surrender to her Beloved God, as she said, ***"I have fled from the world and all that is in it. My prayer is for Union with You; that is the goal of my desire."*** Then, since she always attributed her illnesses and misfortunes to the Will of her Beloved God, how could she oppose Him in trying to rid herself of them? Once she was heard to say, ***"If You had not set me apart by affliction, I would not have increased Your lovers."***

It was part of her faith that she welcomed an asceticism who accepted everything as a Gift from Allah, the Lover to his beloved slave. Therefore, she regarded misfortune in the same way as she regarded favours and happiness, and this was the ultimate of bondsmanship to her. About this she said, ***"You have given me life and have provided for me, and Yours is the Glory."*** And she added, ***"You have bestowed upon me many favours, and gifts, graces and help."*** In this she acknowledges her bondsmanship to the Giver and Bestower of all Bounty.

The sole object of Rabi`a's life was bound up in her yearning and passionate love (*shawq*) for her Beloved, which meant not merely the destruction of her self (*nafs*) but surrender to Allah every moment in the perfect Union in which there is no Lord and slave, no Creator and created being, only He in Himself. In that state she came to realize that she existed in Him without any possibility of separation from His indivisible Oneness.

It was related in one of her biographies that she once said, ***"I praised Allah one night with the praises of dawn, then I slept and I saw a bright, green tree, not to be described in size and beauty, and lo, upon it were three kinds of fruit, unknown to me amongst the fruit of the world, like virgins' breasts, white, red and yellow and they shone like spheres and suns in the green spaces of the tree. I***

*admired them and said, 'Whose is this?' And one said to me, 'This is yours, for your praises aforesaid.' Then I began to walk around the tree, and lo, underneath it were eighteen fruits on the ground of the colour of gold, and I said, 'If only these fruits were with the fruits on the tree it would be better.' That person said to me, 'They would have been there but that you, when you offered your praises, were thinking, 'Is the dough leavened or not?' So this fruit fell off. This is a warning to those of insight, and an exhortation to those who fear Allah and worship Him."*

One day a man, who was said to be a knower of Allah, met sayyida Rabi`a (RA) who asked him of his state, whereupon he replied, "*I have trod the Path of obedience and I have not sinned since Allah created me.*" She, may Allah be pleased with her, said to him, "*Alas my son, your existence is a sin wherewith no other sin may be compared.*"

Her attraction to a life of poverty (*Zuhd*) was also part of her need not to be distracted from her inner journey by the necessity for material considerations. There is a story about this poverty of hers, as one of her companions said, "*I went to visit Rabi`a and saw her in her house with nothing but a broken water pitcher out of which she drank and made her ablution. There was also an old reed mat and a brick which she sometimes used as a pillow. When I saw this, I felt very sad and I said to her, 'I have rich friends. If you wish I will get something from them for you.' She said, 'You have committed a grievous error. Is not my Provider and theirs one and the same?' I replied, 'Yes.' Then she said, 'And has the Provider of the poor forgotten the poor on account of their poverty? And does He remember the rich because of their riches?' I replied, 'No.' She said, 'Then since He knows of my state, how should I remind Him? Such is His Will and I too wish what He wills.'"*

One of her biographers said, Sayyida Rabia's love, which was passionate (*shawq*) and all-consuming was also full of humility, fear (*khawf*) and reverence (*taqwa*) for her Beloved, and when she was asked about how she had such a degree of intimacy, she said, "*By constantly saying: I take refuge in You from everything which has distracted me from You and from every hindrance which has hindered me from You.*"

She also said, "*You must conceal your good deeds as you conceal your evil deeds.*"

Now let's complete the event of her pilgrimage to Mecca as mentioned earlier, Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) as she approached the blessed city of Mecca. When she was half-way there she saw Ka`ba coming to meet her and she said, "*It is the Lord of the House Whom I need. What have I to do with the House? I need to meet with Him Who said: 'Whoso approaches Me by a span's length I will approach him by the length of a cubit (Hadith Al-Qudsi).' The Ka`ba which I see has no power over me. What does the Ka`ba bring to me?'"*

And again, an event in the same nature is as follows: It is related that Sheikh Ibrahim ibn Adham (RA), a very holy person, spent fourteen years making his way to the Ka`ba because in every place of prayer he waited and prayed two ruk`u

before proceeding and at last when he reached Mecca, he did not see Ka'aba, it was not there, but an empty spot. He said to himself, "*Alas, what has happened to my eyes. Maybe a sickness has come to them.*" Then he heard a voice which said, "*No harm has befallen your eyes, but Ka`ba has gone to meet a woman who is approaching.*" Ibrahim (RA) was seized with jealousy and said, "*O indeed; who is this?*" He ran and saw Sayyida Rabi`a (RA) arriving, and Ka`ba was back in its place. When Ibrahim (RA) saw that, he said, "*O Rabia, what is this disturbance and trouble and burden which you have brought into the world?*"

She replied, "*I have not brought disturbance into the world. It is you who have disturbed the world, because you delayed fourteen years in arriving at the Ka'ba.*" He said, "*Yes I have spent fourteen years in crossing the desert (because I was engaged) in prayer.*" Rabia said, "*You traversed it in ritual prayer (Salat) but with personal supplication.*" Meaning the *salat* of Ibrahim (RA) was filled up with his personal prayers and supplication which he joined with, not pure prayers for Allah alone.

Once when Sayyida Rabi`a (RA), may Allah be pleased with her, was asked, "*Where have you come from?*" She said, "*From that World.*" They then asked her, "*Where are you going?*" She replied, "*To that World.*" They asked, "*What are you doing in this world?*" She said, "*I am sorrowing.*" They asked, "*In what way?*" She said, "*I am eating the bread of this world and doing the work of that World.*" Then someone said, "*One so persuasive in speech is worthy to keep a guest-house.*" She replied, "*I myself am keeping a rest-house. Whatever is within I do not allow to go out, and whatever is without I do not allow to come in. If anyone comes in or goes out, he does not concern me, for I am contemplating my own heart, not mere clay.*"

Rabi`a's companions spoke about how she was always weeping and when she was asked, "*Why do you weep like this?*" she said, "*I fear that I may be cut off from Him to Whom I am accustomed, and that at the hour of death a voice may say that I am not worthy.*"

Sayyidah Rabi`a (RA) witnessed another event during her pilgrimage, when she was on the pilgrimage rites and upon reaching the standing on mount`Arafat she heard a voice saying to her, "*O you who call upon Me, what request have you to make to Me? If it is Myself that you desire, then I will show you one flash of My Glory, but in that you will be absorbed and melt away.*" She said then, "*O Lord of Glory, Rabi`a has no means of reaching to that degree, but I desire one particle of Poverty.*" The voice said, "*O Rabi`a, Poverty is the drought and famine of Our Wrath which We have placed in the way of men. When but a hair's breadth remains between them and Union with Us, everything is changed and Union becomes separation. As for you, you still have seventy veils of existence, and until you have come forth from beneath these veils you will not benefit even to speak of that Poverty.*"

A biographer said, The key to Rabi`a's reaching and living in the loving Presence of her Lord was her constant praying, remembrance and asking for forgiveness for

all her shortcomings, and a knowing that her Union with her Beloved God could not come in the way that she desired, but only in the way that He desired for her. She was also well aware that her remembrance and repentance did not come from herself, but from Him, her Beloved God. It is said that someone once said to her, "*I have committed many sins; if I turn in repentance (tawba) toward Allah, will He turn in His Mercy toward me?*" She said, "*No, but if He will turn toward you, you will turn toward Him.*"

For Rabi`a, repentance was a Gift from Allah. As she said, "*Seeking forgiveness with the tongue is the sin of lying. If I seek repentance of myself, I shall have need of repentance again.*" Or as she also said, "*Our asking for forgiveness of Allah itself needs (seeking for) forgiveness.*"

She, may Allah be pleased with her, said:

*"O God, my whole occupation  
And all my desire in this world,  
Of all worldly things,  
Is to remember You.  
And in the Hereafter  
It is to meet You.  
This is on my side, as I have stated.  
Now You do whatever You will."*

Sayyida Rabiá (RA) used to pray over the night and used to say, "*O God, the night has passed and the day has dawned. How I long to know if You have accepted my prayers or if You have rejected them. Therefore console me, for it is Yours to console this state of mine. You have given me life and cared for me, and Yours is the Glory. If You want to drive me from Your Door yet would I not forsake it for the love that I bear in my heart towards You.*"

#### **Her death**

Sayyida Rabiá (RA) spent her last seven years in Jerusalem, where she travelled to from her home town of Basra with a woman companion and attendant, and she bought a small house with some land surrounding it on top of the holy Mountain of Olives (at-Tur). There she lived, and from there she used to walk down, every day, to Masjid Al-Aqsa where she prayed and gave Teachings to the people, both men and women, who came to listen to her. Although she was a woman, nobody could prevent her from doing this because it was Allah Who moved her in this way to be the means of manifesting Himself to the people who sought Him through her. Then after praying and teaching in the Mosque she would walk back up the mountain to her house. This she did every day until she died in the year 185 A.H. / 801 C.E at the age of eighty-six years old.

After she died, she was buried on the mountain which still exists near the Christian Church of the Ascension on top of the Mountain of Olives.



*The grave of Sayyida Rabi'a (RA) in Jerusalem*

At this stage, I completed the compilation of the short biography of Sayyida Rabi'a (RA) who lived in Basra in present day Iraq, Baghdad in present day Iraq also and Jerusalem in present day Palestine. She lived for 86 blessed years, 11 out of it in Basra under her parental care, 25 out of it as street dancer under her master in Baghdad, 43 of it as a saint and a Sufi grand mistress teaching Sufism and bringing back the lost souls back to the Almighty in Baghdad and finally 7 out of it in Jerusalem calling people to Allah and teaching them about Him and how to love Him. May Allah continue to bless her soul and raise her position before Him.

To this note, anything I compiled or put into written here and is rewarded may the reward be extended to you the reader and the retinue of biographers I relied on their materials. Anything that I compiled or put into written and I erred that error should be mine alone and I implore Almighty Allah to forgive me and raise correction soonest.

*Faqeer Ilallah wa abduhu*

16<sup>th</sup> Safar, 1434.

### **References**

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