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## O B I T U A R Y

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### INTO HIS LORD'S MERCY:

REMEMBERING MARTIN LINGS (JANUARY 24, 1909–MAY 12, 2005)

*Muzaffar Iqbal*

My letter had remained unanswered, but a few days before my departure for Iran, I received a message through a friend that Martin Lings would soon contact me. I had wanted to stop over in England to see him. We had never met, but he had been a constant presence in my life since the early 1970s, when he and a handful of other Westerners who had formed a close-knit group around René Guénon (Shaykh 'Abd al-Wāḥid Yaḥyā, 1886-1951) first entered my spiritual and emotional life. That first encounter, which had taken place in a literary setting through the works of Muhammad Hasan Askari (d. 1978), one of Pakistan's most insightful men of letters, was to take a totally different dimension on a hot summer day when my friend Siraj Munir (1951-1990) first talked about joining a Shādhilī Sufi order of which Sidi Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn (Martin Lings) was a member. We had struck a deep friendship as soon as we met, but it was not until that hot summer day that I came to know of a new dimension of Siraj's life in which René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon (Shaykh 'Īsā Nūr ad-Dīn Aḥmad, 1907-1998), and Martin Lings (1909-2005) were playing a major role.

We shared certain dimensions of our spiritual quests at that time and, in our own ways, yearned for certitude and sought guidance. By that summer, Siraj had almost made his choice; his veritable search had led him to the small group which was then being led by Schuon, and Martin Lings was perhaps the closest person to Schuon.

My own spiritual landscape was still rugged and it would take more years before the yearning soul would find solace, but since that first encounter with him, Martin Lings remained a close spiritual presence. Thus,

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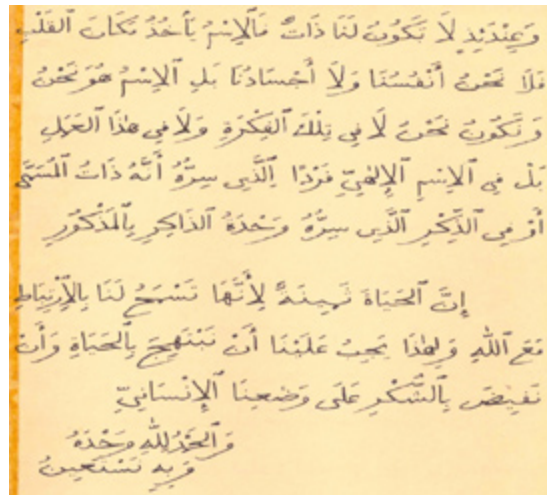
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when the phone rang on April 4, 2004, two days before my departure for Iran, and I heard an unfamiliar voice with a heavy British accent, I immediately realized that Martin Lings had kept his promise. He explained in an unhurried manner why he could not see me on the sixth of April, the day I was planning to break my journey in England to see him. He hoped that we could meet some other time, but I had a presentiment that a future occasion may not be possible in this world. Thus, when the news came on May 12, 2005 that Martin Lings had passed into his Lord's Mercy, I felt a deep sense of personal loss, not merely because of a lost opportunity to meet him in person, but also because the world has become poorer with his passing.

Born in Burnage, Lancashire, on January 24, 1909, Martin Lings spent his early childhood in the United States, to where his father was posted. He returned to England just in time to have a partial taste of English education, first at Clifton College, Bristol, where he became head boy, and later at Magdalen College, Oxford, where C. S. Lewis was the English tutor. When he left school, he "had no real ambition beyond that of writing poetry".<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of his two years at Magdalen College, he had written a masque which he sent to C. S. Lewis who wrote back: "I have a clear-cut idea of the difference between poetry and mere verse, and this is poetry beyond doubt." The masque was performed at Magdalen College in 1930.



Sample of Abū Bakr  
Sirāj ud-Dīn  
Martin Lings'  
Arabic handwriting.

1. Lings, Martin, *The Elements and Other Poems* (London: Perennial Books, 1967), 7.

C. S. Lewis was clearly the greatest early influence on young Lings who, along with his dear friend and classfellow, Adrian Paterson, found Lewis' teaching of Old English poetry so rich and captivating that nothing else mattered in those early years. More importantly, along with this love for poetry, Lings also learned from Lewis the "surpassing greatness of the Middle Ages, and it was [Lewis] who fired [them] to snatch up, on the basis of Latin, enough Italian to read *the Divine Comedy* in the original, for [Lewis] was of the opinion that there was nothing in English poetry that could approach Dante's epic."<sup>2</sup>

Lings' love for the Middle Ages was not merely academic; from his childhood he had been "conscious of a nostalgia for the past times. What struck me above all was the extreme ugliness of modern civilization. Why had I not been born into an earlier age?"<sup>3</sup> It was perhaps because of an inner inferno that he was drawn to C. S. Lewis and to the high poetry of the Middle Ages during his two years at Oxford when his poetic spirit, fired by high spiritual aspirations and uprooted from religious soil, yearned for certitude—for he tells us elsewhere that by the time he was at Oxford, he had "given up any form of worship except individual prayer... and [had] made for myself a 'religion' of beauty, centered on nature and on art."<sup>4</sup>

Lings received a degree in English from Oxford in 1932 and spent a year in Poland, giving lessons in English. This was followed by a lectureship at the University of Kaunas in Lithuania. With this job and his interest in English, he seemed to be well on his way to enter the academic world as a teacher of English language and literature. One can imagine a young man in his mid-twenties, with a strong nostalgia for things past and a pre-deliction for writing poetry, spending his days in refining his poetic sense and teaching the intricacies of his chosen field to Lithuanian students.

But "all of this, including the nostalgia that accompanied it, was thrust into the background"<sup>5</sup> when he first encountered the works of René Guénon in the mid-1930s. "I realized for the first time in my life that I was face to face with the truth."<sup>6</sup> Guénon was to teach him an esoteric dimension of things that removed certain inner inhibitions toward religion by opening the eye of the heart to the essential unity of all Divine religions,

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2. Ibid. 8.

3. Lings, Martin, "Frithjof Schuon: An Autobiographical Approach" in *Sophia* Vol. 4 (1998) No. 2, 15.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

and though he did not yet know which of these he would follow, once he conceived of the multiplicity of religions as points on the circumference of a circle, each being connected to the center by a radius, he knew “immediately that [his] place was on one of these radii that lead from the circumference to the Center”.<sup>7</sup> He also learned from Guénon “with overwhelming clarity that before [he] could enter upon any esoteric path [he] would have to find a spiritual Master and receive from him an initiation into that way.”<sup>8</sup>

Lings seems to have been the recipient of special Divine Mercy, for Guénon and Lewis were poles apart and for someone to travel from one to the other in such a short time indicates special Divine favor. Guénon was then living in Cairo. Martin Lings initiated by writing to him. He also started to translate Guénon’s *Orient et Occident* (1924) into English.<sup>9</sup> He sent copies of Guénon’s books to his friend Adrian Paterson, who was profoundly moved by them. When Paterson went to Cairo to teach at the University, Martin Lings sent a letter to Guénon, introducing his friend to him, though at that time Guénon was very reluctant to see anyone. They did meet, however, and Guénon liked Paterson so much that he told him he could come to his house whenever he liked; Paterson soon became nearly a member of Guénon’s household. He collected his mail from the *poste restaurant* and took care of many other practical matters for him.

It was also through his encounter with Guénon’s works that he understood the significance of religious rites. It was thus this profound understanding of the rites together with the desire to perform them in accordance with the strictest possible requirements that he entered the Roman Catholic Church and began to lead an intense spiritual life. In addition to the daily morning Mass and Vespers every evening, his days were then centered on the Rosary. At this time, Lings’ spiritual guide was Guénon’s *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta* (1945)<sup>10</sup>, and he devoted time every day to the learning of Sanskrit, because he felt his final choice regarding a religion would be Hinduism. More than anything it was this pending decision that occupied his thoughts and feelings:

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7. Ibid, 16.

8. Ibid.

9. The book was first translated by William Massey as *East and West* (London: Luzac and Co., 1941). Lings’ translation was published *East and West* (New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001).

10. Originally published in French as *Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, (1921).

It was the question of that decision which preoccupied me more than anything else. I would sometimes recite the Rosary with its one *Paternoster*, seven *Aves* and one *Gloria* again and again throughout the whole night, and at certain moments—I think it was after every seventh recitation—I would make a prayer, in the conviction that the Blessed Virgin would add her prayers to mine in response to my *ora pro nobis nunc* (pray for us now). My supplication was always one and the same, that I should find a truly great spiritual Master who would take me as his disciple, initiate me into the Way, and guide me to its End.<sup>11</sup>

By the autumn of 1937, Lings' search had changed course; instead of being drawn to a Hindu Master, he was increasingly led toward Islam. We do not yet know the details of the process through which he reached a certitude that a certain Algerian Sufi Shaykh—about whom he would one day write a wonderful book, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (1961)—was the man for whom he had been praying, but we know from subsequent details of his life that once he made his choice, there was no faltering. Shaykh Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī al-Ṣūfī had, however, died some two years before Lings realized that his spiritual quest could be indirectly guided by him.

In response to his prayers, however, he soon began to hear about a certain group of Sufis in Switzerland and he tells us that “one morning I woke up with the realization that Heaven had placed within me the certitude that the leader of that group was in fact the answer to my prayer.”<sup>12</sup>

A few more weeks passed. On Tuesday, January 11, 1938, he made his way to Basel and knocked at the door of the house where the group of Sufis met. A man opened the door. “I am an Englishman,” Lings said in French, “a reader of Guénon, and I understand that you have a Sufi order. I want to join you.”<sup>13</sup> He was invited in. The man who received him immediately contacted someone and gave Lings lunch. Soon the German Swiss who had been called on the phone arrived; he was Titus Ibrahim Burckhardt (1908-1984), then 29, three months older than Lings, who was two weeks away from his 29th birthday. Titus Burckhardt took him for a

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11. *Sophia* Vol. 4 (1998) No. 2, Op. Cit., 16-7.

12. *Ibid.* 17.

13. *Ibid.*

long walk “which marked the beginning of a great friendship”<sup>14</sup> that was to last until Burckhardt’s death in 1984.

It was perhaps on this long walk that Martin Lings opened his heart to Titus Burckhardt and told him about his spiritual quest. Titus Burckhardt informed him that the leader of the Sufi order—Frithjof Schuon—lived in Mulhouse, France, just across the border, and that he would be coming to this house on Friday. But the news of Martin Lings’ arrival reached Mulhouse the next day through another member of the group, the 20-year-old Leo Schaya, who had gone to see Schuon. “Tell him, if he wants to join us, to enter Islam,” Schuon said to Schaya.<sup>15</sup> “So Sidi Ibrahim received me into Islam,” Martin Lings was to recall that day much later, “and taught me how to say the prayers, which meant that I had to change from learning Sanskrit to learning Arabic.”<sup>16</sup>

On that Friday, both men went to the train station to meet Shaykh ʿĪsā Nūr ad-Dīn Aḥmad (Frithjof Schuon), who was only 30 at that time. As soon as Lings saw Schuon, he knew his prayers have been answered because “his appearance corresponded to all that I had prayed for. But that did not increase my certitude that he was indeed the answer to my prayer for I was already, by the grace of Heaven, as certain as I could be. Nor has that certitude ever wavered during the 60 wonderful years that I have been privileged to be his disciple.”<sup>17</sup>

That evening, the group at Basel—about eleven men and five women—met at their *Zāwiyah* (*lit.* corner), a large room in a rented old building overlooking the Rhine, which the group used for its meetings.

That evening...as I sat in the circle of men, all of them in Islamic dress (they had managed to find some garments for me also), an immense happiness dawned upon me. My yearning for an impossibility, which Guénon’s message had thrust into the background, suddenly reasserted itself, but this time as a reality: I was, so it seemed, about to be reborn into an earlier age which was independent of the modern world and dominated by traditional values; and I rediscovered my ‘religion of beauty’ as a normal setting, a kind of

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14. *Ibid.* 18.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

protective shell, for the spiritual life. I had come to the Shaykh in order to receive initiation and guidance. It had never occurred to me that he would give me, as part of that guidance, a whole civilization.<sup>18</sup>

For the next four months Martin Lings lived in one of the rooms of the *Zāwiyah*. Schuon came there for two nights every weekend. A month later, Lings was formally initiated into the Way. The Shādhilī *ṭarīqah* Lings entered dated back to Abu'l-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī (1196-1258), but Schuon's immediate Shaykh was none other than the Shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī (1869-1934) whom Lings had hoped to take as his Master before discovering that the Shaykh had passed away two years previously.

In the summer of 1939, Martin Lings went to Cairo to visit Guénon and Paterson. At that time he had a lectureship in Lithuania and therefore planned to return to Lithuania after his visit. While he was in Cairo, however, war broke out, and he was forced to stay in Egypt. This was only the first of several major events that would change the course of his life. A year later, when he and his friend Paterson were riding in the desert, Paterson was thrown from his horse and killed. When Lings went to Guénon and told him about the accident, Guénon wept for an hour. Thereafter he took his friend's place in Guénon's household, becoming a member of the family. He quickly learned Arabic and was able to converse with Fatima, Guénon's Egyptian wife, who spoke only Arabic. Lings was offered the post of his late friend at the Cairo University and he accepted it. Now he went to see Guénon almost daily. When Guénon started to write *The Reign of Quantity*, Lings was the first person to read it, chapter by chapter. It was about this time that Martin Lings started to write his first book, *The Book of Certainty* (1952), and Guénon read it too chapter by chapter, as it was being written.<sup>19</sup>

In 1944, Lings married Lesley Smalley, whom he had known since childhood.<sup>20</sup> They lived in a village at the foot of the pyramids. Twice a year, he would send his car to fetch Guénon and the two families would spend a day together. Another highlight of the year was Lings' annual produc-

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18. Ibid, 18-19.

19. *The Book of Certainty: The Sufi Doctrine of Faith, Wisdom and Gnosis* (London: Rider, 1952); reprinted (New York: S. Weiner, 1970); reprinted (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992).

20. Lesley Lings survives her husband and lives in their home in rural Kent.

tion of a Shakespearean play at Cairo University. His passionate involvement with Shakespeare was to result in a remarkable book, *The Secret Of Shakespeare: His Greatest Plays Seen In The Light of Sacred Art* (1966).<sup>21</sup>

Guénon died in 1951. Shortly after that Cairo was overtaken by violent anti-British riots in which three of Lings' colleagues were killed. On July 23, 1952, young officers overturned the monarchy of King Farouk and established a government under General Naguib. The newly established revolutionary council dismissed all British staff from the university. Martin Lings and his wife returned to England where Lings decided to further his formal education, while Lesley, a physiotherapist, went back to work. Lings first finished a BA in Arabic studies, and then went on to do a doctorate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); he chose the life and works of Aḥmad al-'Alawī as the subject of his thesis, which was later published as *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (1961) and was recognized as a unique contribution to literature on Sufism.<sup>22</sup>

After his doctorate, Martin Lings joined the British Museum as assistant keeper of oriental printed books and manuscripts (1955-1970). In 1970, he became the keeper, and in 1973 he was seconded to the British Library.

The years 1964 to 1976 saw the publication of several major works: *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* (1965);<sup>23</sup> *The Elements and Other Poems* (1967);<sup>24</sup> *The Heralds and Other Poems* (1970);<sup>25</sup> *What is Sufism?* (1975);<sup>26</sup> *The Qur'anic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (1976).<sup>27</sup>

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21. *Shakespeare in the Light of Sacred Art* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966); reprinted (New York: Humanities Press, 1966) and as *The Secret of Shakespeare* (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1984).

22. *A Muslim Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1961); reprinted (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Arabic translation published in 1973 as *al-Shaykh Aḥad al-'Alawī al-Ṣūfī al-Mustaghānīmī al-Jaza'irī: ḥayātuhu, taṣawwufuhu, irṭhuhu, waṣīyatuhu* (Beirut: Dar al-kitab al-jadid); Spanish translation published in 1982 as *Un santo sufi del siglo XX* (Madrid: Taurus).

23. *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions* (London: Perennial Books, 1965); reprinted (Boston: Unwin Paperback, 1980 and Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1991).

24. *The Elements, and Other Poems* (London: Perennial Books, 1967).

25. *The Heralds, and Other Poems* (London: Perennial Books, 1970).

26. *What is Sufism?* (London: Unwin, 1975), reprinted (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

27. *The Qur'anic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London: The World



All of these works had, however, a rather select audience, and though highly valued, they did not attract a wider readership. It was the publication of his *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* in 1983 that was to totally change the public image of Martin Lings as a writer.<sup>28</sup> This biography of the Prophet of Islam is not only the best work of *sīrah* in the English language; it is one of the best biographies of the Noble Prophet ever written in any language. The book is essentially one man's spiritual journey into the time in which the Prophet lived; it is as if Lings lived with the fullness of his yearning spirit in Makkah and Madinah and then came back to re-live that life during which hundreds of ordinary men and women were coming into contact with the Prophet and their lives were being transformed. Its exactitude, its directness, its chiseled prose, its intimacy with the subject, its profound sense of humility—all are simply unparalleled in *Sīrah* literature. What makes this book unique in the entire corpus of *Sīrah* is not merely the skilled use of primary sources, but Lings' ability to immerse the reader in the Prophetic time in such a vivid way that one begins to breathe the very air of Makkah and Madinah of the seventh century.

It is, however, not merely the well-researched data that makes this book outstanding; it is its ability to transform the reader by seizing his or her spirit in the intimate flow of events that makes it a living testimony to one man's passionate involvement in and recall of a Prophet's life. The book is also not merely a dramatic recount of the life and times of a man whose words and deeds have remained a constant source of guidance for billions of people over the last fourteen hundred years, it is a living text that transports the reader into that other time through a sacred understanding of history, and it does so in very human terms.

The poetic flow of language is a gift which Lings had understood as a sacred responsibility even at the young age of twenty-three, when he wrote his second poem, *The Muse*, with which his first book of poetry, *The Elements and Other Poems*, opens:

*Many have sought what now I seek, and few have won;  
Yet not the less I am driven to pray: pause in thy fleeing  
While I have breath, and call to me, and lead me on*

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of Islam Festival Trust, 1976) reprinted (New York: Interlink Pub Group Inc, 1st American edition, 1987).

28. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (New York: Inner Traditions, 1983); several reprints.

*Into that garden where the Muses sing and dance,  
That I may fill mine ears with sound, mine eyes with seeing,  
And make for men some deep enduring utterance.*<sup>29</sup>

Later, he was to recall:

When I wrote this particular poem, I already knew that the Muse was a reality. But when I came to understand more clearly the nature of that reality and therefore of the “pledge” and the “prayer” that I had made, it dried up the ink on my pen. The rule of *noblesse oblige* has a negative as well as a positive significance, and there are some things which cannot be learned with impunity. If I had been content just to remain at the outskirts, it might have been different. But I had prayed for no less than to enter the Garden; and I had learned, as it were in answer to my prayer, that the only way to it lies along the path of the kind that is traced out by Dante in his *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Nor can one enter for the sake of writing poetry, but only for the sake of the Garden itself and what lies beyond.<sup>30</sup>

We do not know the details of the inner process that allowed Martin Lings to write his book on the life of the Prophet, but it must have been a slow spiritual journey sustained over years that brought this inner clarity and intimacy to that blessed time, allowing him to narrate the details of the life of the Prophet in such a vivid manner. This is not an ordinary book and it could not have come into existence but through a special *barakah*. No doubt there were years of reflection, careful reading of source material, and diligent sifting of data behind the sudden appearance of this work in 1983, and it would be illuminating to know more details of that process through personal records like his diaries, letters, and notes.

After the publication of his work on the Prophet of Islam, Martin Lings increasingly devoted considerable time to a growing number of individuals who wanted to partake of the blessings of the Order. He published five more books during his lifetime, with plans for three additional future publications.<sup>31</sup> Out of these later works published during his resi-

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29. “The Muse”, *Elements and Other Poems*, 17.

30. *Elements and Other Poems*, 8-9.

31. *Collected Poems* (London: Perennial Books, 1987); *The Eleventh Hour*:

dence on earth, *Sufi Poems* has a distinctive mediaeval aura. The thirteen Sufis whose poems have been included in this slim volume are not only authentic representatives of that era, they are among the brightest lights of the Islamic mystic tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Lings' *The Eleventh Hour* has direct relevance to the Islam and science discourse, containing a penetrating critique of the theory of evolution, within the general framework of Lings' critique of the pseudo-religions of the modern world: scientism, belief in progress, and so on. "In scientism," Lings explains,

which supplies the pseudo-doctrine of evolution, the error is mainly objective, at any rate as far as the 'layman' is concerned. Here the scientist, who is the 'high priest' of the modern world and who alone has power to speak ex cathedra, misleads his flock with a false object of faith. This is by far the greatest stumbling block, for the question of progress must always remain a matter of opinion, but evolution is presented as a scientific fact that 'transcends' all discussion; and whereas truly transcendent doctrines lend wings to the intelligence, the pseudo-transcendent paralyses it and sets up a stifling 'dictatorship' in the soul.<sup>33</sup>

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*The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern World in the Light of Tradition and Prophecy* (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1989); *Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence* (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1991); *Sufi Poems: A Mediaeval Anthology* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2004); *Mecca From Before Genesis Until Now* (Cambridge: Archetype, 2004). *A Return to the Spirit: Questions and Answers* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2005) was published earlier this year, and forthcoming publications include *The Underlying Religion*, co-edited by Clinton Minaar, a collection of essays by Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, and other eminent Traditionalists (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2005) and *The Essential Martin Lings*, co-edited by Reza Shah-Kazemi and Emma Clark (forthcoming by World Wisdom, date not yet determined); this information is from an article by Michael Fitzgerald, "In Memoriam: Dr. Martin Lings" published in *Sacred Web* Vol. 15 (June 2005), 144-53.

32. See the review by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in *Sophia*, Vol. 11 (2005) No. 1, 189-96; also see the review by Muzaffar Iqbal in *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 44 (2005) No. 1, 142-148.

33. *The Eleventh Hour*, 19-20.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 إِنَّ لَكَ الْأَذْيَانَ وَالْحِكْمَ كُلَّهَا هُوَ اللَّهُ  
 بَيْتَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ أَوْ بَيْتَ الْوَجْدِ وَ  
 وَالتَّوَكُّلِ عَلَى الْحَقِّ الَّذِي لَا يُجُودُ إِلَّا  
 كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مَحْصُورٌ فِي هَذَا التَّعْرِيفِ الْمُرْتَبِعِ  
 وَتَعْنِي هَذَا فِي الظَّاهِرِ مَعْرَ الْعَقِيدَةِ وَفِي  
 بِالْعَمَلِ أَوْ الْإِبْرَارِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَ  
 الْعَقَائِدِ كُلَّ نَوَاصِيهِ الْمَنَاجِحِ الْعَمَلِيَّةِ وَ  
 التَّشْيِيرِ بَيْنَ الْحَقِّ وَالْبَاطِلِ وَبَيْنَ  
 وَالْمَقْتَدِرِ وَبَيْنَ الْهَامِي وَالْمُنَاقِبِ  
 كَمَا أَنَّ التَّوَكُّلَ عَلَى الْحَقِّ وَاجِدٌ وَالْوَدْعُ  
 وَاجِدٌ وَكَذَلِكَ النَّجَاةُ

Sample of Abū Bakr Sirāj ud-Dīn  
 Martin Lings' handwriting.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Mosque

The six themes of meditation are expressions of what might be called the dimensions of holiness, and since sacred art is a crystallization and a perpetuation of sainthood, being an image of the perfect microcosm as well as of the macrocosm, it ~~will~~ reflect, in its own particular mode, these six aspects of the Saint. A striking example of this is to be found in the architecture of Islam.

1. The Door and the walls

The Mosque is an image of the Fortress mentioned in the Holy Utterance (Hadith Qudsi): "Lā ilāha illā 'Llāh is My Fortress, and whose entered My Fortress is safe from My anger." We turn our back on the world as we pass through the great portal; measuring out by the length of our entry the massive thickness of the walls which will make us safe from the noise and heat and agitation of life, we too take refuge in a sanctuary which penetrates and purifies purification us with its cool and motionless silence.

Lings' is not a scientific critique of the theory of evolution—that is to say, he is not concerned with the biological and chemical facts used in support of the theory, but with its status as a sound and coherent theory in the light of spiritual insights that are common to humanity.<sup>34</sup> Looking at evolutionism from his specific perspective, Lings shows how the idea of “a gradual ascent of no return that the evolutionist has in mind is an idea that has been surreptitiously borrowed from religion and naïvely transferred from the supratemporal to the temporal.”<sup>35</sup> He demonstrates logical flaws in the theory and points out its fallacies. “One only needs to be able to put two and two together to see that either evolutionism or God must go.”<sup>36</sup> Pointing out logical flaws, he shows how the argument is generally presented through indoctrination:

‘First of all Copernicus, and the discovery that the earth moves round the sun; then Darwin, and the discovery that men have evolved from apes.’ Such is the train of thought which is encouraged to prevail. It is never pointed out that the implicit logic is false, that there is no comparison between the two men in question, and that their respective theories did not even result from the same processes of thought, inasmuch as Darwin’s theory is pure hypothesis.<sup>37</sup>

*Mecca From Before Genesis Until Now* reads like an aural lecture, though the book does not indicate whether it has been transcribed from a talk given by Martin Lings or was actually written by him. In any case, this

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34. For the scientific critique, Lings suggested Douglas Dewar’s *The Transformative Illusion* (Murfreesboro: Dehoff Publications, 1957) and Evan Shute’s *Flaws in the Theory of Evolution* (Nutley: Craig Press, 1961). Of course, now there numerous other works available which show the scientific inaccuracy of the interpretation of data used to support the theory of evolution. These include, Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Harun Yahya, *The Evolution Deceit: The Scientific Collapse of Darwinism and its Ideological Background* (London: Ta Ha, 1999); Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Chevy Chase: Adler and Adler, 1996); Michael Pitman, *Adam and Evolution* (London: Rider, 1984); Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1991).

35. *Ibid.* 23.

36. *Ibid.* 33.

37. *Ibid.*

short book of forty-six pages is perhaps his only work that is somewhat disjointed in its overall impact and where passages from his *sīrah* have been incorporated into the work in an inorganic manner. The book is, nevertheless, a useful, albeit extremely brief, account of Makkah and the rites of Ḥajj, and include a few reflections by Lings on his own Ḥajj, performed first in 1948 and then in 1976.

If one were to describe Ling's spiritual quest metaphorically, it might well be found in the last sentence of his introduction to the book of poetry written in 1967: for the sake of the Garden itself and what lies beyond.

Of the many aspects of *The Garden*, it is the aspect of "Beauty" that he sought most.

*To the sun's splendour splendour offering,  
Behold, eloquent, eloquent the peacocks!  
Sharper their beauty than their sharpest note,  
Remembrances of Mercy, mirrors of Beatitude—  
Beautiful, Bountiful, Most Blessed is Thy Name!*<sup>38</sup>

No wonder that gardening was a passionate and a lasting activity for Martin Lings. The design of the flowerbeds in his garden in Kent, his passion for colors and hues reflecting the heavenly qualities, and his carefully collected floral specimens were all part of this yearning. The garden of his home in Kent that he has now left for his wife to tend reflects this inner yearning for the Garden beyond. It is here in his own earthly garden that he desired to be buried—a wish granted in this world; may the Most Merciful grant his wish for the Garden in the next world, and may he live in his Lord's Mercy until the day when we will meet, *inshā'Allāh*, in that Garden, with the permission of its Owner.

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38. "The Garden", *Elements and Other Poems*, 31.