

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Khatam Sharif  
IN HONOUR OF THE VENERABLE

*Sidi Bel Abbas* رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ

**‘Allah is Self Sufficient, while you are the needy.’ (47:38)**

### The Shrine Culture

Within the narrow alleys of the old city of Marrakech, you find the famed Souks, the largest marketplaces within Morocco. They are an amalgamation of vibrant colour and energy; and as you enter, they seem to transport you to another age; to some exotic place of intrigue and adventure. The air is rife with cries of gypsies, the pavements full of snake-charmers, magicians, and folk-singers. Walking further through this maze, it seems there is nothing that isn't sold here, as you overhear the haggling between buyers and sellers. This all seems overwhelming, but unbeknown to the ordinary tourist; these are not the only dealings taking place in the Souk.

Within the heart of the old city, is situated a place that can be easily missed. A small door is all that distinguishes it from the neighbouring stalls. The door leads to a retreat away from the hustle and bustle of the Souks. It is a haven for those who find themselves in circumstances where they seek support and assistance. Within the confines of the courtyard, a congregation of people sit attentively on benches with their backs slouched against the wall. The first impression is one of a waiting room in a doctor's surgery and it is noticeable that some are blind or disabled. They sit patiently, waiting to be summoned but there is no one to summon them. This is no doctor's surgery and there is no receptionist present to take appointments. Venturing inside the complex, within a special room are the tombs of the saints of the old. The congregation of people have come to seek support from one saint in particular; the patronage of this complex, Sidi Bel Abbas رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ. Without doubt, these individuals are helpless and yet they have complete certainty that Sidi Bel Abbas رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ will hear their pleas and come to their aid.

The blessed *sahabi*, Sayyiduna Abu Ayub al-Ansari رضي الله عنه was seen crying at the *Rawda Mubarak* of RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم. He was asked why he was doing this and he replied, ‘I am not crying to brick and mortar! This is my Prophet! I have a need; he will sort it out.’”

It is with this conviction of belief that people flock to Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه and other saints likewise. Known as *darbars* (courts) in the sub-continent, the people visiting do so in the manner that they envisage themselves at the court of the saint; where their case is presented before the compassionate saint who will judge in their favour. Knowing full well that they can seek help and support from the confines of their homes, in some cases they make the arduous journey to saints such as Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه with the hope that the proximity to the saint will speed up the process of grace.

## Background

Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه in his lifetime was a source of comfort and support to many. Even after hundreds of years, he is able to fulfil the needs of his people. His full name was Ahmad bin Ja’far al-Khazraji رضي الله عنه and he was born in the twelfth century, 524 Hijri, in Sabta, Morocco. He was given the *kunya* Abu al-Abbas and his surname suggests his lineage traces back to the *Ansar* (local people) of *Madinah sharif*. And so he became affectionately known by the masses as Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه and today is recognised as one of the seven patron saints of Marrakech.

A student once noticing Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه in a relaxed and cheerful mood, thought it to be an opportune moment to ask him about his personal life, “Tell me about how all this began, master. How did all this happen to you? ”

Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه responded in depth, “I became an orphan at an early age and my family circumstances were such that I was sent to work with merchants by my mother. However, I had no interest in trading and money matters and was instead inclined towards a spiritual master, Shaykh Abu Abdullah al-Fakharaji رضي الله عنه, a student of the renowned Qadi Iyad رضي الله عنه. Shaykh Abu Abdullah رضي الله عنه would give a *dars* regularly in my local area and I became a regular attendee. However, this impacted on my livelihood, which enraged my mother. My family was very poor and in need of my earnings to provide basic needs and out of despair she beat me. I stopped attending the *dars* and went back to working full time with the merchants.

To my surprise, a few days later, I was visited by Shaykh Abu Abdullah رضي الله عنه, who asked why I was no longer attending his *dars*. I informed the Shaykh that I wanted to come and listen to his teachings, but alas my circumstances could no longer allow this. The Shaykh listened attentively to me and then immediately visited my mother. He informed her that he would financially support my family and cover my tuition fees. Shaykh Abu Abdullah رضي الله عنه ensured the needs of my family were met and provided the means for me to study.”

During this period of studying, Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله completed *Hifz* of the Holy *Qur'an* and studied *Maliki fiqh* and received further education from his spiritual master, Shaykh Abu Abdullah رحمته الله. Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله mentions, "It was during my studies that the following verse of the Holy *Qur'an* kept coming to my mind.

**Verily, Allah orders you to be Al-Adl (just) and Al-Ihsan (benevolent). (16:90)**

I kept on reciting this verse and realised there must be a deeper meaning as Allah is commanding us to do two deeds, be just and benevolent. I found the answer when I studied the *Seerah* and read about when RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم instructed the *Ansar* brothers to give half of their wealth to the *Muhajireen* (migrants). I now understood that this was the meaning of being just; to give away half of what you have. As I further studied the *Seerah*, there were numerous examples of benevolence with many incidents mentioned where the *Sahaba* gave away everything they possessed.

I had an immense feeling in my heart that this verse had revealed the purpose of my life to me. I made a firm intention that I would ensure I did both these deeds in all my actions and so I started to provide for the needs of eighty three people, including my immediate family, my poor relatives, my students, poor families in the local area and I took on sponsoring thirty two orphans. If any of these individuals no longer needed my support, I replaced them with another needy person.

I did this for a period of sixteen years such that my life became revolved about practicing justice and benevolence in all matters. In return, I was rewarded by Allah Almighty with the governess into heavens and on Earth. I could appoint rulers and have them removed at my discretion and other matters were also handed over to me."

The student was captivated by this detailed account and although Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله would not elaborate on his spiritual rank, the student understood this was the sign he was the *Qutub* (spiritual pole).

The same student then recalled an incident, which illustrated the Shaykh's spiritual rank, "I remember when we once travelled through an area and you instructed a wealthy person in that region to give charity to the local people. This wealthy person arrogantly commented that Allah was not in need of his wealth. We were instructed to write down a date and you said this foolish person has just lost his position. Twenty three days later on that exact day you stipulated, this wealthy person was removed from his position."

Upon hearing this incident being recapped, Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله recited the following verse from the Holy *Qur'an*.

**'Allah is Self Sufficient, while you are the needy.' (47:38)**

## Fulfiller of Needs

Like the wealthy person Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه had instructed, it has become deceptively common for us to overlook a simple fact about our natural disposition. This deception has left us unaware that we are in 'need' at all times. This ignorance is due to our selfish outlook on how to live our lives and is also partly based on the foolish assumption of perceiving a poor person and a needy person as being of the same ilk. We do not realise the distinct difference between the two and so cannot understand how Allah Almighty has defined humanity.

Irrespective of our worldly status and wealth, we are all needy. All human beings, rich or poor, are in need of oxygen with every breath taken, in need of food to survive and in need of sleep for our bodies to rest, to mention but a few of our endless needs. This realisation that Allah Almighty is not in need of anything and becoming aware of our basic state as human makes us consider, 'Who do we turn to as needy people?'

Our first instinct is to think that as needy people, we make supplications to Allah Almighty and our needs will be fulfilled. However, we must follow the methods of Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه, who throughout his lifetime contemplated on many questions and had a routine of looking for answers in the Holy *Qur'an*, the *Seerah* and the teachings of pious people.

RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'Amongst Allah's creation, there are those who Allah created to fulfil the needs of others. Hence people shall seek their help.'

It is common knowledge that the role of Hadrat Jibra'il عليه السلام was to bring revelations to Prophets. Not so apparent is that his key role now following the end of Prophet-hood, is as 'The fulfiller of needs.' All the supplications made throughout the world are received by Hadrat Jibra'il عليه السلام and he chooses accordingly which ones to immediately pass to Allah Almighty and which can wait. The needs of people are then fulfilled by special servants of Allah Almighty that He has placed in every continent. Whatever sincere supplications are made by people, it becomes an obligation on these servants to have those needs fulfilled.

These servants live amongst us but as their lives do not revolve around themselves, they have followed the instructions of RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم and adorned the qualities of Allah Almighty, such as being generous, compassionate and helping people in need. All they seek is Allah's pleasure, as they realise that their purpose is to help Allah's creation, as Allah loves those who are considerate to His creation.

It is these qualities that are apparent in the personalities of the *Awliya* (Friends of Allah), special servants like Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه who become 'fulfiller of needs.' During his early life, Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه was based in Agadir and being a mathematician of high calibre, he taught students who stayed at the hotel. Whatever he was paid for his teaching, he would spend on food from the market to feed the students and poor

people in the local vicinity. One day, some young students at the hotel were threatened with execution by the King's royal guards as they had raised their voices during the middle of the night when debating a matter. The students were all frightened at facing the prospect of being beheaded and immediately informed Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله, as they knew only he could help them in their moment of need.

Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله was always concerned about people who were in need and disliked arrogant people and those who did not show justice towards others. After hearing the account of the students, he went away into his private chambers for a lengthy period of time. Upon returning, he said, "I pleaded to Allah Almighty; you are all safe. But those guards will not see another day. They will be executed for threatening those who study the knowledge of RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم."

The students pleaded that such drastic action was not necessary. Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله said, "If you do not want them dead, they will receive a hundred lashes for making these threats." Later the guards were arrested due to a bottle of wine being found near them and they received the fixed punishment for alcohol use; a hundred lashes.

The famous Spanish Qadi, ibn Rushd رحمته الله once instructed once of his friends to visit Marrakech and sit in the gathering of Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله. When his friend returned, Qadi ibn Rushd رحمته الله enquired, "What is the way of the master?"

His friend replied, "His path is to fulfil the needs of other people. Even when he has needs himself, I saw him giving preference to helping people. He was extremely handsome, always wore a cloak made from *suf* (wool) and would often go around the streets, reprimanding people for missing the prayer, not giving charity and not following the *Shari'ah*. His humility is such that he practices the concept of *malama* (self-blame), hiding his inner state and often speaks in riddles. I have never witnessed backbiting in his gatherings.

The essence of his teachings is based on benevolence; he teaches that you will only attain if you give to others, and that a person should be benevolent in both attitude and in deeds. He explained to us that being benevolent is to desire for others, what you desire yourself."

It was the way of Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله to always encourage people to do the best of actions; to give *sadaqa* (charity). He promoted this concept as this would steer people away from the worst of actions, to be *baheel* (miserly). Sidi Bel Abbas رحمته الله explained that such is our need, that if Allah Almighty was to even withhold his generosity from us for one moment, we would perish. This is why we should not withhold from being generous towards people, as Allah Almighty is always the provider, and can fulfil the needs of people in other ways. But He provides us with the opportunity to be generous towards His creation, and so we should not disappoint Him.

In every situation we are faced with, we have the capacity to be generous, whether it is by using our wealth, or by being considerate towards other or even speaking kind words with our tongue. As this thought process does not enter our minds, we do not seek opportunities to be at service to Allah's creation. And so we remain oblivious to the divine blessings that we would be granted, if we were generous in every situation.

Unlike common people, the *Awliya* possess generous souls and are always mindful that Allah Almighty is the ultimate provider for His creation in every matter. They are always looking out for the needs of people and are so attentive day by day, that they increase the level of fulfilling the needs of others. If no one comes to them with a need, they feel as if Allah Almighty is upset with them because they have not been presented with an opportunity. RasulAllah ﷺ explains that Allah Almighty bestows certain special individuals for the function of being fulfiller of needs. In this role, Allah Almighty always makes them come to the aid of the needy, even if they are unknown to them.

Once, Sidi Bel Abbas رضى الله عنه had fallen ill due to the cold weather and despite his family members putting many blankets on him, he was still shivering and could not feel any warmth. Suddenly, he took the blanket off and walked out on to the streets and into the rain despite the pleas of his family to remain indoors. As he looked around, he came across a family who had a fire burning and were shivering. Sidi Bel Abbas understood immediately that this was why Allah Almighty had not let him rest, and he went back home and made preparations for that family to be looked after.

## **Tawakkul**

In his classical book, *Risala ul Qushariya*, Imam Qushayri رضى الله عنه discusses many characteristics and spiritual ranks of the chosen people. He comments that an essential quality for those on the spiritual path is known as *tawakkul*, as Allah Almighty says, 'And whoever so puts his trust in Allah, He shall suffice for him.'

Sidi Bel Abbas رضى الله عنه mentions, "As a young man I had heard the sayings of many pious people on the concept of *tawakkul*, to have total reliance upon Allah. I reflected upon this and came to the conclusion that to have complete trust in God, I must abandon attachment to all worldly matters and possessions. I abandoned everything and set off in to the wilderness. Later that night, as I was resting in a mosque, I overheard a commotion. A cow was missing and the owner of the missing cow and his friend were searching around the local area. They came to the mosque to search here also. They noticed me and I mentioned that I was a traveller, passing by through area. A couple of minutes later, the owner of the cow returned with food, bread and milk. He then invited me to come and stay at his house. When we reached his house, the missing cow was there. The owner realised that the cow had not been missing from home at all and this situation had happened to allow him to look after me as I was a traveller who was relying on Allah Almighty.

It is a common situation for the *Awliya* to retreat into the wilderness and to practice *tawakkul*. They only plan for Allah's pleasure and to challenge their inner self not over a matter of days, but year after year. The only period in life where *tawakkul* is truly practiced is in our infancy, where we are totally reliant upon our mothers. As we grow up, our sense of belief in Allah Almighty grows, but we do not feel the need to develop our trust in Him. We remain oblivious of achieving this state as whenever we are faced with situations; our reliance is not on Allah Almighty but instead placed upon certain people or authorities within society. To the *Awliya*, to have such reliance constitutes as *shirk* (idolatry) as Allah Almighty has set a condition for believers,

**'And put your trust in Allah, if you are really believers'. (5:23)**

Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام subtly taught this concept in his teachings saying, "*Tawakkul* is when the only plan is Allah's pleasure." There was one particular student, Musa Bin Hamad, who had attended the gatherings of Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام for many years, but could not figure out the reality of his teacher. Musa Bin Hamad relates the following incident,

"One day, after praying *fajr* in the mosque, Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام said to me today is the day of *Arafat* and instructed me to give away everything I had with me to the first person who entered the city gate, or else to go away and not accompany him. An old lady walked through the gate, so I gave her all the money I had. After this, Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام raised his hand, made a supplication and we offered prayers. Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام then commented that we have combined two things of great merit, charity and prayers. It was at that moment I had a spiritual experience that had an immense impact on me. Through this incident, I became aware that Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام was instructing me to practice *tawakkul*."

Once, it had not rained for a long time in Marrakech, and Musa Bin Hamad queried why Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام had done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the people. Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام replied, "As you are holding, Allah is also holding" Musa Bin Hamad was accustomed to his teacher speaking in riddles and understood this meant that as no *sadaqa* had been given; Allah was withholding the rain. Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام stated the following Hadith, "O son of Adam, you spend and I will send." Musa Bin Hamad gave *sadaqa* and soon after, rain fell across Marrakech. This incident became widespread in the community and people became mindful of the spiritual rank of Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام.

Once, Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام was sat in the shop of a friend, when a poor person approached them both, and repeatedly asked for some money to purchase food. Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام apologised as he did not have any money, and then turned to his friend and asked him to give some money to the poor man to buy bread. After the poor man had left, Sidi Bel Abbas عليه السلام said to his friend, "I sense that you are worrying about how I will pay you back. What you have failed to understand is that this poor person

has just saved you from the burden of poverty, such is the favour Allah Almighty has given you for fulfilling this poor person's needs.”

## Legacy

Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه practiced this concept of *haja* (to fulfil the need) throughout his lifetime as he was aware that RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم has said, 'If anyone fulfil his brother's needs, then Allah will fulfil his needs.'

The *Awliya*, like Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه please RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم by sincerely following his teachings. This approval was made known to Sayyid Abdur Rahman رضي الله عنه who at the time did not have a good opinion of Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه. Sayyid Abdur Rahman رضي الله عنه asked RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم during a dream, “What is your opinion of Sidi Bel Abbas رضي الله عنه.”

RasulAllah صلى الله عليه وسلم smiled and said, “He is amongst those people who will cross the bridge by lightning on the Day of Judgment. This is the category of the most chosen people.”

*Al-Fatiba*