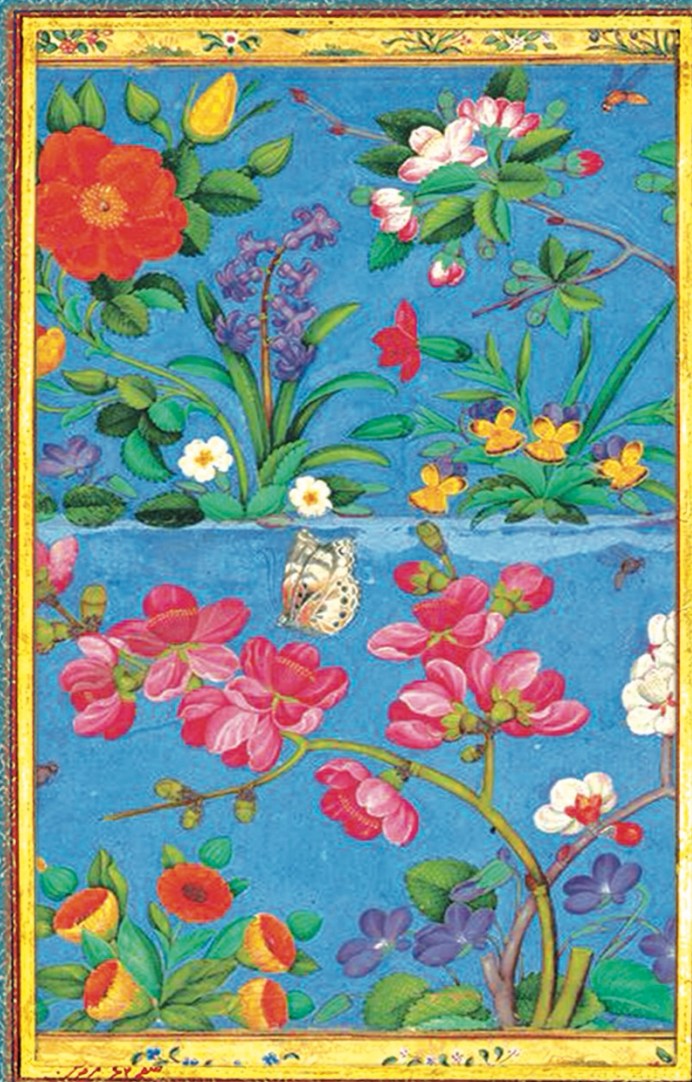


# PATHWAYS TO THE GARDEN

Contemporary insights on the Sufi Path



SHAYKH FADHLALLA HAERI

# **Pathways to the Garden**

**Contemporary Insights on the Sufi Path**

*By*

**Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri**



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Autobiography

Health Sciences and Islamic History

## Book Description

It is a natural human drive to discover and develop the perfect Garden. We long for a state where we have no concerns, anxieties or needs, just living in the Garden in the eternal drift of time. Only a few reach a point of bewilderment when they are not certain whether the Garden is in them or they are in the Garden. Truth is beyond space and time; therefore, its apparent confusion is a big grace when the ‘you’ is lost and the cosmic Oneness illuminates all.

Cosmic Light is boundless and eternal. Throughout human history, irrespective of religious orientation or culture, people have reflected on the eternal truth of this reality. Some of these sages, like Shaykh Sa’d ud-Dīn Mahmūd Shabistārī, were able to convey this in a universal light. In my experience and understanding, the conditioned consciousness of human beings has within it a drive towards higher consciousness and intelligence. Throughout our history, this appears in diverse ways and forms, cloaked within the culture of the time. With the rise in intelligence and education, today’s people can easily understand duality and the quest for unity without it being too esoteric. Young people today can also easily appreciate the truth that our existence has emerged from a mysterious unific source and will return to it after the end of time. Every one of us is challenged by the mystery of now, which is ever-changing and constant, and the unique gift of life.

All quests and teachings lead to the realisation that the soul, or essence of life, is eternal and that the moment radiates from timelessness. We are obsessed with that which is eternal and ever-present. In my lifelong search to uncover and share the dazzling lights of Truth, I have been propelled to make more accessible translations of specific seminal texts from the Sufi tradition available, as I have done with *‘The Secret Garden’*. This book, *‘Pathways to the Garden’* is presented as an update to key questions for today’s time.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

## About the Author

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri is a spiritual philosopher and writer whose role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfilment.

Since childhood he has been attracted to scientific investigation and intellectual pursuit.

He was born in Karbala, Iraq, and is a descendant of several generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders.

After a stint in industry and consulting, he embarked on teaching, writing and meditating.

His awareness of global realpolitik compelled him to seek a truth that would reconcile the past with the present, the East and West. His discovery affirms that One Cosmic Reality is the source behind all known and unknown states.

Shaykh Haeri's unifying perspective emphasises practical, actionable knowledge of self-transformation. It provides a natural bridge between different approaches to spirituality, offering common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

His main work has been to make traditional Islamic teachings more comprehensible and widely available to the modern seeker through courses and publications. Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri is currently engaged in lecturing and writing books and commentaries on the Holy Qur'an and related subjects, with particular emphasis on ethics, self-development and gnosis (*`irfan*).

With a lifetime's experience of contemplation, research, and insights, he shares what it means to live in the light of the Absolute in a relative world and maintains that spiritual awakening is potentially available to all.

For more information about the author, please visit [www.shaykhfadhlallahhaeri.com](http://www.shaykhfadhlallahhaeri.com)

Zahra Publications' other books are listed at <http://www.zahrapublications.pub>.

## Introduction

Cosmic Light is boundless, eternal and contains the entire universe. Throughout human history, irrespective of religious orientation or culture, humans have sought after the eternal truth of this Reality. A sage like Shaykh Sa'd ud-Dīn Mahmūd Shabistārī was able to convey important aspects of this in a universal light. One of his books of poetry written in 1317 CE, *Gulshan-e Rāz* or 'The Secret Garden', offers guiding insights into the realities of the Sufi path.

Not much is known about the life of Shaykh Shabistārī, who was born around 1250 CE in Shabistār, near Tabrīz in Iran, during the turbulent times of the Mongol invasions. He wrote two popular poetry collections and at least one treatise. 'The Secret Garden', one of his two works of mystical poetry, had been composed in response to questions on metaphysics sent to him by a contemporary Sufi Master, Shaykh Rukn ad-Dīn Husaynī Harawī, himself a renowned Sufi master from Azerbaijan. Adeptly referring to the imagery used by previous Sufi poets, Shabistārī's work feeds into the tradition of Sufi language, as he elaborates on realities of the journey of awakening. Shabistārī's penetrating answers and symbolic expositions cover critical facets on awakening to the human soul and the doctrine of the 'Unity of Being' as represented in the work of Ibn 'Arabī, among others. His exposition reveals the interconnectedness of reason, revelation and unveiling in the symbolic garden. Shabistārī's answers to the critical questions about the nature of humanity and the Divine may propel us along the ladder of consciousness towards the eternal supreme light of existence.

In my experience and understanding, the conditioned consciousness of human beings has within it a drive towards higher consciousness and intelligence. Throughout our history, this appears in diverse ways and forms, cloaked within the culture of the time. With the rise in intelligence and education, today's people can easily understand duality and the quest for unity without it being too esoteric.

Young people today can also appreciate the truth that our existence has emerged from a mysterious, unific source and is sustained by it and will unify with it. Every one of us is challenged by the mystery of time, which is ever-changing and yet constant, and the unique gift of life.



All quests and teachings lead to the realisation that the soul, or essence of life, is eternal and radiates from time and its flow within space. We are obsessed with that which is eternal and boundless – the divine soul or spirit within the heart.

I have tried to make a modern translation of ‘The Secret Garden’ available and on several occasions, I had visions of Shaykh Shabistārī and others like Ibn ‘Arabī, Mulla Sadrā, Shaykh Rūzbehān Bāqli and Ibn ‘Atā’ Allah al-Iskandarī, in which they would look at me with quizzical expressions as if to say, ‘You do not need to redo the classical works of past masters, for they were for the people of that time. Truth is eternal and appears appropriately at every point in time. Now you need to answer the questions for your time.’

It is in that spirit which I hope to address these questions in this book.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri  
South Africa, 2024

## What is Our Purpose

**H**uman life on earth demands participation and interaction to experience a better outcome within our consciousness of dualities, some of our participative efforts are attractive and useful, while others are detrimental. Our earthly life drives us to climb along the ladder of higher intelligence through trial and error. This is the real evolutionary progress.

Our purpose on earth is to prepare for the highest stage of consciousness which comes after the removal of the body and the mind. Higher quality life only begins after death. To realise this purpose, we need to move our focus from the numerous shadows emanating from the one light from our own heart, spirit or soul towards the constant inner light. When we die, all the shadows disappear and only the light of the soul remains. We have to practice shadow disappearance and emergence of pure inner light.

Once you truly discover the truth that the source of life within you is Divine and boundless, then the fear of death will abate and concerns for any loss will also disappear. The old and false identity of the ego-self is now the effulgent soul.

***“Prepare yourself for the highest consciousness.”***

*51:56 I created jinn and mankind only to worship Me:*

*23:1 Prosperous are the believers.*

*67:2 Who created death and life that He may try you – which of you is best in deeds; and  
He is the Mighty, the Forgiving.*

## Who am I, and What am I not?

**I**t is natural for intelligent human beings to question their real nature, the reasons for their actions and state of being, and to reflect upon what to do and what not to do.

Who am I? Why do we change or reverse our value systems? Why do we long to leave normal consciousness behind and embrace deep sleep?

We learn a lot by realising who we are not. I am not just the pursuer of success or wealth and power, although in a list of priorities of what I desire, power and wealth may appear right on top. Ultimately the main drive in my life is to preserve and prolong life. That is the most valuable entity there is – life – which causes my experiences of life itself.

Throughout the millennia, a few individuals have touched supreme consciousness to assist us by showing that duality in life enables us to understand the timeless eternal nature of life itself, as well as the more defined and confined nature of the animal life that we harbour. The outcome of these spiritual inspirations is that the human being is composed of two entities: one is a divine eternal light which carries life with it, and the other one is an animal that enables it to function in an intermediate and transitional state on earth, where it participates in the pursuit of what is considered to be good for it, like nourishment, rest, safety, security and personal and social harmony.

Ultimately, the so-called ‘I’ emanates from the constant light of life, which enables it to experience all the various shadows and flavours of likes and dislikes, acceptances and rejections, and other dualities.

***“It is in our nature to seek an inner state that is ever-constant for that is where your soul resides.”***

The real ‘I’ is a constant soul with a heavenly nature undergoing an earthly exposure. Durability will further define the perception. You may be a disappointed friend or an anxious parent or a pursuer of material success, but all of these roles have a limited durability, until you end up at your origin, pure and eternal.

Life is not constrained by space or time. But emerges within space and time, like a flame it emerges and then subsides.

The fundamental 'I' is the experiencer with the evaluation that goes with it. The changing or prevailing experience is taken as an aspect of personality or character. Nothing is ever constant like change itself. The Source of cognisance, experience or the so-called 'I' is ever constant. That is the nature of the soul within the heart. The outer appearance always changes, whereas the inner source is constant.

The real 'I' has the potential to experience and respond to events and stimuli. The so-called 'I' accepts, rejects, or suffers. The real me is inseparable from that which is eternally and boundlessly present: life.

*15:29 And when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down  
before him in prostration!’*

*21:35 Every soul shall taste death. We put you to the test, with evil and good, as an ordeal,  
and to Us you shall return.*

*67:2 Who created death and life that He may try you – which of you is best in deeds; and  
He is the Mighty, the Forgiving,*



## **Is Inner Peace and Contentment Possible in Today's Time?**

The human drive for peace and contentment is constant in all situations, including during manmade or natural disasters. Peace and contentment are the ultimate hopes and objectives for intelligent living beings, irrespective of place, culture or time.

Life is experienced through movement or change within time and that is disturbance and agitation and whatever we experience has disturbed peace, but it may be desirable for other reasons. If durable peace, tranquillity and perfect presence is desired, then the ego-self needs to be still and inert.

Peace is the foundation state from which existence emerges. Peace is a field of energy that has not been affected by our emotions, agitation, needs or anxiety. Peace exudes tranquillity and timelessness.

The power of the sacred soul is most experienced with peace and stillness. With the stillness of the ego-self and through peace, the divine power of the soul is naturally experienced and appreciated.

***“Peace is more accessible when the ego-self is less dominant.”***

*89:27–30 O self at peace! Return to your Lord, well pleased, well pleasing, And enter among My worshippers, and enter My Garden!*

*13:28 Those who have faith and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah – truly it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find peace.*

*8:10 Allah did not bring this about except as glad tidings, and so that your hearts might be calmed thereby. Victory comes only from Allah; Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.*

## How Do We Break Habits and Overcome Desires?

**H**abits are formed naturally due to our desire for continuity in the flow of life. Desirable habits serve the soul within the heart and undesirable habits are ego-self enhancers. With wisdom we choose the habits that enable the soul to shine and lead instead of falling into the darkness of the lower self.

We can break habits by replacing them with new, more elevated habits and actions. Replacing old habits with better ones moves us towards higher consciousness.

We naturally repeat what we like and avoid what we don't like. But what you may desire today may be something you will avoid tomorrow. A good quality life is based on a flexible attitude that is connected to the moment. Willingness to change simple daily routines regarding, for example, food, work or relationships is healthy. Changing the type of food you eat, or the time of day you eat, or sleeping in different locations will cultivate flexibility. Subjecting yourself to situations that are outside of your routine can bring freshness in your interaction with the outer world.

Overcoming desires comes with experience and wisdom. Eventually you will realise that all earthly events are temporary anyway; the zest and drive you had for those desires will fall away, and your interest in them will dissipate. With each new era in your life, it will become easier to lose interest in most of your previous desires. A five-year-old longs for a tricycle, while a seventy-year-old prefers safety and ease.

***“Habits give the illusion of continuity due to their repetitiveness. Desires are natural drives towards what we imagine will give us reliable contentment.”***

*2:170 But when it is said to them, 'Follow the message that Allah has sent down,' they answer, 'We follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?*

*3:145 A self cannot die save by Allah's leave, at a date to be determined. Whoso desires the reward of this world, We shall give him thereof, and whoso desires the reward of the other world We shall give him thereof. We shall recompense those who give thanks.*

*5:48 We sent down to you the book with the truth, confirming the book that came before it and with final authority over them; so judge between them according to what Allah has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you.*

*We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to Allah and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about.*

*87:14 He indeed shall be successful who purifies himself.*

# How Can We Transcend Our Obsession with Benefits and Outcomes?

Within conditioned consciousness lies the natural drive to succeed and achieve beneficial outcomes. Transcendence means a different consciousness to that of gain and loss. When you are able to stop aspirations and ambitions in the outer world, you are at the boundary of a higher level of consciousness. The drive is constant and without an end.

We normally operate in one of two modes: neutral or non-participating, and participating. When we are participating in life it helps us to grow in intelligence and consciousness, but in this mode, there isn't any possibility of transcendence. Only when we are neutral, or 'in the moment', and not pre-occupied with our thoughts, desires or projects, we can enquire and search for source and origin. However, looking for the eternal light of the cosmic divine does not diminish the engagement with the human role.

Human consciousness links cosmic boundless consciousness with limited earthly consciousness. As such we are "middle people." These two zones link, but do not mingle.

***“Transcendence means accessing a different consciousness to that of achieving outcomes.”***

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***Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***

"All quests and teachings lead to the realization that the soul, or essence of life, is eternal and that the moment radiates from timelessness. We are obsessed with that which is eternal and ever-present. In my lifelong search to uncover and share the dazzling lights of Truth, I have been propelled to make more accessible translations of specific seminal texts from the Sufi tradition available, as I have done with *'The Secret Garden'*. This book, *'Pathways to the Garden'* is presented as an update to key questions for today's time."

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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**Refinement of Character: Friday Discourses**

***Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***

These discourses, offered by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri in South Africa, present a comprehensive and complete package of essentials regarding the self and its emergence, of the interplay between the ego and the soul (behaviour and personality dynamics).

**Seasons of Wisdom**

***Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***

*Seasons of Wisdom* is mostly collated from the closing unscripted talks given by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri at annual conferences held in South Africa.

**Songs of Iman on the Roads of Pakistan**

***Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***

A series of talks given on the divergence between 'faith' and 'unbelief' during a tour of the country in 1982 which becomes a reflection of the condition occurring in the rest of the world today.

**Seasons of Wisdom**

***Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***



Seasons of Wisdom is mostly collated from the closing unscripted talks given by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri at annual conferences held in South Africa.

### **The Connection Between the Absolute and the Relative**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

This is a 1990 conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, in which he talks about wide-ranging topics on Islam and presents it as the archetypal, universal, Adamic path that began when humanity rose in consciousness to recognize duality and began its journey from the relative back to Absolute Unity.

### **The Spiritual Path: A Conversation with Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri On His Life, Thought and Work**

*Professor Ali A. Allawi*

In this wide-ranging conversation with Professor Ali Allawi, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri talks about his life story and the spiritual journey that he embarked on and the path he has been on ever since.

## **Poetry, Aphorisms & Inspirational**

### **101 Helpful Illusions**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

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*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

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### **Bursts of Silence**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

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*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

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### **Fulfilment Now**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

A modern-day sage's indispensable insights into how to access true fulfilment.

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*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

Look Again invites us to cast our sight beyond things as they appear to be – Insight

### **Pointers to Presence**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

A collection of aphorisms providing insights into consciousness and are pointers to spiritual awakening.

### **Ripples of Light**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

Inspired aphorisms which become remedies for hearts that seek the truth.

### **Sound Waves**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

A collection of aphorisms that help us reflect and discover the intricate connection between self and soul.

### **Sublime Gems: Selected Teachings of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani**

*Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani*

Spiritual nourishment extracted from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's existing works.

### **The Four Journeys**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

A Collection of Poetry from the works of Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri along the Four Journeys of Mulla Sadra.

### **The Wisdom of Ramana Maharshi: A Modern Sufi Rendition**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

Forty Verses on Reality by Sri Ramana Maharshi is a pithy and aphoristic short sacred work. This little book is full of the most profound revelations of Self-Knowledge. An essential text for all interested in Nonduality and the Maharshi's teachings.

## **Autobiography**

### **Son of Karbala**

*Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri*

The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

## **Health Sciences and Islamic History**

**Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2**

***Collected Papers By: Sami K. Hamarneh***

***Edited By: Munawar A. Anees***

***Foreword By: Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri***

*Health Sciences in Early Islam* is a pioneering study of Islamic medicine that opens up new chapters of knowledge in the history of the healing sciences. This two-volume work covers the development of Islamic medicine between the 6th and 12th centuries A.D.