

## AL- TARIQAH AL-HIBRIYAH (الطريقة الهبرية)

The al-Hibri *tariqah* is a *Darqawi Shadhili sufi tariqa* (درقاوية شاذلية) whose sheikhs trace their spiritual chain of authority to the Prophet. The al-Hibri sheikhs are physical descendants (النسب الطيني) of Sayyedina al-Hassan. In *sufism*, the spiritual lineage is more important than the “clay” or physical lineage.

The al-Hibri *zawiyahs* focus on instilling good moral values in students, and providing them with a solid education in the Qur’an, *sunnah* and various Islamic studies. They also encourage them to “do good” (فعل الخير) in the world, in accordance with these moral values and beliefs.

The origins of the al-Hibri *zawiyah* go back to Sheikh Abdallah bin ‘Azzah al-Idrissi al-Hassani (c. 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> C.), a distinguished *sufi* ancestor who had a vision that instructed him to establish his own *zawiyah* in the mountains of Bani Zinyasin, in east Morocco. From that *zawiyah* other *zawiyahs* proliferated, many founded by his own offspring, including the al-Hibri branch that descends from his son Muhammad al-Sanusi.

Bin ‘Azzah’s first *zawiyah* was primitive, housed in tents. As it grew, it required more water to serve the students and visitors. The water was being transported daily from a distant spot on the back of animals. Bakhtah, a pious woman who frequented the *zawiyah*, identified a need for a regular water supply. So she donated her inherited share in a large spring to the *zawiyah*, asking them to remember her in their *du’a* (supplication). A canal was then built between the *zawiyah* and the spring, and the problem was solved. The pond where the water collects near the *zawiyah* is known till this day by the name of the charitable woman Bakhtah.

But this is not the only woman who played an important role in the life and mission of Sheikh Abdallah bin ‘Azzah. Although he was the son of *al-Sharif*

Amuhammad (أحمد) al-Maghrawi al-Hibri, he was popularly attributed to his mother *al-Sharifah* ‘Azzah bint ‘Afif who was a respected scholar. She taught many young scholars who honored her name, and mentioned it in their records.

Interestingly, this was not the only learned woman in the al-Hibri family. We are also told about Lalla Safiah, sister of Sidi Ahmad al-Hibri. She oversaw the famous *zawiyah* in Draiwah, in the Ihfir region in Morocco, until it was destroyed by the French. She then moved to the *zawiyah* in Madagh, Morocco, and continued her teaching there. Lalla Safiah was known for her vast religious knowledge, ascetic *sufi* consciousness, and deep piety. She taught a lot of women, and the *zawiyah* till this day continues the tradition of teaching women.

Another famous figure in the al-Hibri *zawiyah* is Sidi Muhammad al-Hajj al-Hibri (19<sup>th</sup> C.), who is the founder of the more recent al-Hibri *zawiyahs*. He was a student of Sheikh Sidi Muhammad bin Qaddour al-Wakili who had a *zawiyah* in Karkar, Morocco. Al-Wakili was the spiritual descendant of Sheikh Mawlay al-‘Arabi al-Dirqawi, who in turn was a spiritual descendant of Abi al-Hassan al-Shadhili.

There are several al-Hibri *zawiyahs* in Morocco and Algeria. I visited the *zawiyah* of Sheikh Muhammad bin A’mar (may God rest his soul in Peace) in the rebuilt Draiwah *zawiyah*, and met some of the *fuqara* (sing. *faqir*) (see photo in the Photos section/ Morocco). “*Fuqara*” is the name given to those who espouse the al-Hibri *tariqah*. Literally, it means “poor people.” This appellation is based on the Qur’anic verse 35:15 that states:

“Oh People! It is you who stand in need of God (فقرَاء لله), whereas He alone is self-sufficient, the One to whom all praise is due.”

A *sufi* is a person who has turned away from the material desires and attractions of this World of Appearances, and turned towards God the All-Merciful seeking Reality. In this spiritual journey to sublimate the *sufi's* physical existence into a higher spiritual existence, the *sufi* recognizes that he is nothing but a *faqir* who must recognize his/her own human arrogance/ignorance to submit fully to God, the source of all Truth.

Among the students of Sidi Muhammad bin Sidi al-Hajj Muhammad al-Hibri was Sheikh Muhammad Bilqayed who later established a highly regarded *zawiyah* in Oran, Algeria.

The famous Sheikh al-Mutwalli al-Sh'arawi of Egypt, a distinguished scholar and jurist, sought out Sheikh Bilqayed following a vision he had. (see Media section for related video.) Sheikh al-Sha'rawi asked the younger Sheikh Bilqayed to become his teacher, which he did. The two had the greatest regard and affection for each other. Al-Sha'rawi wrote a poem about the al-Hibri *tariqa*. It starts with the following verse that compliments the *tariqa* for its spiritual gifts:

نور القلوب وري روح الوارد هبرية تدني الوصول لعابد<sup>1</sup>

I visited this *zawiyah* with my father a couple of decades ago, and had a nice cup of tea with Sheikh Bilqayed's son, Abdullatif, who succeeded his father. I also met Sheikh Abdullatif's kind wife. After that, we toured the *zawiyah*. I found out that it was self-sufficient, meeting its nutritional needs from the agricultural products of its own farm land. The curriculum included courses in science, computers, and other modern disciplines.

Sheikh Bilqayed recounted to my father the history of the *zawiyah* during the French colonial era. The French confiscated the *zawiyah* and its land from

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<sup>11</sup> For the full poem, see Salah Mu'ayyad al-'Aqbi, AL-TURUQ AL-SUFIIYAH WA'L ZAWAYAH BI'L JAZA'IR (Dar Al-Buraq, Beirut 2002)

Sidi Muhammad bin Sidi al-Hajj Muhammad al-Hibri. But the *zawiyah* was reclaimed and returned to its former glory after liberation.

Books also recount that Sidi Muhammad bin Sidi al-Hajj Muhammad al-Hibri supported the revolution against colonialism and the right of the Algerian people to liberty. He refused to cooperate with the French despite the many enticing offers made to him. Instead, he provided humanitarian assistance to the Algerian freedom fighters. As a result, he was exiled repeatedly by the French to distant parts of Algeria. But the *fuqara* kept tracking him down and joining him.

It is estimated that those who espouse the al-Hibri *tariqah* exceed five million worldwide. The al-Hibri *zawiyahs* continue to proliferate. Some are small and simple. Others are large and grand, with virtual presence on the internet. The al-Hibri sheikhs and scholars, male and female, however, opted for simple unassuming tombs in Ihfir and elsewhere.

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