

Şūfism

8.1 Al-Ghazālī on the path of the Şūfis

On al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and the book from which this passage is taken, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* ('Deliverance from error'), see above, section 6.4. As was suggested above, the entire treatise is probably better understood as a work of epistemology. The aim is to show that right knowledge will deliver one from error. Here, he speaks autobiographically about the knowledge of the Şūfis, the last group whom he describes on his quest for knowledge. It is therefore with the Şūfis that al-Ghazālī finds his thirst for certain knowledge of the truth satisfied. He describes the practical steps necessary for purifying one's heart, and the importance of direct experience, or 'taste', for mystical knowledge. Al-Ghazālī discovers that the path of the Şūfī saints can bestow on the seeker direct experiences that are comparable with the experiences of prophets, in this way providing irrefutable proof of the truths of religion. Following the discussion provided here, he is able to argue for the reality of prophecy in general, through a faculty of perception grounded in the soul, which can be verified by non-prophets through 'taste' (i.e., direct experience) on the path of the Şūfis.

Further reading

Farid Jabre, *La notion de la ma'rifa chez Ghazali*, second edition, Beirut 1986.

Eric L. Ormsby, 'The taste of truth: the structure of experience in al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*,' in Wael B. Hallaq, Donald P. Little (eds), *Islamic studies presented to Charles J. Adams*, Leiden 1991, pp. 133–52.

Source text

Farid Jabre, *Al-Munqid min aḡalāl (Erreur de délivrance)*, Beirut 1959, excerpts from pp. 35–40 of the Arabic text.

Section: The path of the Şūfīs

1. When I had done with these sciences, I turned my efforts to the Şūfī way. I came to know that their way became complete only through both knowledge and practice. The sum of their sciences is the removal of the soul's deficiencies, and cleansing it of its reprehensible and vicious qualities, so as to achieve a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God.
2. Knowledge was easier for me than practice. So I began by acquiring their knowledge from their books, such as the *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī [d. 386/998], the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and the disparate fragments deriving from al-Junayd, al-Shiblī, Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī and others. In the end I understood their aims in so far as these were a matter of knowledge, and appreciated their way as far as was possible through learning and listening. And I realized that their most singular characteristic was such as could be appreciated not through learning but only through 'taste', 'state' (*ḥāl*) and change of qualities. How different it is to know the definitions of health and of fullness, together with their causes and conditions, and to be healthy and full; to know the definition of drunkenness . . . and to be drunk. In fact the drunkard, while drunk, does not know the definition or the science of drunkenness – he knows nothing about it – while the sober man may know the definition and the principles of drunkenness, and be quite free of the state itself. The doctor, while sick, may know the definition and the causes of health, and its medicines, and yet lack health. Similar to this is the difference between knowing the truth of asceticism together with its conditions and causes, and being in a 'state' comprising asceticism and abstention from things of this world.
3. I knew then for sure that they were masters of 'states' and not purveyors of words. All that could be achieved through knowledge, I had achieved. What remained could not be learned through study and listening but required 'taste' and practice.
4. Now, I had acquired through the sciences I had studied and the paths I had followed in investigating the two types of science, revealed and rational, a firm and certain faith in God, in prophecy and in the last day. These three principles of faith had become firmly rooted in my soul, not through specific discursive proof, but through causes, connections and experiences, the details of which could not be enumerated. It was also evident to me that I had no expectation of the happiness of the other world except through piety, and through control of the desires of the self. The foundation of all this lay in cutting the link between the heart and worldly things, through turning away from the abode of illusion and towards the abode of eternity, and advancing with the utmost resolution

towards God. It could not be achieved except through abandonment of rank and wealth, and flight from distraction and entanglement. . . .

[Al-Ghazālī here describes the difficulties he had in achieving a determination to abandon position, fame, comfort and so forth. Ultimately, however, his plans change.]

5. I left Baghdad. I distributed such wealth as I had, preserving only a bare sufficiency, and maintenance for the children. (I found excuse for this in the thought that the wealth of Iraq is earmarked for the welfare of society, it being a *waqf* on behalf of all Muslims. I could see no wealth in the whole world that a scholar might more fittingly draw on for his children.) I went into Damascus, and stayed there for about two years, with no distractions save retirement and seclusion, spiritual exercises and moral striving. I was concerned to cleanse the soul, to train the morals, and to purify the heart for memory of God, in accord with what I had learnt from the books of the Şūfis. I practised seclusion for a while in the mosque at Damascus, climbing the minaret during the day and locking its door behind me. Then I travelled to Jerusalem, entering there the Dome of the Rock every day and locking its door behind me. Then I was moved to carry out the duty of Pilgrimage, to seek help from the blessings of Mecca and Medina, to visit the tomb of the prophet of God, after visiting the tomb of Abraham. So I went to the Hijaz. Then various cares and the summons of my children drew me back to my homeland, and I returned there, after having been the furthest of all creation from such an act. There, too, I preferred retirement, out of desire for seclusion and the purification of the heart. But the vicissitudes of time, the demands of my family and the necessities of making a living all conspired to change in me the nature of my desire and to sully the purity of my seclusion. Only at scattered moments did my situation achieve purity. My desire for this end was, however, not affected and though obstacles pushed me away, I would return. So it was for ten years. During these periods of seclusion various things were revealed to me that can be neither computed nor adequately analysed.
6. As much as I shall say – that it might be beneficial – is this, that I came to know for sure that the Şūfis were following the path of God, the Şūfis in particular, and that their conduct was the best of conduct, their path the surest of paths, their morals the purest of morals. Even more, if the wisdom and intellect of the wise were united, together with the knowledge of those *‘ulamā’* who understand the secrets of the law, in order to change one aspect of their conduct and morals and to replace it with something better, they would be unable to do so. For all their movements and their ways of being still, in their manifest and in their hidden aspects, are derived from the light of the lamp of prophecy; and there is not, on the face of the earth, beyond the lamp of prophecy any higher source of light.
7. What can one say about a path for which the purification – the first of its conditions – is complete purification of the heart from all save God; to which the key – corresponding to the act of reciting the opening of the daily prayers – is complete drowning of the heart in memory of God; and of which the end is

complete annihilation in God? This indeed is its end only in relation to its beginnings, those which belong to the realm of choice and acquisition. These in truth represent the first part of the way; what precedes this is but, as it were, the entrance hall.

8. Early in the way visions begin, such that Šūfis in waking hours perceive angels and the spirits of prophets, and hear from them voices, and derive from them benefits. Their state then proceeds from the witnessing of forms and likenesses to levels of perception which transcend the boundaries of speech. None who tries to give expression to these can do so without his words containing manifest error which it is impossible to guard against. But, overall, the matter culminates in a closeness which one group have imagined to be 'incarnation' (*ḥulūl*), another group 'union' (*ittiḥād*) and another 'connection' (*wuṣūl*). All of this is error. The nature of the error we have explained in our book *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* ('The noblest aim'). Indeed one to whom such a state is given should say no more than the poet:

What happened, happened; I'll not remember it.
Don't ask about it; just think well of it.

In sum, he who is not granted anything through 'taste', will be able to perceive of the truth of prophecy only the name. The miracles of the saints are in truth [the equivalent of] the first steps of the prophets. Such was the first state of the prophet of God when he came to Mount Ḥirā' to practise there seclusion with his Lord and worship, so that the bedouin said, 'Muḥammad is in love with his Lord!'

9. This is a state which can be realized through 'taste' by those who follow the path of the Šūfis. Those who are not granted 'taste' may become certain of its existence through experience and intimacy, if they increase their companionship with the Šūfis until they achieve a sure and certain understanding based on circumstantial evidence. Those who share their company will derive from them this faith, for they are a people whose companions are not left in distress. Finally, for those who are not granted the possibility of the companionship of Šūfis, let them acquire sure knowledge of the possibility of that state through rational demonstration, as we have explained in our book, *'Ajā'ib al-qalb*, 'The wonders of the heart', contained in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* [Book 21]. To comprehend this state through rational demonstration is 'knowledge'. To participate in that state is 'taste'. To accept it as a result of experience and intimacy, with good will, is 'faith' (*īmān*). These are the three degrees referred to in, *God raises those of you who believe and those of you who are given knowledge in degrees* (Q 58/11).
10. Beyond these degrees are an ignorant people. They deny the basis of all this, they express astonishment at such claims, they listen and they scoff. They say, 'Amazing!' How they rave! But concerning them God has said, *Amongst them are some who listen to you, but when they leave you they say to those who have been given knowledge, What did he say so haughtily? They are the ones upon*

whose hearts God has set a seal. They follow their whims (Q 47/16). God has made them deaf and blind (Q 47/23).

11. What became clear to me through my experience of their path is the truth and the essence of prophecy.

8.2 Al-Sarrāj on the *sunna* and musical audition

Abū Naṣr ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) was a Ṣūfī scholar from Tus, in present-day north-eastern Iran. Very little information is available about his life. The main source of information is his sole-surviving work, the *Kitāb al-luma‘ fī ‘l-taṣawwuf*, which indicates that he travelled widely in the Near and Middle East to meet a large number of teachers and transmitters.

The *Kitāb al-luma‘* details the states and stages of the mystical itinerary, describes the distinctive practices and customs of the Ṣūfis, and defines a large set of their technical terms. It is particularly remarkable for its breadth of coverage and its accommodating approach: it includes chapters on conventional Muslim issues, such as the chapter presented below on the veneration of the prophet, as well as chapters which deal with issues specific to Ṣūfism that may be considered controversial, such as the lengthy section on musical audition (*samā‘*), a chapter of which is presented below, and the several chapters on the ‘overflowing utterances’ (*shaṭaḥāt*) attributed to Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī and others.

The *Kitāb al-luma‘* consists of a collection of chapters, each forming a discrete and autonomous treatise in itself. They also take diverse forms, the range of which is indicated by the chapters presented below. The chapter on the importance of the *sunna* for Ṣūfis consists entirely of citations, a selection from among the large stock that circulated about the Ṣūfī attitude towards the ultimate sources of authority in Islam. In contrast, the chapter on the audition of poetry relies almost exclusively on reasoned arguments as proof for the validity of this distinctive practice of the Ṣūfis.

As the oldest systematic presentation of Ṣūfism, al-Sarrāj’s *Kitāb al-luma‘* is considered the first and most authoritative work of the Ṣūfī manual genre. It has served as the main source for the later, more accessible works of al-Qushayrī (section 8.4) and Hujwīrī (section 8.5), through which it has become familiar throughout the Muslim world.

Further reading

Richard Gramlich (ed. and trans.), *Schlaglichter über das Sufitum: Abū Naṣr as-Sarrājs Kitāb al-Luma‘*, Stuttgart 1990; a fully annotated German translation.

P. Lory, ‘Al-Sarrādj, Abū Naṣr,’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition.

R. A. Nicholson (ed.), *The Kitāb al-luma‘ fī ‘l-taṣawwuf of Abū Naṣr ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī*, Gibb Memorial Series, Leiden/London 1914, introduction and summary.

Source text

R. A. Nicholson (ed.), *The Kitāb al-luma‘ fī ‘l-taṣawwuf of Abū Naṣr ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī*, Leiden/London 1914, Arabic text pp. 103–4 (part I) and 283–5 (part II).

I Chapter dealing with what has been mentioned about the *Şūfī shaykhs* with regard to their following the messenger of God

1. The shaykh said that he heard ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn ‘Ulwān say that he heard al-Junayd say, ‘This knowledge of ours is interwoven with the *ḥadīth* of the Messenger of God.’
2. I heard Abū ‘Amr Ismā‘īl ibn Nujayd say that he heard Abū ‘Uthmān Sa‘īd ibn ‘Uthmān al-Ḥīrī say, ‘He who makes the *sunna* the ruler of his soul in speech and action expresses wisdom, while he who makes lust the ruler of his soul in speech and action expresses innovation.’ God said, *If you obey him you will be rightly guided* (Q 24/54).
3. I heard Ṭayfūr al-Baṣṭāmī say that he heard Mūsā ibn ‘Īsā, the one known as ‘Ammī, say that he heard his father say that Abū Yazīd said to him, ‘Let us go to see this man who has made himself famous for sainthood.’ He was a sought-after man, famous in his locality for asceticism and piety. Ṭayfūr had identified his name and family for us. ‘Ammī’s father said, ‘We went and when he came out of his house and entered the mosque he spat towards the *qibla*, and so Abū Yazīd said, “Let’s go back,” and he turned away without greeting him, and said, “This is unfaithful to one of the customs of the messenger of God, so how can he be faithful about what he is claiming with regard to the stations of the saints and God’s elite!”’
4. I heard Ṭayfūr say that he heard Mūsā ibn ‘Īsā say that he heard his father say that he heard Abū Yazīd say, ‘I intended to ask God to spare me from the need for the provision of food and women, then I thought to myself, “How can it be permitted for me to ask God for this when the apostle of God did not ask him for it?” So I did not ask him. Then God spared me from the need for the provision of women, such that I do not care whether a woman meets me or a wall!’
5. I heard Abū ‘l-Ṭayyib Aḥmad ibn Muqātil al-‘Akkī al-Baghdādī say, ‘I was with Ja‘far al-Khuldī on the day of al-Shibli’s death, when Bundār al-Dīnawarī, who was a student of al-Shibli, approached us. He had been present at his death, so Ja‘far asked him, “What did you see him do at the time of his death?” He answered, “When he could no longer speak and his forehead was dripping with sweat he indicated that I should do his ablutions for him in preparation for prayer, so I did that. However, I forgot to run my fingers through his beard, so he grabbed my hand and ran my fingers through his beard himself.”’ Abū ‘l-Ṭayyib said, ‘Ja‘far wept, saying, “What can you say about a man who wouldn’t leave out cleaning his beard during ablutions even when he was about to die, when he couldn’t speak and his forehead was dripping with sweat!”’
6. I heard Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Wajīhī say that he heard Abū ‘Alī Rūdhbārī say, ‘My teacher in Şūfism was Junayd, my teacher in jurisprudence was Abū ‘l-‘Abbās ibn al-Surayj, my teacher in grammar was Tha‘lab and my teacher in the *ḥadīth* of the messenger of God was Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarbī.’

7. Dhū'l-Nūn was asked, 'Through what did you attain knowledge of God?' He answered, 'I attained knowledge of God through God, and I gained knowledge of what is other than God through the messenger of God.'
8. Sahl ibn 'Abd Allāh said, 'Sometimes the truth would keep trying to penetrate my heart for forty days, but I wouldn't allow it to enter except with two witnesses in the form of the book and the *sunna*!'
9. This is what I have with me at the moment concerning what the Ṣūfis believe about following the messenger of God. I dislike verbosity, so I've been brief for the sake of conciseness. Through God alone can one find success.

II Chapter mentioning those who have chosen the audition of poetry

1. The shaykh said: The proof for the opinion of the group who have chosen musical audition of poetry takes the form of that saying of the prophet, 'In poetry there is wisdom,' and his utterance, 'Wisdom is the goal of the believer.' This group have maintained that the Qur'ān is God's speech and His speech is one of His attributes, so it is a divine truth which a human being cannot endure when it is manifested; this is because it is uncreated and so created attributes cannot endure it. Moreover, it is not possible for one part of it to be better than another part, nor can it be embellished by means of created music, but rather created things are made beautiful by it: it is the most beautiful of things, and created things of beauty are not considered beautiful when compared with it. God said, *We have made the Qur'ān easy to remember, but do any remember it?* (Q 54/17). And He also said, *If we had sent down this Qur'ān to a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, split apart by the fear of God* (Q 59/21). Therefore, if God were to send it down to men's hearts with its divine truths, and open up to their hearts an atom of veneration and awe for it during recitation, they would be torn apart, startled, confounded and perplexed.
2. It is common for somebody to recite the Qur'ān in public, but without anyone experiencing any tenderness in their heart during the recitation. If a beautiful voice were used for the recitation, or pleasant, moving melodies, tenderness and delight would then be experienced in listening, and if that beautiful voice and that pleasant melody were used for something other than the Qur'ān, that same tenderness, delight and pleasure would be experienced then as well. Though they may think that the tenderness, purity, enjoyment and the ecstasy were from the Qur'ān, if that were really the case then they would always experience this without any interruption whenever the Qur'ān is recited.
3. Pleasant melodies have affinities with men's inner dispositions; this relationship is based on pleasure, and is not divine. The Qur'ān is God's speech, and its relationship is a divine one, not one based on pleasure. Verses of poetry also have such a relationship based on pleasure, not a divine one. Although those who engage in musical audition differ in rank and specific characteristics, there is in

each case an affinity with one's inner dispositions, pleasure for the soul and enjoyment for the spirit, because they are in harmony with those subtleties in a beautiful voice and pleasant melodies. The same can be said for poems, for they contain lofty meanings, tenderness, eloquence, subtlety and allusions; if these voices and melodies were to be combined with this poetry, they would be in harmony with each other because of their mutual affinity and similarity, and this would be more pleasurable, less difficult to endure and less dangerous for listening hearts because created things resemble each other.

4. Those who have chosen audition of poems over audition of the Qur'ān have done so out of reverence for the Qur'ān and respect for the danger in it, because it is a divine truth and men's souls shrink from it, die due to its effects and become annihilated by its delights and pleasantness whenever the rays of its truths shine their radiance on them and make manifest to them their divine meanings.
5. This group have said, 'As long as our human nature remains, we still have our attributes and enjoy pleasures, and our spirits delight in moving melodies and pleasant voices, our taking delight in poetry, through which we witness the continuance of such pleasure, is better than our taking delight thus in God's speech, which is His attribute, that is His speech which was made manifest and will return to Him.'
6. A group of religious scholars have disapproved of trilling the Qur'ān, and combining melodies with the Qur'ān is not allowed according to them. God said, *Recite the Qur'ān in a measured rhythm!* (Q 73/4). Those who do this do it only because human dispositions make men shrink from the audition of the Qur'ān and its recitation, since it is a divine truth. They therefore recite it with a beautiful voice in order thus to attract the dispositions of ordinary men so that they will want to listen. If hearts were fully engaged, each present moment fulfilled, innermost spirits pure, souls disciplined and human dispositions withdrawn, there would be no need for this. Through God alone can one find success.

8.3 Abū Nu‘aym’s biography of al-Basṭāmī

Abū Nu‘aym Aḥmad ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038), the assumed author of the *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, which is recognized as one of the most important sources for the early development of Ṣūfism, is none the less remembered in later sources more for his importance as a Shāfi‘ī *ḥadīth*-transmitter than as a Ṣūfī. While the other major works ascribed to him, namely the *Dhikr akhbār Iṣbahān* and the *Dalā’il al-nubuwwa*, confirm his interest in the collection of historical material and the biography of the prophet, it is remarkable that his *magnum opus* should have been the ten-volume *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’*, which belongs to a tradition in which he is not remembered as a prominent representative. His maternal grandfather, Ibn Ma’dān al-Bannā’, was most probably the source of Abū Nu‘aym’s interest in Ṣūfism; Ibn Ma’dān’s importance as a Ṣūfī is reflected in the fact that he is commonly identified as the teacher of ‘Alī ibn Sahl al-Iṣfahānī (d. 307/920), who was the most celebrated Ṣūfī from Isfahan up to this point in time. The introduction of the *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* confirms that he was Abū Nu‘aym’s forerunner in Ṣūfī scholarship, and the inclusion of members of his school at the end of the work suggests that Abū Nu‘aym was himself also a follower of the living tradition of Ṣūfism in Isfahan which he had established.

The *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* consists of approximately 650 biographies (amounting to approximately 4,000 pages in the printed edition). An overall chronological principle is evident in the order of presentation of biographies in this work of the Ṣūfī *ṭabaqāt* genre, since they begin with the four ‘rightly-guided’ caliphs and culminate with Abū Nu‘aym’s own contemporaries. The time-span is covered predominantly by individuals who are not usually identified as Ṣūfis, including the generations of the pious predecessors, the first six Imāms of Shī‘ism, the founders of the main law schools (apart from Abū Ḥanīfa, for polemical reasons) and other jurists, theologians and pietists. These religious authorities are attributed with some Ṣūfī utterances (amongst other material) in their respective biographies, even though they may not usually be remembered in this way. Despite the wide net that has been cast, the controversial al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) has been excluded for polemical reasons.

Most of the biographies of individuals who are recognized primarily as having been mystics are found in the tenth volume. This includes the biography of Abū Yazīd, which is typical in format of the biographies in the *Ḥilya* in general. It begins with an introduction in rhyming prose (*saj’*), which is immediately followed by a long sequence of discrete segments of biographical information, less than half of which are introduced by a complete chain of authorities (*isnād*). This sequence of biographical segments is followed by concluding remarks, presented as the opinions of Abū Nu‘aym, and, finally, a *ḥadīth* transmission by Abū Yazīd.

The translation presented here is representative of a number of distinctive features of the structure of the text of the *Ḥilya*, including the signs of growth, interpolation and interference with the text, the recurrence of variants and the competing influence of key-word, thematic and *isnād* associations on the juxtaposition of individual segments. All of these characteristics suggest that the text may have undergone a number of redactions. Since this passage is taken from the very start of the biography, it includes the introduction and the

biographical segments which follow immediately after it. The latter consist mostly of short anecdotes and pithy utterances, including some of the bold, uncompromising utterances about his own spiritual experiences and rank with which Abū Yazīd is traditionally associated. Consistent with the remainder of this work and other contemporary works is the use of the term *ʿarīf* (gnostic) to refer to the Şūfī, as distinct from, for example, the *zāhid* (ascetic) and the *ʿābid* (pietist).

Further reading

G. Böwering, 'Bestāmī (Baṣṭāmī), Bāyazīd,' *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

R. G. Khoury, 'Importance et authenticité de textes de *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*,' *Studia Islamica*, 46 (1977), pp. 73–113.

W. Madelung, 'Abū Nuʿaym al-Eṣfahānī,' *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The biographical tradition in Sufism: the ṭabaqāt genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, Richmond 2001, chapter 2.

Source text

Abū Nuʿaym al-Eṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, Cairo 1932–8, vol. 10, pp. 33–7.

Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī

1. The shaykh and *ḥāfiẓ*, Abū Nuʿaym, said, 'Among them is the lone roamer, the solitary wanderer Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī. He roamed and withdrew, he wandered and then returned. He withdrew beyond the limits to the originator of perceptible and knowable things. He separated himself from creation and stayed consistent with the truth. He was helped by secret retreats, and strengthened by his mastery of piety. His allusions are plain but their meaning is hidden; to those who understand them they give security, but to those who reject them they are a source of temptation.'
2. 'Umar ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Uthmān related to us that 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Mūsā al-Şirfī related to him that Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan related to him that 'Umar al-Baṣṭāmī related to him on the authority of Abū Mūsā that Abū Yazīd said, 'My love for you is no surprise, since I'm a poor slave; your love for me is the surprise, since you are a powerful king!'
3. 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Bakr related to us saying that al-Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm al-Damaghānī said that Mūsā ibn 'Isā related to him, saying that he heard his father say that he heard Abū Yazīd say, 'O God, you created mankind without their knowledge and you invested upon them a trust without their choosing it, so if you don't help them who will?'
4. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn (al-Sulamī) related to us saying that he heard Maṣṣūr ibn 'Abd Allāh say that he heard Ya'qūb ibn Iṣḥāq say that he heard Ibrāhīm al-

Harawī say that he heard Abū Yazīd al-Basṭāmī say, 'When I started I was mistaken about four things: I imagined that it's me who remembers him, that it's me who knows him, that it's me who loves him and that it's me who seeks him. When I finished I realized that his remembrance came before mine, his knowledge preceded mine, his love was prior to mine and that he sought me first until I started to seek him.'

5. 'Umar ibn 'Uthmān related to us that 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Mūsā related to him that Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Jābān related to him that 'Umar al-Basṭāmī related to him on the authority of Abū Mūsā that Abū Yazīd said, 'God has an elite among his servants, who, if he were to veil them in heaven from vision of himself, would appeal for help to get out of heaven just like the inhabitants of hell appeal for help to get out of hell!'
6. I heard al-Faḍl ibn Ja'far say that he heard Muḥammad ibn Manṣūr say that 'Ubayd ibn 'Abd al-Qāhir said, 'A group of people sat around Abū Yazīd, while he hung his head down for a while, and then he raised it to them to say, "While you have been sitting down before me, here I have been, roaming my thoughts, looking for a rotten grain which you can bear, to extract it for you, but I did not find anything."'
7. He said that Abū Yazīd said, 'I was absent from God for thirty years. My absence from him was as a result of my mentioning him, for when I refrained from it I found him in every state.'
8. A man said to me, 'Why do you not travel?' Abū Yazīd said, 'Because my companion does not travel and I am staying with him.' The questioner opposed him by means of an analogy, saying, 'Ablution with still water is disliked!' Abū Yazīd responded, 'They did not see any fault with sea water; its water is clean and its dead things are lawful!' Then Abū Yazīd said, 'You may see the rivers flowing with droning and murmuring until they approach the sea; when they mix with it their murmuring and turbulence subsides, and the sea water does not notice them: neither an increase appears in it, nor would a decrease appear in it if they were to leave it.'
9. 'Umar ibn Aḥmad related to me that 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad related to him that Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad related to him that 'Uthmān related to him on the authority of Abū Mūsā, saying that Abū Yazīd said, 'For thirty years whenever I wished to mention God I always rinsed and washed my tongue, deeming Him too high to mention Him.'
10. 'Uthmān ibn Muḥammad al-'Uthmānī related to me that Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Rāzī said that he heard Yūsuf ibn al-Ḥusayn say that he heard Yaḥyā ibn Mu'ādh say that he heard Abū Yazīd al-Basṭāmī say, 'I did not cease to wander in the field of unity until I entered the enclosure of unicity. Then I did not cease to wander inside the enclosure of unicity until I departed to everlastingness, and I drank from his cup such a drink that, thanks to its memory, I will certainly not thirst ever again.'

- 10.1 Yūsuf said ‘I used to hear this speech in different words from Dhū ’l-Nūn, there being an addition to it; Dhū ’l-Nūn would not utter it except when excited and overwhelmed by his ecstasy. He used to say that, and follow it with, “Yours is the glory and beauty, Yours is the perfection. Glory be to you, glory be to you. May the tongues of praise and the mouths of glorification venerate you. You, you, eternal, eternal. His love for me is eternal.”’
11. Abū ’l-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Abī ’Imrān related to me that Mūsā related to him that Maṣṣūr ibn ‘Abd Allāh related to him, saying that he heard Abū ’Imrān Mūsā ibn ‘Isā say that he heard his father say that Abū Yazīd said, ‘I was absent from God for thirty years. My absence from Him was a result of my mentioning Him, for when I refrained from it I found Him in every state, until it was as if He was me!’
12. Aḥmad ibn Abī ’Imrān related to me that Mūsā related to him that Maṣṣūr related to him that a man came to Abū Yazīd and said, ‘Give me some advice.’ He told him, ‘Look at the sky!’ and his companion looked at the sky. Then Abū Yazīd asked him, ‘Do you know who created this?’ He answered, ‘God.’ Abū Yazīd said, ‘The one who created it is watching over you wherever you are, so beware!’
13. Aḥmad related to me that Maṣṣūr told him that Mūsā related to him the following: a man came up to Abū Yazīd and said, ‘I’ve heard that you fly in the air.’ He responded, ‘And what’s so surprising about that? Carrion can fly, and surely a believer is nobler than such a bird!’
14. Aḥmad ibn Ḥarb sent him a rug with a note in which he had written, ‘Pray on it at night!’ Abū Yazīd wrote back to him, ‘I have gathered together the acts of worship of the people of heaven and the seven climes, put them into my pillow and placed that under my cheek [for when I sleep]!’
15. I heard al-Faḍl ibn Ja’far say that he heard Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr say that he heard ‘Ubayd say that he heard Abū Yazīd say, ‘I divorced the world three times, absolutely and irrevocably. Then I turned to my lord by myself and called out to Him for help: “My God, I pray to you with a prayer which is divest of all but You!” When He knew the sincerity of my heart’s prayer and my despair over my carnal soul, the first thing that came to me by way of a reply to this prayer was that He caused me to forget myself completely; and He set up created beings in front of me despite my shunning them.’
16. ‘Umar ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Uthmān related to me that ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Aḥmad related to him that Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Jābān related to him that ‘Umar al-Baṣṭāmī related to him on the authority of Abū Mūsā that Abū Yazīd said, ‘There are so many faults in acts of obedience that you don’t need to look for sins!’
17. ‘Umar related to me that ‘Ubayd informed him that Aḥmad told him that ‘Umar informed him on the authority of Abū Mūsā that Abū Yazīd said, ‘As long as

the worshipper reckons that there is someone more evil than himself in creation he is still proud.'

18. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn (al-Sulamī) informed me that he heard Maṣṣūr ibn 'Abd Allāh say that he heard Abū 'Imrān Mūsā ibn 'Isā say that he heard his father say that Abū Yazīd said, 'For thirty years I struggled against my carnal soul, but I did not find anything harder than scholastic knowledge and putting it into practice. If it were not for the differences of opinion of the scholars I would have grown weary; the differences of opinion of the scholars are a blessing, except with regard to stripping bare divine unity.'
19. Abū Yazīd said, 'Whoever lets his lusts stay with him does not understand his carnal soul.'
20. Abū Yazīd said, 'Heaven is of no consequence for the lovers of God,' and 'Those who love God are veiled by their love.'
21. 'Umar ibn Aḥmad related to me that 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Aḥmad related to him that Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad related to him that 'Umar told him on the authority of Abū Mūsā who said that Abū Yazīd said, 'Those who are most veiled from God belong to three categories, each veiled by different things: the first is the ascetic, by his asceticism, the second is the pietist, by his piety, and the third is the scholar, by his knowledge.' Then he continued, 'The poor ascetic has worn his uniform of asceticism and gone to the centre of the ascetics. Now if that poor fellow knows that God called the entire world "little", how much does he possess of it, and how much of that has he renounced?' Then he continued, 'The real ascetic is the one who looks at God with a gaze which stays fixed and never reverts to anything else, not even to himself. The pietist is the one who sees the gifts God has in store for his piety, rather than the acts of piety themselves, such that he only understands piety as a means of acquiring God's gifts. As for the scholar, if he were to know that all that God has revealed is just a single line from the Preserved Tablet, then how much of that line has he understood, and how much of his knowledge has he put into practice?'
22. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn (al-Sulamī) informed us, saying that he heard Aḥmad ibn 'Alī say that he heard Ya'qūb say that he heard al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī say that Abū Yazīd said, 'Gnosis concerning the essence of God is ignorance, knowledge about the essence of gnosis is perplexity, and making allusions by a teacher is associationism (*shirk*)!'
23. And he said, 'While the gnostic is preoccupied with what he hopes for, the ascetic is preoccupied with what he eats.'
24. And he said, 'Blessed is the one who has only one preoccupation, whose heart is not distracted by what his eyes see, nor by what his ears hear.'
25. And: 'The one who has gnosis of God renounces everything that might distract him from God.'

26. Aḥmad ibn Abī 'Imrān related to us that Maṣṣūr ibn 'Abd Allāh said that he heard Abū 'Imrān Mūsā ibn 'Isā say that he heard his father say that Abū Yazīd said when asked about the sign of the gnostic, '*When the kings enter a village they destroy it* (Q 27/34).'
27. And he said, 'I am amazed how someone who has gnosis of God can worship him!'
28. And someone said to him, 'You are one of the seven supreme saints (*abdāl*) who are the supports of the earth.' He responded, 'I am all seven!'
29. And someone asked him, 'When does someone attain to the level of the top men in this affair?' He answered, 'If he realizes the faults of his carnal soul then he attains to the level of the top men.'
30. And he said, 'God has some servants who, if he were to veil them from him for the blink of an eye and give them all of the heavens, would not feel any need for them – so how could they rely on the world and its adornment?'

8.4 Al-Qushayrī on the term Šūfī, Šūfī states and satisfaction

Abū 'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) was born into a privileged Arab family from among those who had settled near Nishapur, the city where he spent most of his adult life. It was apparently on the instruction of his teacher in Šūfism, Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq (d. 406/1016 or 412/1021), that he studied Ash'arite theology and Shāfi'ite jurisprudence under the leading authorities in Nishapur as a young man. Some Ash'arite theological writings are included among his approximately twenty extant works, indicating the continued importance of this theological school for him. Indeed, he is said to have become their leading representative in Nishapur. However, his most important work by far is the *Risāla*, which is possibly the most popular prose work on Šūfism ever to have been written. Although the earlier works of al-Sarrāj and al-Sulamī which overlap in scope with al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* are considered the most authoritative in the Šūfī tradition, they have in fact become familiar to most readers through the latter work, for al-Qushayrī bases his biographies on those of al-Sulamī and his thematic discussions on the corresponding discussions of al-Sarrāj. Like these two illustrious predecessors, al-Qushayrī is remembered in the later Šūfī tradition primarily for his scholarship. His *Risāla* has been translated into numerous languages and has attracted many commentaries.

Al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* consists of four main sections, followed by an appendix. The first section, which is by far the shortest, is theological in content, confirming al-Qushayrī's Ash'arite allegiance; the second section is made up of biographies in an overall chronological pattern, thus representing the *ṭabaqāt* genre; the third section offers definitions of technical Šūfī terminology; and the fourth section consists of thematic chapters on the theory and practice of Šūfism. The appendix deals with various issues, under the rubric 'Advice to disciples'.

The passages presented here in translation are taken from the second, third and fourth sections of the *Risāla*. The first passage translated here is the introduction of the biographical section. It links the subjects of the first biographies back to the time of the prophet of Islam, while also accounting for the relatively late emergence of the term *šūfī*. The definition of *ḥāl* displays al-Qushayrī's tendency in the third section to define terminology himself using, for illustration, citations of the sayings of past Šūfī authorities, as well as occasionally from the texts of Muslim revelation. This specific term is perhaps the most frequently used of all, since it is the generic term for an inner experience bestowed by God on the mystical itinerary. The discussion of *riḍā* is consistent with al-Qushayrī's systematic method in the fourth section of beginning each chapter with citations from revelation, even if they should be only loosely related. He follows this form of introduction with his own comments and the opinions of past Šūfis on the issue concerned.

Further reading

- A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: an account of the mystics of Islam*, London 1950, pp. 74–83.
 R. Gramlich (ed. and trans.), *Das Sendschreiben al-Qusayrīs über das Sufitum*, Stuttgart 1987; a fully annotated German translation.

Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The biographical tradition in Sufism: the ṭabaqāt genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, Richmond 2001, chapter 4.

Barbara R. Von Schlegell (trans.), *Principles of Sufism*, Berkeley 1990; an English translation of most of the fourth section, including the entirety of the chapter on *riqā*.

Michael Sells, *Early Islamic mysticism*, Mahwah NJ 1996; a source book for early Şūfism, which includes (pp. 99–149) a translation of the third section of the *Risāla*.

Source text

Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, Cairo 1972, pp. 34 (part I), 54–5 (part II) and 150–2 (part III).

I Chapter mentioning the shaykhs of this path and those aspects of their sayings and behaviour which indicate veneration for the sharīʿa

You should know that the best of the Muslims after the apostle of God were not called, in their own time, by a title of distinction other than companionship of the apostle of God (*ṣuḥba*), since there was no virtue higher than that. Thus they were called the *ṣaḥāba* and when those of the second period took over from them, those who had associated with the *ṣaḥāba* were called the *tābīʿūn*, this being considered the most noble title. Then those who came after them were called the *atbāʾ al-tābīʿīn*. Subsequently the people were at variance and different ranks became discernible. The elite of the people amongst those who were preoccupied with religion were called the *zuhhād* ('ascetics') and 'ubbād ('pietists'). Then innovations emerged and challenges were made between the groups, each of them claiming that the *zuhhād* were amongst their number. The elite of the traditionalists who maintained their souls with God and safeguarded their hearts from the paths of heedlessness alone possessed the name *taṣawwuf* (Şūfism). This name became well known for these great individuals by the year 200. In this section, we will now mention the names of a group of the shaykhs of this sect from the first generation until the time of the later ones amongst them, and briefly mention their behaviour and sayings which contain an indication of their principles and their customs, God willing.

II Chapter explaining the technical terms (alfāz) which are current amongst this group and explaining their difficult aspects

On the *ḥāl*.

1. A *ḥāl*, according to the Şūfis, is something which affects the heart, without intention on the part of those affected, without attraction, and without acquisition. It may take the form of delight or sadness, expansion or contraction, yearning, confusion, awe or need. *Hāls* are gifts, in contrast to *maqāms*, which are acquisitions. From the uncreated world *hāls* come, from hard work and effort, *maqāms*. The person with a *maqām* is fixed in his *maqām*; the person with a *ḥāl* is in a transitory phase.

Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī was asked what the meaning of the gnostic (*al-ʿārif*) is. He replied that he was here, but now he is gone. Some shaykhs said that a *ḥāl* is like a lightning flash. If the condition lasts, it is the soul's learning. Some also say that a *ḥāl* is like its name; it alights in the heart (*taḥillu*) and disappears in an instant. They recite the following:

It's not a *ḥāl* if it did not alight
And what alights must pass and fade from sight:
Like when a shadow reached its full length, then
It starts to shrink and disappear again.

2. Some authorities have suggested that the *ḥāl* lasts and can endure. They say that if it does not survive, or come in constant succession, then it is not a *ḥāl* but an impulse or an insight; and one who experiences these has not yet arrived at the level of *ḥāls*. Only when the quality survives is it called a *ḥāl*. This is like Abū 'Uthmān al-Ḥirī, who said, 'For forty years now God has not put me in a *ḥāl* that I have disliked.' He was talking about being maintained in a state of satisfaction (*riḍā*), for *riḍā* is one of the *ḥāls*.
3. The necessary resolution of this dispute is to admit that the proponents of remaining at length in a *ḥāl* are correct. For that condition may become, as it were, a pasture, in which one may be given training. However, to one who has achieved such a *ḥāl*, there will be further *ḥāls* and these will be transitory, not lasting, at a higher level than those which have become for him a pasture. If, in turn, these transitory phenomena become lasting, as the *ḥāls* before them did, then the person affected will move on to a higher state, to *ḥāls* beyond these, and more subtle. Eternally he will move in this process of advancement.

I have heard the teacher Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq comment on the prophet's words, 'My heart is in darkness, and I call seventy times a day for God's mercy.' He said that the prophet was eternally advancing in his *ḥāls*. When he advanced from one *ḥāl* to a *ḥāl* that was higher, he gained a vantage point on the *ḥāl* he had left behind, and, in relation to his new position, his former one was darkness. His *ḥāls* were eternally advancing.

- 3.1. Infinite are the possibilities in God of subtle and more subtle experience. If the truth of the truth which is God most high is glory, and if to arrive at Him in truth is impossible, then God's slave is eternally advancing in his *ḥāls*. There is no point which he can reach for which there is not within God's compass a higher possibility which God can bring him to. According to this insight is the Ṣūfī saying interpreted: 'The virtues of the pious are the sins of the advanced.' Junayd was asked about this and recited the following verse:

Transient lights, they gleam when they appear,
They tell of union, mysteries they make clear.

III On satisfaction (*riḍā*)

1. God says, *God is satisfied with them and they with Him* (Q 5/119).
2. 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Ahwāzī informed us, saying that Aḥmad ibn 'Ubayd al Baṣrī related to him from al-Karīmī, who said that Ya'qūb ibn Ismā'īl al-Sallāl related to him from Abū 'Āṣim al-'Abādānī, who had it from al-Faḍl ibn 'Isā al-Raqqāshī, from Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir, from Jābir, that the prophet of God said the following.

While the people of paradise were engaged in a discussion, there appeared to them at the gate of paradise a light. They raised their heads, and beheld the Lord looking down on them. 'People of paradise,' He said, 'ask of me anything.' 'We ask of you satisfaction with us.' 'My satisfaction has already settled you in my house, and given you my bounty. This is the time of its fulfilment, so ask again.' 'We ask you for more of the same.' They were brought stallions of red ruby with trappings of green emerald and red ruby. They rode on the stallions, who moved their hooves with the utmost grace. And God commanded trees laden with fruit. And maidens came, brown-eyed maidens, saying, 'We are soft, free of harshness; we are eternal, undying, partners to a people who are believers and noble.' And God commanded heaps of white musk, sweetly smelling, and it evoked in them a perfume which was called evocation. Finally the horses brought them to the Garden of Eden, which is the citadel of paradise. And the angels said, 'Lord, the people have arrived.' 'Welcome, righteous ones,' said the Lord, 'welcome, obedient ones.' And the veil for them was drawn aside and they looked upon God and enjoyed the light of the Merciful, so each saw not the other. Then He said, 'Escort them to their palaces, with gifts.' So they returned, and each saw the other. That, said the prophet, is the meaning of God's word, *Hospitality from a merciful, a generous [host]* (Q 41/32).

3. The Iraqis and the Khurasanis are in dispute on the question of *riḍā*, as to whether it is a *ḥāl* or a *maqām*. The people of Khurasan say that *riḍā* is one of the *maqāms* and that it comes at the end of *tawakkul* (reliance). The meaning of this is that it is to be interpreted as something accessible to God's slave through his own act of acquisition. As to the Iraqis, they say that *riḍā* is one of the *ḥāls*. It is not an acquisition by the worshipper; rather it is a gift that alights in the heart, like all the *ḥāls*.

The two views may be reconciled by asserting that the beginning of *riḍā* is an acquisition by the worshipper, and it is, at that stage, a *maqām*. But its end is a *ḥāl* and is not an acquisition.

4. The mystics have spoken much on *riḍā*, each one expressing his own situation and experience. They are varied in the manner of their expression, as they are diverse in their experience and share of *riḍā*. But the basic condition of knowledge, that which cannot be done without, is this, that he alone has *riḍā* who does not oppose God's decree.

I have heard the master Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq say that it is not *riḍā* merely that you should not feel that there is vicissitude, rather that you should not oppose God's predestinary decree. What is required of God's slave is that he should feel

riḍā in the divine decree in so far as he has been commanded so to feel. Not all that is by God's decree is required or permitted to evoke *riḍā* in God's slave: he should not feel *riḍā* at the sins of humans or the trials visited on the Muslims.

5. The sages have said that *riḍā* is God's high gateway, meaning that one who is honoured with *riḍā* has found the most generous welcome, has been honoured with the highest status.

I heard Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn (al-Sulamī) say that Abū Ja'far al-Rāzī related to him that al-'Abbās ibn Ḥamza related to him, that Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥawārī related to him that 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Zayd said that *riḍā* is God's high gateway and the paradise of this world.

6. Know that the slave can scarcely feel *riḍā* with God except after God feels *riḍā* with him, for God has said, *God is satisfied with them and they with Him* (Q 5/119).

I heard from the master Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq that a pupil said to his master, 'Can the slave know that God has *riḍā* with him?' 'No,' he replied. 'How can one know that, since his *riḍā* is of the invisible world?' 'But the saint knows,' said the pupil. 'How so?' 'If I find that my heart has *riḍā* with God, I know that He has *riḍā* with me.' 'You have spoken well, O my servant,' said the teacher.

7. The tale is told that Moses said, 'O my God, guide me to deeds that, when accomplished, will evoke in You *riḍā* with me.' 'You cannot bear that,' said the Lord. Moses fell prostrate before the Lord, beseeching him. So God spoke directly to him, 'O son of 'Imrān, My satisfaction (*riḍā*) lies in your satisfaction with My decree.'

The shaykh Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī told us that Abū Ja'far al-Rāzī said that al-'Abbās ibn Ḥamza related that Ibn Abī 'l-Ḥawārī related that he heard Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī say the following. When the slave forgets his own desires, he has acquired *riḍā*. I heard him say that he had heard al-Naṣrābādhi say, 'He who desires to attain the quality of *riḍā*, let him cling to that wherein God has placed His *riḍā*.'

8.5 Hujwīrī on drunkenness and sobriety

Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī was born in Ghazna and settled eventually in Lahore, where he wrote the *Kashf al-maḥjūb*. As his sole-surviving work, this is the main source of information about his life. The contents of the *Kashf al-maḥjūb* suggest that he was first and foremost a Šūfī, one who had also received a traditional scholastic education in theology. Hujwīrī's teacher in Šūfism was probably the relatively little-known Abū 'l-Faḍl al-Khuttalī, whom he describes as his role model on the Šūfī path. The *Kashf al-maḥjūb* also alludes to meetings with other Šūfī teachers, during travels in an area extending from Syria (where Khuttalī was based) to the Punjab. Hujwīrī died in Lahore where his shrine is today the most celebrated pilgrimage destination. The dates given traditionally for his death are 456/1063–4 and 464/1071.

The *Kashf al-maḥjūb* is the oldest surviving work of its kind written in Persian. Similar to Qushayrī's *Risāla*, it is a dual-generic work, covering both the *ṭabaqāt* (biography collection) and manual genres. While sections one and three are made up of thematic chapters, section two consists mostly of biographies. The biographies are grouped into chapters in an overall chronological pattern, from the companions of the prophet until Hujwīrī's own contemporaries, including Khuttalī. They are followed by an innovative chapter on contemporary Šūfis. This divides his contemporary Šūfis into twelve particular groups, by presenting what are mostly contentious issues related to Šūfism as their distinctive doctrines. It seems to be largely of Hujwīrī's own construction.

In this context, the *Ṭayfūriyya* (named after Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr al-Bastāmī, d. 261/865) and the *Junaydiyya* (named after Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Junayd, d. 297/910) are said to follow the doctrines of drunkenness (*sukr*) and sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) respectively. The relative merits of such approaches are presented in the specially devoted section, translated below, which is sandwiched between the brief accounts of each of these two groups. This lengthy discussion of an issue of debate is typical of Hujwīrī's method of presenting contentious topics, in that, despite making categorical statements in favour of one and in opposition to the other group, he none the less strives to accommodate both viewpoints. He achieves this ultimately by distinguishing between positive and negative types of both drunkenness and sobriety. This passage illustrates Hujwīrī's distinctive preference to present reasoned arguments, however inconsistent they may sometimes be, rather than to rely primarily on citing past authorities. It also reveals his overriding interest in the Šūfī theory of annihilation and subsistence in God, through his association of drunkenness and sobriety with those experiences. This passage also represents a key stage in the development of the belief that Abū Yazīd and Junayd represented opposite poles of Šūfism, for it is the first time that they are associated with doctrines of 'drunkenness' and 'sobriety', an association which would become firmly established in the later Šūfī tradition.

Further reading

- G. Böwering, 'Hojviri, Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Otmān,' *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.
 Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The biographical tradition in Sufism: the ṭabaqāt genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, Richmond 2001, chapter 5.
 — 'Getting drunk with Abū Yazīd or staying sober with Junayd: the creation of a popular typology of Sufism,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 66 (2003).
 R. A. Nicholson (trans.), *The Kashf al-mahjub: the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism*, Leiden/London 1911 (second edn 1936), republished as *The revelation of the mystery*, intro. Carl W. Ernst, Westport CT 1999. This translation is based on a single manuscript which appears to be deficient in significant parts of the work; this can be witnessed by comparing the translation presented here with its corresponding translation (pp. 184–8 of the 1936 second edition).
 Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian subcontinent*, Leiden 1980.

Source text

'Alī Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. V. Zhukovski, reprint Tehran 1993 (first published St Petersburg 1899), pp. 230–4.

Discussion of drunkenness and sobriety

1. You should know that 'drunkenness' (*sukr*) and 'rapture' (*ghalaba*) are expressions that those with knowledge of spiritual truths have used for the rapture experienced through love of God, while 'sobriety' (*ṣaḥw*) is an expression for attainment of the goal. They have discussed these issues extensively; one group reckons that sobriety is better than drunkenness, while another group disagrees, holding the view that drunkenness is better than sobriety.
2. Abū Yazīd (Baṣṭāmī) belongs to the second group. His followers say that sobriety causes the reinforcement and balance of human attributes which is the greatest of veils before God. Drunkenness causes the reduction of blemishes and human attributes, the loss of one's will and freedom to choose, as well as the annihilation of one's self-control for the sake of subsistence in a higher potentiality, one that exists inside one and in opposition to one's own human nature, and which is more perfect, advanced and complete than that.
 - 2.1. David was in the state of sobriety when God attributed His own action to His prophet, *David killed Goliath* (Q 2/252); Muṣṭafā (Muḥammad) was in the state of drunkenness when God attributed to Himself one of His prophet's actions, *You did not throw when you threw, but God threw* (Q 8/17). What a difference between the two slaves: the one who subsists in himself and is affirmed by his own attributes when it is said, 'You did it yourself as a miracle,' and the one who subsists in God, his own attributes having been annihilated, to whom it is said, 'We did what we did.' Thus the attribution of the servant's own action to God is better than the attribution of God's action to the servant, for if God's action is attributed

to the servant then he subsists in himself, while if the servant's action is attributed to God he subsists in God. When the servant subsists in himself it is like when David glanced at Ūriyā's wife when he shouldn't have and saw what he saw, while when the servant subsists in God it is like when Muṣṭafā glanced once at a woman like that, which was forbidden for men. This is because the former was in sobriety, while the latter was in drunkenness.

3. Those who prefer sobriety to drunkenness include Junayd. His followers say that drunkenness is a blemish since it causes a disturbance of one's state, the loss of soundness and reduction of self-control. The basis of all spiritual affairs is seeking, either by means of one's annihilation or one's subsistence, by one's effacement or one's affirmation, and if one's state lacks soundness there is no point to it because the hearts of the seekers of God must be stripped of all impressions. By blinding oneself one can never find release from the grip of worldly things, or escape their baneful effects. The reason why people remain pre-occupied with things other than God is that they fail to see them for what they are: if they saw them properly they would escape.
- 3.1. There are two types of correct vision: one is to see a thing with an eye to its subsistence and the other with an eye to its annihilation. If you behold with an eye to its subsistence you see that all things must be deficient in their subsistence for they do not subsist in themselves in their state of subsistence. If you behold with an eye to its annihilation you see that all existent things must be annihilated in God's subsistence. Both of these characteristics will turn you away from existent things, and that's why the prophet asked in his supplication, 'O God, show me things as they are' – whoever sees finds peace. This is also the meaning of God's words, *Consider well, those of you with discerning vision* (Q 59/2) – so long as one does not see, one does not become free. None of this can be achieved except in the state of sobriety, and the proponents of drunkenness do not have an inkling about it. For instance, Moses in drunkenness could not bear the revelation of one theophany and consequently lost his wits, while the messenger of God in a state of sobriety travelled from Mecca as far as 'two bows' length away' in the heart of a theophany, and each moment he became more aware and conscious:

Glass after glass I drank wine till I burst,
It neither made me drunk nor quenched my thirst!

4. My own shaykh, who was of the Junaydian school, used to say that drunkenness is the playground of children while sobriety is the place of the annihilation of men. I, 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Jullābī, say in agreement with my shaykh that the perfection of the state of the possessor of drunkenness is sobriety, and the least degree of sobriety provides vision of the deficiency of mankind. Therefore, a sobriety which highlights inadequacies is better than a drunkenness which is itself an inadequacy.

- 4.1. It is related that Abū 'Uthmān Maghribī in the beginning withdrew into the desert for twenty years, not hearing any human voice until his body had wasted away and his eyes had become as small as the eye of a needle, such that he no longer resembled a human. After the twenty years he was instructed to associate with people. He thought to himself that he should begin by associating with the devotees of God and those who live next to his house as this would be more blest. He headed for Mecca, where the shaykhs were made aware in their hearts that he would be arriving, and came out to welcome him. They found that he had transformed in appearance, hardly resembling a living creature anymore. They asked, 'Bū 'Uthmān, for twenty years you've lived in such a manner that Adam and his progeny are at a loss to understand your condition. Tell us why you went, what you saw, what you found and why you returned.' He answered, 'I went in drunkenness, I saw the harm caused by drunkenness, I found despair and I came back helpless.' The shaykhs all said, 'Bū 'Uthmān after you it is forbidden for anyone to talk about sobriety and drunkenness, for you have done the subject justice by showing the harm caused by drunkenness.'
- 4.2. Therefore drunkenness is simply to imagine that you have been annihilated while your attributes remain, thus representing a veil. However, sobriety is seeing your subsistence in God while your attributes are annihilated, which is the ultimate unveiling. In short, if someone asserts that drunkenness is closer to annihilation than sobriety this is absurd, because drunkenness is an attribute over and above sobriety; so long as the servant's attributes increase he remains clueless, but when they decrease the seekers can nurse hope for annihilation. This is the climax of their experience in drunkenness and sobriety.
5. The following story has been passed down about Abū Yazīd, which has been interpreted the wrong way around: Yaḥyā ibn Mu'ādh wrote a letter to him, asking, 'What do you say regarding someone who becomes drunk with one drop of the sea of love?' Bāyazīd wrote in response, 'What do you say regarding someone who, if all the oceans of the world were to become the wine of love, would drink them all and still scream out about being thirsty?'
 - 5.1. People assume that Yaḥyā has alluded to drunkenness and Bāyazīd to sobriety. The opposite is the case for the sober one is the one who cannot bear a drop, while the drunk is the one who, in drunkenness, drinks everything and still needs more, since drinking is the means of prolonging drunkenness. It is more fitting for like to pair with like. Sobriety is opposed to drunkenness; it is not compatible with drink.
6. Drunkenness is of two types, the first by the wine of affection and the second by the cup of love. The drunkenness of affection has a secondary cause for it is produced by vision of personal benefit. The drunkenness of love is without such a cause for it is produced by vision of God, the benefactor Himself. Therefore whoever sees the benefit, sees by means of Himself and therefore sees himself, while whoever sees the benefactor, sees through him and so does not see himself. Although the latter is in drunkenness, his drunkenness is [actually] sobriety.

7. Sobriety is also of two types: one is sobriety through heedlessness, and the other is the sobriety of love. A sobriety which is related to heedlessness is the greatest of veils, and a sobriety which is related to love is the clearest of unveilings. Therefore the one which is associated with heedlessness, although it is sobriety, it is actually drunkenness, while the one which is linked with love, although it is drunkenness it is actually a sobriety. When the foundation is firm then sobriety is like drunkenness and drunkenness like sobriety. When that foundation is missing they are both worthless.
8. In short, sobriety and drunkenness are in the path of men, caused by diversity. When the Sultan of Truth shows his beauty sobriety and drunkenness both appear to be intruders, since they are interconnected, the end of one representing the beginning of the other. Beginnings and ends exist only where there is separation, and those things which belong to separation are all judged equal. Union is the elimination of separations, regarding which the poet says,

When morning breaks above the star of potent wine
Sober and drunk shall stand as equals at that time.

9. In Sarakhs there were two Şūfī masters, Luqmān and Abū 'l-Faḍl Ḥasan. One day Luqmān approached Abū 'l-Faḍl and found him with a notebook in his hand, so he said, 'O Abū 'l-Faḍl, what are you seeking with a notebook?' He replied, 'The same thing you are seeking by abandoning notebooks!' Luqmān asked, 'So why are we at odds?' Abū 'l-Faḍl answered, 'You're the one who sees a dispute between us because you asked me what I was seeking! Sober up from this drunkenness and release yourself from sobriety, so that the dispute will disappear and you will come to know what it is that we are both seeking!'

8.6 Rūmī and the *Mathnawī*

Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī was born in 604/1207 in Balkh, in what is now northern Afghanistan. His father, Bahā' Walad, was a popular preacher and teacher of the religious sciences as well as a Šūfī, and Jalāl al-Dīn followed in his footsteps in each of these areas. Around 610/1213, the approach of the Mongols prompted Bahā' Walad to flee Balkh with his family. They eventually settled in Konya, in present-day Turkey, which is why Jalāl al-Dīn, who spent most of the remainder of his life there, became known as Rūmī ('of the West'). In 642/1244, a wandering mystic from Tabriz called Shams al-Dīn arrived in Konya and started a much celebrated teacher-student relationship with Rūmī which changed the course of his life. From dry scholarship and pious exhortations, Rūmī was inspired by Shams al-Dīn to write volumes of mystical poetry. Rūmī's intense relationship with Shams aroused jealousy and suspicion among his own students, and consequently, within a couple of years of arriving in Konya, Shams finally left without a trace.

Although he wrote a number of important prose works as well, Rūmī is best known for his poetry: the collection of thousands of ghazals, quatrains and other short pieces, which he entitled the *Dīwān-i Shams-i Tabrīz*, and his six-volume didactic work, the *Mathnawī*, which contains over 25,000 couplets in total. (Rūmī dedicated his own *Dīwān* of poetry to Shams-i Tabrīz as a gesture of his own annihilation in the love of his inspiring mentor.)

The *Mathnawī* was written during the 660s/1260s at the request of Rūmī's disciple Ḥosām al-Dīn Chalabī. The title of this work is the generic name for its verse form, the *mathnawī*, or couplets following the rhyme pattern *aabbccdd* and so on. Before Rūmī, the Persian poets Sanā'ī and 'Aṭṭār had established the *mathnawī* as an effective form in which to write didactic Šūfī poetry, but Rūmī's work is considered the supreme example.

Like other mystical *mathnawīs*, it consists mostly of stories that serve to illustrate the specific teachings of Šūfism. Not having a frame-narrative, they appear to be held together relatively loosely without any obvious principle of order. The characters of Rūmī's stories, which are mostly based on those recounted in earlier written sources, range from prophets and kings to shepherds and slaves, and often animals also feature. Rūmī is renowned for his ability to expound and illustrate mystical doctrines through the description of everyday situations. His *Mathnawī* is also distinctive for the frequency with which he breaks off from narratives in order to comment on, or expand, a specific point – often at great length and through further, shorter narratives – suggesting that for him the importance of the message far outweighed stylistic concerns.

While it has been described as 'the Qur'ān in Persian' by the fifteenth-century Šūfī poet 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, the *Mathnawī* has also been influential on Turkish literature and culture, since most of Rūmī's successors in the Mevlevī Šūfī order came from the region where he settled rather than his homeland. Rūmī died in 1272 in Konya, where his shrine today is one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the whole Islamic world. His successors named their order 'Mevlevī' after him, for they referred to him as Mevlana, 'Our master', but they are better known in the West today as the 'whirling dervishes' because of the unique form of dance which they perform for worship.

The translations offered here include the famous first eighteen couplets, which Rūmī is said to have composed before being asked to write a *mathnawī* work, two narratives, describing the early Şūfī Bāyazīd (Abū Yazīd) Basṭāmī encountering a poor old Şūfī shaykh and Moses encountering a simple shepherd, respectively. Also included is a passage on the necessity of following a guide on the Şūfī path, which refers to the archetypal teacher–student relationships between Muḥammad and ‘Alī, and between Khidr and Moses, to which the relationship between Shams-i Tabrīz and Rūmī would be added in the later Şūfī tradition.

Further reading

Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: past and present, east and west*, Oxford 2000.

R. A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalāl’uddin Rumi*, London 1925.

Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book 1*, trans. Jawid Mojaddedi, Oxford World’s Classics Series, Oxford forthcoming.

Annemarie Schimmel, *The triumphal sun: a study of the works of Jalāl’uddin Rumi*, second edition, Albany NY 1993.

Source text

Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, *The Mathnawī of Jalāl’uddin Rumi*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, London 1925, Persian text vol. 1, vv. 1–18 (part I); vol. 1, vv. 2943–80 (part II); vol. 2, vv. 1720–96 (part III); and vol. 2, vv. 2218–51 (part IV). This is still the most readily accessible edition and offers the advantage of a line-by-line literal prose translation to refer to, not to mention extensive commentary for books 1 to 4. The translations offered here employ rhyme and metre in order to convey the musicality and pithy, aphoristic form of the Persian original, through an equivalent English verse form, heroic couplets. Earlier versions have appeared in a different format in the journal *Sufi* (2000–2).

I The song of the reed

Now listen to this reed-flute’s sad lament
 About the heartache being apart has meant:
 ‘Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me
 My song’s expressed each human’s agony,
 A breast which separation split in two
 Provides the breath to share this pain with you:
 Those kept apart from their own origin
 All long to go back to rejoin their kin;
 Amongst the crowd to mourn alone’s my fate,
 With good and bad I’ve learnt to integrate,
 That we were friends each one was satisfied,
 But none sought out my secrets from inside:
 My deepest secret’s in this song I wail,

But eyes and ears can't penetrate the veil:
 Body and soul are joined to form one whole,
 But no one is allowed to see the soul.'
 It's fire not air the reed-flute's mournful cry,
 If you don't have this fire then you should die!
 The fire of love is what makes reed-flutes pine,
 Love's fervour thus gives potency to wine;
 The reed consoles those forced to be apart,
 Its melodies will open up your heart,
 Where's antidote or poison like its song
 Or confidant, or one who's pined so long?
 This reed relates a tortuous path ahead,
 Recounts the love with which Majnūn's heart bled:
 The few who hear the truths the reed has sung
 Have lost their wits so they can speak this tongue;
 The day is wasted if it's spent in grief,
 Consumed by burning aches without relief,
 Good times have long passed, but we couldn't care
 If you're with us our friend beyond compare!
 While ordinary men on drops can thrive
 A fish needs oceans daily to survive:
 The way the ripe must feel the raw can't tell,
 My speech must be concise, and so farewell!

II *The Ṣūfī guide*

Follow the journey's guide, don't go alone,
 The path is filled with trials that chill the bone!
 Even on routes which numerous times you've used
 Without a guide you're hopelessly confused,
 Beware now of this path you've not yet tried!
 Don't go alone, keep focused on your guide!
 If you're not safe in his protective shade
 The ghoul's deep wails will leave you stunned, afraid,
 Diverting you straight into further harm,
 Much shrewder men than you could not keep calm;
 Heed the Qur'ān on those who went astray
 And how the wicked Satan made them pay:
 He lured them all a thousand miles from here,
 Reducing them to nakedness and fear.
 Look at their bones and hair, and now take heed,
 Don't be an ass, don't let your passions lead!
 Grab hold of its thick neck and pull it back
 Away from lust towards the guide's own track,
 If left alone this donkey's bound to stray
 Towards the field with golden mounds of hay,
 Don't you forget to hold with force its leash,

Or it will bolt for miles to find hashish!
 A donkey stoned – what greater enemy!
 That donkey's ruined countless, can't you see?
 If you're unsure of what's correct, just do
 The opposite of what it wants to do,
 'Consult them, then do just the opposite!
 Or else you'll always be regretting it.'
 Don't ever tolerate your carnal lust,
They'll lead you off the path, betray your trust, (Q 38/26)
 While nothing conquers passion better than
 The company of fellow travellers can:
 The prophet summoned 'Alī to his side,
 'Hey, lion of God, brave hero of my pride,
 Don't count on courage on its own to cope,
 Take refuge also in the tree of hope:
 Enter the realm of that pure intellect
 Whom no opponent can from truth deflect.
 Just like Mount Qāf, he reaches to the sky
 His spirit like the Simorgh soars so high,
 We could continue with this man's applause
 Until the end of time without a pause,
 He is the sun, though human to our sight,
 Please understand that "God knows best what's right."
 'Alī, in preference to all pious deeds
 Follow the one whom God's direction leads,
 Others persist with acts of piety,
 Hoping to flee their egos' tyranny,
 Take refuge here instead with this true guide,
 Just leave the hidden enemy aside!
 Of all the acts of worship it's the best,
 It makes you far superior to the rest.'
 If he accepts, surrender to the guide
 Like Moses, who with Khidr once had tried,
 Stay calm, don't question what he should commit,
 So he won't say, *Enough, Now we must split!* (Q 18/8)
 If he destroys their boat, don't you go wild,
 Don't tear your hair out if he kills a child!
 Since God has said this man's hand's like his own,
 And, *Up above their hands rests God's alone*, (Q 48/15)
 With God's own hand he slays the helpless boy,
 To bring him back with new, eternal joy;
 The few who tried this journey on their own
 The guide still helped, they didn't walk alone:
 His helping hand's for all across the land,
 It has to be then naught but God's own hand,
 If he can stretch his help out far and wide
 There's even more for those stood by his side,
 If absent ones receive such gifts for naught

Imagine what those present shall be brought,
 You can't compare his faithful followers
 With those who choose to be mere onlookers;
 Don't be too delicate when he's around,
 As weak as water, crumbly like the ground,
 If each blow leaves you bitter don't expect
 Without pain like a mirror to reflect.

III Moses and the shepherd

Once Moses overheard a shepherd pray:
 'O you whose every whim we all obey,
 Where do you live that I might meet you there
 To mend your battered shoes and comb your hair,
 To wash your clothes and kill the lice and fleas,
 To serve you milk to sip from when you please,
 To kiss your little hand, to rub your feet,
 To sweep your bedroom clean and keep it neat?
 I'd sacrifice my herd of goats for you,
 This loud commotion proves my love is true.'
 He carried on in this deluded way,
 So Moses asked, 'What's that I hear you say?'
 'I speak to my creator there on high,
 The one who also made the earth and sky.'
 Moses replied, 'You've truly lost your way,
 You've given up the faith and gone astray,
 It's gibberish and babble stupid twit,
 You'd better learn to put a cork in it!
 Your blasphemy pollutes the atmosphere
 And tears to shreds that silk of faith so sheer,
 While socks and shoes might be superb for you
 How can they fit the sun, have you a clue?
 If you don't shut your mouth immediately
 A fire will burn up all humanity.
 You don't believe? Then please explain this smoke,
 And why your soul turned black when you just spoke!
 If you're aware that He is God, our Lord,
 Why act familiar when that is abhorred?
 Friendship like this is worse than enmity,
 The Lord's above such acts of piety,
 For family friends reserve your generous deeds,
 God has no body, nor material needs:
 Milk is for babies, who must drink to grow,
 And shoes for those with feet, as you must know;
 Even when you address his chosen slave
 Select your words with care, don't misbehave,
 Since God has said, "I'm him and he is Me.

'When I was ill you never came to see':
 He wasn't left alone with his disease
 That servant who 'through Me both hears and sees'.
 Don't talk to saints without the reverence due
 It blocks your heart, and blots your record too;
 If you address a man by Fāṭima's name
 Though man and woman are inside the same
 He'll still seek vengeance for it, if he can,
 Even if he's a calm and patient man,
 That glorious name which women all revere
 Can wound a man more deeply than a spear;
 While feet and hands are great for you and me
 They'd just contaminate God's purity,
He was not born, nor does the Lord beget, (Q 112/3)
 But reproducing beings are in his debt:
 Those with a body once were born – that's sense,
 Creation must stay this side of the fence,
 That's all because we wither and decay,
 Unlike our source we're bound to fade away.'
 The shepherd said, 'Your words have struck me dumb,
 Regret now burns my soul, and I feel numb.'
 He breathed a heavy sigh and rent his cloak,
 Then in the desert disappeared like smoke.
 A revelation came down instantly:
 'Why did you turn a slave away from Me?
 Your mission's to unite all far and wide,
 Is it instead your preference to divide?
 As far as possible don't separate,
 "Above all else divorce is what I hate",
 I've given each one his own special ways
 And his unique expressions when he prays:
 One person's virtue is another's sin,
 His meat might seem like poison, listening in;
 I stand immune to all impurity,
 Men's pride and cunning never bother Me,
 I don't command for My own benefit,
 But so My slaves themselves can gain from it;
 For Indians their own dialect seems best,
 But folk from Sindh think Sindhi's much more blest,
 I'm not made any purer by their praise,
 Their own impurities these prayers erase,
 And I pay no attention to their speech
 But their intention and the heights they reach:
 Pure, humble hearts within are what I seek
 Regardless of the haughty way they speak.'
 The heart's the essence, words are mere effects,
 The heart's what counts, the cackle he neglects!
 I'm tired of fancy terms and metaphors,

I want a soul which burns so much it roars!
 It's time to light one's heart with pure desire,
 Burn thought and contemplation with this fire!
 How far apart the meek and well-behaved
 From ardent lovers who may seem depraved!
 Each moment lovers burn themselves away:
 A ruined village has no tithes to pay,
 Don't pick at faults and call him a disgrace,
 Don't wash the blood upon love's martyr's face!
 His blood exceeds your water's cleanliness:
 This martyr's blemish beats all righteousness;
 Those at the Ka'ba scrap the *qibla* rule:
 What use are boots to divers in the pool?
 You don't seek guidance from those drunken men,
 So why insist they mend their rags again?
 The lovers stand beyond religion's hold,
 From God himself truth's creed and laws they're told:
 If rubies have no seal stamped there's no harm,
 Midst seas of grief love stays serene and calm.
 Then in the depths of Moses God concealed
 Such secrets that can never be revealed,
 Into his heart poured words, pure and refined,
 Transparent just like speech and sight combined,
 He lost his wits and then found them anew,
 From pre- to post-eternity he flew,
 I'd just waste time by trying to explain,
 It's far beyond the ordinary brain:
 This mystery would blow your brain to bits,
 While writing it the firmest pencil splits;
 Moses, on hearing God's reproach, just ran
 Towards the desert searching for that man:
 He followed footprints that the shepherd laid,
 Scattering dust throughout the track he'd made,
 Footprints of drunkards are a special kind
 Distinct from those the sober leave behind:
 He starts just like a rook, steps straight ahead,
 Then bishop-like diagonally instead,
 Sometimes just like a wave's crest rising high
 And then as if a fish has slithered by,
 Occasionally he'd write his thoughts in sand
 Like fortune-tellers reading what is planned,
 At last when Moses found the shepherd there
 He gave the message, 'God's decree is fair,
 Don't bother with mere custom anymore
 But let your heart express what's in its core!
 True faith salutes your infidelity,
 Through you the world has found security,
 Absolved by God *whose will must be fulfilled*

(Q 14/27)

Scream out, without the fear that you'll be killed!
 The shepherd said, 'I've gone beyond that stage,
 My heart's blood cannot still this thirst assuage,
 I've even passed that tree at heaven's end
 A thousand spheres beyond – I still ascend:
 You cracked the whip and made my stallion vault
 Above the heavens with a somersault!
 For spurring me towards divinity
 God bless that hand which cracked the whip for me!
 Right now my state's beyond what tongues can say,
 What I've described gives just a glimpse away.'
 The image in the mirror that you see
 Is yours, and not the mirror's property,
 The breath inside the reed its player has blown
 Is just a tiny portion of his own,
 Whenever you give praise to God, beware
 It's worth no more than this poor shepherd's prayer!
 You might suppose your own immaculate,
 But still for God they're all inadequate,
 So when the veil is lifted don't protest:
 'What's now revealed we never could have guessed!'

IV The pilgrimage of Bāyazīd

For Mecca Bāyazīd one day set out
 To make the pilgrimage, to be devout,
 At every town he passed along the way
 He'd seek what local sages had to say:
 He'd wander asking, 'Who here has the light?
 Who only leans on truth's supporting might?'
 God said, 'When on your travels always seek
 The few who take from Me each word they speak!'

Seek treasure, shun the world of gain and loss,
 This world is second-best, no more than dross!
 In hope of wheat whoever sows his seeds
 Soon finds his field has also sprouted weeds,
 But if it's weeds you sow no wheat will rise,
 Seek masters of the heart, the meek and wise!
 Head for the Ka'ba when it's time to go
 And you'll see Mecca too, as all must know:
 God was, on his *mīrāj*, the prophet's aim,
 He saw the throne and angels all the same.
 A new disciple built a house one day,
 The master passed and saw it on his way,
 He questioned the disciple as a test,
 Knowing that his intentions were the best:
 'Why did you put a window over here?'

'To let the light come in to make things clear.'
 'That's secondary, it's not like breathing air,
 Your primary need's to hear the call to prayer!'

While travelling Bāyazīd searched far and wide
 To find his epoch's Khidr, the perfect guide,
 He found him like a crescent hunched and pale,
 Majestic, speaking just like those we hail,
 His heart like sunshine though his eyes were blind
 Like elephants seeing India in their mind:
 Countless delights are seen with eyes shut tight,
 But when they're opened none are seen in light!
 While you're asleep the mysteries are shown
 Your heart's a window viewing the unknown,
 The mystic even dreams when wide awake,
 Prostrate and feel the ground beneath him shake!
 So Bāyazīd then asked him, 'How are you?'
 The man was poor and had a family too,
 'O Bāyazīd, why did you take this road?
 Where is it that you're carrying that load?'

'To *hajj*, since day-break I've been travelling.'
 'For your expenses how much did you bring?'
 'Two hundred silver coins is all I've got,
 I've tied them to this garment with a knot.'
 'Just walk around me seven times right here,
 That's better than the *hajj* for you, fakir!
 Then hand your coins to me, you generous man,
 Complete your *hajj*, fulfil your mission's plan!
 You've run to Ṣafā, entered purity,
 You've done the *'umra*, live eternally!
 He judges me much loftier, I swear,
 Than that mere house of bricks they flock to there:
 That Ka'ba is the home of piety,
 But I possess his deepest mystery,
 Inside the Ka'ba no one's ever stepped
 And none but God will my pure heart accept,
 When you've seen me, you've seen the lord as well,
 Truth's Ka'ba you've just circled, can't you tell?
 To serve me is obeying God's decree
 So don't suppose he's separate from me:
 Open your inner eye, see if you can
 Perceive the light of God inside a man!'

This wisdom pierced right into Bāyazīd,
 Just like an earring, making him take heed,
 For he had heard such wisdom from this friend
 Enabling him to reach the journey's end.

8.7 Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī on the path to union

Sayyid Nūr al-Dīn b. 'Abd Allāh Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī (730/1330–834/1430) was born in Aleppo, but spent most of his life in Persia, where he founded the Şūfī order named after him, the Ni'mat Allāhiyya. Shāh Ni'mat Allāh's teacher in Şūfism was the Yemenite shaykh 'Abd Allāh Yāfi'ī (d. 768/1367). After succeeding Yāfi'ī and travelling widely, Shāh Ni'mat Allāh first settled in Transoxiana, where he quickly attracted a large following. However, the fame that he acquired resulted in his expulsion by Tamerlane, most likely on the advice of the Şūfis in his entourage who belonged to the rival Naqshbandī order. After further travels, Shāh Ni'mat Allāh finally settled in the area of Kerman, in south-eastern Persia. His magnificent tomb in Mahan, just outside the city of Kerman, was built on the orders of the Bahmanid sultan Aḥmad Shāh, who had invited him to the Deccan. Shāh Ni'mat Allāh's son and successor, Shāh Khalīl Allāh, took up this invitation, and thus his successors all came to be based in the Deccan for some 250 years, until the order returned to its native Persia.

Shāh Ni'mat Allāh was himself a Sunnī, although, like the majority of Şūfis, he also expressed a deep reverence for the family of the prophet, attributed to the twelve Imāms a special role in the path to sainthood (*wilāya*) and considered affiliation with regards to the law (*sharī'a*) as secondary to affiliation in the Şūfī path (*ṭarīqa*). The Ni'mat Allāhī order has thus functioned in the context of both Sunnism and Shī'ism in Persia (before and after the Safavid dynasty). More recently, they have experienced an unprecedented revival in the secular Iran of the mid to late twentieth century, followed by a rapid spread to North America and Europe.

Shāh Ni'mat Allāh was a prolific writer of both prose and poetry. His surviving works reveal that he was heavily influenced by the Şūfī belief in the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) as propounded by the followers of Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), on whose *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* Shāh Ni'mat Allāh wrote his own commentary. His poetry strikes the reader as focusing on a combination of the theme of divine love prevalent in the poetry of Rūmī and the theme of the unity of being associated with Ibn al-'Arabī.

The following three passages are taken from the 'treatises' (*rasā'il*) of Shāh Ni'mat Allāh. Ranging from brief comments to lengthy discussions, these writings mostly consist of balanced rhyming clauses of poetic prose, frequently supported by verse. These three passages describe the Şūfī path to union through detachment, divine love and poverty, all of which are central themes in the Persian Şūfī writings of this period. It is clear that Shāh Ni'mat Allāh's treatment of them is based on the principle that God is Absolute Being, while everything else is His manifestation. Shāh Ni'mat Allāh's clear and succinct expositions shed light on a number of subtle paradoxes, such as the status of a Şūfī who utters statements like 'I am the Truth.'

Further reading

Hamid Algar, 'Ni'mat-Allāhiyya 1. The founder and the development of his order,' *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition.

Jean Aubin, *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shah Ni'matullāh Wali Kirmani*, Tehran and Paris 1983.

Terry Graham, 'Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī: founder of the Ni'matullāhī Šūfī order,' in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *The legacy of medieval Persian Sufism*, London and New York 1992, pp. 173–90.

Source text

Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Walī, *Rasā'ilhā*, ed. J. Nūrbakhsh, Tehran 1976, vol. 1, pp. 134–7 (part I), 167–70 (part II) and 208–15 (part III).

I Guidance for seekers

1. You must know that when the attachments and obstacles of created things are present the Sultan behind the curtain of the royal tent will not reveal the truths of His essence, behind the fine veil of His attributes and the subtle highlands of His acts, for the beggars in the lowlands of His effects, and that love of the futile is incompatible with love of God. Turn away from every changing thing until you find Him in all manifestations.
2. So turn away from everything and find thus what you seek.
Once you've abandoned everything He'll then reveal a cheek.

Necessarily, the seeker of God must turn away from futile essences, accidents and desires, and resolve to follow the path of love towards the Lord, not letting the dust of enjoyment of perceptibles, nor the dust of attachment, enter through the window of his senses, and not letting the dust of the oratory of his own existence rise up either, for the nurturing of blameworthy qualities and the strengthening of the commanding self is caused by all of that. The commands of the commanding self to commit hypocrisy seek authority without being entitled to it.

The mystical wayfarer must follow *Say, If you love God follow me so God may love you* (Q 3/31), and turn the commanding self from something that gives commands to something that follows them, and fulfil the order to *All of you turn to God* (Q 24/31) from the barren plains of egotistic ignorance and the deserts of bestial delusion – *They are like cattle, only worse* (Q 7/179) – and return in peace to the nearness to God possessed by mankind – *We have honoured the sons of Adam* (Q 17/70).

3. At this stage he's a regular renunciant.
He's an ascetic who still suffers greed and want.

The essence of asceticism is to renounce voluntarily both this world and the hereafter. As it has been said, 'Asceticism for those other than the mystic is a mere transaction: they buy the goods of the hereafter with the goods of this world. For the mystic it is to transcend what preoccupies his inner being from God and to rise above everything that is other than God.' So it is necessary to advance and not to stay fixed in the station of asceticism more than this, for the devil's whispering to one's soul is not cut off by sensual deprivation and the removal of greed.

This is the rank of the beginners, friend,
But those who don't know think that it's the end.

4. The others are like that, but the purest are like this:

By day and by night, hidden and in the open, they strive to acquire noble characteristics, and, through the love of the drunkenness from witnessing the truth, they drink the wine of religious devotions from the goblet of spiritual exertion; they are preoccupied with cleansing and purifying their heart and soul, and, to the soothing melody of 'Love is what lasts, and any love which fades is not real love' in the tune of 'My sickness, and my cure!' they sing this song:

Pain you inflict's the cure of those in agony
And those who feel need and direct to you their plea.

- 4.1. These men of vision, who are the title-page of the scroll of detachment and the sermon in the exordium of the book of unicity, are drawn by the attraction of 'One of God's attractions to which the actions of men and jinn correspond.' They are the supreme truths in the world and the fulfilment of the essence of man, embellished outwardly with their fine conduct and adorned inwardly through their efforts on the mystical path. They have broken off from the futile to join with God, and like me they have flung off their shoulders the cloak of hypocrisy of humanity, to plunge like a drop into the sea of effacement in God; they have become annihilated from human characteristics and, by the decree of 'You were created with God's characteristics,' they have attained subsistence in divine attributes.

Subsistent in God after self-annihilation
He is the glass, the wine, the server and companion.

- 4.2. So understand this, and avoid making a mistaken assumption, like a bat that flies away from the nest of certainty and confirmation to the realm of doubt and rejection, by claiming that he is saying that he is God. He is the slave of God; he is separate from creation and for God his name is 'Abd Allāh ('slave of God'), as God has said concerning the reality of his messenger, *Yet when the slave of God stands up . . .* (Q 72/19),

Nī'mat Allāh's rank is precisely this,
By God, it is a station of sheer bliss!

II On poverty

1. The messenger of God said, 'The *sharī'a* is my words, the mystic path is my actions, the truth is my state, gnosis is my capital, intellect is my faith, love is my foundation, yearning is my vehicle, fear is my comrade, knowledge is my weapon, clemency is my companion, trust is my garment, contentment is my treasure, sincerity is my rank, certainty is my refuge, and poverty is my pride; I pride myself in it above all other achievements.' He also said, 'Poverty is to be black-faced in both worlds,' and 'Poverty almost reaches the point of being infidelity.'
2. Scholars have commented about each one of these sayings. Those who assert Divine unity (*muwahhidān*) have also made allusions to them. The summary of all this is that real poverty is the non-existence of ownership; therefore, whenever a poor man reaches the point where he has absolutely no possessions left whatsoever, he has attained to true poverty and to the point of excelling other existents in this, for when the messenger of God said that poverty is pride he did not mean merely superficial poverty. In Mecca there were many people who were poor according to their appearance, but were not completely lacking possessions.
 - 2.1. The meaning of 'non-existence of ownership' is that the poor man has nothing that can be attributed to himself as a possession, to the extent that he becomes annihilated from himself, such that, 'The poor man does not need anything and nothing needs him.' This is the station of pure unity and absolute oneness, notwithstanding the fact that unity becomes confirmed each time an excess is shed, for 'Unity is the shedding of excesses.' This is the reason why it has been said, 'When poverty is perfected there is only God left.'
3. If we examine the saying, 'Poverty is to be black-faced in both worlds,' in this context what is meant by 'black' is the annihilation of the mystic wayfarer in both worlds, this world and the hereafter. This is because black is darkness, and wherever it is used it has the meaning of non-existence and annihilation, since God has said, *God is the patron of those who believe; He takes them out of darkness into light. The patrons of those who disbelieve are false deities; they take them out of light into darkness* (Q 2/257).
 - 3.1. Therefore, the meaning of true poverty is this, for true poverty cannot be established except through the annihilation of the mystic wayfarer in both worlds; this is the non-existence of ownership and the shedding of excesses, and all that has been attributed to him is shed from his own being and its dependencies, so that he has no possessions left at all. There is no doubt now that he is poor, and so he has attained to the rank of poverty, becoming 'white-faced' in this world and the hereafter. God has said, *Illustrious in this world and the hereafter and one of those who are brought near* (Q 3/45). Whoever has not attained these aforementioned characteristics and claims to have poverty is black-faced in this world and the hereafter. God said, *Those of you whose faces have been blackened – did*

you disbelieve after having believed? Then taste the punishment for having disbelieved!' (Q 3/106).

4. The saying, 'Poverty almost reaches the point of being infidelity,' means in essence that this kind of poverty gets close to infidelity. That is, since the end of true poverty is the non-existence of ownership and the shedding of excesses which have been attached to oneself, then nothing remains apart from the pure being of the one essence, for that is God's being. This compels the individual to say, 'Glory be to me! How glorious my station is!' and 'There is nothing inside my robe apart from God,' and 'I am the Truth.'

- 4.1 It is clear that in the *sharī'a*, on the basis of its outward form, it is infidelity, although in the *ṭarīqa* (mystic path) and the *ḥaqīqa* (truth-reality) it is true. We refer to their report, 'If something exceeds its limit, then its opposite is reflected.' Up to this point my speech has been a secret.

The strong expression travels rapidly
I fear the reins will slip away from me

For the wise man the allusion suffices.

5. Since the end of poverty is the beginning of divinity and lordship, it is not the cause of infidelity. However, if the mystic wayfarer has attained perfection he knows that removing from view the existence of others and eliminating superficial possessions will not cause the attainment of divinity and the permanence of lordship and wealth, but rather it will cause his needlessness and withdrawal to last, and he will abide in the station of pure unity and absolute oneness. This is what is meant by poverty by the people of God. God knows what is correct, and it is to him that we return.

III *Treatise on love*

1. God said, *Say, If you love God follow me so God may love you* (Q 3/31). In the Torah it states, 'Sons of Adam, I truly am your lover, so you owe it to me to be my lover.' The messenger of God said, 'God is beautiful and He loves beauty.'

Love is a station with divinity
Love is much better than mere royalty.

2. This glorious station has four names:

The first is *ḥubb*, so listen as you should
From the beloved to what sounds so good.

- 2.1 The sign of *ḥubb* is that the heart of the lover is free of the impurity of contingents and desires, and the lover must seek the beloved from the beloved and not look for anything else.

I speak these sweet words from the one I love,
 Share secrets like companions in the cave;
 If you seek the beloved from himself
 You’ll know the one whose perfect form I crave.

- 2.2 The next name is *wadd*, which is the demonstration of love: a thing of beauty is called the demonstration of love (*wadūd*) because it has been established on earth.

In love *wadūd* is very necessary
 For the beloved gave such a decree.

God said, *The Merciful will give them wadd* (Q 9/96), meaning steadfastness in love to the hearts of his servants. This is the meaning of *wadd*.

- 2.3. The third is *‘ishq*, which is overflowing love. God said, *Those who believe love God intensely* (Q 2/165).

Love came and then the brain packed up and left.
 It broke that vow that it had made and left.
 When he saw that the king had entered drunk,
 His poor old servant jumped straight up and left.

- 2.3.1. With the appearance of the light of the sun of jealousy of what is other than the burning of *‘ishq*, the lamp of the intellect loses its own light. When the power of the sultan of love seizes the throne of the royal court of the existence of the lover, with the sword of jealousy it annihilates everything else.

The fire of His fierce jealousy lights up
 And with one breath burns other things all up.
 ‘For others in this realm there is no space’ –
 He taught this Arabic through His pure grace.

- 2.3.2. *‘Ishq* is a pain which you can’t know about unless you feel it, and if you read this *Treatise on Love* of mine with your intellect alone, you cannot understand. The term *‘ishq* is derived from the noun *‘ashaqa* [a vine which kills the tree it grows around], so whenever it grows around the tree of the existence of the lover,

It seizes him from his feet to his head.
 That tree collapses when it’s finally dead.

- 2.3.3. Since overflowing and excessiveness cannot be part of God’s eternal attributes and *‘ishq* is excessive love according to experience, if you have experienced it that is, the terms *‘ishq* and *‘āshiq* do not apply to God.

2.3.4. When the water of life of love flows in all the rivers of the spiritual forces and the streams of the bodily parts of the lover, and the fountain-head of being leads him to the crashings of the torrent of *ḥubb* in the seas of love,

To us he is one of the lovers now,
Immersed within the vast and boundless sea.
With love of the beloved in his heart,
Like soul in body flowing endlessly.

Any sound he hears, he hears from the beloved; any words he utters, he takes from the beloved; and in everything that he looks at he sees the beloved, and he seeks the beloved from the beloved.

Bravo! This love is so superb and sweet.
If you have it, come here so we can meet!

2.3.5. When the blood flowing in the veins of Zulaykha boiled and her heart screamed, in order to hold back depravity she began to bleed; each drop of blood which dripped on the tablet of the ground at that moment joined together to form the name of Joseph on that spot.

When you have smeared your own blood by his door
It's 'Joseph' that your heart writes on the floor.

- 2.4. The fourth term used for love's *hawā*, my friend,
Something that's sweeter who can comprehend!

Hawā leads to the effacement of the will of the lover in the beloved, and the relationship with the beloved overwhelms at first whatever is in his heart.

Whoever should possess such a *hawā*
Has in his heart our very own *hawā*.

3. The cause of love is either beauty or beneficence. If it is beauty: 'God is beautiful and loves beauty.' If beneficence: 'Beneficence is not perfected except by God, and there is no beneficent one but God.'

The path of love is one that leads this way,
For love of Him you'll love the world today

4. On the evidence of 'The slave does not cease to approach me with supererogatory acts until I love him . . .', supererogatory acts are a cause of love, and supererogatory acts are an excess. The forms in the world are an excess in relation to being: supererogatory acts are loved by the beloved of God, just as the forms of the world are loved by God, the eternal beloved. The jealousy of the eternal beloved necessitates that he not love anything other than Himself, so consequently the reward is 'And when I love him I am the hearing with which he hears and the sight with which he sees.' My sight and hearing he bestows.