

## Chapter 4

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### Bulent Rauf as guiding figure

In reality ... I do nothing, for there is only God. We are His players on the stage that He set so that He might see Himself.

Bulent Rauf, cited in Reshad Feild, *The Last Barrier*, p.74

#### Origins

Bulent Rauf's origins and the formative period of his life must be set against the milieu of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods in Turkey. In light of this milieu, which we characterise below, we explore his family background and map out his life up to his arrival in London, paying particular attention to the uncovering of specific spiritual associations. There are few external narratives and autobiographical accounts on which to draw.<sup>1</sup> Generations that might have served as repositories for relevant memories have mostly passed away, so it is difficult to find informative oral sources in Istanbul. Given this, we make extensive use of internal narratives in reconstructing Rauf's family background and life story, evaluating these through internal comparison and, where possible, comparison with external sources. In some cases internal narratives converge, reflecting information conveyed by Rauf. In others there is no consensus and accounts have become confused. We settle on narratives we consider most likely to be authentic, confining to the notes alternative perceptions that have some degree of credibility.

The issue of interpretation in what follows must be acknowledged. A prominent theme is the implicit legitimisation of Rauf's authority as founder-guide in associates' perceptions, based on the establishment of apt credentials and genealogies. We by no means impute to him any explicit intention in this regard: associates would vigorously reject such a motive, and it is not borne out by the profile of the man that unfolds below.

#### The late Ottoman and Republican milieu: sufism and the *tariqas*

The importance of sufism as a fundamental element of Ottoman Islamic society and the omnipresence of the *tariqas* in town and rural settings across the Ottoman Empire is universally recognised.<sup>2</sup> Widely accepted also is an involvement with the thought of Ibn 'Arabi among the elite, literate circles, and beyond, through oral teaching.<sup>3</sup> The visibility of Ibn 'Arabi's legacy fluctuated, and there were periodic polemics against it. Yet its influence remained profound and pervasive, and the sultans in particular were concerned to protect and perpetuate it.<sup>4</sup> The result was that mainstream Ottoman

discourse did not consider Ibn ‘Arabi heretical, while for their part Ottoman sufis widely supported his doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

The *tariqas* withstood the modernising thrust of the nineteenth-century *Tanzimat* reforms and the impact of European thought.<sup>6</sup> This is attested to by the urgency with which the Kemalist campaign against them was engaged. Like the ulama and the Şeyhülislam (whose authority encompassed them), the *tariqas* had been part of the Ottoman state. Given this, their centrality to Ottoman social organisation and their significance as the most powerful competing network and focus of loyalty, Republican decree 677 of 30 November 1925 officially banned them.<sup>7</sup> It came in the wake of Atatürk’s famous *Nutuk* (‘Speech’) in August of that year, in the course of which he attacked their shrines, *tekkes* and spiritual figures.<sup>8</sup> *Tekkes* and mausoleums associated with the *tariqas* were immediately closed down, but it was soon recognised that these were not the core element in their existence. Consequently, during the first Republican reform period further measures were implemented against them.

Many sufis rejected the Kemalist reforms. Among these opponents, four categories have been identified.<sup>9</sup> The first group consisted of original supporters of the National Struggle who then changed their attitude towards the government when the reforms were introduced, as they felt unable to comply with them. A second group engaged in silent opposition (by refusing to accept official positions, for example), while a third openly opposed both the reforms and the regime. The fourth group comprised those who fled Turkey to continue their religious–political activities abroad.

In contrast, some leading figures within the *tariqas* suggested that their abolition might have a positive impact on their affiliates’ spiritual life. This opinion reflected a general sense, captured by Schimmel, that ‘much mismanagement and many non-Islamic practices had tinged [the] external life [of the *tariqas*] ... and the ... *tekkes*, once source for spiritual education and purification, had often lost this lofty meaning.’<sup>10</sup> Two orientations have been discerned among sufis who supported and/or legitimised the reforms. The first group (which encompassed the majority of all sufis) accepted or pretended to accept them. They frequently assumed official positions, and pursued their sufi activities in secret.<sup>11</sup> The second group explicitly supported the reforms. In the face of the relentless pressure of Kemalism, both groups advanced justifications for repudiating the *tariqas*. Rauf’s arguments, conveyed to associates much later in the century, reflect something of the tenor of these earlier justifications. A few examples will illustrate their general thrust.

The Halveti shaykh Mehmed Şemseddin Efendi (d.1936) and the Bektashi shaykh Rahmi Baba (d.1935/6) both gave the reforms their silent assent. After 1925, Mehmed Şemseddin argued that people do not need a *tekke* for *dhikr*, given that the Qur’an urges them ‘to remember God wherever they are.’<sup>12</sup> Rahmi Baba originally opposed the reforms. During the 1930s, he arranged for a sufi gathering to place a curse on Atatürk. On the eve of the designated day he had a dream in which the Prophet appeared before a map of the world.

He was assigning parts of it to specific people. Turkey appeared in green surrounded by wide, low, black walls, and Ataturk stood on Thrace with his back to the Prophet. When it came to the turn of Turkey, the Prophet said 'Give this to him [Ataturk]!' The next day Rahmi Baba explained his dream to the gathering. He concluded that, in spite of everything, the Prophet had given his approval (if unwillingly) to Ataturk as leader of Turkey. The green colour of Turkey on the map (associated with Islam) was deemed a good sign, while the negative one indicated by the black of the walls (the colour of unbelief) was mitigated by the fact that the walls were low. Based on this dream, the gathering abandoned the intention to curse Ataturk, and Rahmi Baba and the invited shaykhs ended their opposition to him.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike these figures, Shaykh Kenan Rifai (d.1950) explicitly supported the Kemalist reforms from the outset. He conveyed his approval of the closure of the *tekkes* to the press, arguing that, out of the 300 or so in Istanbul, only a few were 'in the service of knowledge': furthermore, their part in history was over.<sup>14</sup> He maintained that the *tariqas* as a whole had completed their roles, and now had nothing to give the community. In an exchange with a Mevlevi shaykh, he spelled out his views: 'We are now, what we were earlier. Earlier we were in visible *tekkes*, now in an inner, heart, *tekke*. Allah wished so, and made it so. Everything from Him is fine.'<sup>15</sup>

It has been suggested that, in their capacity as 'a cardinal element in traditional Turkish religious life', the *tariqas*' 'survival' of their proscription had been inevitable.<sup>16</sup> Yet the termination of Ottoman government had deconstructed their entire frame of reference, both organisational and symbolic, which had indeed been intrinsic to them. Faced with an uncompromising new context and the threat of their own demise, during the early Republican period some *tariqas* resorted to radical and comprehensive self-reinvention. The resulting changes were compounded by the sharp break with the past instituted by the new regime, and the difficulty in securing continuity of knowledge within such reinvented or reconstituted forms in the new context.

The picture of *tariqa* life and activities in Republican Turkey is far from clear and studies of this remain limited, especially in Western languages.<sup>17</sup> As Ayata notes, a sociological account of their underground history is yet to be attempted.<sup>18</sup> Individuals have continued to represent themselves as shaykhs and to accept followers on this basis,<sup>19</sup> and traditions of transmitting texts and practices have remained vital. At the same time, the associated values and spirit, long internalised, have radiated across Turkish society. Thus sufism, as Kafadar argues, 'has always been much more than the sum of the fortunes of various orders,' for the limits of its reach are defined neither by location nor organisation. As a cultural tradition, it 'continues to run as a deep current in modern, including secular, Turkish life.'<sup>20</sup> This deep current forms a prominent aspect of Rauf's origins and family background.

## Family background

Rauf was the great-grandson of Ismail Pasha (1830–95), khedive of Egypt from 1863 until his deposition by Sultan Abdülhamid in 1879.<sup>21</sup> Ismail's daughter was Princess Fatma Hanim (b.1850), who died some time after World War I.<sup>22</sup> Rauf writes of her in an autobiographical fragment, describing himself as her favourite grandson.<sup>23</sup> Concerning her genealogy, he relates, 'On my mother's side, my great-grandmother was Georgian, my great-grandfather was of a mixture of Turkish, Circassian and probably Albanian descent. Their second daughter was my grandmother.'<sup>24</sup> Fatma Hanim married twice. She outlived her first husband, 'a Prince who died in his early twenties.'<sup>25</sup> Her second husband was 'a Circassian come over from the Caucasus to study at the Islamic University of Al-Azhar.'<sup>26</sup> This was Mahmut Sirri, 'a pauper and stateless since the Russian persecution'. A clan relative of the wife of the Egyptian Pasha, he was looking after the affairs of the widowed Princess. A romantic affair resulted in their marriage,<sup>27</sup> and he reportedly 'tripled her income.'<sup>28</sup>

The daughter of this marriage was Emire Hanim.<sup>29</sup> She had no claim to the title of Princess, because her father was a commoner in origin (although Mahmut Sirri had been granted the status of Pasha on marrying into the khedival family).<sup>30</sup> Like her mother, Emire Hanim also had two marriages. Her second husband, Abdul Rauf Bey, was the son of Field-Marshal (Mushir) Rauf Pasha. An army officer who had been educated at a Military College in France,<sup>31</sup> Abdul Rauf Bey was the father of Emire Hanim's two sons. The elder was Mahmut, and the younger, the focus of our interest, Mehmet Ali Bulent Rauf. Abdul Rauf Bey is barely mentioned by associates in accounts of Rauf's family background, perhaps because the marriage did not last long.<sup>32</sup>

Rauf's maternal grandfather Mahmut Sirri Pasha had fallen ill and died in 1911 at the staging post of Tebuk, as he was travelling home from Mecca following the hajj.<sup>33</sup> His body was carried to Damascus and interred in the mausoleum of Ibn 'Arabi, in accordance with a wish he had expressed on leaving Istanbul. Rauf related that, when he had conveyed this wish, his grandfather had been told there was no room to accommodate him in the mausoleum. His response had been that, somehow, 'space would be found'. A popular memory in the neighbourhood today relates that, when he was buried, gold coins were distributed for his soul.<sup>34</sup> Embellished with 'the light verse' (Qur'an 24: 35), his fine white marble tomb is one of six within the mausoleum.<sup>35</sup> It is the innermost of three tombs situated in the space presently designated for women to pray in.<sup>36</sup> A framed calligraphy on the adjacent wall marks it: 'This is the tomb of the late Sayyid Pasha Sirri al-Khunaji, brother-in-law of his majesty Fu'ad I, king of Egypt: died 1329'. Ibn 'Arabi's tomb draws countless visitors, bringing attention also to the tombs of his neighbours. Some women have attempted to avail themselves of the *baraka* (blessing) associated with this sacred space by writing their prayers directly onto the tombs where possible. The smooth surface of Mahmut Sirri Pasha's

tomb in particular, which is not draped in cloth, has been covered with layer upon layer of penned prayers, submitted by women for their families.<sup>37</sup> In general, visitors hold all those buried alongside Ibn 'Arabi in high regard, assuming that their physical closeness to the great saint in death reflects a close spiritual affinity in life.

Rauf did not indicate the specific nature of his grandfather's association with Ibn 'Arabi, but his wish to be buried alongside him can be seen as evidence of his great esteem for the saint, and of a special bond with him. We do have some indication of Mahmut Sirri Pasha's *tariqa* affiliation, for Rauf wrote to a close associate: 'My grandfather, buried in Damascus, was a *murid* of one of the shaykhs of Shaban Veli (the Shabaniyye) in Kastamonu, and had the area restored and three houses bought and left in trust to the mosque and tomb. Until very recently, they were still in our possession, but not anymore'.<sup>38</sup>

For their part, Fatma Hanim and Emire Hanim appear to have had a special connection with the Celvetiyye, for they undertook to restore the shrine-mosque complex of the prominent Celveti saint Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi (d.1628) in Üsküdar, Istanbul, after this was damaged during a thunderstorm.<sup>39</sup> Recent Turkish studies of the saint and his complex describe the circumstances of this restoration, but introduce an element of confusion concerning the identity of the benefactor who made it possible. In 1910, a thunderbolt had struck the minaret. This fell onto the middle hall, where the well was situated. 'For several years, the author of a recent study of the complex writes, 'the keepers of the mausoleum stood guard at the base of the marble columns. Later ... Rauf Pasha's daughter, Princess Fatma Hanim, who lived in Beylerbeyi, had the present middle hall and conservatory made, and also donated a single-piece carpet to the mausoleum'.<sup>40</sup> According to this account, Princess Fatma also met the cost of publishing a second edition of Hüdayi's collected works in the Ottoman script.<sup>41</sup> These acts of dedication to Hüdayi were most likely the work of mother and daughter together.<sup>42</sup> Rauf had indeed explicitly affirmed to close associates that his mother was a direct descendant of Hüdayi, through one of the saint's daughters. This claim is difficult to investigate,<sup>43</sup> but it may point to Emire Hanim's maternal ancestry and thus explain Fatma Hanim's special interest in the Hüdayi complex.

Emire Hanim also had a close association with the Qadiri shaykh Hz. Mehmet Ali Özkardeş (1895–1980), and with his shaykh Hz. Ahmet Süreyya Emin (1848–1923), who was also a Qadiri.<sup>44</sup> Özkardeş' daughter describes Emire Hanim as 'a spiritual daughter' of Süreyya, and recalls her frequent visits to Özkardeş, with the young Rauf in tow.<sup>45</sup> This does not necessarily indicate a Qadiri *tariqa* affiliation, however, for Arim, herself a close associate of Özkardeş, relates that he admitted members of all *tariqas* to his meetings. Perhaps reflecting her father Mahmut Sirri Pasha's affiliation, at the same time Emire Hanim reportedly had a connection to the Shabaniyye.<sup>46</sup> There are also accounts among associates of her having attended the *sama'* at the Mevlevi *tekke* in Istanbul, accompanied by the young Rauf. Such accounts

may be seen in light of the established connection with the Mevlevis enjoyed by the family of her second husband, Abdul Rauf Bey.<sup>47</sup>

Rauf's second cousin, Münevver Ayaşlı (d.1999),<sup>48</sup> and her immediate family feature prominently in associates' accounts of his broader family background.<sup>49</sup> Arim suggests that Ayaşlı's father Caferi Tayyar, a colonel in the Turkish army, had a close association with Ibn 'Arabi. He always kept a copy of the *Fusus* with the Qur'an by his bed, and would see Ibn 'Arabi in dreams and waking visions. Arim relates an account of one such episode.

The colonel's first child, a daughter,<sup>50</sup> had been born in Thessalonica, where his wife was based while he served during the Greek war. Three years later, he was walking in the market when his name was called out. He turned and saw Ibn 'Arabi before him. The saint asked him for a silver coin and gave him a gold sovereign in its place.<sup>51</sup> Tayyar was then sent to Damascus, where his wife and daughter joined him. Soon afterwards, the little girl died of typhoid. Tayyar buried her 'in the courtyard of Ibn 'Arabi's tomb.'<sup>52</sup> His wife later gave birth to a son, materialising Ibn 'Arabi's 'exchange of gold for silver' in Tayyar's vision.

Tayyar's second daughter, Münevver, was also born in Thessalonica. The family finally joined their father in Istanbul in 1911, but relocated frequently as Tayyar's military career advanced. Münevver travelled in Arab countries and Europe and had a varied, multilingual education. At the age of ten or eleven, her father reportedly introduced her to Ibn 'Arabi. Her marriage later to Nusret Sadullah Ayaşlı, an ex-ambassador, brought family connections to the Turkish world of saints and *tariqas*. Her husband was thus related to Ayaş-i Bünyamin Veli of the Melami-Bayrami *tariqa*.<sup>53</sup> Münevver herself developed relations with many shaykhs in Turkey. During a visit to her brother in Paris, she enrolled at the Sorbonne and reportedly studied Ibn 'Arabi with Louis Massignon, for whom she developed a great sympathy.<sup>54</sup>

In 1947, following her husband's death and in the face of financial difficulties, she began a writing career, translating articles from French for publication in a religious newspaper.<sup>55</sup> Eventually, she became a well-known novelist.<sup>56</sup> In 1969, the newspaper for which she worked sent her on the hajj to record her experiences. When she returned to Istanbul, she opened her doors to anyone who wished to visit. Qadiris, Jerrahis, Rifa'is, Mevlevis and Bektashis reportedly flocked to her, while many young people attached themselves to her.<sup>57</sup> Portrayed by some associates as a 'traditionalist' who insisted on 'external' Islamic practice, it appears she emerged as a self-styled spiritual leader.<sup>58</sup>

The three generations of Rauf's family we have just explored displayed both concrete associations with *tariqas*, shaykhs and specific spiritual lineages, and connections in the unseen world through the appearance of saintly figures in dreams and waking visions. Rauf's spiritual heritage encompassed both dimensions, but it was through the imaginal realm in particular that his spiritual awakening would find its moment and its direction.<sup>59</sup>

## Life-story, formative influences and spiritual associations

Impacted by the Ottoman demise of the 1920s and the Free Officers' revolution in mid-century Egypt, Rauf's life prior to his arrival in London reflected some of the major upheavals and prominent trends of the Muslim twentieth century. He was born in Beylerbeyi, Istanbul on 17 July 1911, in the year his grandfather had been interred in Ibn 'Arabi's mausoleum. He acquired his early education in the opulent family home.<sup>60</sup> Later he attended Robert College, an American secondary school favoured by the late Ottoman elite in Istanbul. Exposed to several languages, he eventually developed competence in French, English, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish.

At the age of seventeen, four years after the Kemalist revolution, Rauf travelled to the USA to complete his studies, in English literature at Cornell and Hittite archaeology at Yale. He then travelled to Switzerland, where he enjoyed the life of a wealthy aristocrat in exile. In 1945 (at the age of thirty-four) he married his second cousin Princess Faize (1923–94).<sup>61</sup> Faize was the younger sister of King Farouk of Egypt (r.1936–52) and daughter of the first king, Fu'ad (r.1922–36). It was a marriage arranged through family relations. They settled into a privileged life together in Egypt.<sup>62</sup>

In the wake of the 1952 revolution and the demise of the Egyptian royal court, the wealth of the royal family was largely confiscated and many of its members went into exile. Rauf and his wife left for Spain and then France, living from the sale of valuables. A decade later, they divorced. Finding work as a landscape garden designer, Rauf remained in Paris. His life had changed. He had lost his home and wife, his money was running out, and poverty threatened, as he could no longer take any source of income for granted. An associate sums up the profound changes that had been visited upon him: 'Once he was a prince, now he was heading towards being a pauper.'<sup>63</sup>

A significant turning point came in the aftermath of a car accident, which left him with a broken leg.<sup>64</sup> Lying in a hospital bed in great discomfort and thinking of all that he had lost, he decided to commit suicide by hurling himself out of a window. The appearance of a nurse at a critical moment arrested his train of thought. She told him that an old lady nursing a broken leg in the neighbouring ward had confessed that she kept going in the knowledge that he too was suffering like her, and with such forbearance. He immediately abandoned the idea of suicide.<sup>65</sup>

One internal narrative frames this episode as a 'conversion' experience, suggesting that Rauf then 'turned to God'. Specifically, he was converted to 'the essential meaning of the spiritual life as elucidated by Ibn 'Arabi'.<sup>66</sup> By this account Rauf's decision to abandon suicide had been the fruit 'of innate compassion', and his 'return' would henceforth be a manifestation of divine mercy. Some time after this episode, Ibn 'Arabi reportedly appeared to Rauf and 'told him to go to England'.<sup>67</sup>

Based on his grandfather's association with the saint, Rauf would later describe his relationship to Ibn 'Arabi as 'atavistic'.<sup>68</sup> From some point during

the second half of the 1960s, this relationship came to the fore and began to direct his life. The resulting reorientation is perhaps best understood not in terms of an abrupt conversion (as suggested by the account we have just related), but of the gradual awakening of a mature man, who found in his cultural–spiritual heritage a basis for meaning in a life marked out by extraordinary privilege and loss.

What were the immediate influences upon Rauf, and what can be uncovered in the way of his own spiritual life prior to his arrival in London? Associates project the family milieu of his youth within its broader socio-cultural context as an essential aspect of his ‘preparation’ for his ultimate vocation. Encapsulating the privileged tastes and refinement of the late Ottoman elite, it planted in him the seeds of a deep sophistication. This was a milieu characterised by a cosmopolitan openness to other cultures and a tolerance of different faiths. For example, there are accounts of Emire Hanim having entertained guests of diverse backgrounds, including the Jewish doctor who had delivered her sons and became a close friend. Rauf recalled overhearing their conversations about religion and spirituality, in which the doctor had commented that, if God were removed, there would be great difficulty ‘finding something to replace Him.’ Such concerns may have reflected an early flavour of the direction in which mysticism typically developed among the higher strata of society after 1925, where it sometimes ‘merged into spiritualism.’<sup>69</sup> Associates suggest that, although it was rooted in faith, there was no emphasis in Rauf’s immediate family on traditional Islamic practice, and hence ‘no narrowing’ in his early experience. This may be a projection of the Beshara view concerning religion. It is at odds with Arim’s claim that all family members practised Islam, and that it would have been inconceivable for it to have been otherwise.<sup>70</sup> Given her proximity to the family, Arim’s claim must be given greater weight, but the situation in all likelihood combined elements of both characterisations.<sup>71</sup>

Emire Hanim occupies a prominent place in associates’ perceptions of the origins of Rauf’s spiritual knowledge. Thus, he said that he had learned ‘all that he knew’ from her.<sup>72</sup> Emire Hanim was indeed the dominant influence in his formative years. His childhood exposure to the world of sufism, its shaykhs and *dhikr* meetings mainly took place through her.<sup>73</sup> As a young teenager, he may have read the *Fusus* (reportedly much emphasised within the family) at home with his brother Mahmut, under Emire Hanim’s watchful eye. It is also possible that he was taken to become a *murid* of the Mevlevis at this time, but (significantly, according to associates) they did not accept him.

While all this ended when Rauf left Istanbul aged seventeen, there is a conviction within Beshara that he continued to nurture a ‘spiritual connection’, which informed his conduct and choices even before his so-called conversion of the 1960s. Such claims relating to an individual’s inner life are impossible to evaluate in the absence of any indication of their external manifestation. In Rauf’s case the image that dominates narratives of his life

prior to his 'conversion' is devoid of any such tangible indications. Yet the internal perspective finds evidence of further preparation for his ultimate vocation in the unusual breadth and variety of his experience prior to his arrival in London. This was characterised by extensive travels and encounters with many different cultures, for example. He had himself reportedly come to the realisation that his rich experience of life 'had been necessary for him to develop his spiritual understanding'.<sup>74</sup> It also enabled him later to relate his 'spiritual knowledge' to many fields.<sup>75</sup> In its 'complete absence of narrowing in any way', as one associate puts it, his later life experience had consolidated that of his youth. All this had facilitated the maturing of a vision based on a conviction that the 'narrow path of religion' could not be a viable basis for spirituality in the future. Rauf himself apparently projected the narrative of his life prior to its London chapter as preparation for what was to come in the work of Beshara. He thus reportedly remarked, in one associate's words, that 'nothing (intrinsically important) had happened until his fifties, when he arrived in England.'

After leaving Istanbul, Rauf visited the city perhaps twice, during the years of his marriage to Faize. On later visits, which began some years after his divorce from her in 1962, he encountered the city's sufi personalities, and developed close personal relations with several sufi shaykhs.<sup>76</sup> These included the wandering Melami dervish Shevke Dede, who had told him to return to England during his visit to Istanbul with Culme-Seymour. Rauf reportedly respected him greatly. Among them also were Mevlevi shaykhs, including Suleyman Loras Dede. He was on good terms with Muzaffer Özak (1916–85), the Halveti–Jerrahi shaykh who attracted Western converts and ultimately exported his *tariqa* to the USA.<sup>77</sup> Özkardeş also became a close contact for, according to his daughter, Rauf was his 'spiritual son', and the two men would correspond with each other.<sup>78</sup>

We cannot discount the possible influence of such figures on Rauf, and on the conceptualisation of his spiritual project. Arim indeed recalls that Rauf later discussed Beshara with Özkardeş and Özak (among others), and they understood and respected his vocation.<sup>79</sup> While Özak is well known in twentieth-century Turkish and Western sufism, Shevke Dede, as a Melami, remains inscrutable. We can briefly illuminate the figures of Özkardeş and Süreyya, who are little known beyond Turkey.

The tombs of these two shaykhs in Yıldız Park graveyard, in Beşiktaş, Istanbul,<sup>80</sup> provide evidence of the continuing vitality of the cult that surrounds them.<sup>81</sup> Devotees describe Süreyya as one of the four 'second' *pirs* recognised by the Qadiriyya (the 'first' is 'Abd al-Qadir himself'). They deem both shaykhs members of the highest category of saint.<sup>82</sup> Süreyya described himself as Jesus Christ, come on earth again as a great saint with the purpose of matching his spiritual maturity and perfection in the corporeal realm.<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, he asserted that he was endowed as Jesus had been, and could do what he had done, including raising the dead.<sup>84</sup> Özkardeş described himself as 'Mehdi Rasul', the figure who will appear at the end of time to restore

righteousness for a period. Devotees report that he heard Ibn 'Arabi telling him that he would assume this position. In Özkardeş' words, Ibn 'Arabi had said 'I am giving the great news: you are Mehdi who I mention in my books.'<sup>85</sup> Devotees believe that, at the Resurrection, Muslims will wait for Özkardeş to intercede for them. Christians will wait for Süreyya, who claimed he would be able to intercede for people of all religions. Reflecting their roles and spiritual identities, the cult surrounding these two saints is marked by a strong eschatological element.<sup>86</sup> Their profound admiration and support for Atatürk deserve particular mention, for Rauf was reportedly familiar with the narratives in which this was expressed.<sup>87</sup>

Rauf had no relationship as *murid* to any particular shaykh and no *tariqa* affiliation that might form the basis of his credentials as Beshara's guiding figure.<sup>88</sup> Such credentials as he had were based instead in two distinct but interrelated spheres. First were his familial spiritual associations, which we outlined above. Young thus writes that, on both sides, Rauf's family was 'steeped in the inner, esoteric knowledge of the Unity not only of God but also of the Unity of all Existence'. Based on this, he indeed suggests that Rauf claimed an 'atavistic' esoteric education.<sup>89</sup> His familial spiritual associations furnished potentially powerful symbolic legitimisation of Rauf's status in Beshara. This was perhaps at its most potent in the case of the proximity of his grandfather's tomb to that of the very saint whose teaching he established in the movement. Equally important, however, was Rauf's descent from Hüdayi, especially given his projection of the Celvetiyye as the *tariqa* that most closely reflects the teaching of Ibn 'Arabi.<sup>90</sup> Yet it seems that Rauf made scant mention of these connections, Young's comment above notwithstanding. Most associates were alerted to his grandfather's physical proximity to Ibn 'Arabi in death (with all that this implied) only when it was mentioned on the inside cover of the *White Fusus* in 1986, and only very few close associates correctly grasped Emire Hanim's genealogy.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast, Rauf made the second basis of his spiritual authority widely known to associates. He shared and emphasised accounts of two momentous visions of saintly figures that had effectively redirected his life, and ultimately would shape Beshara. We relate these two accounts, which convey the Uwaysi character of his spiritual education, below.<sup>92</sup> There were other visions, but it is difficult to convey a clear picture of them, as Rauf largely withheld from associates the details of his spiritual experiences. Most of them relate to Ibn 'Arabi's role in directing him to his destiny in England, and in Beshara. These include the saint's appearance to him following his 'conversion', when he instructed Rauf to make for England. There is an account of a mysterious figure who introduced him to Ibn 'Arabi's writings in a dream. Another narrative has the saint appear to Rauf during his early days in London. Rauf related that he had known that something would be established in England but he had not known what, or the direction it should take. He had been thinking 'should it be along Mevlevi lines, or perhaps Celveti?' Having thought about it from all angles, he had declared: 'None of them! Let it be only for Him!' At

this very point Ibn 'Arabi had appeared, standing at the end of Rauf's bed. The saint had exclaimed *in English* 'At last!' Rauf had attributed significance to this choice of language.

There were also visions of the Prophet. Rauf shared an account of one such vision with a very close associate, in correspondence. It took place during the early days of Beshara, in 1973. He had woken before dawn and was calling down prayers and blessings upon the Prophet in his Kastamonu hotel room. He planned to visit the tomb of Shaban Veli (founder of the *tariqa* to which his grandfather had been affiliated) that day. In a vision he saw himself, Culme-Seymour and Münevver Ayaşlı transported to the Kastamonu public square. They were browsing through tourist shops and contemplating buying a wooden key-hanger. The prayers and blessings he was repeating were engraved on it. At that moment the Prophet had appeared, in 'Arab dress'. He said he had two key-hangers, one for Rauf and Culme-Seymour, and one for Münevver Ayaşlı. They were the same as the key-hangers they had been looking at, but the key-hangers extended by the Prophet bore the name 'Ali' in gold letters, rather than 'Muhammad'. Rauf then recalled the hadith of the Prophet, 'I am the citadel of knowledge and 'Ali is the key to the gate.' He concluded his account by invoking 'Ali to open this gate for himself, and for the associate with whom he was corresponding.<sup>93</sup>

The first vision Rauf emphasised and shared widely with associates was apparently linked with the period of his 'conversion', and may thus have signified an 'initiation' into the mystical way. It took the form of a triple intervention by three towering saints: Ibn 'Arabi, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and Uways al-Qarani. Rauf alerted associates to the 'responsibility and taste' of these figures in the work of Beshara. It appears that they had always been a part of his life. As a child, for example, he had reportedly called on them for help in times of need. Now they had appeared to him to direct his spiritual way.<sup>94</sup> We have explored Rauf's 'atavistic' relationship to Ibn 'Arabi. His connection with 'Abd al-Qadir can perhaps be understood as a reflection of his mother's strong Qadiri associations. Describing this great saint as *al-ghawth al-a'zam*, Rauf was to cite him at length in his early discourses.<sup>95</sup> Finally, it was apt that Uways in particular should provide spontaneous initiation to a man who had neither living master nor formal spiritual training, for the tradition of auto-(or more precisely theo-) didactic sufism takes its name from him.<sup>96</sup>

The second of Rauf's well-known visions took the form of a dream he had at Chisholme during autumn 1978. This was to provide further direction to Beshara. He found himself in a square room with French windows at one end, giving onto a beautiful garden. At the other end there was an open door. Light streamed in through it.<sup>97</sup> Rauf stood with 'the people of Beshara' in a semicircle in one corner, near the door. On the other side of the room stood 'men of great stature' (*büyükler*, as he conveyed it in Turkish), dressed in robes and large turbans. A man in a robe and turban stood in the centre, facing the door. This was Hüdayi. He was waiting to greet 'the master', his teacher Üftade (d.1580), with whom the Celveti tradition emanated.<sup>98</sup>

Before Hüdayi could greet him, Üftade swiftly walked in, his gold-embroidered multicoloured robe flowing behind him.<sup>99</sup> After all present had greeted him, he turned and gestured to Rauf, saying 'You are of us!' (*sizler bizlerdensiniz*). Rauf explained the significance of the saint's address, which had been in the plural. It indicated that 'the people of Beshara [as a whole] are of the taste of Üftade, Hüdayi, and their followers.'<sup>100</sup> The saint's turn of phrase had been emphatic, moreover, implicitly removing any doubt that may have surrounded this matter.

Following this dream, the Celveti saints came to occupy a special place for Rauf, and by extension for Beshara. He spoke much of them to associates, and visits to their tombs were incorporated into the Turkey trip. His spiritual relationship with Hüdayi was reportedly marked by a subtle veiling. Rauf put this down to his physical descent from the saint, which produced some awkwardness between them.<sup>101</sup> Üftade, on the other hand, 'would come and go' freely to Rauf. He related that he could hear the saint's firm footsteps, and would converse directly with him.

From the early 1970s, Rauf's life story was inextricably tied to the emergence and development of Beshara. Associates describe the first phase of his 'life in Beshara' as one of 'coming together,' a reference to the coalescence represented by the Swyre Farm era. The second phase began with the institution of residential courses. This demanded of him an increased intensity of involvement, as he assumed personal responsibility for designing courses and delivering materials. He was generally accessible at this time, and could be found daily in the Mead Hall at Chisholme by any who needed to consult him. The third phase overlapped somewhat with the second. At the end of the 1970s, he began to devote ever more time to translating the Bosnevi commentary. To meet the demands of this work he withdrew a little and was less involved in overseeing courses directly, although 'he kept his finger on the pulse.' The final phase began in the wake of serious illness in 1984. At this point he began to put his affairs and those of Beshara in order, in preparation for death.

Rauf underwent a successful operation to treat cancer of the oesophagus in 1984. Two years later his health began to deteriorate again, and he died in September 1987. His burial in the grounds of Chisholme was a simple affair. Led by Peter Young, associates took turns in carrying the coffin to its resting-place. Some hint at the significance of his passing. They point to the fact that the night marking the end of the fortieth day after this coincided with the worst storms for many decades in the south of England, in October 1987. Associates have made a point of commemorating the date of his passing with a *dhikr* gathering.<sup>102</sup>