

## 1—

### FOUNDATIONS:

#### PROPHETIC REVELATION

The House of Islam rests on the threefold foundation of a sacred scripture, the prophetic sayings of Muhammad, and a sophisticated tradition of exegesis, or interpretation of the sacred texts. All aspects of Islamic faith and practice begin with the sacred scripture, the Qur'an ("recitation"), understood as the literal word of God revealed directly to Muhammad and, through him, to the community. Texts of two complete suras, or chapters, of the Qur'an, ar-Rahman (55, The Merciful) and Yusuf (12, Joseph), appear here in new translations.

Muslims regard Muhammad's own words and deeds as wholly distinct from those of the Qur'an and preserved in a large body of literature known as Hadith. They consider both Qur'an and Hadith to be divinely revealed; the major theological distinction is that although the content of the Hadith is ultimately from God, the precise words are those of Muhammad. A second major category of Hadith comprises sayings attributed to God but still considered distinct from the Qur'an. These "sacred hadith" appear almost exclusively in the context of Muhammad's sayings; for example: Muhammad is reported to have said that God said. . . . This chapter offers a small sample of hadith of both types; subsequent texts in this and later chapters include many more examples, including several hadith attributed to Shi'i Imams.

Muhammad's sayings provide a wealth of material helpful in the interpretation of scripture. The third section of this chapter offers two types of exegetical literature that make extensive use of prophetic traditions. Three different interpretations of Sura 1, Al-Fatiha, provide the entire text of a chapter, along with examples of different approaches to its interpretation. Then two of Islam's most influential religious scholars, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328), analyze the principles behind the two major exegetical types, the relatively straightforward *tafsir* and the often esoteric *ta'wil*. Visual illustrations will focus on three themes: styles of calligraphy, sacred text in inscriptions on architecture generally, and epigraphy on the unique visual focus called the *mihrab*, or niche.

#### Texts from the Qur'an

The Qur'an's 114 chapters (suras) offer a wide array of literary styles, lengths, tones, themes, and textures. Some of the earliest suras, dating from the first years of Muhammad's public

ministry (610–615), are only a few verses in length—Sura 112, for instance: "Say: He, God, is one; God is everlasting; he does not beget and he is not begotten, and there is none like him"; or Sura 110: "When the help of God and victory arrive, and you see humankind entering God's religion in throngs, then break forth with praise of your Lord and seek his forgiveness, for he is ever turning back [to forgive]." After the community left Mecca for Medina in 622, the qur'anic texts gradually shifted in style and tone from more poetic and exhortatory to more prosaic, and in content from pedagogical narrative and apocalyptic imagery to regulatory and practical instruction.

The two complete suras that follow represent the early and later Meccan periods; both are particularly suitable for recitation even in translation. Surat ar-Rahman (55), presented first, needs to be read aloud to be appreciated, while Surat Yusuf (12) offers an excellent opportunity for group dramatization. It is the only sura dedicated entirely to a single narrative, and Joseph is the only one of the prophets whose story the Qur'an tells without interruption.

## ***Surat ar-Rahman, the Merciful***

### **Anthony H. Johns**

From the litany of divine blessings in this expansive paean one gets a vivid sense of the earliest Muslim teaching about the creator and sustainer of all, about this world as a theater of God's revelation, and about the ultimate consequences of faith and unbelief. Intensity builds with the insistent refrain.

- 1 The Merciful
- 2 He taught the Qur'an.
- 3 He created the human being.
- 4 He taught him speech.
- 5 Sun and Moon follow their courses.
- 6 Creeping plants and trees both bow before Him.
- 7 He has raised up the heavens and set the Scale of Justice
- 8 [so firmly] that you cannot play it false.

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9 Apply this scale with justice;

you must not give short measure by this scale.

- 10 The earth God has set out for His creatures;
- 11 in it are fruits of every kind
- 12 and date palms packed with blossom,  
unwinnowed grain and fragrant herbs
- 13 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?
- 14 He fashioned the human being like earthen ware from potter's clay;
- 15 He fashioned the jinn from fire with smokeless flame
- 16 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?
- 17 He is Lord of the furthest points of the sun's rising  
and its setting
- 18 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?

19 He has let the two great waters flow to a point of meeting,  
20 yet between them rests a barrier they cannot breach  
21 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
22 From them come forth pearls and coral  
23 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
24 His are the ships on the sea with sails aloft like mountains  
25 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
26 Everything upon the earth is to perish,  
27 yet the face of your Lord will remain  
full of might and honor  
28 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
29 Everything in the heavens and on earth is supplicant to Him;  
every day He is attentive [to them]  
30 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
31 We have ample time to deal with you,  
you and your burdens  
32 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
33 You, company of jinn and humankind,  
try, if you can, to enter the regions of heaven and earth,  
try to enter them!  
Enter them you shall not other than with the power

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[We alone can give]  
34 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
35 Smokeless flame and flameless smoke will be hurled against you;  
no help shall reach you  
37 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
38 Then when the heaven is sundered and glows rose like tanned hide  
39 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
40 on that day neither human creatures nor jinn need be questioned of  
their sins  
41 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
42 Evildoers will be known by the marks they bear, then will they be seized by  
their feet and forelocks.  
43 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
44 Here is the hell the evildoers denied.  
They circle between it and scalding water  
45 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
46 But for one who fears his encounter before his Lord  
there are two gardens

47 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
48 in each of them boughs giving shade  
49 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
50 in each of them two flowing springs  
51 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
52 in each of them of every fruit two kinds  
53 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
54 as they recline on couches, lined with  
thick textured silk,  
and the fruit of both gardens at hand hanging low  
55 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
56 In them are maidens of modest gaze  
neither man nor jinn having yet touched them  
57 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
58 their beauty like that of jacinth and coral

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— 5 —

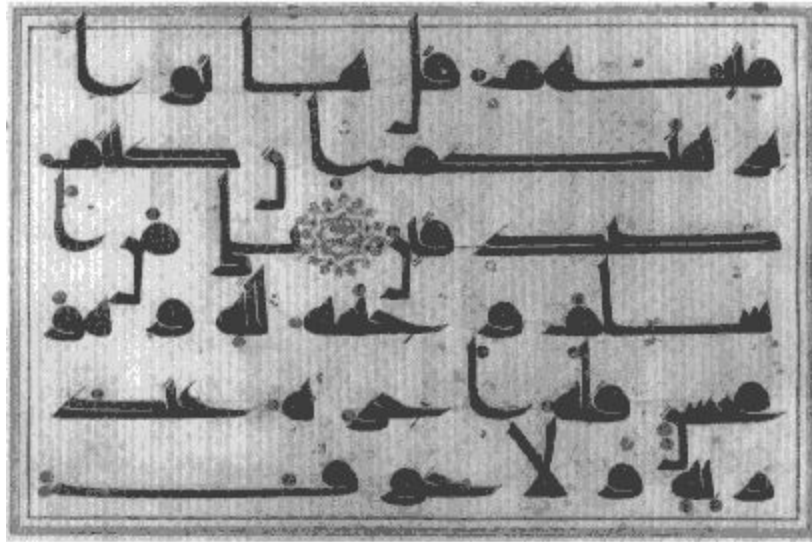
59 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
60 Can goodness receive aught but goodness?  
61 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
62 And below them both are two other gardens  
63 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
64 both of deep green  
65 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
66 In each of them two springs abundantly flowing  
67 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
68 In them are fruit, with date palms and pomegranates  
69 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
70 In them are virtuous women beautiful of face  
71 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
72 clear black their eyes, set apart in pavilions  
73 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
74 no man nor jinn having yet touched them  
75 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
76 reclining on green cushions and rich carpets  
77 —which then of your Lord's blessings can you deny?  
78 Blessed be the name of your Lord, full of grace and honor.

### ***Writing Sacred Text***

A number of exquisite calligraphic styles developed during the early centuries of Islamic history, largely for the purpose of writing the sacred word. Kufic script, named after the Iraqi city of Kufa,

was the first important style. Its chief distinguishing mark is bold, thick letters with flat bottoms that do not descend much below the horizontal line; Kufic's low profile lends itself to a horizontal format. Figure 2 displays the text of Qur'an 2:111–112. Noting that Christians and Jews assert that only they will be saved, the text picks up: "Say [to them]: Give proof if you are correct. On the contrary, anyone who surrenders wholly to God and does good will be rewarded in his Lord's presence, and no fear will beset them [and they will not grieve]." The small medallion in the middle of the page is a device used to indicate divisions in the text. Bold dots distinguish various otherwise similar consonants from each other. As later illustrations will show, Kufic

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[Full Size]

Figure 2.

Ninth-century Qur'an page, possibly from Iraq. St. Louis:

St. Louis Art Museum, 32:1948.

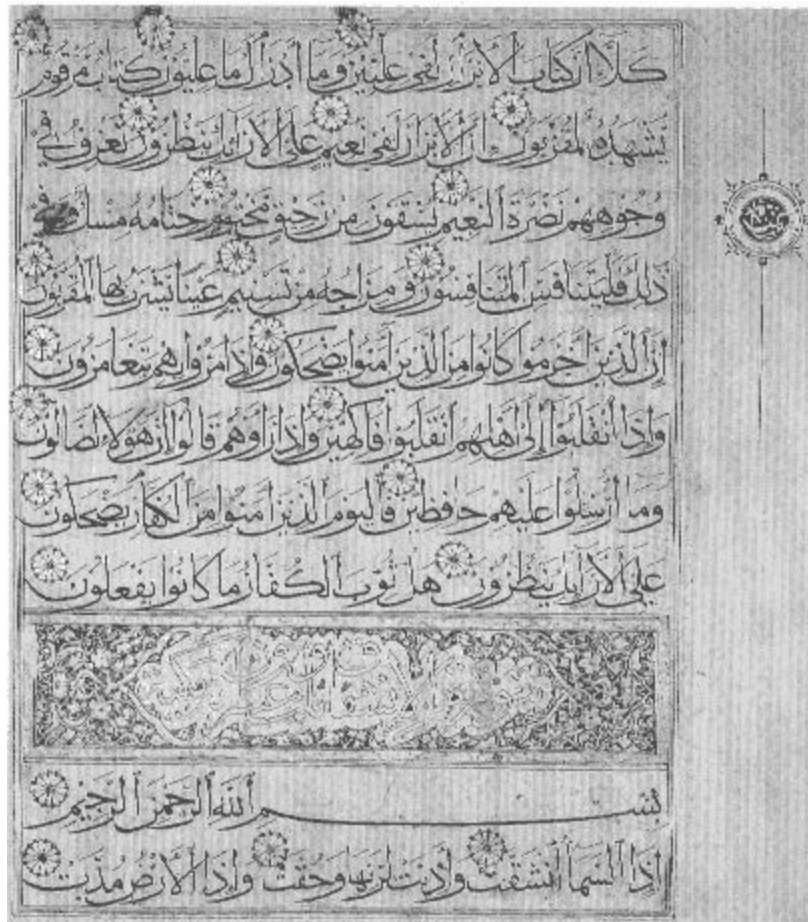
script developed in a number of stylistic variations but retained its characteristic angularity.

More graceful cursive styles of script, whose elongated forms look best on pages of vertical format, developed alongside of Kufic. Figure 3 displays two of the many "rounded" scripts, showing the end of one sura (83:18–36) and the beginning of another (84:1–3). The Qur'anic text itself is written in *rayhani* script. The title panel below, in *tawqi* ' script, reads, "Surat al-Inshiqaq [The Sundering], 25 verses, Meccan," and is followed by the phrase "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," which occurs at the head of all but one of the 114 suras. The small roundels in the text mark the ends of verses; the medallion in the right margin indicates one of the standard liturgical divisions of the Qur'an; and the small markings above and below the lines of text indicate vowels, added out of a concern for maximum accuracy in reciting the sacred text.

## ***Surat Yusuf***

**James W. Worris**

This "literal" version of the twelfth sura of the Qur'an, "The Most Beautiful of Tales," is designed to convey a more accurate sense of the actual experience of



[Full Size]

Figure 3.

Fourteenth-century Qur'an page from Mamluk Egypt. New York:  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Pickering 69.149.

reading the Arabic text. Many of the most distinctive rhetorical, structural, and metaphysical features of the Qur'an become strikingly apparent when one studies this text in comparison with the long biblical narrative of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37–50).<sup>[1]</sup> One of the most difficult challenges in translating the Qur'an is to bring out the unifying themes, symbols, and vocabulary that are so evident to Arabic readers. To help convey this richness in English, the most important of what are essentially untranslatable spiritual terms have been

presented throughout in small capitals and in "literal" form, to remind readers of their mysterious, multivalent nature. The text lends itself beautifully to dramatic recitation, with parts read by four or more participants. The four basic "levels" or "frames" of discourse are indicated thus: I = Narrator; II = Divine "We"; III = Various Actors; IV = Inner "Asides." Frame III can then be further divided among the various individual characters indicated.

## In the Name of God, the All-Loving, the All-Compassionate

I. [1] Alif Lam Ra: Those are the SIGNS of the BOOK making-clear.

II. Indeed, We have sent It down, as a Qur'an [lit., recitation] in Arabic, so that you all might understand. We, We are recounting to you the most good and beautiful of tales through what We have inspired to you, this Qur'an—even though before It you were among the heedless ones.

I. When Joseph said to his father:

III. "O my dear father, I indeed, I have seen eleven planets and the sun and the moon: I saw them to me bowing down!"

I. [5] He said:

III. "O my dear son, do not recount your vision to your brothers, for they are devising a scheme against you. The Shaytan is indeed for INSAN \* an enemy making-clear!"

III. [Jacob to Joseph? or possibly "We"/Narrator (to whom?)]: And that is how your RABB † picks you out, and causes you to KNOW ‡ through

\* Throughout Q, the term *insan* refers to the spiritual reality of every human being, the manifestation of the divine "Breath/Spirit of God" fully realized in the prophets and "friends of God"; always contrasted with the created, part-animal mortal form of "clay," referred to as *bashar*.

† The term *rabb* is used over a thousand times in Q, usually as an emotionally charged form of address evoking our "personal," most powerfully real and intimate existential relationship to some aspect of the divine. This Arabic root evokes images of a parent lovingly and devotedly "raising" or "taking care of" and educating a dependent child.

‡ "Knowing" as divinely inspired spiritual awareness (*'ilm*); a central spiritual virtue in Q (used nearly nine hundred times). The different verb and noun forms of this term usually refer to direct (nonconceptual) human awareness of God and the spiritual world, of the inner nature of things and ultimate realities underlying the phenomenal and historical world; located in the Heart (*qalb, lubb*); term also intimately connected with the central symbolic families of images of Sight and Light.

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FINDING THE INNER MEANING of what comes to be,\* and fulfills His blessing upon you and upon the people of Jacob, as He fulfilled His blessing upon your two fathers before, Abraham and Isaac. Indeed your RABB is ALL-KNOWING, ALL-WISE .

I. [Narrator?/"We"?]: So in Joseph and his brothers there was surely a SIGN for those who question and plead. When they said:

III. "Now Joseph and his brother are more dearly beloved by our father than we, though we are a tight-knit bunch: Certainly our father is clearly gone astray!"

IV. [Who? Shaytan? One of the brothers?]: "Kill Joseph! Or toss him out on some earth, [so that] your father's regard may be left for you all alone. And after that you all can be a group

DOING WHAT IS RIGHT !" †

I. [10] One of them, speaking, said:

III. "Don't kill Joseph, but throw him in the hidden depths of the well, [so that] some caravan may pick him up, if you all are indeed doing [what you propose]."

I. They said:

III. "O our father, why do you not have FAITH ‡ in us regarding Joseph, though surely we are sincerely meaning him well!? Send him with us tomorrow, [so that] he may run around and play. Certainly we are protecting him!"

I. He said:

III. "As for me, it does make me sad for you all to take him with you. And I am afraid that the wolf may eat him up while you all are heedless in regard to him!"

## I. They said:

\* *Ta'wil al-ahadith* : The first term of this key phrase means "taking (things) back to the First," to their ultimate source, while the second refers to whatever "comes to be."

† The Arabic root *s-h* ordinarily means whatever is "right," but the qur'anic usage consistently joins and precedes references to the "right things" (*as-salihah*) with the essential precondition of "having FAITH."

‡ *Iman* refers to the condition of faith, inner peace and absolute assurance, implicit confidence and total trust, granted by God. Its most frequently mentioned "contents" or perceptions include the reality and presence of God, the angels, and all the divine "Books" and Messengers.

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III. "If the wolf were to eat him up, while we're such a tight-knit bunch, then we would be the ones suffering loss!"

II. [15] Then when they took him with them and agreed together that they would put him in the hidden depths of the well, We inspired in him: "Surely you will inform them of this affair of theirs, while they are [still] unaware!"

I. And they came to their father in the night [or: night-blind, dim-sighted], crying. They said:

III. "O our father, we, we went off trying to get ahead of one another, and we left Joseph back with our possessions. So the wolf ate him up!"

IV. "But you don't have FAITH in us, even if we were SPEAKING TRUTHFULLY !"\*

I. And they came with lying blood upon his shirt. He said:

III. "No, on the contrary: your souls † have seduced you into some affair!"

IV. "So SABR ‡ is beautiful. And it is God [alone] Whose Help must be sought against what you all describe!"

I. And a caravan came along. So they sent their water-man, and he let down his vessel. He said:

III. "O what GOOD NEWS ! This is a young man!"§

I. And they kept him hidden, as trading goods.

II. But God is ALL-KNOWING of what they are doing.

\* *Sidq* (along with related epithets such as *as-Siddiq*, later applied to Joseph) means acknowledging the truth of what is real—and therefore discerning the divine presence and intentions behind appearances.

† Like the English expression "the self," the Arabic term *nafs* has many meanings in Q. This passage and verse 53 below became the locus classicus for later Islamic references to the psycho-spiritual aspect of the *nafs* as the "carnal soul" manifesting the reprehensible qualities of the human animal (*bashar*, rather than *insan*).

‡ *Sabr*, exemplified in Q above all by Jacob, refers to faithful perseverance in allegiance to the divine Truth in the midst of difficult circumstances.

§ Ordinarily, the term *ghulam* means simply a boy or youth; however, in Q it usually refers to the spiritual state of a young future prophet, visible as such only to those family members, like Jacob here, who are specially inspired by God (Abraham, Mary, Zacharia). Likewise, the water-drawer's reference to his caravan's serendipitous "good news" (*bushra*) contains a similar irony: in Q that same Arabic root is always used more specifically (several dozen times) to refer to the divine "good news" brought by the prophets and Messengers.

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I. [20] And they sold him for a cheap price, a number of dirhams—for they were among those considering him of little value. And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife:

III. "Honor his dwelling place. Perhaps he may be useful to us and we may adopt him as a son."



II. And that is how We established a place for Joseph upon the earth, and so that We might cause him to KNOW through FINDING THE INNER MEANING of what comes to be.

I. [Narrator?/"We"?]: And God is prevailing in his affair—but most of the people do not know!

II. And then when he reached his mature strength We brought him WISE JUDGMENT \* and [divine] KNOWING : That is how We reward the MUHSINUN . †

I. And the [woman] in whose house he was tried to entice him away from himself. She locked the doors and said:

III. "Come here!"

I. He said:

III. "May God protect [me]! He is my RABB , who has made good and beautiful my dwelling place. He does not cause the wrongdoers to truly flourish!"

I. Now she was longing for him, and he was longing for her, were it not that he saw the Proof of his RABB .

II. That is how [it was], so that We might keep away from him evil and indecency. He is indeed among OUR WHOLLY DEVOTED SERVANTS . ‡

I. [25] So they each tried to reach the door first and she ripped his shirt in back, and at the door they met her master. She said:

\* Divinely inspired wisdom (*hikma*), or the inspired right-judgment and spiritual authority (*hukm*) concerning particular circumstances that flows from such inspired Knowing, are mentioned as human spiritual virtues almost a hundred times in Q. See part 3 below for a discussion of wisdom in Surat Luqman.

† *Muhsinun* are "those who do *ihsan*," one of the highest spiritual states, typified by the greatest prophets. Meaning literally "doing/making-what-is-good-and-beautiful," its qur'anic usage stresses the deeper, divinely inspired awareness necessary to know concretely what is truly good-and-beautiful.

‡ The virtue of *ikhlas* refers to purity of intention, doing whatever one does entirely for God's sake. In Q it is often connected specifically with the spiritual state of the prophets and Friends of God.

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III. "What is the recompense for someone who intended evil for your family, if not that he be imprisoned or [receive] a painful torment!?"\*

I. He [Joseph] said:

III. "She tried to entice me away from myself!"

I. And a witness from her people testified:

III. "If his shirt is ripped in front, then she spoke truthfully and he is among the liars. But if his shirt is ripped in back, then she has lied and he is among THOSE SPEAKING TRUTHFULLY ."

I. So when he [her husband] saw his shirt was ripped in back, he said:

III. "This is from your [fem. pl.] scheming, for your scheming is indeed tremendous!"

"O Joseph, turn away from this!"

[To his wife]: "And you, seek forgiveness for your offense: surely you were among the erring ones!"

I. [30] And some women in the city said:

III. "The wife of the DEAR/MIGHTY ONE † is trying to entice her young servant away from himself. He's made her fall madly in love. Indeed, we see she's clearly gone astray!"

I. So when she heard about those women's sly devising she sent to them and prepared for them a cushion, and she brought a knife to every one of them and said [to Joseph]:

III. "Come out before them!"

I. And when the women saw him they glorified him and they all cut their hands [in astonishment], and they said:

III. "God preserve [us]! This is no ordinary mortal †—this can only be a majestic angel!"

\* *'Adhab alim* : Used some seventy times in Q, this term means the sufferings or punishments of Gehenna and the "Fire"; the root referring to "prison" throughout this section (*s-j-n*) also refers to a fearful level of Gehenna in many key eschatological passages. Thus Zulaykha's threat here has powerful eschatological resonances that openly set the stage for a more symbolic, metaphysical "reading" of this drama and Joseph's predicament.

† *Al-'Aziz* : one of the more common divine Names in Q, appearing more than a hundred times. Joseph turns out to have this same semiregal title when he is later addressed by his brothers.

† *Bashar* , in contrast with the spiritual *insan* ; cf. verse 5, and above, notes on pages 8 and 10.

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I. She said:

III. "So there for you all is the one because of whom you were reproaching me! I did try to entice him away from himself, only he resisted."

IV. [To herself?] "But if he doesn't do what I order him to, he will most certainly be imprisoned, and then he will surely be among the lowly ones!"

I. He said:

III. "My RABB ! Prison is more lovable to me than what they [masc. pl.] are calling me to—and if You do not turn their [fem. pl.] scheming away from me I will give in to them [fem. pl.] and become one of the ignorant and foolish ones!"

I. So his RABB did respond to him and turned their scheming away from him. Surely He is the ALWAYS LISTENING , the ALL-KNOWING . [35] Next, it appeared [right] to them [masc. pl.], after they had seen the SIGNS , to imprison him until a certain time.

And two young servants entered the prison with him. One of the two said:

III. "I am seeing myself squeezing out wine."

I. And the other one said:

III. "I am seeing myself carrying above my head a loaf of bread from which the birds are eating."

[Both of them]: "Inform us both about the INNER MEANING of it. For we see you among the MUHSINUN ."

I. He said:

III. "There does not come to you two any nourishment that is bestowed as your SUSTENANCE ,\* but that I have already told both of you the INNER MEANING of it, before it comes to you both. That, for you both, is among what my RABB has caused me to KNOW . I have

\* *Rizq* (sustenance) almost always refers to the universal divine activities of creating and bestowing all the forms of God's "grace" and "bounty," including much more than food and extending ultimately to the very existence of all creatures and forms of manifestation.

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indeed forsaken the MILLA \* of a group who do not have FAITH in God and who reject † THE OTHERWORLD !

"And I have followed the MILLA of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob: it was not for us to associate any thing with God. That was through God's favor for us and for [all] the people—and yet most of the people are not giving thanks!

"O two companions [or 'masters'] of the Prison: Are disparate/separate lords [pl. of *rabb* ] better—or God THE ONE, THE OVERPOWERING ?!"

I. [40] ["We"? Narrator? Muhammad?]: † "What you all are worshipping/serving besides Him are nothing but names that you all have named, you and your fathers! God has not sent down for them any authority. Certainly the DECISIVE JUDGMENT is only for God! He commanded that you all not worship/serve any but Him alone: That is THE UPRIGHT RELIGION §—and yet most of the people do not know!"

III. [Joseph]: "O two companions of the Prison: As for one of you, he is pouring wine for his lord to drink. And as for the other one, he is crucified, so that the birds are eating from his head.|| The matter has [already] been decreed which you are seeking to have me explain."

\* The term *milla* is usually used in Q specifically in connection with the particular monotheistic religious "way" or path of Abraham (or his descendants).

† The root *k-f-r*, here meaning to reject, cover over, or be ungrateful for, often denotes the contrary of faith and mindfulness, as well as of gratitude or thankfulness to God.

‡ The "addressees" here are in the indefinite plural rather than the explicitly dual form used repeatedly in the preceding verses, making it unclear who is speaking to whom or in what situation and time frame.

§ *Ad-din al-qayyim* (also in 9:36, 30:30, and 30:43) affirms the unchanging unity of "religion" (*ad-din*) as the proper relation between God and the human soul, the spiritual state of true "worship-and-divine-service" (*ibada*, on which see text by Madjid in part 2) exemplified by the prophets and Friends of God.

|| The image of "pouring wine" for one's Lord evokes the eschatological symbolism of "banquets" (fountains, cupbearers, etc.) in the heavenly Garden and the related symbolism of the divine "Court" that is continued in the next few verses. Similarly, symbolism involving birds often suggests the spiritual states of souls or other spiritual beings.

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I. And he said to the one of the two who he suspected was being saved:\*

III. "Mention/remember me in the presence of your lord [*rabb* ]!"

I. Then the Shaytan made him forget mentioning/remembering his RABB, so he lingered in the Prison several years. And THE KING † said:

III. "Surely I am seeing seven fat cows that seven thin ones are eating, and seven green ears [of grain], and other dry ones. O you dignitaries, † explain to me about my vision, if you are [capable of] interpreting the vision!"

I. They said:

III. "Mixed-up dreams! And we are not, with regard to FINDING THE INNER MEANING of dreams, among those who know."

I. [45] And he said, the one of the two who was saved and [only now] remembered after some time:

III. "I [intend to] inform you of its INNER MEANING, so send me out."

[Then at the Prison he said]:

"Joseph, O you TRUTHFULLY SPEAKING ONE [*as-siddiq*]: Explain to us regarding seven fat cows that seven thin ones are eating, and seven green ears and other dry ones, so that I might return to the people, so that perhaps they might know!"

I. He said:

III. "You all plant for seven years, tirelessly. But of what you all have harvested, leave it on the ear except for a very little, from which you eat. Then there come after that seven hard ones eating up what you all have prepared for them, except for a very little from what you all are preserv-

\* As in God's "saving" the prophets and the righteous in an explicitly spiritual or eschatological sense. Likewise, Joseph's parting words here clearly evoke the imagery of the eschatological intercession (*shafa'a*) of the prophets in the divine "Court" alluded to in Q and described in greater detail in many well-known hadith.

† "The King" or "Possessor" (*al-malik*) of all creation, is one of the most frequent of the divine Names. Curiously, this sura never mentions "Pharaoh" (*fir'awn*), the usually pejorative title for the Egyptian ruler in the rest of the stories of Q.

‡ *Al-mala'*: A term also used in Q (and the hadith) to refer to the highest angels or archangels around the divine "Throne."

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ing. Then there comes after that a year in which the people are abundantly helped out, and in it they are pressing [much oil]."

I. [50] And the KING said:

III. "Bring him to me!"

I. Then when the messenger came to him, he said:

III. "Return to your lord and ask him: 'What was the problem with those women who cut their hands?'"

IV. [To himself?] "Certainly my RABB is WELL KNOWING about their schemes!"

I. He [the King] said [to those women]:

III. "What was going on with you all when you tried to entice Joseph away from himself?!"

I. They said:

III. "God forbid—we didn't know any wrong of him!"

I. The wife of the DEAR/MIGHTY ONE said:

III. "Now the Truth has become clear: I did try to entice him away from himself, and surely he is among the TRUTHFULLY SPEAKING ONES ."

IV. [Joseph—apparently to himself]: "That is so that he\* might know that I did not betray him regarding the UNSEEN , and that God does not guide the scheming of those who betray. And I am not absolving my NAFS : † Surely the NAFS is commanding [us] to do wrong, except to the extent that my RABB has MERCY . Indeed my RABB is MOST FORGIVING, MOST LOVING AND MERCIFUL !"

I. And the KING said:

III. "Bring him to Me, so that I may have him WHOLLY DEVOTED to Myself!"

I. Then once He had spoken with him, He said:

III. "Today you are in Our presence, well settled and well trusted!" ‡

\* Or "He": may refer to Zulaykha's husband, the King, or perhaps to God. In favor of the latter possibility is the fact that in Q the recurrent expression for "the unseen (spiritual) world" (*al-ghayb*) has to do with realities far broader (and quite different from) mere worldly "secrecy" and discretion.

† See note on page 10 (to verse 18) above.

‡ This phrase evokes eschatological images of people in the presence of the divine judge. Moreover, both the epithets bestowed on Joseph here (*amin*, *makin*) are often applied to Muhammad as divine Messenger.

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I. [55] He [Joseph] said:

III. "Place me over the TREASURIES OF THE EARTH . Indeed I am WELL PROTECTING, WELL KNOWING !"\*

II. And that is how We established Joseph on the earth, settling down upon it wherever he wishes. We bestow Our LOVING MERCY on whomever We wish. And We do not neglect the reward of the MUHSINUN !

I. [Narrator?/"We"?]: And surely the reward of THE OTHERWORLD is best, for those who had FAITH and were MINDFUL [of God]! †

I. And Joseph's brothers came. Then they entered before him and he knew them, while they were DENYING ‡ him. And when he had provided them with their supplies he said:

III. "Bring me from your father a [certain] brother of yours. Don't you all see that I fill up the measure and I am the best of those who give hospitality?!" [60] "But if you don't bring him to me, then there is no measure for you with me—and you may not come near me!"

I. They said:

III. "We will try to entice his father from [holding on to] him: Certainly we are doing [that]!"

I. And he said to his young servants:

III. "Put their trading goods back in their saddlepacks, so that they may recognize them when they have gone back to their family—that perhaps they may return."

I. So when they returned to their father they said:

III. "O our father, the measure [of grain requested] was forbidden to us. So send our brother with us that we may be given the measure. Surely we are protecting him!"

\* The terms *hafiz* and *'alim* , both of which appear often as divine Names, here suggest Joseph's "investiture" with full prophetic attributes. Likewise, the word "treasuries" always refers elsewhere in Q to God's Treasuries (e.g., at 63:7).

† "Those who do *taqwa* " (mindfulness, which could be rendered as "active Godawareness"): it is the consciousness of God's Presence, an inner mindfulness of the divine at every instant, combined with an eager, attentive orientation to do what that spiritual awareness demands.

‡ The term translated here as "denying" (*munkir* ) connotes a person pretending not to know something that he or she really does know. The Arabic roots of the word convey a broader reference to spiritual "blindness"; here, too, it points by way of contrast to Joseph's inspired recognition of theophany (the divine "Signs").

I. He said:

III. "Can I have faith in you regarding him—except as I had faith in you regarding his brother before!?"

IV. [To himself?] "For God is BEST IN PROTECTING , and He is the MOST LOVING OF THOSE SHOWING LOVING MERCY !"

I. [65] But when they opened their possessions they found their trading goods returned to them. They said:

III. "O our father, what [more] do we desire? These are our own trading goods returned to us! And we will provide for our family and protect our brother and increase [our provisions] by the measure of a camel load. That is an easy measure!"

I. He said:

III. "I will never send him with you all until you give me a pledge from God that you will most surely bring him back to me, unless you are surrounded!"

I. So when they had given him their pledge he said:

III. "God is TRUSTEE for what we are saying!"

I. And he said:

III. "O my sons, don't go in through a single gate, but enter through separate gates! And I cannot help you, in place of God, with regard to any thing. The DECISIVE JUDGMENT is only for God: in Him have I trusted, and on Him should rely all those who trust!"\*

I. And when they entered in the way their father had commanded them, that was not of any help to them, in place of God, with regard to any thing—except as a need in Jacob's NAFS , which he satisfied. And surely he is a possessor of [divine] KNOWING through what We have made him KNOW —and yet most of the people do not know! And when they entered before Joseph, he made his brother his [special] guest. He said:

III. "Indeed, I myself am your own brother! So do not be upset about what they have been doing."

\* *Tawakkul* : the spiritual station of total trust and confidence in God, the inner attitude of sincerely "handing things over" totally to Him, as a departing traveler or pilgrim would entrust his family and affairs to a servant or steward (*wakil* , as in the previous verse).

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I. [70] Then when he had provided them with their supplies, he put the drinking cup in his brother's saddlebag. Next a herald called out:

III. "O you of the caravan, indeed you all are surely thieves!"

I. They said, as they came [back] close to them:

III. "What is it you are missing!?"

I. They said:

III. "We are missing the King's chalice!

[Joseph]: "For whoever brings it there is a camel's load [in reward], and I am responsible for it."

I. They said:

III. "By God, you all surely know we didn't come to do harm in the earth and we haven't been thieves!"

I. They said:

III. "Then what are the amends for it, if you all have been lying?"

I. [75] They said:

III. "The amends for it are the person in whose saddlebag it is found—let him be the compensation for it: that is how we repay the wrongdoers!"

I. So he began with their sacks before his brother's sack, and then he brought it out of his brother's sack.

II. That is how We contrived for Joseph: he would not have taken his brother according to the religion of the King, except that God wishes [it]. We raise up by degrees whomever We wish, and above every possessor of knowledge is ONE ALL-KNOWING !!\*

I. They said:

III. "If he is stealing, then a brother of his had stolen before!"

I. But Joseph kept it secret within himself and did not reveal it to them. He said [to himself]:

IV. "You yourselves are in a far worse situation, and God is MORE KNOWING about what you describe!"

I. They said:

\* This famous last phrase may refer either only to God (as translated here), or to the existence of much wider earthly and/or spiritual hierarchies of religious or other knowledge. In Q these frequently mentioned "degrees" or "ranks" (*darajat*) usually refer specifically to spiritual qualities, functions, or rewards in the otherworld.

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III. "O DEAR/MIGHTY ONE , he has a father, an extremely old man,\* so take one of us instead of him. Certainly we see you are among the MUHSINUN !"

I. He said:

III. "God forbid that we should take anyone except the person with whom we found our things! Otherwise we would surely be wrongdoers!"

I. [80] So then, when they had despaired of [persuading] him, they went away to talk in secret. The oldest of them said:

III. "Don't you all know that your father took a pledge from you with God, and before how you were so remiss with regard to Joseph?! So I will never leave [this] earth until my father gives me permission or God judges for me, for He is the BEST OF THOSE WHO JUDGE ! You all return to your father and say: 'O our father, your son has certainly stolen. And we have only given witness to what we have come to know: we were not protecting the UNSEEN !' And ask the village where we were and the caravan in which we came back: indeed, we are surely SPEAKING TRUTHFULLY !"

I. He [Jacob] said:

III. "No, on the contrary: your carnal souls [pl. of *nafs*] have seduced you into some affair! So SABR is beautiful. Perhaps God may bring them to me all together. For He is THE ALL-KNOWING, THE ALL-WISE ."

I. And he turned away from them and said:

IV. "O my grief for Joseph!"

I. And his eyes had become white [i.e., blind] from sorrow, for he was restraining himself.

[85] They said:

III. "By God, you won't stop remembering Joseph until you waste away, or join those who pass away!"

I. He said [to himself?]:

IV. "I only complain to God of my grief and my sorrow. And I KNOW from God what you all do not know."

III. "O my sons, go and try to find out about Joseph and his brother.

\* Or "a great shaykh."

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And do not despair of THE SPIRIT OF GOD ! No one despairs of THE SPIRIT OF GOD , but the group who reject [God]."

I. So when they entered before him they said:

III. "O DEAR/MIGHTY ONE , we and our family have been beset by hardship, and we have brought unworthy goods! So fill up the measure for us, and be charitable with us: surely God rewards those who are charitable!"

I. He said:

III. "Did you all know what you did with Joseph and his brother, when you were foolish and ignorant?"

I. [90] They said:

III. "Is it really you who are Joseph?!"

I. He said:

III. "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has been generous with us."

I. [Narrator?/"We"/Joseph to himself?]: "For whoever is MINDFUL [of God] and shows SABR , surely God does not neglect the reward of the MUHSINUN ."

They said:

III. "By God, God has preferred you over us, though we were certainly erring ones."

I. He said:

III. "No blame for you today! God forgives you—and He is the MOST LOVING OF THOSE SHOWING LOVING MERCY . Go all of you, with this shirt of mine, then place it on my father's face, that he may come SEEING .\* And come to me with your family, all together!"

I. And when the caravan started out, their father said:

III. "Surely I do feel the smell † of Joseph—even if you think I'm losing my mind!"

\* *Basir* is used more than a hundred times, with related forms, in Q to refer to spiritual "vision," insight, and discernment, often described as a divinely given grace or inspiration.

† *Rih* (smell) is closely related to the divine "Spirit" or "Breath" (*ruh Allah* ) of verse 87 and elsewhere.

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I. [95] They said:

III. "By God, certainly you are in your old error!"

I. Then when the bearer of good news arrived, he placed it [the shirt] on his face, so that he was returned to BEING-SEEING . He said:

III. "Didn't I tell you that I KNOW from God what you all do not know?"

I. They said:

III. "O our father, ask for our sins to be forgiven for us—indeed we were erring ones!"

I. He said:

III. "I will ask my RABB to forgive you. Certainly He is THE MOST FORGIVING, THE MOST MERCIFUL !"

I. Then when they entered before Joseph, he received both his parents as his [special] guests, and he said:

III. "Enter Egypt, if God wishes, in security!"

I. [100] And he raised up both his parents upon the Throne, and they [the brothers] fell down bowing before him. And he said:

III. "O my dear father, this is the INNER MEANING of my vision from before! My RABB did make it real and true. And He was good to me when He pulled me out of the Prison and He brought you all in from the desert, after the Shaytan had incited conflict between me and my brothers. Surely my RABB is MOST GRACIOUS to whatever He wills! Indeed, He is THE ALL-KNOWING, THE ALL-WISE ! O my RABB , You have brought to me some [worldly] dominion and You have caused me to KNOW through FINDING THE INNER MEANING of what comes to be! O CREATOR of the heavens and the earth! You are my PROTECTING FRIEND [*Wali* ] in this world and the otherworld. Come to receive me surrendered [to You],\* and include me with THOSE WHO DO WHAT IS RIGHT !"



II. That was from the disclosures of the UNSEEN We inspire in you. You were not present with them when they agreed together about their affair, while they were slyly devising. And most of the people, even though you greatly desire [it], do not have FAITH .

\* "Surrendered," from *tawaffa* , refers to the divine or angelic "reception" of each soul at the moment of death.

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Nor do you ask of them any reward for it. It is only a REMINDER to the worlds!

[105] And how many a SIGN there is in the heavens and the earth which they pass on by, turning away! And most of them have no FAITH in God, except while they are associating [other appearances with the One]. So do they feel safe from their being overwhelmed by a dark shroud of punishment from God, or from the HOUR suddenly overcoming them while they are not even aware?!

Say: "This is my Path: I am calling/praying to God with CLEAR INSIGHT ,\* myself and whoever followed me. And Praise be to God! I am not among those who associate [others with the One]."

And We did not send [any as Messenger] before you except for some men whom We inspire among the people of the towns. Have they not traveled through the earth, that they might observe how the ultimate end of those before them has been?! Indeed the Abode of the otherworld is best, for THOSE WHO ARE MINDFUL ! So then do you all still not understand?! [110] Until, when the Messengers despaired and supposed that they had been rejected, there came to them Our TRIUMPHANT SUPPORT and whoever We wish was saved. Nor can Our Affliction be kept from those who do harm.

I. Surely in the tales about them there was a deep lesson for THOSE WHO HAVE HEARTS ! † It was not a made-up story, but a confirmation of what was [already] before him, and a proper distinguishing of every thing, and RIGHT GUIDANCE and LOVING MERCY to a people who have FAITH .

\* *Ala basira* (clear insight) refers to the divine guidance of prophets and Friends of God; it recalls Jacob's restored "vision" or spiritual insight above (*basir* , at v. 96; see first note on page 21).

† The phrase "those who have hearts" (*ulu i-albab* ) occurs sixteen times in Q, always in reference to those who are ready to realize the spiritual virtues, who alone are truly capable of recognizing the divine "Signs" and thereby "remembering" and returning to God.

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## ***Hadith: Prophetic and Sacred***

### **John Renard**

Since later texts will include scores of thematically apposite examples from the massive treasure trove of hadith, I include only a few samples of the genre; and I locate them here rather than later in part 1 because of the prominent role of hadith in exegetical commentary.

### **Muhammad's Sayings**

Sayings of Muhammad cover a vast gamut of topics, from the most mundane to the most ethereal. In the thousands of sayings attributed to the Prophet, Muslims have a nearly inexhaustible source of examples and guidance. Some hadiths function as miniature commentaries on individual texts of the Qur'an. In the following example I include the complete chain of transmitters (the *isnad* ) for illustrative purposes; other examples will omit the *isnad*.

The final link in the chain of transmitters here is Abu Dharr (d. 653), a man known for his lofty piety:

Muhammad ibn Yusuf stated that Sufyan had narrated, from al-A'mash, from Ibrahim at-Tamimi, from his father, from Abu Dharr, may God be pleased with him, who said: The Prophet, may God bless him and give him peace, said to Abu Dharr: "When the sun sets, do you know where it goes?" I [Abu Dharr] said, "God and his messenger know better." He [Muhammad] said: "It goes until it prostrates itself beneath the Throne [of God], then it seeks permission [to rise], and it is given leave [to do so]. But [one day] when it is about to offer prostration, [the gesture] will not be accepted from it. It will seek leave [to go forward] but permission will not be granted. Instead it will be told: Return whence you came, so that it will rise in its setting place (i.e., the west). And that is [the meaning of] the saying of the Most High: And the sun follows a course set for it—that is the determination of the Mighty, the Knowing One" (36:38).<sup>[2]</sup>

Many hadith speak of the spiritual and moral responsibilities of Muslims toward one another. Abu Hurayra (d. 678) was one of Muhammad's foremost companions and transmitters of hadith. He reported these two sayings:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, said: Let one who believes in God and the Last Day be hospitable to his guest; let one who believes in God and the Last Day be considerate of his neighbor; and let one who believes in God and the Last Day speak positively or hold his tongue.<sup>[3]</sup>

And again, a saying beautiful and moving in its simplicity:

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The Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, said: A man used to loan money to people, and would say to his employee, "When you come to a person on hard times, go easy on him; perhaps God will go easy on us." [Muhammad] said [further]: And when he came to meet God, God went easy on him.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Sacred Sayings

Tradition ascribes some sayings not to Muhammad but directly to God. Some allude to God's transcendent unity by playing on Arabic words. For example, to understand the saying "I am Ahmad without the *m*," one has to know that Ahmad is an alternate title of Muhammad and that the word *ahad* means "one" in Arabic. Similarly, the saying "I am 'Arab without the '*ayn* " means that if one removes the initial consonant (*'ayn*) and its vowel sound (*a*) from the word '*arab*, what remains is *rab* [*b*] or Lord.

Other sayings suggest aspects of God's relationship to human beings, conveying the essence of some interaction between God and the servant. "Were it not for you [Muhammad], I would not have created the heavens," for example, hints at Muhammad's critical importance in God's own motives for action. Others are more inclusive: "I and my faithful servant are united in in undiluted goodness: even as I am removing his soul from within him, he praises me"; and "For my devout servants I have in store what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and what has not occurred to any human heart"; and "Those who love each other in me, and who keep each other's company in me, and who visit each other in me, and who share unstintingly with each

other—these are entitled to my love." In a slightly longer saying, God speaks to the whole community:

A thousand years before he created the universe, God inscribed a text on his Throne and declared: Observe, O Community of Muhammad, that my mercy comes before my anger. Before you ask, I bestow; before you seek forgiveness, I forgive you. I will usher into Paradise each of you who comes before me and says, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Finally, a charming hadith combines key aspects of these first two kinds of sacred sayings. God says he has divided the first sura, al-Fatiha, between himself and his servant, recalling sacred hadith that refer to God's own qualities as well as those that describe the human servant's relationship to God. According to that hadith, the first three verses of the sura belong to God:

Praise belongs to God, Lord of all beings,

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The Merciful, the Compassionate,

Ruler of the Judgment Day.

The fourth, or middle verse—"Only You do we serve; only from You do we seek aid"—belongs to both because of its reference to asking and granting. And the last three verses belong to the servant:

Guide us along the straight path

The path of those whom you have blessed

Not those against whom You have sent Your wrath, nor those who are

astray. <sup>[5]</sup>

### ***Sacred Text and Architecture***

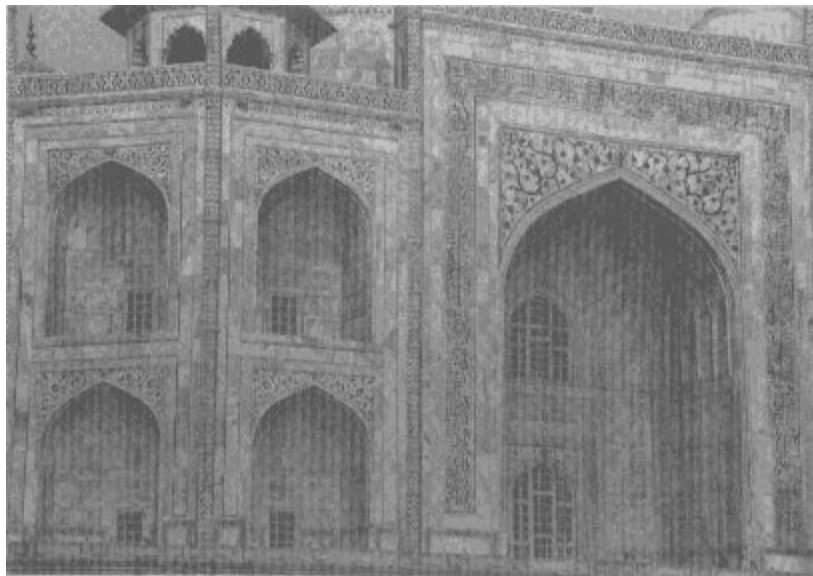
Architectural inscriptions of both Qur'an and hadith texts have long revealed how Muslims interpret both their religious structures and their sacred texts. Facades and domes are the most visible features of major religious buildings. Sometimes even lengthy suras of the Qur'an appear in their entirety on facades, as in figure 4. The Taj Mahal's extensive qur'anic inscriptions in monumental *thuluth* script are of inlaid black stone; here on the east arch is the end (verses 67–83) of Sura 36 (Ya Sin), whose full text begins on the south arch and continues around the west and north sides. Around the doorway within the *iwan* is the full text of Sura 98, al-Bayyina (The Clarification), on the eschatological theme of final accountability, all in keeping with a funerary monument.

Shorter complete texts also occasionally appear on the exteriors of domes, as in figure 5. Three Qur'an texts in thuluth script encircle the upper register of the drum of the dome of the Safavid mosque of Shaykh Lutfullah. In three pairs of contrasting natural phenomena (sun/moon, day/night, heaven/earth), Sura 91, al-Shams (The Sun), calls the created world to witness to God's power, then refers to the individual soul's capacity for moral discernment. Then Sura 76, ad-Dahr (Time), explores the theme of contrast between people who opt for good and those who prefer evil. Finally, Sura 108, al-Kawthar (Abundance), the shortest sura of all, reminds believers to acknowledge God's beneficence with prayer. Larger Kufic inscriptions on the drum give repeating texts of the kind often found on Timurid and Safavid monuments: "Noble one, Merciful one, Compassionate one"; and "God is supreme, to God belongs sovereignty, praise God, God, Muhammad and 'Ali."

Sometimes, as in figure 1, a text on the dome is chosen because of its explicit reference to mosques and their religious significance. Monumental thuluth script, with some upright Arabic letters over ten feet in height, around the drum

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 4.

Taj Mahal, Agra, India (1632–1654, Mughal). The four *pishtaq* facades and two-tiered arcades of the Taj Mahal adapt Iranian forms (see fig. 31), but achieve an entirely different effect by using whitemarble as basic building material and inlaid semiprecious stones for decoration.

of the dome of the Sultan's mosque (seen from half a mile away through a long lens) in Shah Alam, Malaysia, reads: "They will maintain God's mosques who believe in God and in the last day, and observe the ritual prayer, and give alms, and fear only God. It is these who are among the guided. Do you regard offering drink to pilgrims or the upkeep of the Mosque of the Sanctuary [in Mecca] as on a par with [the devotion of] those who believe in God and the last day and [who] strive in the way of God? They are not on a par in God's opinion; and God does not guide people who countenance injustice" (9:18–19).

Inside the mosque as well, the dome over the niche that marks the direction toward Mecca (mihrab) often receives special inscriptions (fig. 6). In glittering mosaic, Qur'an texts in foliated Kufic script on the interior of the dome of the Great Mosque of Cordova emphasize God's sovereignty and power to forgive, as befits a spectacular dome: "On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear. Each receives every good earned, and likewise every evil earned. Our Lord, do not condemn us if we should become heedless or fall into error. . . . Blot out our sins and forgive us; have mercy on us for you are our Protector; aid us against those who deny the faith" (2:286). Built on the site of a former Christian church in the midst of a society long Christian, the mosque also features

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 5.

Mosque of Shaykh Lutfullah, Isfahan, Iran (1603–1619).

Thanks to Jonathan Bloom for identifying the texts.

(Further on Safavid architecture, see figs. 36, 53 below; and SD fig. 23.)

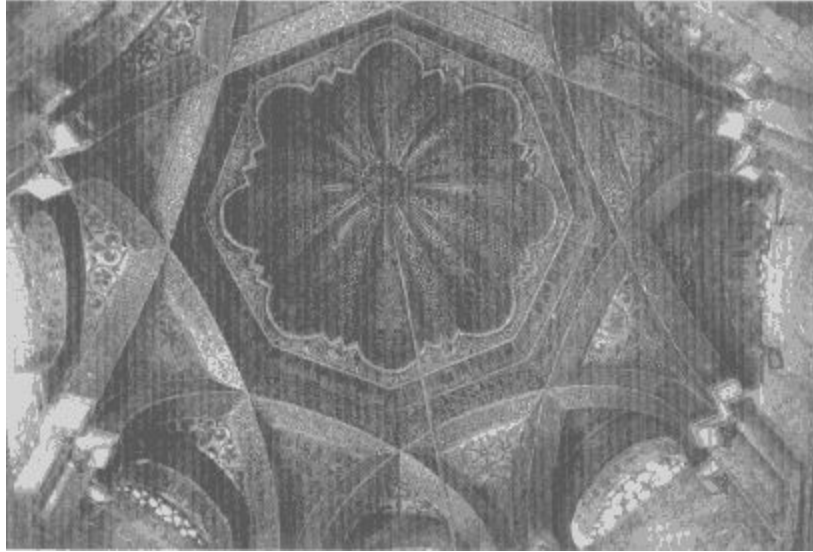
texts that distinguish Islamic from Christian notions of deity: "It is not fitting that God should beget a son. Glory to Him. When He decides on an affair He merely says 'Be' and it is" (19:35). And "To Him belong the origins of heaven and earth; how can he have a son when he has no wife? He created everything and knows all things completely. That is God your Lord. There is no god but He, the Creator of all; so worship Him who is in charge of all matters" (6:101–102). Finally, the dome recalls the goal of human existence and reminds believers of the appropriate demeanor: "Those who hold up God's Throne and who surround it sing 'Glory and Praise' to their Lord, believe in Him and ask forgiveness for believers: Our Lord, your control extends over all things in mercy and knowledge. Therefore forgive those who repent and follow your way and save them from the Fire's torments; give them, Lord, entry to the Garden . . ." (40:7–9).

## Varieties of Qur'An Interpretation

Qur'an interpretation occurs in many contexts. Sayings of Muhammad sometimes function as occasions for a reflection on the meaning of a particular brief text, as in the hadith cited above. Sermons, too, provide a natural setting for the

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 6.

Great Mosque of Cordova, Spain (ca. 961), *qibla* dome mosaics.

elucidation of a revealed text. But Muslim exegetes have also produced countless volumes dedicated to the interpretation of their scripture and to the principles of exegesis. Here are, first, three brief examples of *tafsir* by different exegetes on the Qur'an's first sura, al-Fatiha (The Opening); then a treatise by Ibn Taymiya on the principles of *tafsir*; and finally, a study by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali on the more rarefied art of esoteric interpretation called *ta'wil*. Frequent citation of hadith gives ample evidence of the foundational importance of Muhammad's sayings in scriptural interpretation.

### ***Three Commentaries on Surat al-Fatiha, the Opening***

#### **Andrew Rippin**

The commentary on the Qur'an by Muqatil ibn Sulayman is probably the earliest existing complete example of this exegetical genre. Muqatil provides an edifying narrative to accompany the reading of the text, with little interest in the Qur'an's grammar and textual details. Muqatil was born in Balkh, lived in Marv, Baghdad, and Basra, and died at an old age in the year 767.<sup>[6]</sup>

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

"Praise belongs to God": that is, thanks to God.

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"Lord of all beings": that is, the jinn and mankind; this is similar to God's saying in 25:1: "So that he may be a warner to all beings."

"The Merciful, the Compassionate": two names of compassion, one of which is more compassionate than the other. "The Merciful" relates to the sense of being merciful, while "the Compassionate" means to be inclined toward the giving of mercy.

"Ruler of the Judgment Day": that is, the day of reckoning, just as God said in 37:53: "Are we the ones to be judged?" that is, those subject to the reckoning. Concerning this it is said that the kings of the world will rule the earth and He will inform them that no one other than Him will rule over the day of resurrection. That is contained in His saying in 82:19: "That day the command belongs to God."

The saying of God: "Only You do we serve": that is, we declare your unity, just as in God's saying in 66:5: "Those who worship," that is, those who declare the unity of God.

"Only from You do we seek aid": in Your worship.

"Guide us [*ihdina* ] along the straight path": that is, the religion of Islam because there is no guidance in any religion other than Islam. According to the variant reading of Ibn Mas'ud the text reads *arshidna*, "guide us."

"The path of those whom You have blessed": that is, We have indicated the way of those whom We have blessed, that is, the proofs of those whom God has blessed with prophethood, just as in God's saying in 19:58: "Those were from among the prophets whom God blessed," among whom was Abraham.

"Not those against whom You have sent Your wrath": that is, a religion other than the Jewish one, against which God was wrathful. Monkeys and pigs were made from them.

"Nor those who are astray": God is saying: "And not the religion of the polytheists," that is, the Christians.

The narrator said: 'Ubayd Allah informed me that his father told him on the authority of Hudhayl from Muqatil from Murtadd from Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of God, may the prayers and peace of God be upon him, said: "God, Most Exalted and Most High, said: 'This sura arose between Me and My servant in two halves.' When the servant said:

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'Praise belongs to God, Lord of all beings,' God said: 'My servant thanks Me.' When he said: 'The Compassionate, the Merciful,' God said: 'My servant praises Me.' When he said: 'Ruler of the Judgment day,' God said: 'I will praise My servant and the rest of the sura shall be for him.' So when he said: 'Only from You do we seek aid,' God said: 'This is for My servant who seeks aid only from Me.' So when he said: 'Guide us on the straight path,' God said: 'This is for My servant.' And when he said: 'The path of those whom You have blessed,' God said: 'This is for My servant. "And not those who are astray": this is for My servant alone.'"

The narrator said: 'Ubayd Allah told me that his father told him that Hudhayl told him on the authority of Muqatil who said: "Whenever one of you is reading this sura and reaches its conclusion saying: 'And not those who are astray,' he should say 'Amen'. Indeed, the angels are believers and if the saying of 'Amen' by the angels coincides with the saying of it by people, the previously committed sins of the people will be forgiven."

The narrator said: 'Ubayd Allah told me that his father told him that Hudhayl told him on the authority of Waqi' from Mansur from Mujahid who said that when Sura 1 was revealed, the Devil wailed.

The narrator said: 'Ubayd Allah said that his father told him on the authority of Abu Salih from Waqi' from Sufyan ath-Thawri from as-Suddi from 'Abd Khayr from 'Ali, may God be pleased with him, concerning the words of God in 15:87, "The seven *mathani*, " that he said that they are the seven verses of Sura 1.

The following text of commentary is frequently ascribed to Ibn 'Abbas, although in its present form it probably originated in the ninth or tenth century. Ibn 'Abbas (d. ca. 687) is the source of much Qur'an commentary and is considered one of the best informed of all early authorities, even though he was quite young when Muhammad died. The work is characterized by little narrative embellishment, but considerable attention to difference of opinion as expressed via the connecting phrase "it is also said."<sup>[Z]</sup>

This is a Medinan sura, although some say it is Meccan.

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

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With its chain of transmission from Ibn 'Abbas concerning the saying of God most High, "Praise be to God": He is saying "Thanks to God." He it is who made His created beings, so they praise Him. It is also said [that it means]: "Thanks to God" for his abundant blessing on His servants whom He guides to faith. It is also said that it means thanks and testifies that unity and divinity belong to God, who has no offspring, partner, supporter, or helper.

"Lord of the worlds": Lord of all possessors of spirit moving on the face of the earth and of all the inhabitants of heaven. It is also said that it means: Master of the jinn and of humanity. It is also said that it means: Creator of the created beings for whom He provides the subsistence and whom He takes from one condition of faith to another.

"The Merciful": the One who feels mercy [*raqiq* ], which is derived from *al-riqqa*, mercy, and that is kindness [*rahma* ].

"The Compassionate": the One who is a true companion.

"Ruler of the day of religion": Judge on the day of religion [*din* ], which is the day of reckoning and destiny on which He shall divide up His creatures. That is, the day on which people shall be repaid [*yudanu* ] for their deeds. There is no judge other than Him.

"Only You do we serve": to You do we profess our belief in Your oneness and to You do we yield.

"Only from You do we seek aid": with You do we seek aid in our performance of Your worship and from You we receive trust to perform in Your obedience.

"Guide us along the straight path": direct us to the steadfast religion which pleases You, which is Islam. It is also said that this means: strengthen us in it. It is also said that it means it is the book of God such that He is saying: "Guide us in its categories of permitted and forbidden and in an explication of what is in the book."

"The path of those whom You have blessed": the religion of those to whom You have shown favor by means of religion. They are the followers of Moses [before the blessings of God changed against them (cf. 8:53)], when clouds put them in the shadow and manna and quail were sent down to them in the desert [cf. 2:57]. It is also said [that the people who have been favored are] the prophets.

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"Not those against whom You have sent your wrath": other than the religion of the Jews against whom You have been wrathful and have abandoned and have not preserved their hearts in order for them to become [true?] Jews.

"Nor those who are astray": nor the religion of the Christians, who err away from Islam.

"Amen": thus, His community will come into being. It is also said that it means: So be it thus. It is also said that it means: O our Lord, do with us as we ask of You. God knows best.



Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti (d.1505) is the likely author of the following commentary on Sura 1. It is part of *The Commentary of the Two Jalals (Tafsir al-Jalalayn)*, so called because it was begun by Jalal ad-Din al-Mahalli (d. 1459) and completed by Suyuti. As-Suyuti was a prolific writer who collected material from a vast number of sources and presented it both concisely and in a variety of forms. There is little room in the tafsir for expression of differences of opinion or for elaborations of narratives. This work has been quite popular in the Muslim world because of its precise nature and grammatical focus. [8]

This is a Meccan sura with seven verses, if one counts the *basmala* ("In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate") as a verse and counts the seventh verse as starting with "The path of those whom" until the end of the sura. If one does not consider the *basmala* a verse, then the seventh verse starts with "Not those against whom you have sent your wrath" to the end of the sura. One needs to understand the word "say" at the beginning of the sura because of the statements that precede "Only You do we serve." This is in keeping with the sura being a statement repeated by the worshippers.

"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

"Praise be to God": this is a predicative sentence, which intends thereby praising God such that the sentence affirms that the Most High is the possessor of all the praise from His creation. Or, it is the praise which He deserves because they should praise Him. Allah is the personal name of Him who is worthy of worship.

"Lord of the worlds": that is, ruler of all creation including humanity,

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the jinn, the angels, the animals, and other creatures, all of whom may be said to be endowed with intelligence. It is also said that it means those intelligent members of humanity and those intelligent members of the jinn and so forth. The plurality [of "worlds"] with the *ya'* and *nun* [i.e., the masculine sound plural ending of "worlds"] indicates the supremacy of those who possess knowledge over all others. The word '*alamin*', "worlds," is derived from '*alama*', meaning "Mark, sign, or characteristic" because the world provides a sign of its Creator.

"The Merciful, the Compassionate": that is, the possessor of mercy, which entails intending good for His people.

"Ruler of the day of religion": that is, the day of requital, which is the day of the resurrection. The day is singled out for mention because there is no ruler in reality for anyone on that day other than God Most High, as indicated by "To whom is the rulership of the day? To God!" (40:16). Those who read *malik* [with an *alif* in its spelling] understand it to mean the ruler of the entire affair on the day of resurrection; that is, He is characterized in that way ceaselessly, in the same way that He is the One who pardons sin. The occurrence of *malik* with *alif* is sound, for it indicates a characteristic of knowledge.

"Only You do we serve; Only from You do we seek aid": that is, we devote only to You acts of Islamic worship and the like. We request help only from You in the acts of worship and the like.

"Guide us along the straight path": that is, lead us to the path, which is grammatically substituted by the following phrase [in the accusative case].

"The path of those whom You have blessed": with guidance. The resumptive pronoun ["those whom"] is then substituted in the next phrase by *ghayr* ["not," which is in the genitive case, being governed by the preposition '*ala*' of this phrase].

"Not those against whom You have sent your wrath": who are the Jews.

"Nor": and other than [and thus equivalent to the preceding *ghayr*].

"Those who are astray": and they are the Christians. The subtlety of the substitution is that it is an indication that those who are guided are not Jews or Christians. And God knows best what is right.

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## ***Ibn Taymiya:***

### ***Treatise on the Principles of Tafsir***

#### **Jane Dammen Mcauliffe**

Taqi ad-Din ibn Taymiya, whose father and paternal grandfather were also deeply learned in the religious sciences, was born in the northern Syrian city of Harran in 1263. Fleeing the Mongol incursions, his family eventually moved to Damascus, where Ibn Taymiya was educated, earned acclaim as a Hanbali scholar-activist, and, in 1328, died imprisoned in the Citadel. He spent a total of more than six years in prison, both in Mamluk Egypt and in Damascus, condemned by his adversaries for his relentless attacks on what he deemed to be unacceptable innovations in Muslim thought and practice. Ibn Taymiya was a prolific author and his published works continue to exert a strong influence. What follows is an excerpt from his short hermeneutical treatise on the proper approach to the exegesis and explication of the Qur'an, *Introductory Treatise on the Principles of Tafsir*.<sup>[9]</sup>

#### **Prologue**

One of the brethren asked me to write for him an introductory treatise that would include comprehensive rules prescribed for understanding the Qur'an, for knowing its interpretation and its meanings, for distinguishing—in both what has been handed down about it and what is the result of reasoning—between the truth and various kinds of falsehood, and for drawing attention to the decisive argument [*dalil*] that distinguishes correct opinions from incorrect. For the books composed about Qur'anic interpretation are laden with lean and fat, with obvious falsehood and evident truth. Now, true knowledge lies either in a trustworthy transmission [*naql*] from one who is protected from error [*ma'sum*] or in a statement for which there is a clearly understood argument. Anything else is either [a transmission] rejected as a forgery or remains in "suspension," neither recognized as spurious nor ever critically tested. There is a palpable need for the Muslim community to understand the Qur'an, which is "God's strong rope, the wise remembrance, the straight path, which passions cannot divert nor tongues confuse. Despite frequent repetition, it never wears out; its wonders never cease, and learned men never become satiated with it. Whoever professes it speaks the truth;

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whoever acts upon it is rewarded; whoever judges by it acts justly; whoever summons [others] to [follow] it is [himself] guided to a straight path. Whoever arrogantly abandons it, God shall deal him a mortal blow. Whoever seeks guidance in anything else, God shall lead astray." . .  
[10]

#### **The Best Methods of Interpretation: Interpreting the Qur'an Through the Qur'an and Interpreting it Through the Sunna**

If someone asks, "What is the best method of interpretation?" the answer is that the soundest method is that whereby the Qur'an is interpreted through the Qur'an. For what is summarily expressed in one place is expatiated upon in another. What is abridged in one place is elaborated upon in another.

If that defeats your efforts, then you should resort to the Sunna, for the Sunna is what explains the Qur'an and elucidates it. Imam Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shafi'i\* has even said, "God's Messenger based his adjudications entirely upon what he understood of the Qur'an." God said, "We sent down to you the book with truth so that you may judge between people according to what God has shown you; do not, then, side in dispute with those who are faithless" [4:105]. And God said, "We sent down on you the remembrance so that you may make clear to people what has come down to them and perhaps they may reflect" [16:44]. And God said, "We only sent down the book on you so that you may clarify for them those matters on which they hold divergent views and [that it may be] a guidance and mercy for a people who believe" [16:64]. Because of this God's Messenger said, "Truly I was given the Qur'an and its like together," meaning the Sunna. The Sunna, too, came down upon him by inspiration, just like the Qur'an, except that the Sunna was not recited [to him] as was the Qur'an. Imam ash-Shafi'i and other leading scholars have drawn many inferences from that [hadith], but this is not the place [to discuss them].

The point is that you should seek the interpretation of the Qur'an

\* Ash-Shafi'i (d. 820) stressed prophetic hadith as, along with the Qur'an, fundamental to the elaboration of Islamic jurisprudence.

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from the Qur'an itself, and if you do not find it there, then from the Sunna. As God's Messenger said to Mu'adh when he sent him to Yemen: "On the basis of what will you judge?" Mu'adh answered, "By the book of God." "And if you do not find anything [there]?" Muhammad pressed. Mu'adh responded, "By the Sunna of God's Messenger." "And if you still do not find anything?" Mu'adh replied, "I will give my own considered opinion." Then God's Messenger tapped Mu'adh's chest and exclaimed, "Praise belongs to God, who grants success to the messenger of God's Messenger in satisfying the Messenger of God." This hadith can be found in the various collections [*fi 'l-masanid wa 's-sunan*] with a flawless chain of transmitters.

### **Interpreting the Qur'an Through the Statements of the Companions**

Then when you do not find the interpretation in the Qur'an or in the Sunna, you should have recourse to the statements of the Companions. This is because they are particularly knowledgeable in such matters, given what they actually witnessed with regard both to the Qur'an and to those circumstances of which they alone have cognizance. It is also because of their complete understanding and sound knowledge, especially that of the most learned and prominent among them, such as the four rightly guided and rightly guiding caliphs, and 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ud.\* Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari † stated that Abu Kurayb related that Jabir ibn Nuh transmitted from al-A'mash, on the authority of Abu 'd-Duha [Muslim ibn Sabih], that Masruq reported 'Abdallah, that is Ibn Mas'ud, to have said: "I swear by the one and only God, no verse from the book of God came down for which I was not the most knowledgeable about when it came down and where. If I knew where there was anyone, whom riding beasts could reach, more knowledgeable about the book of God than I, I would go to him." Al-A'mash also, on the authority

\* Ibn Mas'ud (d. 653) was a Companion of the Prophet and a famous Kufan reciter of the Qur'an.

† At-Tabari (d. 923) is renowned for both his massive commentary on the Qur'an and his history of the world from creation to his own times. Samples of his work appear below in parts 2 and 7.

of Abu Wa'il [Shaqiq ibn Salama], reported Ibn Mas'ud to have said: "When any one of us had learned ten verses, he would not go beyond them until he knew what they meant and how to put them into practice."

Among them (that is, those particularly knowledgeable in interpretation) stands the learned man and scholar 'Abdallah ibn 'Abbas,\* cousin of God's Messenger and expositor of the Qur'an by virtue of the blessing obtained for him by the supplication of God's Messenger when he prayed, "O God, give him understanding in religion and teach him the interpretation [*ta'wil*] of the Qur'an". . . .

Yet sometimes sayings which they used to recount from the "people of the Book" † are transmitted on the Companions' authority, [a practice] which was approved by God's Messenger when he said, "Convey on my authority even a single verse and narrate [traditions] about the Banu Isra'il [i.e., Jews and Christians] without constraint. But whoever tells lies against me intentionally, let him take his seat in the Fire." Al-Bukhari related this on the authority of 'Abdallah ibn 'Amr [ibn al-'As].

Because of this, on the day of [the battle of] Yarmuk 'Abdallah ibn 'Amr acquired two camel loads of books belonging to the "people of the Book." He then used to transmit information from them, based on what he understood of this hadith to be the permission to do so.

Yet these Jewish and Christian accounts [*al-ahadith al-isra'iliyat*] should only be mentioned for purposes of attestation, not as a basis for belief. These accounts are essentially of three kinds. The first kind is what we know to be true because we already possess that which attests to its authenticity. That kind is sound. The second sort is that which we know to be untrue because of what we possess which contradicts it. The third type is that about which nothing can be said, being neither of the first kind nor the second. We should neither believe it nor declare it to be false. It is permissible to recount it, given what has just been said, but most of it provides no benefit in matters religious.

Among the "people of the Book" the scholars themselves disagree

\* Ibn 'Abbas (d. 686), whose comments on Sura 1 were given above, was perhaps the most prominent early exegete.

† This expression—*ahl al-kitab* in Arabic—is a common qur'anic designation for Jews and Christians as possessors of earlier revelations.

greatly in such matters and consequently disagreement is conveyed through the interpreters of the Qur'an [who utilize *isra'iliyat*]. . . .

The best thing to do in reporting matters about which there is disagreement is this: all of the views pertinent to that case should be included; the reader should be made aware of those that are valid and the erroneous ones should be refuted; and the extent to which the diversity of opinion is useful or fruitful should be mentioned lest prolonged controversy and disagreement over useless matters distract one from what is more important.

Anyone who reports a disputed question without including everything that people have said about it is acting deficiently, since the correct view may be in what he ignores. Whoever simply reports disputed matters and lets it go at that, without drawing attention to which views are sound, also acts deficiently. If he deliberately defines as sound what is not, he has supported falsehood. If he does so out of ignorance, then he has committed an error. The same can be said for one who generates disagreement about useless matters or transmits statements under many different wordings, the gist of which conveys but one or two views as far as sense is concerned. He, too, has certainly wasted his time and made much of what is unsound. He is like someone

dressed in "the two garments of a lie" [*thawbay zur* ].\* But God is the One who leads us to the right answer.

### Interpreting the Qur'an Through the Statements of the Followers

When you find the interpretation in neither the Qur'an nor the Sunna, nor on the authority of the Companions, in that case much that is reported on the authority of the leading scholars goes back to the statements of the Followers, for example Mujahid ibn Jabr, † for he was a prodigy [*aya* ] in interpretation. Muhammad ibn Ishaq recounted from Aban ibn Salih that Mujahid said, "I spread out the *mushaf* [i.e., the text

\* This expression, which can refer to someone who pretends to have more than he possesses, occurs in a Prophetic hadith recorded in the collections of both al-Bukhari and Muslim.

† Mujahid (d. ca. 720) was a famous reciter and exegete of the Qur'an among the "Followers," the generation after that of the Companions.

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of the Qur'an] before Ibn 'Abbas three times, from its opening sura to its concluding one. At each and every verse I stopped him and asked him about it." At-Tirmidhi included a report about it from al-Husayn ibn Mahdi al-Basri, who received it from 'Abd ar-Razzaq, who was told by Mu'ammara that Qatada said, "There is no verse in the Qur'an about which I have not heard something [significant]."\* At-Tirmidhi also included a report about it from Ibn Abi 'Umar, who received it from Sufyan ibn 'Uyayna on the authority of al-A'mash, who heard Mujahid say, "If I had read Ibn Mas'ud's version of the *mushaf* [*qira'ata Ibn Mas'ud* ], I would not have needed to ask Ibn 'Abbas about many of the Qur'anic matters on which I sought information." Ibn Jarir [at-Tabari] reported from Abu Kurayb, who related from Talaq ibn Ghannam on the authority of 'Uthman al-Makki, that Ibn Abi Mulayka said, "I saw Mujahid, with his slates in hand, asking about the interpretation of the Qur'an. [Whenever he posed a question] Ibn 'Abbas said to him, 'Write.' This went on until Mujahid had asked Ibn 'Abbas about the interpretation of the whole text." For this reason Sufyan ath-Thawri used to say, "When interpretation comes to you from Mujahid, it is sufficient for you."

[After listing a number of Followers, he continues:] You may mention their statements about a particular verse. But when a difference of wording occurs in what they have expressed, the unknowledgeable person counts it as a divergence of opinion and conveys it as a plurality of views. That, however, is not the case. For among this group are those who express something in its exact wording [*bi-lazimihi* ], or the equivalent of that [*nazirihi* ], and those who render the essence of it [*bi-'aynihi* ]. Taken as a whole, this amounts to a single idea expressed in many [different] passages. The intelligent person should certainly understand that. God, however, is the supreme Guide.

Shu'ba ibn al-Hajjaj and others said, "In legal stipulations [*al-furu'* ] the statements of the Followers do not constitute sufficient proof [*hujja* ], so how can they do so in matters of interpretation?" That is to say, they

\* In the *Sunan* of at-Tirmidhi this hadith from Qatada (d. 735), another noted exegete of the Followers' generation, is also inserted among the accounts from Mujahid.

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are not considered a sufficient proof against the statements of other Followers who disagree with them. This, in fact, is a sound argument. When the Followers are in agreement, it unquestionably constitutes sufficient proof. If, however, they disagree, the statement of one does not disprove either the statement of another Follower or that of succeeding generations. In that situation one

must resort to the language of the Qur'an or to the Sunna or to Arabic usage generally or to the statements of the Companions about the matter.

### **Interpreting the Qur'an on the Basis of Personal Opinion**

Interpreting the Qur'an solely on the basis of personal opinion [*ra'y*] is strictly forbidden. . . . Ibn 'Abbas reported, "God's Messenger said, 'Whoever speaks about the Qur'an without knowledge will assuredly take his seat in the Fire.'" Jundab related, "God's Messenger said, 'Whoever speaks about the Qur'an on the basis of his personal opinion, even if he gets it right, has still erred.'" . . .

Similarly, it has been reported that some scholars, both Companions and others, spoke harshly about the interpretation of the Qur'an without well-founded knowledge. No one should suggest, however, that to say Mujahid, Qatada, and other such scholars interpreted the Qur'an means that they spoke about the Qur'an or interpreted it without well-founded knowledge or on their own accord. What, in fact, has been recounted of them definitely confirms what we have said, that is, that they did not speak of their own accord or without knowledge. Whoever *does* speak about the Qur'an on the basis of his own personal opinion feigns a knowledge that he does not possess and acts contrary to the command he has been given. Even if, in actuality, he were to get the meaning right, he would still be erring, because he did not come at the matter in the proper way.

The same can be said for anyone who, in a state of ignorance, judges between people. He, too, is in the Fire, even if, in actuality, his judgment accords with the right one. Still, he is less blameworthy than one who makes a wrongful judgment. God, however, knows best. In similar fashion did God call those who make slanderous accusations liars when He said,

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"Since they did not bring witnesses, in God's eyes they are liars" [24:13]. For one who utters slander is a liar, even were he to slander someone who has actually committed adultery. That is because he has made a statement about something on which he has no right to comment, and because he has feigned a knowledge which he does not possess. But, again, God knows best.

For this reason a group of our distinguished predecessors refrained from any interpretation of which they had no knowledge. . . . Abu Bakr as-Siddiq\* exclaimed, "What earth would support me and what heaven would overshadow me were I to say about the book of God what I knew not." . . .

Ayyub, Ibn 'Awn, and Hisham ad-Dastawa'i reported that Muhammad ibn Sirin said, "I asked 'Abida as-Salmani about a verse of the Qur'an and he replied, 'Those who know why the Qur'an was sent down (that is, the circumstances of revelation) have died, so fear God and follow the right course.'"

Abu 'Ubayd related from Mu'adh, who transmitted from Ibn 'Awn that 'Ubaydallah ibn Muslim ibn Yasar reported that his father said, "When you speak about God stop to consider the premises and the consequences of what you say."

Hashim related from Mughira that Ibrahim said, "Our associates have always feared and dreaded interpreting the Qur'an."

Shu'ba related from 'Abdallah ibn Abi as-Safar that ash-Sha'bi said, "By God, there is not a single verse about which I have not asked, and yet it is God's own transmission!"

Abu 'Ubayd reported from Hashim, who related from 'Umar ibn Abi Za'ida on the authority of ash-Sha'bi that Masruq said, "Beware of interpreting the Qur'an because it is nothing less than God's own transmission!"

These and other well-founded reports, which come down to us from our leading predecessors, are concerned with their refusal to say anything

\* Abu Bakr (d. 634) was the first caliph of the Muslim community after the death of Muhammad.

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of which they have no knowledge about the interpretation of the Qur'an. There is no objection, however, to one who speaks from a basis of [sound] linguistic and legal knowledge.

There is no contradiction, consequently, in the fact that statements about the interpretation of the Qur'an have been reported from these and others, because they talked about what they knew and kept quiet about what they did not know. This is what everyone should do. Just as one should remain silent about what he knows not, one should speak when asked about what he knows. This is supported by God's saying, "You shall expound it to people and not suppress it" (3:187), and by the hadith that is handed down through various lines of transmission: "Whoever is asked about something he knows but suppresses it, will be bridled on the Day of Resurrection with a bridle of fire."

Ibn Jarir [at-Tabari] reported from Muhammad ibn Bashshar, who transmitted from Mu'ammal on the authority of Sufyan who reported from Abu 'z-Zinad that Ibn 'Abbas said, "Interpretation of the Qur'an is of four kinds: a kind that the Arabs recognize on the basis of their [native] speech; interpretation that no one can be excused for not knowing; interpretation that the scholars [alone] know; and interpretation that only God knows." For God, may He be exalted and glorified, is all-knowing.

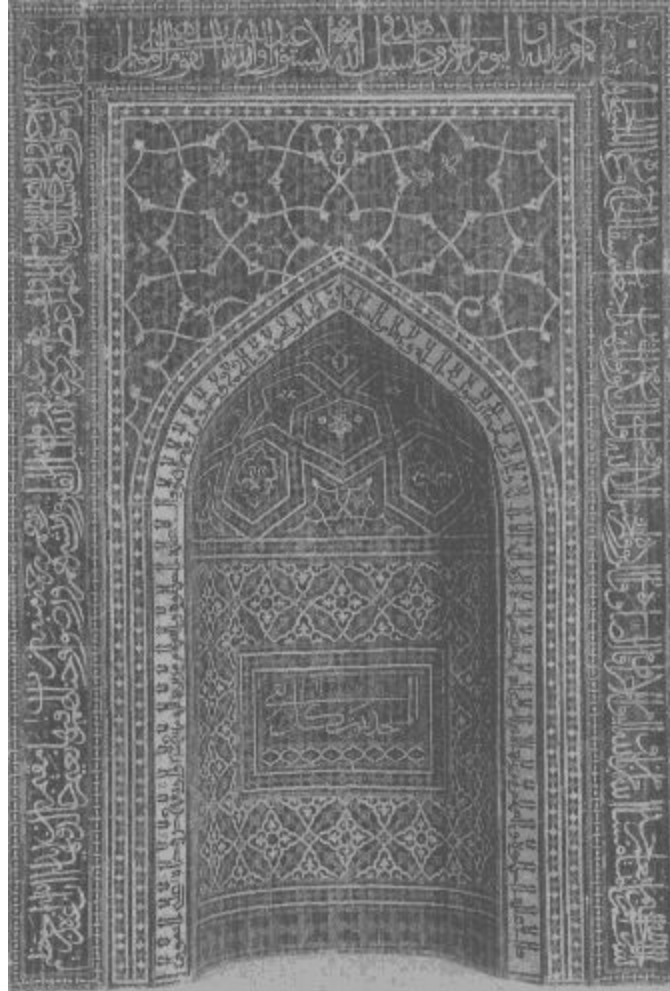
### ***Sacred Text and the Mihrab***

In many mosques the primary visual focus is the niche (mihrab) that indicates the *qibla*, the ritual orientation to Mecca. Around the outer edges of the tile mihrab shown in figure 7 runs the same text featured on the drum of the Sultan's mosque in Shah Alam, near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (9:18–19; see fig. 1), in *muhaqqaq* script, but here the inscription also includes the following three verses (20–22) encouraging believers to emigrate (lit., "make a *hijra* ") and strive "in the cause of God" in sure hope of eternal reward. Around the inner arch runs a hadith, in Kufic script, about the five pillars; and at the center of the niche another brief hadith declares: "The mosque is the house of every God-fearing person."<sup>[11]</sup>

The inscription in thuluth script above the mihrab of the Rustem Pasha mosque (1561–1562) built by Sulayman the Magnificent's chief architect,

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 7.

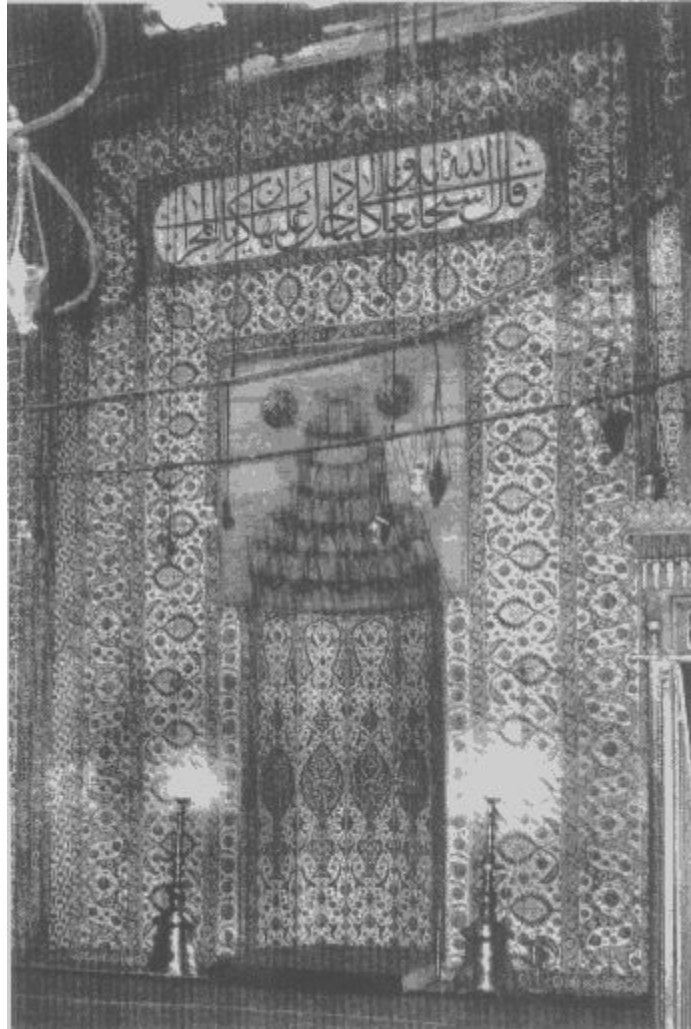
Tile mihrab, Isfahan, Iran (ca. 1354).

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art,

Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20).

Sinan, is an example of the most literal kind of epigraphic exegesis—the implied interpretation of a text by association with a visual setting (fig. 8). The text (3:37) appears often on Turkish mihrabs, apparently because it contains the word *mihrab*, even though the text uses the word in the sense of "private chamber" rather than Mecca-oriented niche: "God the Most High, to whom be praise, said: Every time Zacharia went in to her [Mary] in the chamber [he found her (miraculously) supplied with provisions]." In other words, the mere appearance





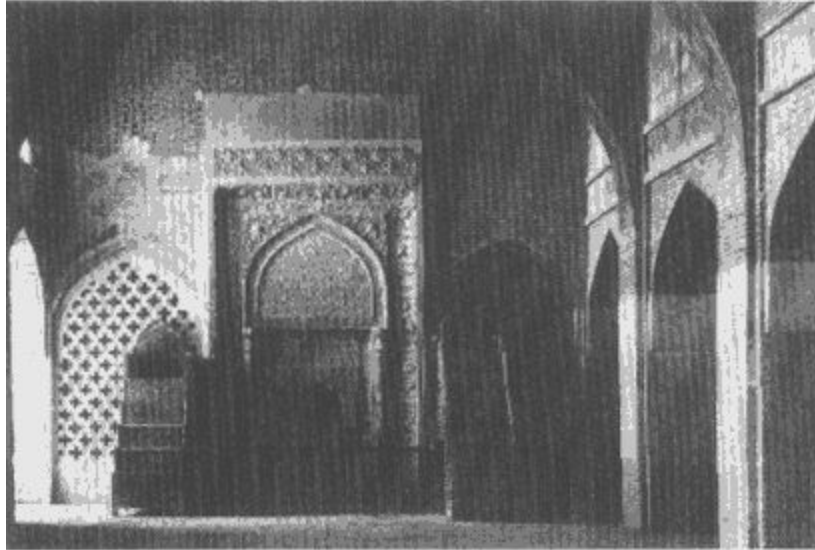
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Figure 8.

Rustem Pasha Mosque, mihrab, Istanbul (1561–1562).

of a word seems to have dictated the choice of inscription. (The flanking brass candlesticks are similar to the one shown in fig. 13.)

Some mihrabs function in a commemorative or votive capacity in addition to serving their principal ritual role of liturgical orientation. A stucco mihrab dated 1310 (fig. 9) in a "side chapel" of the Congregational Mosque of Isfahan (see fig. 31) was in part a commemorative gift to acknowledge the conversion (in 1309) of the Il-Khanid ruler Uljaytu to Twelver Shi'ism. Several extended



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 9.

Mihrab of Uljaytu, Congregational Mosque of Isfahan, Iran (1310).

(On votive mihrabs, see also fig. 10, SD fig. 3.)

texts, almost entirely in thuluth script, include hadith about the Imams, obvious evidence of Shi'i patronage. One long hadith provides a commentary on Qur'an 4:59: When Muhammad uttered the just-revealed words "O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those who hold authority among you," a listener named Jabir asked who those in authority might be. Muhammad responded by naming the twelve Imams, 'Ali and his two sons Hasan and Husayn, and the nine yet to come. A second Prophetic hadith reminds would-be patrons that "anyone who builds a mosque, be it as small as the Prophet of God's dovecote, will have house in paradise." Finally, a saying attributed to 'Ali recalls that anyone who comes to the mosque will receive one of eight rewards, including guidance on the straight path and freedom from fear. Taken together, the inscriptions provide an interpretation of the mihrab as part of the renovation of an existing structure now under the care of Shi'i leaders.<sup>[12]</sup>

Men of royal blood were not the only people to fund such offerings. A twelfth-century Iranian woman named Fatima Khatun also commissioned a votive or commemorative mihrab (fig. 10). Its historical inscription in Kufic on the horizontal panel above the inner arch indicates that "the Khatun Fatima bint Zahir ad-Din ordered its [construction]." Two qur'anic texts are cited: the first, in Kufic around the three outer edges, "Perform ritual prayer at the



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 10.

Votive mihrab of Fatima Khatun, Iran (12th cent.).

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Macy Fund, 31.50.1.

(See also SD figs. 2, 3.)

two ends of the day and as night approaches" (11:114); and the second, in Naskhi around the innermost arch, "Indeed God is with the God-fearing and those who do good" (16:128). A devotional Kufic text around the upper arch reads: "Occupy yourself with prayer and do not be among the heedless; serve your Lord generously."<sup>[13]</sup>

***Al-Ghazali:***

***The Canons of Ta'wil***

## Nicholas Heer

Now for a very different approach, one that assesses the value of reason as a principle of interpretation. The text of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's (d. 1111) *The Canons of Ta'wil (Qanun at-ta'wil)* translated here is the middle section of an essay in which Ghazali responds to a number of questions regarding scriptural passages that deal with Satan, the jinn, the angels, and certain eschatological matters. In this section Ghazali explains that the interpretation of scripture is necessary because there often appears to be a contradiction between statements found in the Qur'an or the traditions of the Prophet and what is known to be true through reason. He describes the approaches five different groups have taken with respect to this issue, pointing out that only one is correct. He concludes the section with a set of three recommendations for those who may want to interpret scriptural passages for the purpose of reconciling them with reason. [14]

At first glance one's superficial impression is that there is a conflict between reason [*ma'qul*] and scripture [*manqul*]. Those who deal with this issue have split up into (1) those who, at one extreme, have confined their studies to scripture, (2) those who, at the other extreme, have confined their studies to reason, and (3) those moderates in between who seek to unite and reconcile [reason and scripture].

The moderates, in turn, have split into (1) those who made reason fundamental and scripture secondary, and who consequently were not very concerned with the study of scripture, and (2) those who made scripture fundamental and reason secondary, and who were therefore not greatly concerned with the study of reason, and (3) those who made both reason and scripture equally fundamental and strove to bring together and reconcile the two.

There are thus five groups. The first group consists of those who confined their studies to scripture. They stand at the first stage of the way, being content with what they already understand of the apparent meaning of scripture. They have accepted as true what scripture contains both in its details and in its fundamentals. If they are asked to explain a contradiction

in the apparent meaning of scripture and to give an interpretation [*ta'wil*] [of it], they decline, saying that everything is within the power of God. If one asks them, for example, how the person of Satan can be seen at the same time in two places and in two different forms, they reply that nothing is amazing in view of the power of God, for God has power over all things. And perhaps they would not even shrink from saying that a person's being in two places at once is within the power of God.

The second group distanced themselves from the first [taking a position] at the opposite extreme from them. They confined their studies to reason and did not concern themselves with scripture. If they hear something in scripture [*ash-shar'*] that is agreeable to them, they accept it. On the other hand, if they hear something that is in conflict with their reason, they claim that it is something that has been imagined by the prophets, for the prophets were required to descend to the level of ordinary people, and sometimes it was necessary for them to describe things in a way that did not conform with reality. Thus anything that did not agree with their reason they interpreted in this way. They exaggerated rationality to the extent of becoming unbelievers inasmuch as they ascribed lying to the prophets, may God's blessing and peace be upon them, for the sake of the general welfare. There is no disagreement within the [Islamic] community that whoever sanctions such a thing with respect to the prophets should have his head cut off.\*

As for the first group, their shortcoming was in seeking safety from the danger of interpretation and investigation. They ended up in the domain of ignorance but felt secure there. Nevertheless, the position of this first group is closer [to safety] than that of the second group. The first group sought refuge from difficulties by saying that everything is within the power of God and that we cannot fathom the wonders of God's command. The second group sought refuge by saying that the Prophet, for the sake of the general welfare, described things as other than the way he knew them to be. It is evident how much difference there is between these two kinds of refuge with respect to danger and safety!

\* That is, ascribing lying to the prophets amounts to apostasy, and the punishment for that is death.

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The third group made reason fundamental and investigated it at length. However, they paid little attention to scripture, and did not encounter those passages that at first glance and initial impression seem to be contradictory and in conflict with each other or contrary to reason. They did not plunge into the heart of the problem, but when they did hear passages that conflicted with reason they rejected and ignored them or accused their transmitters of lying, except when the transmission was by *tawatur*,\* like the Qur'an, or when the words of the hadith were easy to interpret. They rejected what they found difficult to interpret in order to avoid making far-fetched interpretations. It is clear how dangerous this position is in its rejection of sound traditions that have been transmitted by those trustworthy persons through whom scripture has reached us.

The fourth group made scripture fundamental and dealt with it at length. They were familiar with a large number of scriptural passages [*zawahir*], but they avoided reason and did not plunge into it. The conflict between reason and scriptural passages was apparent to them only in some fringe areas of the rational sciences. However, since their involvement with reason was not extensive nor did they plunge into it, rational impossibilities were not obvious to them, for some impossibilities are perceived only after careful and extended investigation built on many successive premises.

One must add here another point, and that is that they believed that they could consider anything to be possible as long as it was not known to be impossible. They did not realize that there are three categories [to be taken into account]: (1) a category whose impossibility is known by a proof, (2) a category whose possibility is known by a proof, and (3) a category neither the possibility nor impossibility of which is known. It was their custom to judge this third category to be possible, since its impossibility was not apparent to them. This is a mistake, just as it is a mistake to conclude that something is impossible because its possibility is not apparent. Indeed, there is a third category, namely, the category

\* Transmission by *tawatur* (repetition, frequency) is transmission that involves so many transmitters at each stage of transmission that it is inconceivable that the transmitters could have conspired together on a falsehood.

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that is neither known to be possible nor known to be impossible, either because it is beyond<sup>[15]</sup> reason and cannot be comprehended by human ability, or because of the shortcoming of an individual investigator due to his inability to discover the proof himself or his not having someone to point the proof out to him.

An example of the first, from the sense of sight, is the inability of the visual sense to determine whether the number of stars is even or odd or, because of their distance, to apprehend their real sizes. An example of the second, which is the shortcoming of the individual [investigator], is the inability of some people to perceive the stations of the Moon<sup>[16]</sup> and the visibility of fourteen of them at any given time [of the night] and the concealment of fourteen of

them opposite the course of the [visible] stations as they rise and set, as well as other things that some people grasp with the sense of sight and others cannot. Such differences [in ability] also extend to the intellect's faculty of apprehension.

Since these (that is, the fourth group), did not plunge deeply into the rational sciences, they did not encounter many of these impossibilities. They were therefore spared the great effort of making most interpretations, for they were not aware of any need for interpretation. They resemble someone who does not know that God's being in a location is impossible and who can therefore dispense with the interpretation of "above" and "mounting" and all such words that indicate location.\*

The fifth group is the intermediate group who combined the study of reason and scripture. They made each of them an important fundamental and denied that there was a real conflict between reason and scripture. One who denies reason denies scripture as well, since it is only through reason that the truth of scripture is known. Were it not for the truthfulness of the evidence of reason, we should not know the difference between the true prophet [*nabi*] and the false [*mutanabbi*], nor between the truthful person and the liar. How can reason be denied by scripture, when scripture can only be proven true by reason?

\* This is a reference to such verses in the Qur'an as "The Hand of God is above their hands" (48:10) and "God it is who raised up the heavens without visible supports, then mounted the Throne" (13:2).

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These constitute the group who are in the right. They have followed a proper procedure. Nevertheless, they have climbed to a difficult level, have sought an exalted goal, and have traveled an arduous road. How difficult is the goal they have sought, and how rugged is the road they have traveled! It may be level and easy in some places, but it is arduous and difficult in most.

Indeed, one who has dealt with the sciences at length and who has been involved in them extensively will be able to reconcile reason and scripture in most cases with simple interpretations. Nevertheless, there inevitably remain two situations [in which interpretation is difficult]: the first is the situation in which one is forced to employ far-fetched interpretations from which [rational] minds shrink, and the other is the situation in which one cannot determine how to make any interpretation at all. This latter situation is a problem similar to that of the letters mentioned at the beginning of some of the suras [of the Qur'an],<sup>[17]</sup> since no correct explanation of them has been transmitted [to us]. Anyone who thinks that he has escaped from these two situations does so either because of his deficiency in the rational sciences and his ignorance of rational impossibilities, so that he considers possible what he does not know to be impossible, or because of his deficiency in reading traditions, so that he has not encountered many individual traditions which contradict reason. I should therefore like to make three recommendations:

The first recommendation is that one not aspire to know all of that,\* and this was the purpose to which I was directing my discourse. Such knowledge is not something to be aspired to, and one should recite [the verse from the Qur'an in which] God says, "And of knowledge you have been vouchsafed but little" [17:85].

The second recommendation is that one should never deny the testimony of reason, for reason does not lie. Were reason to lie, it might lie in establishing scripture, for it is by reason that we know scripture to be true. How can the truthfulness of a witness be known through the testimony of a lying character witness? Scripture is a witness for the details, and reason is the character witness for scripture. If, then,

\* That is, that one not aspire to a complete understanding of scripture.

it is necessary to believe reason, one cannot dispute [the fact that] location and form must be denied to God. If you are told that works are weighed,\* you will recognize that works are an accident that cannot be weighed, and that interpretation is therefore necessary.

If you hear that death is brought in the form of a fat ram which is then slaughtered,<sup>[18]</sup> you will know that [such a statement] requires interpretation. The reason for this is that death is an accident, and as such it cannot be brought, for bringing constitutes movement, which is impossible for an accident. Moreover, death does not have the form of a fat ram, since accidents cannot be transformed into bodies. Nor is death slaughtered, for slaughtering involves separating the neck from the body, and death has neither a neck nor a body. Death is an accident, or the absence of an accident in the opinion of those who believe that it is the absence of life. Therefore, interpretation [of this statement] is inescapable.

The third recommendation is that one refrain from specifying an interpretation when the [various] possibilities [of interpretation] are incompatible. Judgment concerning the intention of God or of His Prophet by means of supposition and guessing is dangerous. One knows the intention of a speaker only when he reveals his intention. If he does not reveal his intention, how can one know it, unless the various possibilities are limited and all but one of them is eliminated. This one [intention] is then demonstrably specified. Nevertheless, the various possibilities in the speech of the Arabs and the ways of expanding upon them are many, so how can they be limited? Refraining from interpretation is therefore safer.

For example, if it is clear to you that works cannot be weighed, and the tradition concerning the weighing of works comes up, you must interpret either the word "weighing" or the word "works." It is possible that the word used metaphorically is "works," and that it was used in lieu of the register of works, in which they are recorded, and it is these registers of works which are weighed. On the other hand, it is also possible that the

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\* A reference to weighing human works in the Balance as an indication of who will be the inhabitants of the Garden and who the inhabitants of the Fire. See 7:8–9, 23:101–104, 101:6–11.

word used metaphorically is "weighing," and that it was used in lieu of its effect, that is, the determination of the amount of work, since that is the utility of weighing, and weighing and measuring are ways of determining [amounts]. If you conclude at this time that what is to be interpreted is the word "works" rather than the word "weighing," or "weighing" rather than "works," without relying on either reason or scripture, you are making a judgment about God and His intention by guessing, and guessing and supposition are tantamount to ignorance.

Guessing and supposition are permitted as necessary for the performance of acts of worship, piety, and other works that are ascertained by *ijtihad*.\* Nevertheless, matters unrelated to any action belong in the same category as abstract sciences and beliefs, so on what basis does one dare to make judgments in these matters by supposition alone? Most of what has been said in the way of interpretation consists of suppositions and guesses. The rational person has the choice either of judging by supposition or of saying: "I know that its literal meaning is not what is intended, because it contains what is contrary to reason. What exactly is intended, however, I do not know, nor do I have a need to know, since it is not related to any action, and there is no way truly to uncover [its meaning with] certainty. Moreover, I do not believe in making judgments by guessing." This is a safer and more proper choice for any rational person. It also provides more security for the day of resurrection, since it is not improbable that on the day of resurrection he will be questioned [about his judgments] and held accountable for them and be

told, "You made a judgment about Us by supposition." He will not, however, be asked, "Why did you fail to discover Our obscure and hidden meaning [in a passage] in which there was no command for action? You have no obligation with respect to belief in it except absolute faith and general acceptance of its truth." This means that one should say, "We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord" [3:7].

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\* *Ijtihad* : independent investigation as conducted by a religious scholar with requisite training, called a *mujtahid* .

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## Experiencing Qur'an

**Nawawi:**

### ***Etiquette in Recitation***

**Frederick M. Denny**

Imam Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf ad-Din an-Nawawi (1233–1278), from Damascus, rose to a respected position through his scholarship on a wide range of Islamic subjects, but he was especially noted for his commentary on Muslim's collection of Hadith. His *Exposition of the Code of Behavior for Those Who Bear the Qur'an (at-Tibyan fi adab hamalat al-Qur'an)* from which the following selections come, contains many Qur'an and Hadith texts on the subject of those who learn, recite, and teach the Qur'an. Its concern for sincerity, humility, responsible awareness, and God-fearing respect in all dealings with the scripture underscores the devotional aspect of experiencing the Qur'an.

#### **[General Matters]**

The first thing incumbent on the scholars and performers of recitation is to aspire to the pleasure of God Most High. As God Most High has said: "And they have been commanded no more than to serve God, being devoted to him, people of pure faith; to establish regular prayer; and to pay the alms—that is the religion of the truly upright" [98:5]. [This is true concerning] any religious community. In the two sound hadith collections [of Muslim and Bukhari], according to the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, "Acts are judged by their intentions; however, for everyone is what was intended."

. . . First, sincerity is required of the reciter . . . and compliance with the etiquette of the Qur'an. It is also necessary that he call to mind in his soul that he is confiding in God Most High. And it is said concerning the case of one who sees God Most High, that he does not see [God], but God Most High does see him.

#### **[Reciting with a Clean Mouth]**

It is required that at the beginning of recitation that the mouth be cleansed with a toothbrush of some kind or other. This tooth cleaner

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should preferably be a stick of the arak tree. However, it is permissible to use twigs of other woods for cleaning, such as rough scraps of saltwort and so forth. . . .



### **[Recitation and Ritual Purity]**

It is meritorious, when reciting, to be in a state of ritual purity, although recitation in the state of minor impurity is permissible, according to the consensus of Muslims, and many hadith concur. The Imam al-Haramayn [al-Juwayni, d. 1085] said: "It is not to commit a sin of reprehensible conduct; rather it is to omit a better way." If water is not available, then purify using clean sand or stone. . . . However, the person with major impurity and the menstruating woman are forbidden to recite the Qur'an, even just a verse or part of one. But it is permitted for them to apply the Qur'an in their heart rather than uttering it out loud. It is permitted for them to look at the book as it influences the heart. The Muslims agree that glorification, rejoicing, praise, exclaiming "God is most great," and blessing of the Prophet are permitted, among other things concerning pious utterances of the ritually impure individual and the menstruating woman. . . .

### **[Where Recitation May Take Place]**

It is recommended that recitation be performed in a select, clean location. With respect to that, the majority of legal scholars prefer recitation in the mosque, because it is generally clean and dignified. And it is there that takes place another excellent practice, namely secluded spiritual retreat. Moreover, in that case, it is first required that the reciter's entry into the mosque include the formal intention of retreat and the etiquette of careful attention to it. . . . However, with regard to recitation in the bath, the pious forebears differ as to whether it is legally reprehensible. Our companions say: "It is not reprehensible." . . . [But others have declared that] "recitation in three places is disliked: in the baths, in the hashish dens, and in the mills when they are grinding." As Abu Maysara has declared: "Recite only in a nice place."

As for recitation in the street, it is permitted, not disliked [so long as

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nothing inappropriate is connected with it]. But if there is, then it is reprehensible, as when the Prophet disapproved the recitation performance of a drowsy person for fear of confusion. [Even] outside the formal *salat* [daily ritual] prayer, it is [nevertheless] preferable for the reciter to face the qibla direction of Mecca. . . .

### **[Taking Refuge with God]**

At the point of beginning the recitation [the reciter] says: "I take refuge with God from Satan the accursed." The generality of religious scholars say to do that. But some of the scholars specify that refuge should be taken after the recitation. According to the speech of God Most High: "When you recite the Qur'an, take refuge with God from Satan the accursed" [16:98]. . . .

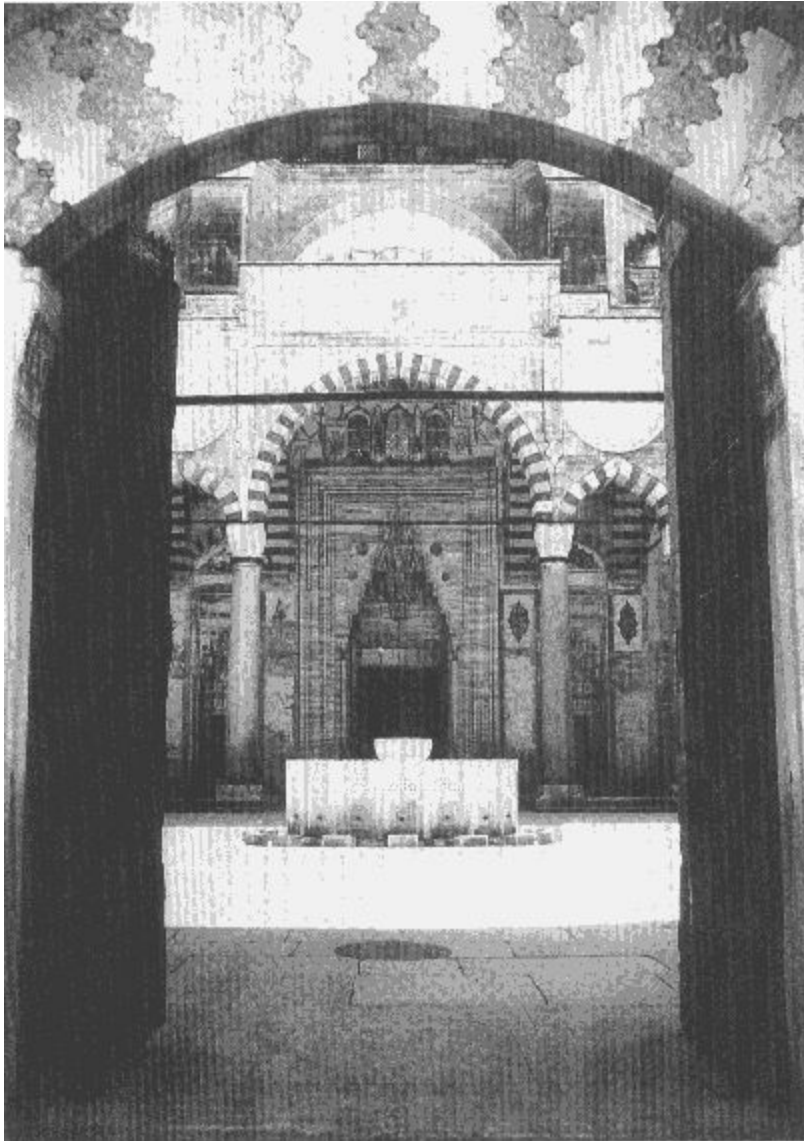
### **[Concerning Reflection During the Recitation]**

When the reciter begins reciting, his state is humble submission and reflection on the matter being recited. . . . God said: "Will they not reflect on the Qur'an?" [4:82]. God Most High also said: "We caused the Book to be revealed to you, full of blessing, so that they may ponder its verses" [38:30]. There are also many hadith concerning [reflection]. . . .

### **[Weeping During Recitation]**

God Most High has said: "They prostrate on their faces and weep and humility increases in them" [17:109]. The Prophet said: "Recite the Qur'an and weep, and if you do not weep, then induce tears in yourselves. . . ." Imam [Abu Hamid] al-Ghazali declared: "Weeping is recommended with recitation and in its presence."<sup>[19]</sup>

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 11.

A view through the courtyard of the Mosque of Ottoman Sultan Selim II in Edirne, Turkey (1568–1575), built by Sinan, showing the ablution fountain and prayer hall entrance.

(On Ottoman architecture, see also figs. 34, 35, 40, 41, 44, 50; and SD fig. 19.)

## **DEVOTION:**

### **RITUAL AND PERSONAL PRAYER**

Muslim writers and artists have invested enormous energy in celebrating, teaching, and interpreting the devotional aspects of their tradition. From the complex of rituals expected of all, to the practices of smaller populations that vary from one region to another, to the aspirations of the individual who prays in silence, recent scholarship has made the riches of that tradition increasingly accessible. In this section Muslims past and present from all over the world offer their views on the core of the believer's response to God's initiatives. Visual themes will feature the ritual settings of daily liturgical prayer, pilgrimage, and funerary rites.

### **On the Five Pillars**

We begin with a fourteenth-century letter from India on the prerequisite of all devotion, right intention, and a contemporary Indonesian theologian's analysis of the relationship between ritual and faith. A hadith describes how Muslims came to pray five ritual prayers daily (see figs. 11–15); a recently discovered Swahili religious epic recounts a conversation between God and Moses on the requirements of the life of devotion; and a selection from a modern Indonesian *tafsir* explores various aspects of pilgrimage (see Figs. 16, 17).

#### ***Sharaf ad-Din Maneri:***

#### ***On the Necessity of Proper Intention***

##### **Paul Jackson**

Ahmad son of Yahya Bibi Razia was born in 1290 in Maner, not far west of Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar, India. He left home at age fourteen to study in Bangladesh; after nineteen years there he headed for home, but soon journeyed to Delhi in search of a spiritual guide. After nearly ten years with a shaykh of the Firdawsi order, Najib ad-Din, Ahmad again returned to Maner; but on the way he decided to spend some time in solitude in a cave near Rajgir. His reputation

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for sanctity and sage advice spread abroad. So many people sought his counsel that he ended up remaining there nearly fifty years, until his death in 1381. Given the name Sharaf ad-Din (Eminence of the Religion), the shaykh developed a large correspondence with disciples unable to visit in person. The Shaykh 'Umar to whom this letter is addressed probably lived in the Gaya district. Maneri's hundreds of letters are sprinkled with citations of Persian poetry. His topic here is no less than the bedrock of devotional response to God's revelation: purity of intention.<sup>[1]</sup>

Brother, Shaykh 'Umar, prayerful greetings from the writer of these lines, Ahmad Yahya Maneri!

You must know that the position of the Law is: "On the Day of Resurrection, people will be raised according to the purity of their intention." If the desire and quest of God predominates within you, you will be raised up among the lovers and seekers of God. Their reward is: "Our Lord will shine forth radiantly." What room is there for heaven and hell here?

There is no room for heaven or hell:

Whatever you know serves but to veil Me.

If your desire and quest is mainly for heaven, you will be counted among the virtuous, for whom the reward is: "Gardens of paradise descend." 'Ayn al-Qudat\* says: "Here we have eating and drinking, and there we have eating and drinking. God forbid that simply by eating and drinking we are the same as brute beasts!" Behold the boldness of the intrepid!

A spiritless dog searches for bones:

A lion cub pursues living marrow.

If your predominant passion is a desire and quest for the world, you will be counted among the worldly. Their reward is: "And a gulf is set between them and what they desire" (34:54). Here, dust has to be thrown

\* 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani: a Persian Sufi executed in Baghdad in 1132 because of statements some judged heretical.

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on the head, and one should grieve for oneself, and the same thing should be said as was mentioned by a luckless one:

Where shall I seek medicine for this pain?

My life is done: how can I grieve?

I am a plaything of the age, no matter what I do:

Nothing comes to completion, no matter what I do.

Look within yourself to see what is there. Do love and affection for God predominate? Or love and affection for paradise? Or love and affection for the world? Realize that whatever predominates now has its significance explained in the following couplet:

Whatever captures your attention in this world

Will be your path to union for eternity.

This is the meaning of the one who said: "God does not look at your faces or your works: He looks at your hearts and your intentions." The impact of this news on the souls of the righteous is similar to that of hell on the souls of the unbelievers and foolish people.

Until one experiences this work of seeking God,

What does he know about love and pain?

You know not this work, nor are you a lover:

You are dead! How are you fit to love?

O brother, asking questions about the state of the work takes its birth from you and me. If you are serious, correct your intention and desire, for the work of a believer cannot but be one. If he goes on pilgrimage to Mecca, he cannot keep trying to please his mother. If he does not go because he wants to please his mother, he simply cannot go on pilgrimage. The same applies to other works. By his intention he reaches out to all sorts of good deeds and acts of submission. The recompense for any good work performed by the believer has to be limited because the work is limited, while the recompense for a believer's good intention is unlimited, for there can be no limit to the intention of performing acts of submission and good deeds. "The good intention of a believer is better than his work." This would mean that if someone has a good intention and desire but for some reason is unable to perform the work—as, for ex-

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ample, a sick person is unable to perform the pilgrimage; a weak man cannot go out to fight on the way of God; and a poor person cannot bestow alms—the reward and recompense would certainly be the same as that of the person who performs all these works.

It is related that the Messenger set out on the jihad of Tabuk during which the Muslims had to undergo many labors and trials. he said: "It is perfectly true that there are some people in Medina who have not seen this desert, nor have they defrayed any of the expenses involved, nor have they suffered any trial or sorrow on the way of God. Nevertheless, they are participating in all things along with us."

People said: "O Apostle of God, how could this be? They are still in Medina." He replied: "There was an excuse for their remaining. They are accounted as present with us because of the perfection of their intention." From this it is proved that the work is of the heart, not of clay, and there is an enormous distance between clay [*gil*] and heart [*dil*]. The abode of intention is the heart, not clay. Here one needs to be careful so that negligence finds no entrance. That is the meaning of the words

From the door of the body to the Ka'ba of the heart,

There are, for lovers, a thousand and one stages.

Along this way, befriend your heart:

Make provision for a hundred thousand stages.

O brother, the science of intention is exceedingly refined and subtle. Not everyone is capable of traveling along that road. Whatever a master of the heart does is in accordance with his intention, for the intention of each person is a measure of his faith. The faith of someone who follows others is rooted in imitation; that of the rationalist, in proof; while that of a mystic flows from personal experience. Look at the astonishing work of the renowned Righteous One [Abu Bakr]! He left his wife and children behind in Mecca and migrated from Mecca together with the Chosen One [Muhammad]. Khwaja Uways Qarani\* did not leave his mother behind. When you examine their intention, both are correct.

\* Uways Qarani: a legendary figure of Yemen during Muhammad's time, after whom a group of religious seekers, guided solely by God's grace without aid of a spiritual guide, is named (Uwaysis).

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There were a number of people from earlier generations who abandoned submission to God because they did not have a correct intention therein. Ibn Sirin\* did not recite the funeral prayer for Khwaja Hasan Basri. † He said: "This is not my intention." Thus it is that renowned men say that it is possible that his not saying the prayers was better than their recital by others, as far as merit was concerned. What do you know about why people pray, or why they do not pray? What do you know about their motive for going on pilgrimage to Mecca, or for not going? Do you know why people fast or not? The heads of those addicted to habit and custom spin at this stage. Inevitably, habit and custom are one thing, while the way of the prophets and saints is something else.

When can you travel along this way, O friend?

Can a spider hope to travel like an elephant?

Nowadays everybody finds contentment in foolish ideas and feels satisfied with false opinions. If religion were as easy as people think it is, then prophets and saints would not have grown anxious, nor would the brave have become faint hearted. . . .

You should know that the behavior of the world is one thing, while lovers form a different category. They do not have the strength to wait. They seek the Promised One here and now. Intoxicated with love they all say:

Either give me what I want, or free me of my desire:

Don't talk about tomorrow's promise! Do this or that.

Rabi'a of Basra ‡ was asked why she did not wish for paradise. She said: "First the neighbor, then the house." Look at the firm resolve of this wearer of a skirt and grieve over your fine dress and turban-sash and know that, in reality, you are neither a man nor a woman. Simply ask, "What am I?"

On one occasion Imam Shibli§ disappeared. His disciples went looking

\* Ibn Sirin (d. 728): a Hadith scholar and renowned interpreter of dreams.

† Hasan al-Basri (d. 728): an early ascetic and a father figure of Sufism.

† Rabi'a (d. 801): a poetess and the most famous woman Sufi; see Rabi'a's hagiography in part 3, and her dream account in part 7.  
§ Abu Bakr ash-Shibli (d. 945): an early Sufi of Baghdad and friend of Hallaj.

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for him. They saw him in the garb of hermaphrodites and seated in their midst, looking just like one of them. They threw dust upon their heads and cried out: "O Leader of the Age, what is this all about?" He replied: "I saw that I could not be called a man, nor did I have the features of a woman. Thus I could not be anything else than a hermaphrodite. And what could be better for a hermaphrodite than to be among kindred folk?" Khwaja 'Attar\* says:

When a madman seeks with such artful boasting,

Don't blindly rush to do battle with him.

Keep your tongue far from his enticing words:

Hold excused a lover in his madness.

Wise people experience the difficulty of the Law,

While those without hearts love being honored.

Without doubt a madman, even if at fault,

Speaks arrogantly, no matter what he says.

In short, O brother, each action that a person performs cannot be bereft of intention and purpose. If he is interiorly filled with love of this world, his intention and purpose will be of this world and, in his actions, the same will apply. No matter how much he prays, fasts, goes on pilgrimage, or gives alms, it will all be tinged with worldliness. On the other hand, if his inner disposition is that of a love for what lies in store for him, and that is the purpose and intention of his actions, then, whether it be eating or drinking, it will be related to the world to come. "From each vessel the contents will appear" is a well-known adage.

There is another group of people known for being royally audacious. Whatever they do is done purely for His sake. "My prayer, my worship, my life, and my death are for God, the Lord of the worlds" would be attributed to them. Their splendor is: "They seek His face," with their feet in this world and their heads in the next. They do not lower them until they hear from the Friend: "You are, in truth, My favorites."

\* Farid ad-Din 'Attar (d. 1220): a Persian poet, author of the didactic religious epic *The Conference of the Birds*.

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***Nurcholish Madjid:***

## ***Worship as an Institution of Faith***

### **Thomas Michel**

A contemporary Indonesian discussion of the question of ritual prayer's place in the larger context of Muslims' faith and worship now builds on Maneri's foundational reflections on intention. Muslim authors all over the world continue to write books on Islamic doctrine for the purpose of reinterpreting the tradition in ever-changing circumstances. Dr. Nurcholish Madjid's "Worship as an Institution of Faith" ("Ibadat Sebagai Institusi Iman") is part of a much larger treatise on Islamic doctrine and ethics.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **The Problematic of the Relationship Between Worship and Faith**

Touching upon the connection between worship and faith is not simply a hypothetical question, for people often raise the question, "Isn't it enough for someone to have faith and do good works, without also having to worship?" Einstein has been quoted, for example, as saying that he believed in God and the necessity of doing good, without feeling a need to join a formal religion such as Judaism or Christianity, which he considered useless.

In passing, we might note that a question of this type suggests an attitude both logical and reasonable. Moreover, the Holy Book itself always speaks about faith and good works as two associated values that people must possess. However, if we examine the matter more closely, the question can raise various problems. First, in historical reality, no system of beliefs has ever appeared that has not introduced, to a greater or lesser extent, rituals. Even a view of life that has absolutely no pretense to religiosity, including those like communism that strive to eliminate religion, has its own ritual system. Through the use of ritual, seen both in the show of respect to the party symbol and in a dogmatic living-out of party doctrines and ideology, a communist strengthens his commitment and dedication to its [the system's] profession of life as well as to its ideals. Similarly, Javanese mystical [*kebatinan*] teachings and informal spiritualities, such as those of theosophical movements and Freemasonry,





[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 12.

All traditional prayer rugs depict a two-dimensional version of the mihrab. In this early-nineteenth-century Turkish design, geometry nearly overpowers floral elements; stylized ewers in the spandrels (above the arch on both sides) may allude to the ablution required before every ritual prayer.

St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 108:29.



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 13.

A fourteenth-century Iranian brass engraved, silver- and gold-inlaid, mosque candlestick holder, one of a pair designed to flank the mihrab (as in fig. 8). It is inscribed to the patron: "Glory to our master, the lofty king, the sultan, the magnificent, the wise, the just."

St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 43:1926.

have introduced certain forms of ritual for their members. At the very minimum there is a process of initiation of members, with a ceremony of profession and the pronouncement of a pledge of faithfulness as a type of oath of allegiance.

The second problem connected with the notion of faith without worship is that, unlike scientific systems or philosophies that have only a rational dimension, faith always possesses a suprarational or spiritual

dimension that expresses itself in devotional actions by means of a system of worship. Such devotional acts not only have the effect of strengthening the feeling of belief and producing a higher consciousness concerning the implications of faith in the matter of deeds, but they also prepare one for an experience of holiness that has no little meaning for a feeling of joy. Such an

experience of holiness, for example, is the feeling of closeness to God, the Object of Worship, the One Lord who is humankind's reason for existence and goal of life.

The third problem is that while it is true that what is important is faith and good works, that is, a combination of the two values of which the one [faith] is the basis for the other [good works], in order for abstract faith to move someone in the direction of performing good works, it must possess a warmth and intimacy in the soul of a believer, and this can be achieved by way of the activity of worship. There is even a general understanding that the reality of a religious life is always found connected with forms of worship activities.

It would seem clear from the above that worship systems are a continuation of the logic of any faith system. Otherwise, faith would become a kind of abstract formulation without the ability to motivate the individual inwardly to do something at the level of genuine sincerity. Thus, the act of faith must be institutionalized in worship as an expression of a person's servanthood before the Lord, the Center of meaning and the Goal of life.

### **Worship Between Faith and Good Works**

The above-mentioned problem can be taken as the basis for discussing the place of worship as an institution of faith, or an institution that links faith and its consequence, that is, good works.

As an interior attitude, faith or belief can exist at a very high level of abstraction so that it is difficult to understand its relationship to evident daily behavior. Every heavenly religion emphasizes salvation through faith. This emphasis is especially found in the Abrahamic religions—that is, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—because they go back in the central elements of their teaching to that of their ancestor, the prophet Abraham

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in the eighteenth century before Christ. These religions strongly emphasize the connection or internal consistency between faith and works or deeds in favor of humankind. For those heavenly religions, the Lord is not understood to be found in things (totemism) or ceremonies (sacramentalism) as in some other religions, but rather in that which goes beyond the world. At the same time, the Lord demands that humanity pass through life following a specific path whose measure is the goodness of every member of human society. In other words, the Lord, in addition to being of a wholly transcendent and august nature, is, according to the perception of the heavenly religions, also by nature ethical, in the sense that God intends for humankind behavior that is *akhlaqi*, that is, ethical or moral.

The link between abstract faith and behavior or concrete good deeds is acts of worship. Worship, as a kind of concretizing of the sense of faith, bears the intrinsic meaning of closeness to the Lord (*taqarrub*) [see 96:19 and 9:99]. In worship, a servant of the Lord (or *'abd Allah*) feels a spiritual intimacy with the Creator. This experience of holiness is something that can be said to be the essence of religious feeling or religiosity, which in the view of the mystics such as Sufis possesses the highest level of legitimacy. (Sufis even tend to hold that religious feeling must always have an inner dimension, while stressing that every exoteric [*lahiriah*] act is legitimate only if it leads someone to this esoteric [*batiniah*] experience.)

However, in addition to its intrinsic meaning, worship also bears an instrumental meaning, for it can be seen as an effort of private and communitarian education leading to a commitment or an interior adherence to moral behavior [see 29:45]. The assumption is that by way of worship, a believer nourishes and increases his individual and collective behavior in regard to his personal and social duties so as to enable the best possible life together in this world. The root of that awareness is a deep realization of one's responsibility for every deed before the Lord in the unavoidable Divine Judgment, at which a person appears strictly as an individual [see 2:28 and

31:33]. Thus because of its very personal nature (as a relationship between a servant and his Lord), worship can become a very deep and effective instrument of moral and ethical education. In the

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Holy Book the hope is clearly expressed that an important effect of worship is the growth of a kind of social solidarity. It is even emphasized that, without the growth of that social solidarity, worship is not only worthless and incapable of bringing one to salvation, but is in fact cursed by the Lord.

From this perspective, worship can be called a framework and institutionalization of faith that manifests itself in forms of behavior and concrete deeds. Moreover, in addition to being a manifestation of faith in practice, worship also functions as an effort at nourishing faith and making it grow. Faith is not something static that appears once and for always. Faith, rather, is of a dynamic character that knows both the rhythm of negative development (decreasing, failing, becoming weak) and positive growth (increasing, deepening, becoming stronger). Positive growth requires continuous efforts at fostering and nourishing faith [see 48:4].

### **Human Nature and Worship**

As a declaration of servanthood before the Lord, worship, which also bears the meaning of glorifying God, is truly a natural thing. That is, it is something that is inherently found in the native tendency of humankind and as a natural phenomenon in its own right. For this reason changing from one form of worship activity to another can be seen as simply a case of substitution. This is because in the living reality of humans there is almost no individual who is absolutely without some form of expression of worshipful or devotional character. If someone does not carry out a normative act of worship (such as salat in Islam), that person will nevertheless certainly carry out some other form of worship activity (such as, as we have mentioned, the strong tendency of communists to glorify their leaders.)

Thus, as with every other natural tendency, the human tendency to perform acts of worship must be properly channeled. The key test of the correctness of an act of worship is that it must raise the status and human dignity of the individual involved in it. True worship will certainly not result in fettering and restraining the worshipper as happens in mythological systems.

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This means that worship must be directed only toward the Most Exalted Presence, who is truly "superior" to humankind because He is our Creator, while human beings are His creatures (even though, and precisely because, they are the pinnacle of His creation.) Moreover, the act of worship must be directed toward Him who, when one has certitude, consciousness, and an experience of His presence in life, produces the sincere desire to do something to earn his "pleasure," that is, good works.

From this perspective, worship can be seen as the symbol of a servant's glorifying his Creator as well as the declaration of the servant's accepting His moral demands. Through worship, a servant hopes that the Creator will help and guide his life to follow the path toward truth. In standing before Him, an individual becomes aware that in confronting the unavoidable challenge of leading a moral life he needs mercy and grace (in Arabic, *fadl*), for human beings cannot fully and perfectly seek and find the path of truth without His guidance [see 24:21].

### **Worship and Religiosity**

The Qur'an recounts the story of the prophet Jacob (Ya'qub), who held the title *Isra'il*, that is, *'abd Allah*, Servant of God, probably because he was very assiduous in his worship, who asked his sons when he was on the point of death: "What will you worship after I am gone?" They answered: "We shall worship your God and the God of your forefathers Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac: God alone! We surrender ourselves to Him" [2:133]. That account in the Sacred Book shows that an act of worship must be accompanied by an attitude of total self-surrender toward the One who is worshipped, that is, God the One Lord. Performing an act of worship without accompanying it with a sincere attitude of self-surrender nullifies the meaning of the act itself as an approach to and intimacy with al-Khaliq, the Great Creator.

This experience is the basis for a "leap" in the soul of a believer every time the name of the Lord is mentioned and arouses in the believer's heart a deep attitude of appreciation each time an expression of religion, such as God's word [in the Qur'an] is heard. It is this "leap" that arouses in the believer a longing to entrust and pledge one's entire life to God,

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Creator and Protector [see 8:2]. In the consciousness of the presence of the Creator Lord in one's life, a human person finds his or her proper nature.

One form of worship in Islam that is highly symbolic of an awareness of the presence of the Lord in the life of humankind is *salat*. Making "contact" with the Lord is the highest purpose of *salat* (that is, its intrinsic purpose, as has been shown above). This is clear in the command of the Lord to the prophet Moses [see 20:14]. The Arabic word *salat* literally means "to call upon," the same meaning as is carried by the Arabic word *du'a'*, that is, the crying out of a servant to the Lord, Creator of the universe.

Furthermore, *salat*, defined as "a collection of readings and actions that begin with a proclamation of God's greatness (*takbir*) and conclude with the greeting of peace (*taslim*)," is highly symbolic of the submission and surrender (*islam*) of a person to the Lord. In the *salat*, after the opening *takbir* the person is commanded to direct his every attitude and attention exclusively to the object of his cry, that is, the Creator of the entire universe, in his position as a servant who is encountering his Lord. Any attitude, whether exterior or interior, that is not relevant to his situation of encountering the Lord is forbidden (thus the first *takbir* is called the *takbirat al-ihram*, that is, the *takbir* by which one enters the sacred state). In this way, at the moment of *salat*, a person, being totally overcome by his contact with the Lord in the vertical dimension, is free from the horizontal dimension of his life, including the social aspects of that life.

At the moment of *salat*, a servant should experience as deeply as possible the presence of the Lord in his life, [as in the hadith] "as if you see Him, and even if you do not see Him, truly He sees you." With the bodily positions of bowing (*ruk'u'*) and prostration (*sujud*), which is performed by touching the forehead on the surface of the earth, accompanied by sacred readings which serve to prepare a dialogue with Him, humble obedience and submission to the Lord are shown most clearly. It is not an exaggeration to hold that properly performed *salat*, that is, when performed with devotion and attention and accompanied by the tranquillity of every member of the body, is a perfect declaration of faith, as has

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been said by 'Ali Ahmad al-Jurjawi.<sup>[3]</sup> *Salat* creates a highly elevated feeling of religion or religiosity.

Moreover, that religiosity can have broad implications in this life, both in one's external life and in the interior. This is owing to the peacefulness of soul that comes about through

communication with the Lord [see 13:28], so the person who performs salat with reverence will have a soul that is more balanced, full of hope, but not losing awareness of himself or becoming haughty, for he "does not despair if misfortune strikes, and does not become puffed up while he is experiencing good fortune" [see 70:19–23].

Thus, salat will be effective in producing an impact of forming an inner disposition that is free from the misplaced worries of facing life. This is not only because faith is always joined with hope, as the Sacred Book affirms, just as denying the Lord, or unbelief, is linked with despair [see 12:87], but also because a person truly grows in stability in orienting one's life to attain the pleasure of the Lord alone. One result of imbibing the meaning of salat is that "the angels will come down upon them [saying]: 'Do not fear or feel saddened, and rejoice in word about the Garden which you have been promised! We are your companions during worldly life and in the Hereafter'" [41:30].

Religiously, the experience of "being accompanied by angels" must be lived as a reality. Even though the Muslim philosophers tended to interpret this metaphorically, that experience nevertheless has concrete implications in daily life. It is clear that experience is a continuation or consequence of hoping in the Lord and His protection. Thus, even though such a person must suffer, he sees his suffering as a common human experience that can happen to anyone, while he himself, in his sufferings, keeps on believing and hoping in the Lord. This is an attitude that another person would not have [see 4:104].

From all that we have tried to explain above, we can conclude that salat, as well as other forms of worship such as, for example, fasting and the pilgrimage, are strongly connected with a strength of soul and resoluteness of heart in facing life, because there is hope in the Lord. At the same time, hope in the Lord is one aspect of faith that, among other

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things, gives birth to a sense of security: faith (*al-iman*) gives birth to security (*al-amn*) [see 6:82]. Furthermore, that sense of security and of being under the protection of the Lord will equip someone to aspire to lead a moral life, that is, a life that is inspired by the highest social awareness. (That social awareness, for example, is symbolized by the greeting of peace at the conclusion of the salat to the persons on the right and left, by the *zakat fitra* at the end of the month of Ramadan, and by the white robes worn equally by all during the pilgrimage (*hajj*) and the devotional visitation of Mecca (*'umra*), as well as in fulfilling the obligation of paying the *zakat* (alms). As we have seen, worship that does not give birth to social awareness, clearly one of the most important manifestations of a moral life, would lose its true meaning, to the point that someone who performs any type of formal worship without social awareness is cursed by the Lord.

Because of its effects in producing resoluteness and peace of soul, the foundations of optimism in facing a life that is not always easy, worship, particularly salat, is a source of spiritual strength in facing difficulties, as is the case also with mental courage and endurance [see 2:153]. Creativity, inventive power, and resourcefulness in seeking to resolve the problems of life, for example, will grow even stronger in the individual who has found stability through sincere devotion (*taqwa*) [see 65:2]. Thus, worship as a manifestation of journeying the path of life toward the Lord, if it is performed with full consciousness and consistency, will result in a life of total well-being [see 72:16], because of the sense of security based on faith. In this way, worship is the institutionalization of faith.

**Tabari:**

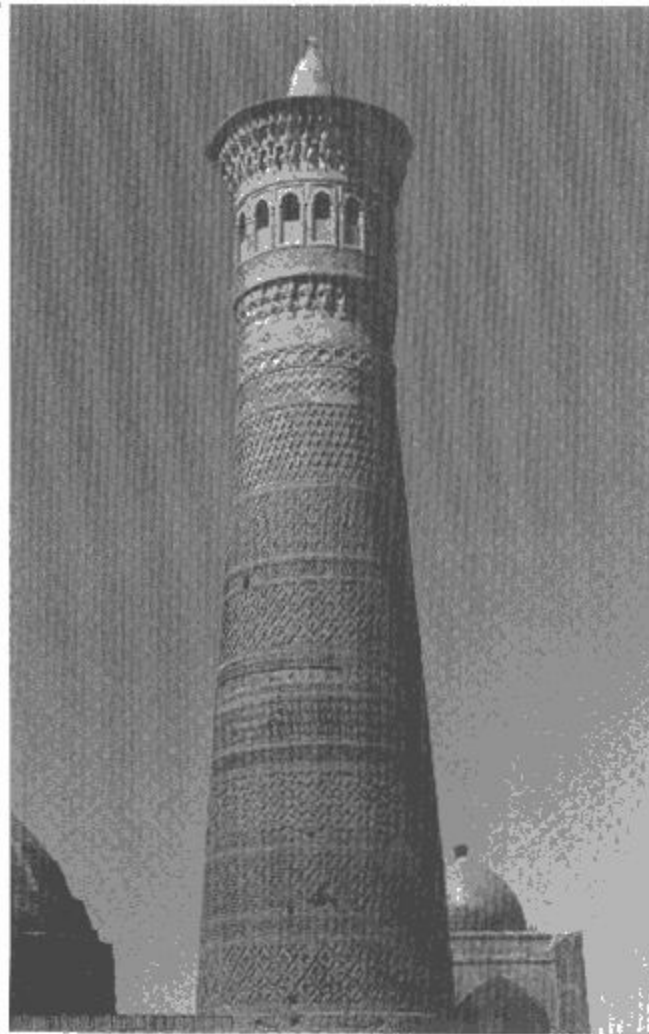
## ***Hadith on the Five Daily Ritual Prayers***

### **Reuven Firestone**

Islamic tradition includes a treasury of lore about the divine origins of ritual practices, such as the following hadith about the five rounds of daily salat. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari (d. 923) grew up in Tabaristan, a northern province in today's Iran. He traveled in search of learning and became a brilliant legalist, qur'anic scholar, historian, and collector of hadith, spending most of his adult life in the center of the civilized world of his day, Baghdad. He fol-

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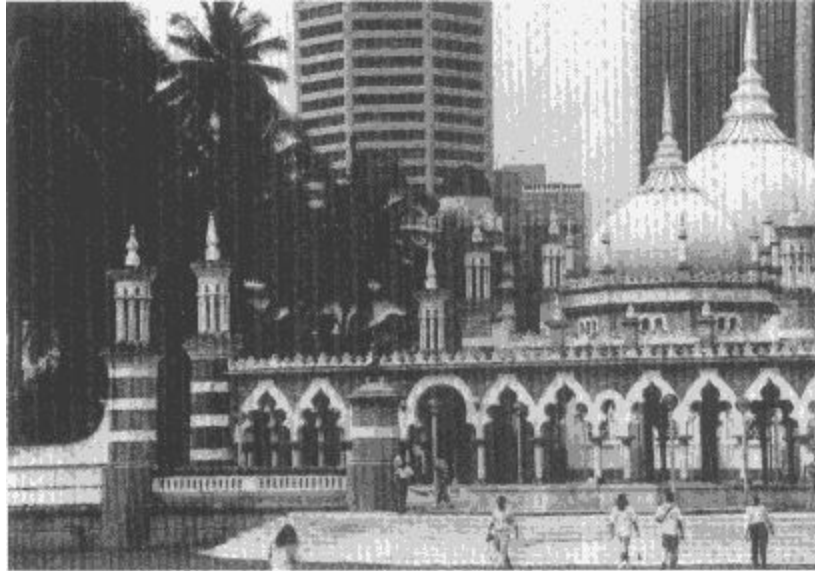
Figure 14.

Fifteen stories tall, the Kalyan Minaret in Bukhara (1127) exemplifies the ornate geometric design in baked brick characteristic of early medieval Iran and Central Asia.

lowed the Shafi'ite legal school until founding a legal school of his own known as the Jariri school, which, perhaps because of its strong similarity to that of Shafi'i, did not long survive. Many of his works are lost, but his great world history and his enormous Qur'an commentary survive. Both are popular among Muslims and are considered extremely important among critical scholars of Islam. His Qur'an commentary includes the following tradition concerning the

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Figure 15.

The classic Jami Masjid (1897) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, shows influence of Mughal architectural style in its ogival arches as well as in the triple ogival domes over the prayer hall and the use of *chattri* pavilions on roofline and minarets.

(See also figs. 32, 33; and SD fig. 24.)

way in which the Muslim community came to the practice of five daily ritual prayers. Cast as a conversation between Muhammad, during his Ascension and journey through the various heavens, and Moses, its tone is reminiscent of Abraham's bargaining with God over Sodom and Gomorrah. The story's repetitive nature is a common characteristic of texts that began as oral tradition. <sup>[4]</sup>

[Muhammad] said: He enjoined upon me fifty prayers, but when I returned to Moses he said: How many were you commanded, Muhammad? I said: Fifty prayers. He said: Go back to your Lord and ask for a reduction, for your community is the weakest of communities, and I have met resistance among the Children of Israel [against imposing such religious requirements]. [The narrator] continued: So the Prophet returned to his Lord, asked for a reduction, and they were reduced by ten. Then he returned to Moses, who asked: How many were you commanded? He answered: Forty. He said: Go back to your Lord and ask for

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a reduction, for your community is the weakest of communities, and I have met resistance among the Children of Israel. [The narrator] continued: So the Prophet returned to his Lord, asked for a reduction, and they were reduced by ten. Then he returned to Moses, who asked: How many were you commanded? He answered: Thirty. Moses said to him: Go back to your Lord and ask for a reduction, for your community is the weakest of communities, and I have met resistance among the Children of Israel. [The narrator] continued: So the Prophet returned to his Lord, asked for a reduction, and they were reduced by ten. Then he returned to Moses, who asked: How many were you commanded? He answered: Twenty. He said: Go back to your Lord and ask for a reduction, for your community is the weakest of communities, and I have met resistance among the Children of Israel. [The narrator] continued: So the Prophet returned to his Lord, asked for a reduction, and they were reduced by ten. Then he returned to Moses, who asked: How many were you commanded? He answered: Ten. He said: Go back to your Lord and ask for a reduction, for your community is the weakest of communities, and I have met resistance among the Children of Israel. [The narrator] continued: So the Prophet returned to his Lord, asked for a reduction, and they were reduced by five. Then he returned to Moses, who asked: How many were you commanded? He answered: Five. He said: Go back to your Lord and ask for a reduction, for your community is the weakest of communities, and I have met resistance among the Children of Israel. [Muhammad] said: I [began to] go back to my Lord, but I was embarrassed and did not go back to Him. So he was told: Just as you had patience for [accepting] five prayers [daily], they will serve as the equivalent of fifty prayers, and every good deed will be considered as ten good deeds. [The narrator] said: Muhammad was overwhelmingly satisfied.\* Moses was very harsh toward [Muhammad] when he [intended to] pass by [with a large number of prayers], and very good to him when he returned to [ask for a reduction from] God.

\* The tradition ends here. The following line is appended.

## ***Ritual and Creed in Moses' Conversation with God***

### **Jan Knappert**

Moses' conversation with Muhammad is well known, but Moses is still more renowned as the *Kalim Allah* : the one who conversed with God. The Swahili *Epic of Moses* (*Utenzi wa Musa* ) is the first literary work yet discovered in northern Mozambique, evidence that a lively Islamic culture existed far from the major cities of East Africa long ago.<sup>[5]</sup> Tentatively dated to the late nineteenth century, the text may have been written in Kenya. About 330 stanzas in length, the poem recounts an intriguing conversation (*munajat* ) between the prophet Moses and God, offering important insights into both the spirituality and theological views of early modern Muslims in East Africa. Topics include the full range of basic religious duties and elements of the creed, as well as a rare "first-person" description of how God created the world. It opens with Moses slaughtering a goat, possibly recalling Leviticus 9:3, but here the prophet seems motivated by a desire to receive a revelation; God obliges. We have here a rare example of a Swahili text that describes a most intimate spiritual experience, similar to but less mythical in tone than accounts of Muhammad's Ascension (see part 7 below). In this story, even the prophet Moses needs encouragement to perform the fundamental religious observances. After a brief invocation, the poet continues:

One day when Moses was in a state of ritual purity [after ritual ablutions], he heard a voice in the air and he knew it was a sign from God. It gave him strength and he fasted for forty days in the mountains. Then he heard again the voice of God: "O ye mountains! Today I need Moses

the son of Amram. I am the Lord without equal. Moses, hasten to come to me! I want you so that we may see each other and speak words to each other."

God's voice shook the mountains, but the Prophet Moses went up and climbed higher and higher. Up to the Mountain of Tur [i.e., Sinai] he climbed, thinking only of God. He made great efforts climbing the steep rocks until he reached the summit at the end of the path. There he prayed a salat of two cycles of prostration, and God on his throne saw it. Moses heard God's voice; it was like thunder and already he received insight. God spoke to his prophet: "I am your God. I am alone. There is no other.

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Listen to me, Moses my messenger, I am God the Absolute, I am the First and the Last. Listen to me, beloved of my heart, I will give you my words."

Moses heard God's words while he was in the act of prostration, and he increased the intensity of his prayers. Then the Lord spoke: "Rise from your prayer. I am the Knower of all secrets: I can hear the date palms rustling in the orchards, I can see all that happens in the shadows of the night." While God spoke the earth shook, and Moses fainted for a long hour. When he came to, he stood up and prayed: "O merciful Lord!" God answered [with a phrase uttered by pilgrims to Mecca]: "At your service!" When Moses heard this he fell down on his face, and God asked him: "When I answer you, you fall down! What is the matter, my prophet?" Moses gave the Lord his answer: "O my Lord, when you answer me with 'At your service,' I feel I am falling and losing my senses." God answered: "My prophet! Hear my words: Every day, when a servant of mine calls me, mentioning my name with true intentions and a pure heart, I answer quickly: 'AT your service,' I answer. Whenever a person calls me, I can hear him wherever he is; even if there are many, I will hear their prayers at once. Now, Moses, if you have a wish, speak!"

Moses spoke to his Lord: "My Lord! I wish to see you!" And Moses saw what seemed like a valley of bright light. He fainted again, so strong was the light; he heard hundreds of angels calling him: "Moses! You have sinned! The Lord God cannot be seen!" And Moses felt as if the mountains were crumbling and the earth was sinking away. But on the third day God relented and restored his brain to complete consciousness and light. The Lord gave him grace because he had become humble.

And Moses spoke to the Lord: "Lord, next time please warn me, may I receive right guidance in time, that I may continue to be humble." The Lord spoke to him: "Avoid the wrath of your Lord. Speak: There is no god but God, and adhere to that conviction. Have no doubt nor any alternative views ever! Doubt will make you want to see, and doubting God is sin. Repeat 'There is no god but Allah' with reverence. When the heart is upright, the soul will not be condemned on the Day of Reckoning. With my mercy you will be carried across to the Garden of Bliss, there to live

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forever. Until the end of time repeat: There is no god but Allah. Mercy comes after wrath.\* Make your prayers numerous at every hour. Pray also for my final prophet Muhammad the Intercessor for his community. Remember to keep the fast and make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Do not neglect to pay the zakat [alms] regularly."

When the Lord had finished speaking to his faithful prophet, Moses suddenly saw how his arms were growing wings, seven on each side, beautiful wings decorated with pearls, and holy scripture was engraved on the feathers: the Torah and the Psalms. But when Moses heard the Lord praise his final prophet, Muhammad, Moses' heart was spoiled by envy and anger as well. † Jealousy entered his heart so that he lost all reason. Strength left his hands and the lovely wings

disappeared from his arms. So Moses asked God the Compeller: "That Muhammad, what kind of person will he be?"

The Lord answered him: "I have given him beauty and I have given him the world, for the entire world will one day accept Muhammad's word and the religion of Islam. I swear by me that he will be mentioned after my name is mentioned in the *shahada* . † If it had not been for Muhammad, I would not have created the world,§ there would be no moon, nor a sun to give light, nor a sky nor an earth, nor paradise nor hell, nor life nor death, if it had not been for my favorite Prophet whom I decided to create first. The prophets would not have existed, nor the animals nor birds, nor the waters, salt or fresh, Adam and Eve would never have been created, nor the forbidden fruit nor any tree or plant, not even the angel Jibril, if it had not been for the Intercessor.

"Now Moses, I tell you, choose between this world and the next. If you choose this world you will surely regret it. Choose between God and the world, Moses; meditate and reflect, avoid hellfire, it has dangerous snakes on every floor. Beware! Every serpent is as long as a year's walk. These terrifying snakes are everywhere in the houses of the wicked, the

\* Inverting a sacred hadith; later in the conversation, God says the opposite.

† Swahili literature provides many examples of one prophet "envying" another's loftier state.

‡ "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

§ A near quotation of a popular sacred hadith.

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oppressors, those who worshipped false gods as well as the eaters of forbidden food, the wine drinkers and drunkards. I have placed snakes ready for the man who rebels against his father and lies with his mother.

"And for the merchant who does not give alms when breaking the fast and for the fornicator I have lit a great fire in hell. Do not doubt it: those who cut their beards and those who pray while weeping will receive no pardon: Amru Rabani, the angel of the fire, will have their trembling souls to roast. The drunkard will not be able to pronounce the confession of faith in the grave, so my snakes will creep all over him.<sup>[6]</sup> I warn all people, do not be tempted to slander others; fear me! Do not increase my wrath by even thinking about atheism [*kufr*]. An angry heart without faith [*iman*] will follow the Devil.

"The gift for those who long for me," thus spoke the kind Lord further, "is knowledge of the divine qualities, the lauding words by which I am praised. He that fears me with goodness, I will fill him with mercy and I will decide in his favor on Judgment Day. Night and day I observe everyone, and whoever repeats my name while doing good things, I will fill him with mercy, and punishment will be removed from him. Remember death day and night: it may come at any time, and when it comes there is no delay. My messenger of death will take his soul, so a person has no other worry in life than to think of the last hour. If a person makes his thoughts pure, I will forgive his sins. The digger of graves will live in heaven, and the one who buries his mother with love will live in a palace in paradise. The one who carries the bier with a heart eager to please, his sins will be forgiven. And the one who pays for the funeral and feeds the poor need not worry and will avoid all suffering later.

"Give meals to the poor and let them be good meals. Feed also my fakirs\* and do not despise them." At that point Moses asked: "Lord, what is a fakir?" God the Giver spoke: "A fakir is a lonely man who is disliked by the people; he is never treated like a neighbor, people take no notice of him. They will invite a rich man to their homes, but they will ignore a fakir. If you invite my fakir with honor and give him a good

meal, then on the Day of Resurrection I will remove your sins from your record.

"Furthermore, never be angry because in your anger there is Satan's footstep. Every dead body must be buried, even the slaves; it is honorable to be buried by all people together. Do not dwell in the company of a miser, nor of a greedy man, for he will not leave you your house. Avoid liars and do not speak evil of people nor reveal their disgrace. Never lie. Beware of adultery. On the day when the souls emerge there will be anxiety and pain, and the rich will be reduced.

"Moses! Your people must always repeat my name and my greatness, then an angel will come [at Judgment] and purify all the people with compassion, those who have remembered me all their lives with gratitude. Their sins will be removed."

Moses spoke and asked the Generous One: "What did you do to Adam? What were his sins?" The Rich One spoke: "Adam rebelled against me to follow the Devil instead of what I had told him. I placed him in the Garden; he could not eat from all the trees, but he ate from the forbidden tree knowingly. A quarrel does not end soon. I had to expel him from heaven. My commandments must never be questioned. I am the Giver. Wrath comes after mercy."

God the Giver spoke: "I will always stay close to my believers. My visiting will be in their hearts. There I will stay. I am as close as that which throbs in your throat" [50:16].

Then faithful Moses asked: "How can I know who is a believer?" Spoke the Exalted One, answering his good prophet: "The one who abandons the forbidden and does what is allowed and loves the law for my sake." Further Moses inquired: "Where do you live? What is your true abode?" The Lord God the Giver revealed to him: "I live up there above all else on the Throne. But there is more that I will disclose: even though I reside on my throne, it is not there alone that I live. My existence spreads across the skies" [see 2:255]. And Moses asked: "Who are you? Please explain yourself to me." The Powerful One answered: "I am I, with the angels."

Then Moses asked: "Who is righteous [*salih* ]?" The Lord spoke: "A righteous person keeps my commandments by night as well as by day.

He is my beloved and I shall recognize him [on the Day of Judgment]." Then Moses asked: "Where is your abode? If it is not only on the Throne, where are you?" The Majesty spoke: "You want to know my first existence? Then listen: In the beginning I created something with the likeness of an egg, and the whole creation in one, the very first, but it was invisible. It was a hundred thousand years long and as much in width. Then I made the elements: light, fire, water, and earth. I created the earth out of foam. I created the rocks, and I placed one rock in Jerusalem as a good gift. It will await the Resurrection when the masses meet there. The throngs of the risen will converge there.\* That will be the moment of luck or disgrace and joy for the good. I accompany the clouds, I reveal by my power, I am my power, there is nothing that can stop it." The Lord spoke: "All things people wish for will be given to them in this life and the hereafter."

All the Majesty spoke further: "You want to know my first? Hear, we will tell you: My first is to love the thing I begin to do, and that is creating the heart of a human being, for what is more useful than the heart? The length of a human heart is eight finger breadths across, and yet I dwell inside it. † Every heart, trustworthy one, is rounded, soft and weak, more so than any other thing on earth. These hearts, my prophet, a mustard seed of faith inside one will be

sufficient for salvation. Each heart, my prophet, I give it a soul inside it, like a little bird with green feathers. When you die that bird will fly back to me. It will show me if there was a mustard seed of true faith in a person's heart at the time of his death, so that he did not have to fear death. No one has to fear death and yet they cry when death approaches, but I do not prolong their lives. The body dies. I created all souls out of the first light. Half of this light in my hand I made into the soul of my prophet Muhammad. I placed this light-substance in front of my face for a thousand years until it began to spread and the soul worshipped me. Then it rose up and stood before me.

"Ten thousand angels prostrated themselves worshipping the light,

\* An apparent reference to the Dome of the Rock (see fig. 23).

† An allusion to a sacred hadith that says that although heaven and earth cannot contain God, the human heart can.

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performing the salat of noon. Only then did I create my throne of light, the lesser angels, the human souls, and many other things: the wind that carries voices, the palanquin of the starry sky, the bright light of the sun and the full moon. The skies with their mists, the clouds and the earth, and the ocean full of waves. I created mountains, my prophet, and the true paradise full of good things. I adorned it with jewels, pearls and gemstones, with red gold and fine silver.

"I will place all human souls in it who have not worshipped idols but have followed the truth of God, thus keeping sin away from themselves. This paradise, Confessor, I will place in it the Muslims who have worshipped me unceasingly, praying the good prayers; and those who have kept the vigils, who have never harmed other people nor envied anyone, nor coveted anything they saw. But everyone who rebels and follows the devil, the seducer of souls, will go into the fire forever. Having created all those things, I then created the jinns and placed them in the wells; there they live.

"After that, Confessor, I created Adam, who would rule the jinns and make them his subjects. Listen carefully: this is not *your* Adam who was your ancestor, it was not the same person. This Adam lived for a thousand and ten years, then I took him away and replaced him with another king of the jinns. Many years later I created the human Adam and his wife, Eve. All their descendants will die at an unknown time, so remember to repent your sins daily, keep the fast in Ramadan, pray to the Lord day and night, love your parents, respect your neighbor, be generous to the poor and to the orphans, and live in peace with all people. I will reward you later.

"Let there be no corruption, accept the commandment to pray, submit yourselves to my law, purify your souls, and read my book. Contemplate my mercy: on the Day of Resurrection your sins will be forgiven. The one who worships me sincerely according to my religion of praying, I will reduce his pain on the day his soul is taken."

Think, human being! Be honest, never lie! Pray God that he lighten the suffering in the afterlife and forgive you your sins. God of grace! Help us with your power. Be merciful toward us obedient Muslims! This is my last wish in this life.

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**Hamka:**

***Qur'an Commentary on Pilgrimage Ritual***

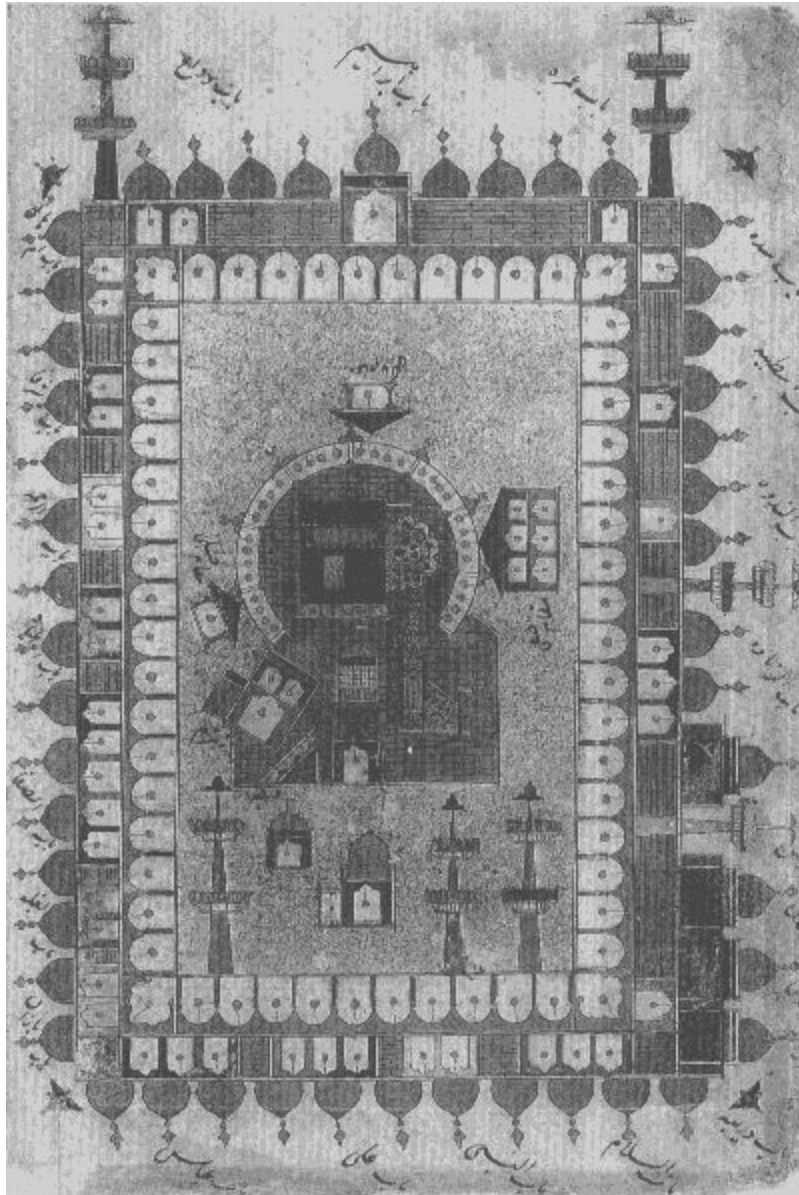
## Anthony H. Johns

Pilgrimage to Mecca is the fifth of the "pillars" of Islam. As numerous visual reminders make clear (see figs. 16 and 17),<sup>[7]</sup> over the centuries Muslims have expended enormous effort preparing for the event and enjoyed reminiscing about it afterward. The following example of modern *tafsir* from Indonesia discusses an important ritual aspect of the required religious practice of hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca. During hajj, pilgrims commemorate Hagar's frantic search for water for her baby Isma'il; this commentary explains a key verse related to the practice, 2:158.

Hamka is the acronym of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (1908–81). His father, Karim Amrullah, belonged to the first generation of Sumatran '*ulama*' who returned from study in the Middle East at the turn of the nineteenthth century to spread the reformist ideas of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida in the then Dutch East Indies. Hamka was born in 1908, in central Sumatra. He studied with his father (of whom he wrote a biography), with other outstanding local '*ulama*', and at local religious schools. He first made the pilgrimage in 1927 (he was to make it seven times). He became a leading figure in the Reformist Muhammadiyah (a social welfare and educational organization), and in addition became widely known as a novelist. After the Japanese occupation he became a national figure, and from 1959 on regularly denounced Sukarno's increasing reliance on the Indonesian Communist Party. He was arrested in 1964 and held in detention until 1966, being rehabilitated in 1967. While in prison he wrote the *tafsir* from which this excerpt comes. When the Council of Indonesian '*ulama*' was established in 1975, he was elected its first general chairman.<sup>[8]</sup>

"Safa and Marwa [two hills now within the precincts of the Ka'ba] too are among the signs of God. So whoever makes the Hajj or the 'Umra [lesser pilgrimage] to the House, there is no objection that he makes the round between them. Whoever adds to a good deed, then God is indeed one who responds to gratitude, one who is all-knowing" [Q 2:158].

According to Muhammad 'Abduh in the explanation he gives in his *tafsir*, this verse continues the matters presented in the verses on the change of *kiblat* [i.e., qibla, facing Mecca] [2:144–145: "Turn your face then toward the Sacred Mosque . . ."], although other *tafsir* do not make



[Full Size]

Figure 16.

A leaf from a Pilgrimage guidebook shows the Ka'ba in both plan and elevation and indicates the various sacred sites within the sanctuary, especially the "station of Abraham," where the prophet is said to have stood and prayed, and the well of Zamzam at lower left of the Ka'ba. Written in Mecca in 1582 after the Ottoman conquest of the central Middle East, the diagram also indicates places assigned to the four Sunni law schools and the names of all gates into the sanctuary.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, Arthur M. Sackler

this connection. It mentions the hastening to and fro (*sa'y*) between Safa and Marwa after giving a reminder of the need for prayer and patience [2:153: "ask help with prayer and patience"] and the endurance of trials of various kinds later to receive the fullness of God's blessing [2:157: "It is such who receive blessings and mercy from their Lord"].

This verse then gives hope that a time will come when they will be able to make the round between Safa and Marwa. No matter how hard are present difficulties they now face, there must always be hope, especially when it is God Himself who gives this hope.

"Safa and Marwa too are among the signs of God" [2:158, first words]. We have enriched our Indonesian language with the word *shi'ar*, for we regularly speak of the *syi'ar* of Islam. *Shi'ar* means sign. Its plural form is *sha'a'ir*. *Sha'a'iru'llah* means signs of devotion to God. Many such signs are included in the performance of the Hajj. The napes of the necks of the camels and cattle to be sacrificed on the conclusion of the Hajj are incised as a sign. This incision is called a *shi'ar*. Prayer at the tomb of Abraham is another of these *sha'a'ir* of devotion. Circumambulation of the Ka'ba, the station at 'Arafat, and also the hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa mentioned in this verse are also among these *sha'a'ir*, and likewise the stoning of Jumra [pillars representing the Devil] at Mina.

These rituals are classed as acts of devotion (*ta'abbud*), as opposed to acts of understanding (*ta'aqqul*). *Ta'abbud* means an act of religious devotion, but why it is performed as it is is not accessible to reason. *Ta'aqqul* is an act of understanding. We can understand by the use of reason why we perform the ritual prayer, but we cannot understand why for the midday (*zuhr*) prayer there should be four cycles of prostration (*rak'a*) and for the dawn (*subh*) prayer two cycles. These are acts of devotion. We can understand why the Hajj should be performed at least once in a lifetime. This is an act of understanding. But we cannot understand why there should be a command to stone Jumra with small stones seven times. This is an act of devotion. All such *sha'a'ir* are acts of devotion.

"So whoever makes the Hajj or 'Umra to the House, there is no objection that he makes the round between them." The House referred to here is the *bayt Allah* (the House of God, the Ka'ba). Now the Hajj is

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 17.

Above a field of talismanic geometric shapes (stars, circles, octagons) on this North African pilgrims' banner (1683), a large horizontal band of Kufic script quotes Q 48:1-3: "Truly we have granted you [Muhammad] a decisive victory victorious, [namely] that God might forgive your sins [both] past and future, bring his grace to fulfillment in you, and guide you on a straight path: and that God might assist you with redoubtable aid."

The twin blades of 'Ali's sword, Dhu 'l-Faqar, repeat those verses in the more flowing Naskhi script, adding part of verse 4: "He it is who sent down peace upon the

hearts of the believers. . . ." In the rectangular panel directly below the upper inscription, an Arabic poem in Maghribi script mentions several of the rituals and sites integral to the hajj, as well as the name 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), suggesting that members of the Qadiriya *tariqa* carried the banner.

Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, Gift of  
John Goelet, 1958.20.

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performed on a prescribed date, commencing on the ninth [*sic*] of the month Dhu 'l-Hijja (the twelfth lunar month) and continuing until the completion of the halt at Mina, on the twelfth or thirteenth of Dhu 'l-Hijja. The 'Umra, on the other hand, is an obligation that may be fulfilled any time, including during the Hajj season. It does not involve the station at 'Arafat and the halting at Muzdalifah and Mina. Both the Hajj and the 'Umra, however, require putting on the garment of *ihram* and the circumambulation of the Ka'ba, and both require the hastening to and fro (*sa'y*) between the hills of Safa and Marwa.

Safa and Marwa are two small hills not far from the Sacred Mosque. The distance between them is about 760.5 cubits [circa 200 m]. After the most recent renovations to the Masjid al-Haram (1957), both are within the mosque precinct. The *sa'y*, that is, the going to and fro around these two hills seven times, is part of both the Hajj and the 'Umra. It is performed after completion of the circumambulation. After this, divestiture [*tahallul*], that is, the cutting of the hair and taking off of the garment of *ihram*, is permissible. With this divestiture the ceremonies of the pilgrimage are complete.

According to a hadith reported by Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, this *shi'ar* of hastening to and fro commemorates Hajar (the second wife of Abraham). After she had given birth to Isma'il, Abraham left her alone in the desert because he had to continue his journey to Syria. Their supply of water was finished, her breasts were almost dry, and there was no well in that place. Her child Isma'il had been crying with hunger until his throat was hoarse. Full of anxiety, Hajar hastened to and fro seven times between the two hills looking for water, while her child remained alone, in her tent in the lower valley.

Suddenly she heard a voice, and saw a bird flying. At the same time, she could hear the voice of her child crying for milk. After her hastening to and fro seven times, she ran back to where she had left her child. There she saw an angel digging the earth at its feet, and water appeared. Anxiously she scooped up the water in her hands exclaiming, "Zam! Zam!," which means, "Gather round! Gather round!"

By chance at the same time, a caravan of the people of Jurhum passed by looking for water. This became the well of Zamzam, and this was how

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"the barren valley" [Q 14:37: "Our Lord, I have set some of my posterity to dwell in a barren valley next to your Sacred House"] became populated and developed into a city. This was the origin of Mecca.

So Hajar's hastening to and fro became one of the shi'ar of the Hajj and the 'Umra, and the verse that we are explaining acknowledges her as indeed a shi'ar of devotion to God. A special sign of religious devotion.

Why should there be or not be anything wrong if one wishes to hasten to and fro between these two hills as is required?

According to a hadith reported by Bukhari and Muslim, 'Urwa ibn Zubayr one day expressed to 'A'isha,\* Mother of the Believers, his opinion that from the wording of the verse the hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa is not obligatory, for if it said there is no objection if one hastens to and fro between these two hills, then there is certainly no objection if one does not do so. 'Urwa's opinion was aptly answered by 'A'isha, "It is not as you understand it, my sister's son."

[The hadith continues:] "The hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa is one of the sha'a'ir of devotion. The reason why the verse says there is no objection to the practice is that, during the Time of Ignorance, † if any of the Ansar ‡ went to Mecca to perform the Hajj or 'Umra, they were sure to encounter a huge, menacing statue of Manat§ placed between the two hills. After they had become Muslims, they had doubts as to whether they should still perform the hastening to and fro between the two hills while the statue of Manat was still there. This verse makes it clear that there was no objection to their hastening to and fro even though the statue was still there." Such is a summary of the hadith in Bukhari and Muslim.

The verse continues, "Whoever adds to a good deed, then God is indeed one who responds to gratitude, who knows all things" [2:158, end]. Performance of the Hajj or 'Umra is required only once in a life-

\* 'A'isha (d. 678): Muhammad's youngest wife and a transmitter of numerous traditions.

† Time of Ignorance: the age of *jahiliya*, prior to the advent of Islam.

‡ The Ansar ("Helpers") were citizens of Medina who become Muslims after the hijra.

§ Manat was one of the three pre-Islamic deities called "daughters of Allah." Muhammad forbade belief in them, of course.

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time. However, if one wishes to repeat it, doing a good deed willingly [and not out of obligation—by *tatawwu* ' ] by adding another performance of the Hajj or the 'Umra, up to as many times as one goes to Mecca, God will respond to the pious act and reward the good deed. God knows every good deed one does.

So it seems that this verse is indeed connected with the command to change the direction of the kiblāt and the hope it gives for a future victory. At a time to come, Muhammad's followers in Medina will indeed be able to perform the 'Umra. Even though at the time of the revelation of this verse there was still an idol between the hills of Safa and Marwa, and there were still statues lining the walls of the Ka'ba, there was no objection to their continuing their act of devotion, because it had no connection with the idols.

Some time later, the Messenger of God dreamt that he and his companions would be able to go to Mecca to perform the 'Umra, and then they would go together. But when in year 6 of the Hijra they reached Hudaibiya, the Quraysh\* prevented them from going further. The treaty of Hudaibiya † was made, and they did not go that year. It was not until the following year, year 7, that the 'Umra of Qadha took place. They were able to perform the 'Umra in full. They circumambulated the Ka'ba, although it still contained idols, and they did the hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa, although there was still a statue of Manat there. They paid no attention to these idols. They carried out the sha'a'ir of the ceremony in full.

Then, a year later, in year 8, because the Quraysh had dishonored the treaty, the city of Mecca was conquered, and all the idols were swept away. Before they achieved this, the Muslims endured sufferings of many kinds, shortages of material possessions and loss of friends who died as martyrs on the field of battle in jihad, but at the end came the fullness of the blessings that God had promised. And God repaid with victory in this world and happiness in the hereafter all the efforts they had made and the good deeds they had done.

\* The Quraysh were the ruling tribe in Mecca.

† In the treaty of Hudaibiya, a place ten miles from Mecca, the Quraysh agreed to allow the Muslims to visit the holy city.

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Concerning this hastening to and fro between Safa and Marwa, all the 'ulama' whose authority we accept agree that it is one of the rituals of the pilgrimage. They only differ concerning the way it is defined according to the norms of *fiqh* [religious law]. Malik, Shafi'i, and Ibn Hanbal are of the view that it is a component [*ruk'n*] of the Hajj. Abu Hanifa is of the view that its performance is obligatory for the Hajj.

## Devotion Beyond Duty

In addition to the required observances suggested by the term "Five Pillars," Muslims the world over have engaged in a variety of devotional activities that often manifest distinctive regional or local characteristics. We begin with personal prayers (*du'a'*) attributed to a number of holy women of the classical and middle periods of Islamic history. Then a series of poems offers a taste of four poetic genres—*marthiya* (lamentation), *madih* (praise of a holy person), *na't* (laud of Muhammad), and *ginan* (love song)—that have played important roles in popular piety, especially in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. A radio sermon preached in an Egyptian village celebrating the birthday of a local holy person provides a sample of how the mosque sermon (*khutba*) continues to function in popular experience. Themes of devotion (fig. 18) and rites of passage such as those associated with death, mourning, and burial are also vividly expressed in art and architecture (figs. 19–21).

## Prayers of Holy Women

### John Renard

In his hagiographical anthology *Shining Stars of the Biographies of the Masters of Sufism* (*Al-kawakib ad-durriya tarajim as-sadat as-sufiya*), 'Abd ar-Ra'uf al-Munawi (1545–1621) includes biographical notices on thirty-five women renowned for piety and learning. Many of his notices feature brief prayers attributed to their subjects. Here is a sample of their heartfelt aspirations.

Barada of [the Yemeni valley of] Sarim lived during the second Islamic century. She used to keep long night vigils and keep herself awake by saying "with a voice of longing": "Eyes are at rest as the stars are

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 18.

An Indian woman at prayer appears on this calendar poster, with the Ka'ba and Muhammad's mosque/tomb in Medina in the background.

Courtesy of Carl Ernst.

setting. Every lover is alone with his beloved. And I am alone with you, O Beloved! Do you not see how you torture me while your love is in my heart, O Beloved."<sup>[9]</sup>

After the night salat, Habiba al-'Adawiya (8th–9th c.) used to stand on a balcony and pray: "My God, the stars have set; eyes are closed in sleep; kings have barred their gates. But your gate is open: every lover is alone with his beloved, and this is my place [lit., (mystical) station] in your presence." At the break of dawn, she would say: "O God, this night has slipped away and this day has unveiled itself. If only I knew: Has my night pleased you, so that I might rejoice? Or have you rejected it, so that I must suffer? For it is by your power that I persevere and by your

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eternal tirelessness that you give me staying power. And if by your power you would drive me away, may I never depart from your door; and let nothing but your generosity and bounty descend upon my heart."<sup>[10]</sup>

Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (d. 801) of Basra (Iraq) was also fond of praying after the night salat: "Eyes are heavy with sleep, unaware of their forgetfulness. And still Rabi'a the sinner abides in your presence in the hope that You might look on her with a gaze that will keep sleep from diminishing her service of You. By your power and majesty, may I not slacken in serving You either night or day until I meet You [in death]."<sup>[11]</sup>

Ruqayya of Mosul (Iraq, 8th c.) prayed: "My God and my Master, if You tormented me with your full punishment, loss of your nearness would be more severe; and if You blessed me with all the delights of the people of the Garden, your love in my heart would be still greater [pleasure]." And "I love my Lord with a fierce love; should he order me to the Fire, I would feel none of its heat for [the heat of] His love."<sup>[12]</sup>

Rayhana (8–9th c.), whom some called "the Madwoman," embroidered this prayer in verse on her gown:

You are my confidant, my desire and my joy

my heart knows how to love only you.

O my beloved, my desire and my longing

my yearning stretches on till I meet You.

I ask not the delights of the Garden

but only to see you, O my greatest desire.

At dawn she prayed: "Darkness has left with closeness and familiarity / O that darkness would come again with its intimacy!"<sup>[13]</sup>

'A'isha (d. 762), daughter of the sixth Shi'i Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (d. 765), prayed: "By your glory and your magnificence, should you send me to the Fire, I would brandish my faith in your unity and would go about among the damned saying, 'People of the Fire, I have believed only in His Oneness yet He punishes me!'"<sup>[14]</sup>

Zahra' the Mournful (9th c.) prayed: "You whose powers are without limit, you the Munificent and Eternal, make the eyes of my heart rejoice in gardens of your power. Join my anxious care to your tender largess, O Gracious One. In your majesty and splendor take me away from the paths of the arrogant [lit., those who make a show of power], O Compas-

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sionate one. Make me a servant and a seeker. And be, O light of my heart and ultimate desire, my Friend."<sup>[15]</sup>

## **Rites of Passage and Popular Practice**

### ***Marthiya***

### ***Imam Husayn's Conversation with God***

#### **Ali Asani**

Annual Shi'i rituals of mourning for the proto-martyr Husayn are symbolic of much more than the love and attachment the Shi'a feel toward Husayn and their Imams.<sup>[16]</sup> Around these rituals has

developed a theological doctrine, unique in the history of Islamic thought, that of redemptive suffering. According to this doctrine, the Prophet's legitimate descendants, the Shi'i Imams and their families, will intercede on the Day of Resurrection for those faithful who have participated in their sorrows and afflictions. God has granted them the status of intercessors by virtue of their sufferings in this world, and in the case of Husayn, by virtue of his martyrdom. Implicit is the doctrine of salvation through faith, for only those who have faith (love) for the Shi'i Imams, and hence suffer with them, will be redeemed. The various rituals in the month of Muharram therefore provide important means for the Shi'a community to participate symbolically in the sufferings of the Imams and ensure their intercession.

The following elegy (*marthiya*) is commonly attributed to Anis (1803–1875), one of the most renowned elegists in the Urdu language. The poem is widely recited among Shi'i communities in South Asia. Its six-line verses are characteristic of the *marthiya* as it developed in the nineteenth century in northern India. Since the elegy deals with the final moments preceding Imam Husayn's martyrdom in 680, it is usually recited on the tenth day of Muharram, the anniversary of the Imam's death, at the climax of the mourning rituals. Its widespread popularity as a religious poem is due to its unusual format as a final conversation between Imam Husayn and God just before the enemy forces behead him.<sup>[17]</sup>

1. After seventy-two bodies had perished in the path of God

The King of Martyrs [Husayn] remained all alone in the field of  
affliction.

The Imam of the two worlds had no more strength in his body;  
And not one among the king's companions and friends survived.

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Neither the glory of his dignity nor that of his court remained;

All that remained [to be done] was the plunder of his women-folk and  
this chieftain's demise.

2. Holding the corpse of [his son] Asghar "Little One" in his arms, he  
repeated:

"O Lord, this unworthy offering, may it be accepted!

How can I adequately express my gratitude to You, O my just  
Sovereign?

You have bestowed on my 'Little One' the highest rank.

He sacrificed his life for the children of my [followers] the Shi'a;

Although a mere babe of six months, his obedience to God was

absolute.

3. "I am not saddened by this tragedy; [rather] I rejoice in happiness.

I do not care about my head, nor do I fear anyone.

Yes! Husayn, son of 'Ali, does have a single request:

May I not see the Prophet's granddaughter disgraced.

When she is stripped of her veil, may it be after I lie [dead] on the  
ground.

And [God] if that truly be Your will, may I not even be lying  
unburied!

4. "You gave me an army, a family, and also a house.

You made me a leader and also gave me a head.

You gave me a son who resembled the Prophet.

You gave me this resolution, this heart and also this courage;

I am proud to give up my dear ones in the path of God

For it is Your bounty that I have sacrificed for You.

5. "Did I have the strength [to endure] having my entire household  
plundered?!

Or to bring forth Asghar 'The Little One' in my arms when Akbar  
'The Elder One' was murdered?!

He was writhing in my arms, but I said not a word!

Even if my arms were to be cut off, I would still not abandon [lit.,  
remove my hand from] my people.

No one [else] could have been happy [as I am] at this assault of  
destruction.

Without the grace of God, I, the lowly one, would not have been  
capable of [enduring] all of this.



6. "Well known is Adam's lament at being exiled from paradise;

But I set out from Yathrib [Medina] cheerful and happy.

When Jacob's son was taken from him,

He cried so much that his eyes went blind.

But I, the lowly one, have received [such] support from the Almighty

That the sacrifice of [my son] Akbar was a festival [*'id*].

7. "Do not You abandon me as the community has!

You are pure; remove me from the world in purity.

Abandoned by all, I journey to paradise alone.

O Lord, protect me from the grief of the grave.

In the gloom of the pauper's grave

May I see from every direction Your splendor.

8. "I need not a house; the door of Your felicity is enough for me.

I need not a head; my only concern is You.

I need not a bed; Your grace is my pillow [lit., support].

I need not an army; I want Your assistance.

May the agonies of death be easy for my Shi'a;

May whatever befalls me be in requital for my devotees."

9. Suddenly a voice issued from [behind] the veil of divine omnipotence:

"Well done! You have demonstrated perfectly submission and  
willingness.

O servant! We made you a divine representative.

In this manner do God's chosen exemplify loyalty and fidelity.

You have sacrificed your dear ones as well as your companions.

Only one head was pledged; you have offered seventy-two!

10. "Enough! enough! O Shabbir\*, for your God is embarrassed.

Why are you afraid, O Shabbir, to enter My presence?

\* Shabbir: an alternate name for Husayn.

O Shabbir, I cover the gift you bring.

O Shabbir, I like humility among my servants;

You have considered Our court the gift of forgiveness.

By understanding your [special] status, one understands the Almighty."

11. When the holy one heard the Divine command in its entirety,

He spontaneously turned toward the infidels and cried out:

"Where is the murderer? Let him come and remove my head!"

From the ladies' tent, the sister cried, "May I be sacrificed for you!

Brother, to whom will the Sayyid\* women lament in their pain?

These sisters of yours, bereft of a mother, will be looted!"

12. From yonder the tyrants suddenly advanced the line of entrenchment,

Casting a cloudlike shadow on Fatima's † moon.

The arrow of oppression was fired so that it pierced through the chest.

The spears were flung so that they penetrated the vitals.

As the blood of the King's body flowed from his wounds,

Came forth from his mouth, continuously, "I trust in God."

### **Madih:**

### **Three Contemporary Poems Honoring Imam Riza**

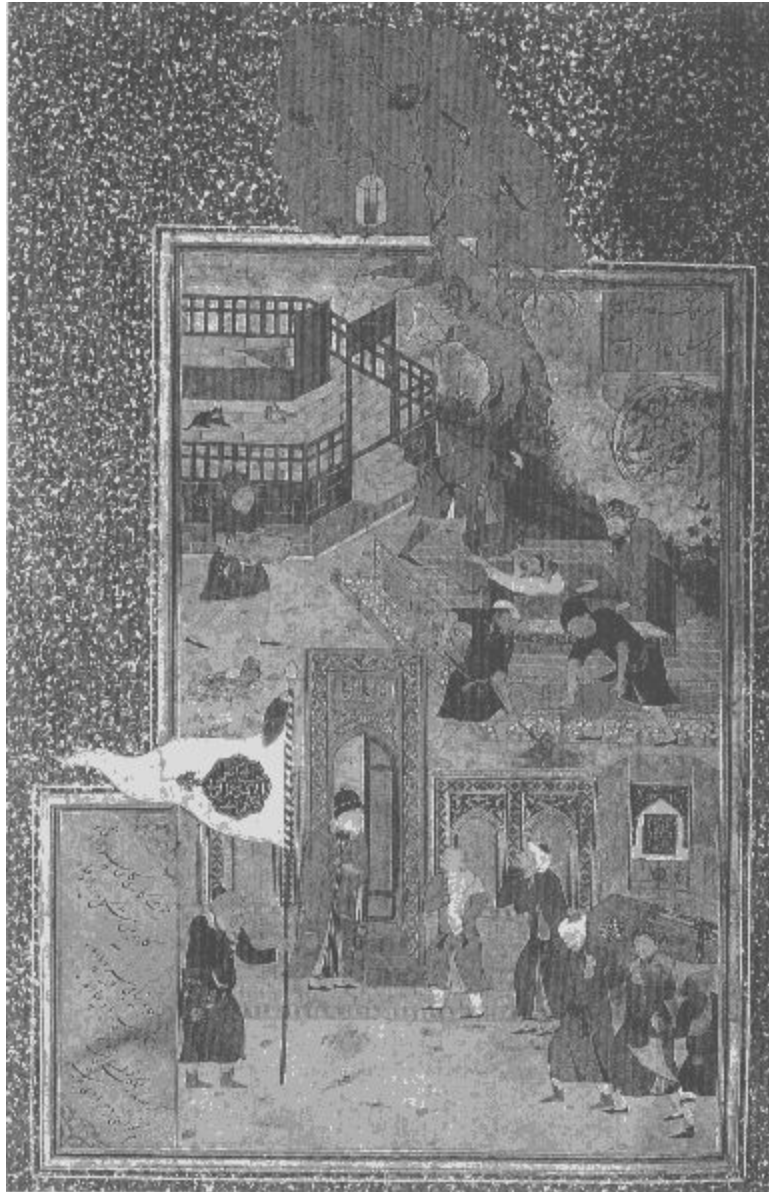
#### **Fatemeh Keshavarz**

Celebration of the spiritual status of the Prophet, the Imams, or other holy persons is deeply rooted in Persian poetic discourse.<sup>[18]</sup> But the passage of time has not left this genre obsolete. A recent edition of contemporary poems, *The Seventh Qibla*, demonstrates the relevance of this kind of poetic tribute in modern Iran. A significant number of such poems are dedicated to 'Ali ar-Riza (d. 818), known as Imam Riza, the eighth successor to Muhammad according to the "Twelver" Shi'a.

Imam Riza is a special figure in Iranian religious culture. His tomb, located in the city of Tus (now known as Mashhad) in northeast Iran (see map), is the site of regular pilgrimage and is associated with many miracles in popular belief. Imam Riza's appointment by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun as the heir to

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\* Sayyid: a title used to refer to any descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, especially through his grandson Husayn.



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 19.

Excessive grief of a son at the burial of his father. In his *Conference of the Birds* (*Mantiq at-tayr*), 'Attar tells how a son walked ahead of his father's coffin, grieving disconsolately. The panels of text on the upper right and lower left of this 1483 Persian miniature relate how a Sufi (here pictured at the gate) reminds the mourner that he should heed the lesson

of his father's mortality rather than dwell on his own sorrow: "Though you long to sit on a kingdom's throne, your hand will grasp only the wind." On the banner is a reminder that "God is the best of trustees, the best of patrons, and the best of helpers"; the pennants around the upper grave read "O God!"

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 63.210.35r.

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the caliphate in the year 816 brought the Shi'a two uncharacteristically jubilant years. However, his untimely death on Iranian soil, attributed to al-Ma'mun's rivalry, resonates in Shi'i memory with the passionate injured feelings of an oppressed minority. He has acquired the unofficial status of the patron saint of travelers, sick and needy persons, and even captive animals.<sup>[19]</sup> Note especially how these twentieth-century poets use imagery of pilgrimage, implicitly likening Mashhad to Mecca.

The first selection is called "The Heart's Hope" ("Umid-i dil"), by Muhammad Husayn Bihjati, a.k.a. Shafaq, "Twilight":

In Riza's domain the soul is purified.

The heart, here, opens up to God's light.

O dejected one, turn to Riza,

For this king accepts beggars graciously.

Go to him humbly, for he receives his pilgrims

At the table of his generosity.

His kindness is boundless like the sea,

He accepts the sinful and the righteous alike.

His unhampered charity is open to all,

He accepts friends and strangers alike.

If you are in pain, come to his door,

For every pain finds a remedy here.

O [Riza] my heart's hope! Look in my direction,

For my heart will be purified in your gaze.

Ask God to forgive my sins,

For whatever you ask, God will accept.

O Shafaq! burn all your longings!

For the Beloved accepts the heart which has no desires. [\[20\]](#)

In a poem entitled "The Ka'ba of the Heart" ("Ka'ba-i dil"), 'Ali Khaliliyan, whose poetic pen name is Raja', "Hope," writes:

Come to the Ka'ba of the heart! Zamzam and Safa are here.

The true house of God's singular glory is here.

If the journey to the house of Ka'ba did not bear fruit,

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Do not look in vain, the essence of faith is here.

If your false [human] insight did not solve the problem

There is no need [for that insight], for the knot-opening hand is here.

Do not despair needlessly because of your sins,

If you have lost hope, this is your true mistake.

Say, O Raja, to the one suffering from the ailment of sin:

"Be happy!" for the best remedy for your pain is here. [\[21\]](#)

The last example is an excerpt from a relatively long poem in rhyming couplets by Rahi Mu'ayyiri, well known for his rich variations on the traditional Persian *ghazal*. This poem, entitled "The Light of Riza" ("Nur-i Riza"), is a nocturnal meditation over a problem that the poet feels

was solved through supplication to Imam Riza. The portion translated here is the middle section and consists entirely of praise of the Imam:

Behold the light of this bright star!

Behold the splendor of the king of Khurasan!\*

See the mirror depicting the unseen!

Abandon yourself and [in the mirror] see God!

Whoever has been immersed in Riza's light

Has found in his own heart the gem of contentment. †

The shadow of the king is a source of respite.

The domain of Riza is the domain of happiness.

What is the Ka'ba where circumambulating his [Riza's] house is

concerned?

What is musk where the aroma of the breeze from his land is

concerned?

Dust turns into gold under his feet

And musk gains aroma in his presence.

Who am I? One among his many slaves

Pleading for help to his generosity.

[Who am I?] A speck of dust revolving around the sun of love

A dead person who, in love, has found eternal life.

\* King of Khurasan: A common epithet of Imam Riza.

† A pun on the word Riza, which means contentment.

To the king of Khurasan, I am but a doorkeeper.

To the king of Khurasan, I am the dust spread on the threshold. [22]

## **Na't:**

### **Poem in Praise of Muhammad**

#### **Ali Asani**

Muslims have composed verses praising the virtues of their Prophet since the seventh century. As expressions of personal piety and feeling, these poems often contain ideas that do not necessarily conform with "official" theological doctrines. Perhaps the most important theme in these poems is love for Muhammad. He appears as a father figure, a revered family elder, a close relative, or a dear friend to whom one would turn for assistance. Indeed, it has become customary for many Muslims to beseech the Prophet for guidance in solving every problem, no matter how mundane. Some poets even express their feelings for the Prophet with language borrowed from the profane realm of human romance, seeing themselves as intoxicated with Prophetic love and yearning to be with their beloved. It is in this context that the poet Lutf (d.1881) expresses his longing for Medina, the site of the Prophet's final resting place. [23]

Intercessor for mankind, O intercessor for mankind,

Forgive me, O intercessor for mankind.

To whom else should I plea, O redresser of grievances,

But to you, O intercessor for mankind.

O king, where should he go, abandoning your door,

This supplicant of yours, O intercessor for mankind.

My every sin you will have

Forgiven by God, O intercessor for mankind.

In both worlds, yours is the protection,

There is none other, O intercessor for mankind.

For God's sake, don't forget me

On the day of recompense, O intercessor for mankind.

Save me from [the torments of] hell,

For God's sake, O intercessor for mankind.

Lord, may I die in Medina,

That is my prayer, O intercessor for mankind.

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In my grave, too, assist me;

O my Mustafa,\* O intercessor for mankind.

You are aware of what I desire;

What [else] can I request, O intercessor for mankind.

Lord, this is my heart's desire,

This is my hope, this is my passion, praise God, O intercessor for

mankind:

As in this life I have enthusiasm for

Composing poems for you, O intercessor for mankind,

May I continue after death in paradise

For ever and always, O intercessor for mankind.

In the Qur'an, in place after place,

God Himself praises you, O intercessor for mankind.

Let aside humans, even angels cannot compose

Praise poems worthy of you, O intercessor for mankind.



Call Lutf to Medina now,

So that he does not have go from door to door [like a beggar],

O intercessor for mankind.

## ***Ginan:***

### ***Isma'ili Petition of a Yearning Soul***

#### **Ali Asani**

The Nizari Isma'ilis are well known in the contemporary Muslim world as members of a small Shi'i Muslim community whose spiritual leader (Imam) is the Aga Khan. The *ginan* translated here is an excellent example of the use of the *virahini*, the yearning young woman or bride tormented by the absence of her husband. This symbol of the soul and the associated concept of *viraha*, "longing in separation," has enjoyed great popularity in a wide variety of South Asian religious literatures, including the Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic Sufi traditions. The hymn, attributed to the sixteenth-century preacher Sayyid Khan (d. 1572), employs a mixture of three Indian languages, Hindi, Braj Bhasha, and Gujarati, and is sung in a suitably plaintive melody.

Here the *virahini* is typically affected by the fiery pangs of yearning for the

\* Mustafa: Chosen One, an epithet of the Prophet.



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 20.

This white marble tombstone of an Iranian named Abu Sa'd ibn Muhammad, who died in 1150, includes inscriptions in both Kufic and Naskhi scripts. Within the mihrab form a Kufic inscription gives information on the deceased; just beneath that is the name of the sculptor. A qur'anic text (3:18) about God's transcendent unity, power, and justice appears around the three sides of the inner rectangular frame.

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1933 (33.118).

vision (*darshan* or *didar* ) of her beloved Imam. Love for the Imam has driven her to distraction, for she knows she can no longer survive without him. In this state, worldly existence has become a cage from which the Imam is the refuge. To emphasize the humility of the disciple before the spiritual guide, the virahini is not only willing to sacrifice everything for her love but is also conscious of her inferiority and sinfulness. These, she fervently hopes, the beloved will over-look out of loving kindness and mercy. Because the relationship between the seeker (*murid* ) and the Imam is spiritual, the composer avoids explicitly erotic or sensual imagery, portraying the virahini's love instead in a strictly spiritualized manner. Hence, the ginan contains references to meditational practices, usually performed early in the morning, during which the disciple repeats, preferably with total concentration, the special name (the *ism-i a'zam* or Greatest Name) given by the Imam for spiritual progress. It is through meditation, ethical conduct, and complete devotion to the guide that the Imam's devotees can attain the goal of their quest, the vision of spiritual light. [24]

1. I thirst for a glimpse [*darshan* ] of you, O my Beloved!

Fulfill my heart's desire, O my Beloved!

I thirst with desire for you;

Why do you not show concern for me?

I serve you with the utmost dedication,

Why do you then turn away [from me] in anger, O my Beloved?

2. Listen to me, my Lord, and grant me what I ask;

Do not be so indifferent to me, your wife.

Grant me, my Lord, grant me what I ask; I suffer immensely.

Beloved, fulfill my heart's desire, so I can be joyously happy.

3. Like a fish without water, how can one live without the beloved?

For the sake of its beloved, it gives away its life;

Without water the fish is lost, see how it writhes [in agony];

It writhes and leaps in vain but [alas] the fisherman shows no mercy!

4. Consider false the love of the bee;

It certainly is not the way to get a glimpse [*darshan* ] of the beloved!

Consider false the love of the bee;

It flits from flower to flower sucking nectar.

Such are negligent and blinded people, lacking virtue,  
who will not sacrifice their lives for the beloved's sake.

5. Consider true the love of the moth;

For it is in this manner in which one may glimpse the beloved:

True love is that of the moth that deliriously sacrifices its body;

For the sake of a single candle, so many moths give up their lives.

6. I have sacrificed everything for my Beloved,

For all that is precious should be offered to him.

Throw aside this hesitation; make up your mind to say something;

Show mercy, O master, and protect me; pay heed to this my prayer.

7. One who sees the Lord wishes

Never to leave Him and thinks not of anyone else.

The heart of one who sees [the Lord] is so attached

That day by day love grows;

Recite [His] name with complete concentration;

For in this way one has a glimpse of the beloved.

8. Do not treat this destitute [female] devotee so,

If I have faults, consider them to be virtues.

I am a devotee of yours, although sinful.

Why are you not concerned about me?

If I have faults, consider them to be virtues; pay heed to this

my prayer.

9. One who becomes nothing [i.e., of no significance] is called your

[female] devotee

In this manner one pleases the Lord;

One who becomes nothing is called your [female] devotee,

Wakes up regularly [for meditation] and grows in her love.

Reciting [the Lord's] name with complete concentration,

Burns away in this way the body [i.e., material ties].

10. Stay with the Lord in complete concentration,

Coloring yourself with the color of love.

Stay with the Lord in complete concentration,

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Loving Him intensely.

Only the one who sacrifices life out of love

Can catch a glimpse of the beloved.

11. Nothing have I seen that compares to [this] love;

Do whatever pleases your Master.

One who dies the death of love

Has led a worthwhile life in this world;

Perform good deeds, and the Master will redeem you.

12. Though sinful, yet I am your creature;

Remember me soon, O Lord.

My Lord has remembered me;

So rejoice, my friends.

By the grace of the Master, says Sayyid Khan,

All difficulties and troubles have fled!

## **Sermon for a Special Occasion**

### ***A Radio Mawlid Sermon***

#### **Patrick D. Gaffney**

Sermons (*khutba*) are preached every Friday at the noon prayer, but special celebrations are also occasions for preaching. The following text is a sermon that fits both descriptions: it occurred on a Friday that fell during a *mawlid*, a celebration of a local holy person's birthday, in the village of Shuha in northern Egypt. Note how in the midst of his call for social justice the preacher makes several suggestions meant to diminish emphasis on the cult of an individual holy person. The radio announcer, by contrast, hints in his opening remarks that he is surprised at the negative attitude of some preachers toward such popular devotion.

In its standard format, the radio transmission of the Friday noon prayer service opens with Qur'an recitation, solemn chanting that lasts for approximately twenty minutes. The reciter (*muqri'*) signals the end of this portion of the service by intoning the opening sura of the Qur'an, al-Fatiha, which the congregation recites in unison. The radio announcer also shares in this recitation. Those gathered in the mosque then wait in reverent silence, while the announcer proceeds with introductory remarks to the radio audience. <sup>[25]</sup>

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 21.

An early example of monumental funerary architecture, the tenth-century tomb of Isma'il the Samanid in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, shows elaborate baked brick decoration similar to that of fig. 14. (For further development of funerary architecture in central Asia, see figs. 30, 38.)

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[Radio announcer:]

Fellow believers, the village of Shuha contains a number of facilities that make it a sort of model village. Its enterprises include farming activities such as the production of cotton, corn, wheat, and rice, alongside other related agricultural works. Among its industrial endeavors is a factory that makes matches and a dairy that supplies milk products to Mansura. Its educational opportunities consist of a secondary school, a preparatory school, a religious institute, and four primary schools, in addition to a kindergarten.

There are more than seven mosques located here, plus a village hospital and a social center. There is also a women's education organization and a training institute serving the meat and milk industry as well as poultry breeding. The village has also sponsored a number of publications in the areas of science and culture. But generally, what one notices here is the expanse of green fields, which our country needs, and it is easy to see that most hands are engaged in cultivating these crops.

[The muezzin chants the call to prayer.]

[Radio announcer resumes:]

Fellow believers, yesterday thousands came to this mosque from throughout the governorate of Daqahliya and from other governorates as well. They came to attend the "small night" of the feast day [*mawlid*] of Sidi 'Abd ar-Rahman 'Uthman ash-Shahawi. Thousands more are now joining them today for yet another celebration, the "big night," which starts this evening.

They have been leaving their ordinary affairs behind, what they call their wealth and their property, in order to gather here around this mosque in the village of Shuha. Countless legends and stories are told about this man of saintly deeds and pious learning. No sooner do these crowds coverge than the stories about him begin to spread as though he were alive. People can see and hear what he has done from the many accounts his devotees relate about him.

But if we are so inspired by their portrayal and by the example of this holy man and others like him, about whom we hear such remarkable stories, then why do certain preachers hold themselves aloof and even disapprove of these blessed ones? Why do they treat these saintly figures,

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their teachings, and their followers so unjustly? For it is the duty of us all to preserve religion from any stain and to rescue scholars from their cleverness when they would close certain beautiful and hospitable mosques all on account of the simplicity of some people. It is incumbent on us to save such persons from their own misguided views and to warn them as best we can in these matters. We should inform them about the truth of their noble religion and about the true role to be fulfilled by those entrusted with learning.

May God bestow upon us what is good and the goodness of our religion. May he make us indeed the best community to have come from humankind, bidding to what is right and shunning evil.

Fellow believers, we turn now to the congregation gathered in this mosque of Sidi 'Abd ar-Rahman 'Uthman ash-Shahawi in the village of Shuha, in the district of Mansura, for the performance of prayer services. The Friday sermon, entitled "Religion and Social Life," will be delivered by Shaykh Mahmud 'Abd as-Salam Muhammad Ibrahim.

[The Preacher:]

May the peace and mercy of God be with you.

[The muezzin again chants the call to prayer.]

[The Preacher:]

Praise to God, the Great, the Most High, the Generous, the Omnipotent. He was pleased to make Islam our religion as we too are pleased with it and we have taken it as our pattern for living. We praise Him and we thank Him, although no praise or thanksgiving can match His greatness. I profess that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His servant, His messenger, and His chosen one. God sent him with guidance and the religion of truth and he strove in the way of God for the instruction of His creatures. The prayers and peace of God be upon him, his family, his companions, and those called by his summons who follow his path up until the Day of Judgment.

Now then, Islam is the religion of guidance and instruction, while the Prophet is peace for every time and place. His motto proclaims a respect for rights and a reverence for authority. He exhorts to truth and honesty in action. He has laid down guarantees that assure its protection and that defend its harmony. Here he established the basis for order in the

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dealings of people with one another. He urges them to hold to standards of justice and to solid principles. They should do nothing that is unfair, nor try to cover up unseemly things. They are to refrain from deception, exert no pressure, avoid oppression, not engage in hoarding, nor behave in a hostile manner. And he endorses this type of behavior in a wise and sturdy expression, as the Lord says: "O you who believe, you should not play false with one another in your business affairs" [4:29].

Indeed, this holy text has laid down the foundation upon which their lives were established, just as it has fixed the basic arrangements for their institutions. Then, when some occasion arose for making financial profit involving a variety of operations and an assortment of procedures, all serving to multiply life's demands and to entangle the interests of different people, it was the law [*shari'a*] that looked after those who lacked experience to assure right conduct in the dealings of people with one another.

And when it comes to the exchange of goods between them, God set down the law as the basis upon which they were to handle their affairs. Thus, they were to devote themselves to the construction of a society out of the storms of contention that had left their cities seething in crime and hatred. God spurred them on to act in this righteous fashion, adding His assistance and favoring with rewards those who followed His way, while He prescribed misery and dispossession upon those who turned away from goodness, for "your Lord does not deal unjustly with His creatures" [41:46].

He commands us to be truthful and honest in our dealings, to practice candor and diligence in our production. He promises that the returns for such behavior will be blessed, "for we do not allow the reward for goodness to be lost" [18:30]. If we consider for a moment the dealings people have with each other in whatever circumstances, there are obviously differences involved that make for endless complications, since the prospects for advantage can change as interests overlap variously. As a result, every loss and gain, every shortcoming and excess, inevitably carries with it for the others some kind of impact, whether it be positive or negative.

We are speaking here of honesty on the part of a teacher in the process

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of education, of the sensitivity of a doctor toward a patient, of the competence demonstrated by an engineer or a worker. Let us look at the need for a professional to handle responsibly whatever matters are entrusted to him, at the truthfulness and moderation of a merchant, who should act with liberality in buying and selling, avoiding attempts to monopolize or to pad prices. We are concerned with the proper job performance of a government clerk, who should display



genuine concern for the convenience of the public, without playing fast and loose with legalistic red tape. Likewise, the skill of a craftsman in forging the work of his hands begins with preparing a foundation, which requires cooperation in such matters as the settling of debts and the avoidance of chicanery and delays. All of these habits contribute to the spirit of mutual support and bolster the respect people have for one another as they make themselves worthy of God's mercy, winning His favor and His gifts.

The discipline shown by those who direct their lives along the course of God's law will allow them to follow an orderly path toward the desired goal of advancing civilization. But a lack of balanced judgment in these areas makes itself felt among the haves and the have-nots, and it cheats children as well. It unleashes enmity and hatred. It divides the ranks of a community and it unravels the bonds of unity. It thwarts mutual respect in a way that leaves us a people cast upon the mercy of God.

The Prophet, prayers and peace of God upon him, said: "Whoever shows no mercy, neither will mercy be shown to him." But the complaints of everyone against everyone else cannot provide the leverage needed to bring about a solution, since the remedy is given in these words: "Begin with yourself." With this attitude, the pillars of the world can be shaken to make people aware of the negligible effect of their complaining, since attempts to track down the motives behind evil schemes will surely continue until the Day of Judgment.

The promise of recompense for goodness has been made to all, while threats of punishment stand for cases of wickedness. Indeed, the Prophet declared his praise for any merchant who was trustworthy and faithful. He placed him in the ranks of the prophets and the righteous when he said: "The honest and faithful merchant stands with the prophets, the

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righteous, and the martyrs." He also said: "Merchants will rise on the Day of Resurrection as the merchants they were but with fear of the Lord, in righteousness and in honesty."

He threatened the unscrupulous and greedy with the mighty fire, saying: "Anyone who engages in sharp business practices among Muslims, such as raising prices unfairly, should know that God's law decrees that he be dispatched to the mighty fire on the Day of Resurrection." In another place the Prophet, prayers and peace of God upon him, spoke thus: "He who sets unfair prices for food among Muslims, God will afflict him with decisive ruin, whether the food is meant for humans or for animals." This threat of his applies to all those who have any part in the oppression and hardship of people, even those connected by circuitous ways or in back rooms. Given that there is enough trouble and distress in our world, the Prophet made it clear what was in store for those who bring more when he said: "O God, may those who are the cause of misery to my community be afflicted with misery themselves."

So fear God, you servants of God, and assist one another in goodness and piety. Do not support each other in anything that causes offense or hostility. Make smooth the ways that lead to the fulfillment of the promises of cooperation and stability in our lives. This means helping to shape public opinion about Islamic society, drawing upon its many principles in order to protect its values and its norms. Its followers must not approve of what is wrong and must not give in to what is forbidden. Let them instead help to establish justice until the community is confirmed in that goodness which has as its precondition the bidding of what is honorable and repudiation of what is dishonorable. For God says: "You are the best community of those formed among humankind, calling for what is good and refuting what is evil" [3:110].

For this reason, silly superstitions of all sorts are to be shunned lest they inflict damage, because corruption introduced by any one member of the body easily corrupts those others around it. For the noble Messenger, prayers and peace of God upon him, was well aware of the

foolishness that may take possession of the hearts of so many among his people. Hence, he cautioned them against such dangers when he related the

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parable of a ship plowing through the high seas. There are many passengers on board, and some of them want to bore a hole in the hull. If they are left to do so, the whole ship would sink and everyone would be drowned. But if they hold back, the ship would be saved and the lives of all those on it would be safe as well. In the words of the Prophet, prayers and peace of God upon him: "Those upright and true in the ways of God can be compared to people sharing space aboard a ship, some of whom are quartered on the deck while others are below. Now, if those below find that water is dripping down on them from those who are above them, they might say, 'If we, for our part, were to bore a hole, we would get back at those afflicting us from above, for we have done them no wrong. But to act on this impulse will mean that everyone perishes, whereas if we show restraint we will save ourselves and all the others too.'" For he also said: "The one who repents his sin is beloved of the All Merciful."

Praise to God, the Most High, the Great, the Nourisher, the Judge. Praise Him and give Him thanks. Pray to Him for prosperity and forgiveness. I profess that there is no god but God, He who pardons, is kind, and is gracious. And I profess that Muhammad is the prophet called from among the Arabs who pleased God by his obedience, while God gave him the banner of praise and of advocacy. The prayers and peace of God be upon his family and his companions and upon those who follow his words until the Day of Judgment.

Now then, O community of Muslims, those who devote themselves to obedience are dear to God, for He exalts their works and He makes their memory to abide forever. He raises them to be strong in the midst of His people. They love God and He loves them. They abstain from sin and find solace in God, who will attend to their safety from the terrors on the Day of Resurrection. "For the friends of God need not fear, nor should they grieve" [10:62]. For every Muslim has the capacity to attain the status of friend of God, if he but devotes his will to God and then acts accordingly with full conviction. He need only turn his efforts to the path that pleases his Lord, excelling in obedience and in good works for the community.

So practice piety before God, you servants of God, and follow God in obedience. Dedicate yourselves to the improvement of society. Rejoice in

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what pleases your Lord, now and in the future. May you be well prepared for the Day of Reckoning. "Indeed, prepare your provisions, and the best of provisions is piety" [2:197].

Let prayers and peace abound upon the leader of those who are God-fearing, Muhammad, the trustworthy Prophet. I call upon you to be believers. O God, we implore you to strengthen Islam and to make Muslims prosper.

[Congregation responds:] Amen!

[Preacher:] And by Your grace, exalt the word of truth and religion.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] O God, show us plainly the fullness of truth and bless us that we may adhere to it.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] Show us clearly the error of falsehood and bless us that we may avoid it.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] Make us to have faith in our homelands.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] Allow no harm to afflict our belief.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] Let not great distress beset our world.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] Do not permit knowledge to be confounded.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] O God, make our lives abound with every good thing.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] At death give us repose from every evil.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] O God, grant pardon to all believers, those living and those who have died.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] O God, be pleased with the patron of this place.

[Congregation:] Amen!

[Preacher:] Servants of God, truly God summons us to justice and

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good deeds, to behave as relatives. He bids us to refrain from crime and forbidden acts and from all that is wrong. He appeals to you, that you might be mindful, so remember the goodness of God, that He may remember you. Call Him to mind that He may pardon you. Let us now rise for the prayer. [Salat follows.]

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 22.

In this seventeenth-century Ottoman Turkish painting, Muhammad prays at the Ka'ba among pilgrims. Muhammad's Pilgrimage in 632 set the example for Islam's retaining much pre-Islamic ritual practice concerning the shrine in Mecca. At bottom, a pilgrim receives a drink from the well of Zamzam.

Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, MS. W.679a.

## INSPIRATION:

### EDIFICATION AND ETHICS

Religious and ethical inspiration are an integral part of every tradition of spirituality. Two broad categories of sources are the main veins running through Islam's mine of inspirational treasure. Poetic and anecdotal presentations of exemplary individuals speak of how spiritual strength more than makes up for human frailty. And several types of wisdom literature represent a further refinement of the example of the great models in the form of advice and encouragement along the path of virtue.

### Exemplary Models

Stories of religious heroes and heroines throughout Islamic history have offered Muslims a rich selection of ethical models. From pre-Islamic prophets such as Joseph (fig. 26) to Muhammad himself (fig. 22), his wives, and members of his extended family and successors (fig. 24); from early Companions of the Prophet to those personifications of holiness called Friends of God (fig. 25), exemplary Muslims have represented the highest virtue and religious commitment for emulation. Although traditional Islamic theology does not allow for mediating presences to close the infinite gap between the divine and the human, in practice millions of people believe that God has endowed these moral exemplars with extraordinary powers. The first section below includes examples of heroic poetry in honor of Muhammad, a modern reading of a classic life of Muhammad, and hagiographical accounts of several men and women renowned for their sanctity.

### The Prophet: From Devotion to Edification

Poems in praise of Muhammad provide a natural transition from devotion to inspiration and highlight the often subtle differences between these two dimensions of Islamic religious experience. Here are two examples of the na't genre, one from Arabic and one from Urdu, that explore important facets of the Prophet's spiritual and ethical significance.

### *Acrostic Poem in Praise of Muhammad*

#### Earle H. Waugh

Muhammad's role in Islamic spirituality is as complex as it is pivotal. In the following poem, the Prophet remains a devotional focus, but in addition becomes the model of the seeker. Sufis have developed a genre of literature that is both useful for meditation and explicative of the mystical

path, understanding the Prophet as the pioneer and pinnacle of spiritual maturity. The poetry that honors Muhammad as both supreme guide and intercessor is not only for the elite; rather, such writings and meditations proliferated for every taste and ability.

Sometimes these selections were put to music to make their memorization easier, or they took on the nature of a song of praise and proclamation such as could be performed in an evening of mystical devotion called a *sama* '. Often a shaykh would compose meditations to be memorized and repeated in *dhikr* rites (the word *dhikr* meaning "mentioning," "recalling" by means of verbal formulae). The poem rests on the premise that Muhammad is active as an intercessor in the world of the believer. Moreover, it uses the Arabic alphabet as a mnemonic device. The translation attempts to retain the sound of the original Arabic by beginning each sentence with an English word that sounds like the Arabic letter. Unfortunately, cadences and emphases cannot be similarly duplicated. [1]

### **In Praise of the Prophet Muhammad**

My brother: your relationship to evil has been for so long that your  
worst provision has been for the world to come.

Your sense departed and your concern lagged, so that you abandoned  
your ordinary reason.

Disobedience freely manipulated you, conveying you wherever it would;  
it found you easy to lead.

You have been summoned to leave, so listen. Deafen not yourself to the  
caller!

Surely sufficient warning to you is your white hair—that whiteness has  
now spread within!

Alif: Adoration have I for my intercessor in the hereafter.

He who is that gentle morning sun, that moon of the cosmos,  
Muhammad.

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Ba': Because he was chosen, strife and enmity have vanished;\*  
the world is filled with purity, genuine affection and devotion, through  
Muhammad.

Ta': Truly the Exalted One, the supreme God in His greatness  
has adorned the heavens with the light of Muhammad.

Tha': Thanks to him, the sky is graced with a pair of moons, †  
for the cosmos is resplendent with the brilliance that is Muhammad.

Jim: Join the whole creation in witness:

its warp and weft arise from the design and guidance ‡ of Muhammad.

Ha': Having shielded true religion with his sword,  
the faith waxed triumphant by virtue of Muhammad.

Kha': Culminating as the seal of the prophets, §  
that seal has the exquisite fragrance of musk: Muhammad.

Dal: Distance was so minimal between him and Allah  
that he heard the greeting "O welcome Muhammad."||

Dhal: That protection afforded by the Hashimi# is sufficient;  
it is precious and treasured by those seeking refuge with  
Muhammad.

Ra': Right pleasing is his presence: none among the prophets  
has the sublime character of Muhammad.

\* This refers to the general Muslim belief that the Arabs and, indeed, the world were in a state of chaos before Muhammad brought order and direction.

† Ancient Arabian poetry speaks of individuals possessing such beauty and stature that they are as prominent as the moon in the clear night sky. The trope was applied to heroes and legendary figures, even to one's paramour. It has been taken over here and in Sufi literature to praise the Prophet.

‡ Some Sufis held that the "light" of Muhammad's goodness and dedication was so powerful that it was an eternal characteristic that informed and directed the creation of the universe.

§ The title "seal of the prophets" means that Muhammad is the last prophet God will send.

|| No human was able to stand before God; but Muhammad came so close during his Ascension that he could hear the very voice of God.

# The Prophet belonged to the Hashimi clan, one of the most important of the ruling Quraysh tribe. One's ancestral roots were very important in the development of Islam, and took on deeply religious meanings. Even now being related to the Prophet is critical for some rulers (those of Morocco, for example). Sufis have taken over the idea in the notion of being spiritually related to their shaykh and through him to the Prophet.

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Za': Zoned sacred, his tomb offers atonement—it is obligatory,\*  
O believer, to attend the resting place of Muhammad.

Sin: Sojourning on al-Buraq, † he rose to the highest heights  
enrapt in the very essence of aroma—Muhammad.

Shin: Surely an intercessor intercedes;  
glory be to Him who ascribed intercession to Muhammad.

Sad: Certain is this truth:  
woman has borne none like Muhammad.

Dad: Dazzled was humanity by his countenance.  
O God! How wondrous is the beauty of Muhammad!

Ta': Treading in the Hashimi's footsteps brings blessing;  
follow everlastingly the footprints of Muhammad.

Za': Zephyrous serenity flowed through the sky's vault with the arrival  
of him who  
pleased God; acceptance was bestowed for the sake of Muhammad.

'Ayn: Above all that shines, joyous his light,  
happiness prevails everywhere through Muhammad.

Ghayn: Grand wealth accrues to the poor through their lauding of the  
chosen one;

Ah! victorious are those who exalt in praise Muhammad.

Fa': Far beyond all in sensitivity and grandeur,

the Creator fashioned none like unto Muhammad.

Qaf: Qualities of righteousness reigned in his laws,  
while the people flourished through the patience of Muhammad.

Kaf: Keen in his generosity, perfected in his spirituality,  
beneficence is the being of Muhammad.

Lam: Languishing dry unto death, his sustaining rod sprouted; † the lizard

\* Sufis developed the notion of the spiritual presence of a departed saint; it is best expressed in the concept of *baraka*, the power and authority manifest in the lives of the saints, mostly for the benefit of their devotees but sometimes to have an impact on the course of Islamic history and of creation.

† Buraq: the human-headed quadruped that carried Muhammad on his Night Journey and Ascension

† Legend says the Prophet had a cane or walking stick that, even though old and dry, sprouted because of Muhammad's spiritual presence.

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proclaimed the good news of the coming of the dearly beloved  
Muhammad.

Mim: My love to him is as a sacred rite;  
Islam's rituals are the love of Muhammad.

Nun: Now commit I myself to attend the tomb  
of him who guides and intercedes for us, Muhammad.

Waw: Witness this by the truth of God: I yearn for you,  
The Zamzami\* and the Hashimi, Muhammad.

Ha': How my love unfolds and my heart longs  
for that mausoleum's beacon in the darkness, Muhammad.

Lam Alif: Lacerate not, † O God,  
those who adulate the Hashimi, Muhammad.

Ya': Yes! Truly, I swear never to free myself from this vow;  
there, God will bind up our brokenness by Muhammad.

## ***Na't in Praise of Muhammad***

### **Ali Asani**

In addition to Muhammad's role as a friend, helper, and beloved, his followers have been grateful to him for conveying the message of Islam to the world. Hence it is only natural that he is frequently conceived of as a guide and leader to the truth. On the basis of various qur'anic verses, including one that declares Muhammad a "mercy to the worlds" (21:107), many Muslims have come to hold that a believer who trusts and loves him will be protected in the hereafter, for the merciful Prophet will seek forgiveness of sins from God. Poems such as the following example by the Indian Nazir Akbarabadi (d. 1831) often allude to Muhammad's mystical or spiritual status, developing ideas inspired by accounts of his mysterious Night Journey and Ascension to heaven (the *mi'raj*; see fig. 22). This journey, the climax of which was a face-to-face meeting with God (often interpreted metaphorically), provides for mystically minded Muslims the prototype for the ascent of their own souls to higher spiritual realms. Although Muslims do not



ordinarily aspire to imitate Muhammad in this regard, his lofty spiritual state is an integral part of his ability to inspire believers.<sup>[2]</sup>

\* Zamzami: associating Muhammad with the well of Zamzam.

† A Sufi theme, from the romantic notion that the beloved tantalizes the lover but always remains beyond his grasp, thus rending his soul and lacerating his spirit.

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You are the ruler of this world and the next, O Muhammad the chosen.

You are the leader of the Muslims, O Muhammad the chosen.

You are the governor of the stable religion, O Muhammad the chosen.

You are the qibla of those with firm conviction, O Muhammad the chosen.

On the night of the mi'raj, you illuminated the heavens;

On account of your footsteps the highest heaven and divine throne became luminous and radiant;

The color and fragrance of the paradisiacal rose gardens increased markedly;

In a place yonder that is beyond the imagination of the angels

You are the reigning prince, O Muhammad the chosen.

O seal of the prophets, even God calls you His beloved,

And to you, with the [divine] revelation, comes Gabriel most respectfully.

Which prophet had attained such an [exalted] status as yours?

You belong to that ocean which is the most sacred ocean of prophethood.

You are a unique pearl, O Muhammad the chosen.

You are the emissary of the Righteous One and the best of mankind;

The master of each of the two worlds and the intercessor for the day of

reckoning;

Your exalted essence is the fountain of kindness and generosity,

Not only for Nazir, but for all you are the asylum for assistance:

[Just] as here you are [with us]; there too you will be, O Muhammad the

chosen.

**Taha Hussein:**

***Interpreting Muhammad's Life in Modern Times***

## William Shepard

Taha Hussein (1889–1973), though blind from childhood, managed to complete his education at the mosque university of al-Azhar in Cairo and obtain a doctorate in France. He became one of the leading lights of the literary flowering in Egypt following its independence in 1922, producing important works of both literature and literary criticism. He was concerned that Egyptians, and Muslims

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generally, be open to learn from the West, but also that they continue be inspired by their own tradition. His position was "secularist" in that he did not see in the Qur'an and the activities of the Prophet Muhammad prescriptive rules laid down for all time, but rather a heritage that should inspire later generations in a more flexible way. The following selection evidences that concern. It is the introduction to his three-volume work *On the Margin of the Sira*, published in 1933, in which he retells the story of the Prophet Muhammad. The word *sira* refers to a literary biography of the Prophet and in particular that of Ibn Ishaq (d. 767) as edited and expanded by Ibn Hisham (d. ca. 830). The distinction made toward the end of the passage between reason and emotion, and the assigning of these stories to the emotional side of life, are also typical of Hussein's thinking. Here are the reflections of one of the twentieth-century Arab world's most famous literary figures on the meaning of the life story of Muhammad. His prefatory remarks emphasize the function of the Prophet's *sira* as ethical paradigm.<sup>[3]</sup>

These pages have not been written for scholars [*'ulama'*] or historians, because my intention in them is not scholarship and my aim in them is not history. Rather, they are a picture that occurred to me during my reading of the *Sira* and which I recorded hastily; then I saw no harm in publishing them. Perhaps I saw some good in publishing them, since they will restore to people bits of the ancient literature that had slipped away from them and become inaccessible, being read only by those who have received a broad and deep education in ancient Arabic literature. Search for those who read what the ancients wrote about the *Sira* and the tales [*hadith*] of the Arabs before Islam and you will find hardly any.

Today people read only the modern literature that contemporaries write for them in their language or in one of the foreign languages that have spread through the Orient, and they find in reading it an ease and facility, an enjoyment and a pleasure that interest and entice them. As for the ancient literature, it is hard to read, harder to understand, and harder yet to enjoy. Where is the reader who will put up with reading lengthy *isnads* [chains of transmitters] and accounts that contain digressions and whose strange ancient language strays from the path of that easy understanding and appreciation that do not impose difficulty and trouble?

Moreover, the ancient literature was not produced in order to remain

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just as it is, fixed and settled, without changing or altering, and with people able to derive pleasure from its texts only by reading and rereading them, by memorizing them and devoting all their effort to doing so. No, truly fertile literature is that which pleases you when you read it because it satisfies both your reason and your feelings, because it reveals to you more than what is in it and inspires in you more than what its texts contain, because it gives you fertility from its fertility, wealth from its wealth, strength from its strength; because it speaks to you as it spoke to the ancients; because it does not settle into your heart until it takes on the form of your heart or makes your heart take on its form, and when you pass it on to people, you deliver it to them

in a new shape adapted to the life they live, to the emotions that stir in their hearts, and to the thoughts that surge in their minds.

This is living literature. This is the literature that can resist the onslaught of time and survive. As for that literature whose effect ends with the reading of it, it may have its value and it may have its use, but it is a temporary literature that dies when the age in which it appeared ends. If you look at the ancient and modern literatures, you will find a group of them that cannot be described as literatures of a particular age or a particular environment or a particular generation, but they are literatures of all ages, all environments, and all generations, not only because they are admired by people of different ages, environments, and generations, but because they inspire people and reveal things [to them], and make of them poets, writers, and masters of diverse kinds of arts.

The immortality of the *Iliad* does not come merely from the fact that it creates enjoyment and stirs admiration in every time and every region. Rather, it comes both from this and from the fact that it has inspired and still inspires writers and poets to compose the most sublime marvels [*ayat*] of eloquence created by humans. Aeschylus, the father of Greek tragedy, used to say that he merely gleaned what dropped from the table of Homer, and the storytellers, playwrights, and composers (songwriters) of the West can still rightly say what Aeschylus used to say twenty-five centuries ago. And the stories of Aeschylus and the other Greek poets and playwrights are no less fertile than the *Iliad*. In fact, they have inspired

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ancient and modern poets and writers, are still able to inspire them today, and will be able to do so tomorrow. . . .

In our Arabic literature also, with its particular strength and the pleasure and enjoyment it affords people, there is a capacity for revelation and inspiration. Thus the tales and accounts of the pre-Islamic Arabs were not written just once and were not preserved in a particular form, but the narrators told them in diverse forms and the authors wrote them in various ways. And you can say the same thing about the *Sira* itself, for it, too, has inspired the poets and writers in most Islamic countries and ages. They have given it diverse forms that have varied in strength, weakness, and artistic beauty. You can say the same thing about the [stories of the Prophet's] wars and the [later] conquests, and about the civil wars and tribulations that befell the Arabs in different ages. Nor was inspiration limited to the great literary heritage of the writers and poets who composed poetry and ornate prose in the Classical Arabic language. Rather, it went beyond them to the band of popular storytellers who recounted to people in diverse forms and widely varying shapes the noble glory that their ancestors had achieved and the grim wars and the dark tribulations that had befallen them, and made known how they had withstood them and persevered through them.

There is no good in the life of the ancients if it does not inspire in the moderns sublime eloquence in poetry and prose. The ancients are not truly immortal if [their heritage] can be sought only in their own writings, if their descendants can come to know them only through the poems and literary collections that they left. The ancients are only truly alive and immortal when they and their deeds fill the hearts of later generations, however distant in time, when they are reflected in people's daily conversation, and when they form a treasury into which writers and poets delve to give life to their speech and poetry.

It was to this manner of giving life to the ancient literature and the memory of the early Arabs that I directed myself when I dictated the chapters in this book. I do not wish to deceive the readers concerning myself or concerning this book, for I did not give it a lot of thought and calculation, and I did not intend it to be a carefully written composition.

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I was driven to it. I found myself reading the *Sira* , and it filled my soul, overflowed my heart, and flowed out of my tongue, and there I was dictating these chapters and other chapters, hoping they might be published after a time.

So this book does not represent a studied or self-conscious effort, it does not seek to excel and to avoid failure. It is just a simple, natural, and truthful picture of some of what I feel when I read these books that I put on a level above all other books, whatever they may be; that I never tire of reading and keeping companionship with; for which my love and admiration never ceases, nor my desire that people should read them. But unfortunately, people do not read them, either because they do not want to or because they cannot. So if this book can make young people love to read the books of the *Sira* , especially, and the books of ancient Arabic literature generally, and [get them to] seek artistic pleasure in their fertile pages, then I shall be truly blessed with success in the thing that is dearest to me and closest to my heart. . . .

And if this book can awaken in the souls of young people the realization that the old must not be forsaken just because it is old, and the new must not be sought just because it is new, but that the old is only to be forsaken if it is profitless and void of utility, while if it is useful and profitable, then people have no less need of it than they do of the new, I shall have been blessed with success in part of what I seek.

I know that a group of people will be uneasy with this book because they are modern people who glorify reason and put their trust and confidence in it alone. Therefore they will be uneasy with many of the tales and accounts that reason cannot stomach or accept. They complain and urge their complaint when they see the fondness of the people for these accounts, their earnestness in seeking them, and their desire to read them and listen to them, and they struggle to turn the people from these accounts and tales and to deliver them from their dangerous and intellectually corrupting sway. These people will be somewhat uneasy with this book because they will read in it a group of these accounts and tales that they have set themselves to war against and to obliterate from the souls of people. And I would like these people to know that reason isn't every-

thing, and that people have other faculties that need to be satisfied and nourished no less than does reason.

If reason is not content with these accounts and tales, and if logic is not satisfied with them, and if they don't measure up to the canons of scientific thinking, still there is something in the hearts of people, in their feelings, their emotions, their imagination, their inclination toward the simple, their desire to seek refuge in it from the struggle and hardship of life, that makes them love and desire these accounts and that moves them to seek in them relaxation for their souls when life bears harshly upon them. There is a great difference between the person who relates these accounts to the intellect as scientifically established truths and acceptable bases for investigation, and the one who presents them to the heart and the feelings as something that will stir up good emotions, deflect evil impulses, and help them to pass the time and bear the burdens and demands of life.

I want people also to know that I have allowed myself the storyteller's liberty and inventiveness in relating these accounts and tales wherever I saw no harm in so doing, but not when the stories and accounts touch the person of the Prophet or any aspect of religion. At those points I gave myself neither freedom or latitude, but stuck strictly to that which is accepted by the ancient authorities on the *Sira* and hadith, the experts on the sources of transmission, and the scholars of religion.

Those who wish to look up the ancient sources from which I have taken the chapters of this book, which is old in its substance and basis but new in its shape and form, will have no great difficulty. For these sources are very few, hardly going beyond the *Sira* of Ibn Hisham, the [*Great Book of* ] *Generations* [(*Kitab at-Tabaqat (al-kabir)*)] of Ibn Sa'd [d. 845], and the *History* of at-Tabari. There is no chapter or account in this book that does not revolve about an account or accounts appearing in one of these books. And when the account is related to the Prophet, I have given the reference so that anyone who wishes can look it up without any particular trouble, because I do not here follow any particular school of thought, but I freely elaborate in explanation and commentary, derive the moral of the story, and bring it home to people's hearts.

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So may God ease the path of this book into people's souls and cause it to make good impression on their hearts.

## **Collections of Holy Lives**

Ibn Hisham's refashioning of the *Sira* originally written by Ibn Ishaq was only the beginning of a tremendous legacy in Islamic hagiography. Numerous other writers down to modern times have recounted the lives of holy men and women. In some instances, as in the *Sira*, they focus on the story of only one individual. But another major genre, the bio-hagiographical anthology, has taken the lead of Ibn Sa'd's *Generations* (to which Taha Hussein refers) and developed into one of the most popular forms of inspirational literature. Here are several samples of brief stories, beginning with one from the eleventh century and moving through the early and later middle periods of Islamic history and into early modern times. Their subjects are from Spain, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and India.

### ***Asiya, an Exemplary Woman in Tha'labi's Stories of the Prophets***

#### **John Renard**

Abu Ishaq Ahmad an-Nisaburi, also known as Tha'labi (d. 1036), wrote one of the most famous Arabic versions of *Stories of the Prophets* (*Qisas al-anbiya'*). His stories include those of several famous women as models of faith and virtue. Muhammad is reported to have observed that the four noblest women of all time were Asiya; Mary, the mother of Jesus; Muhammad's first wife, Khadija; and his daughter Fatima. Asiya was a believer in the true God who willingly suffered for her faith at the hands of her unbelieving husband, Pharaoh. Tradition has it that Asiya was the one who rescued the infant Moses from the river. Tha'labi's account is a fine example of midrashic narrative: the storyteller begins and ends with two halves of a relevant qur'anic verse and, in between, fills in details of a story suggested by the verse. The following anecdote highlights Asiya's fidelity no matter the cost.

#### **The Martyrdom of Asiya Bint Muzahim, Wife of Pharaoh**

God Most High has said, "And God put forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh" [66:11]. It is said that the wife of Pharaoh, Asiya, was one of the children of Israel. She was a sincere believer who

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worshipped God in secret, such that she would pretend to be seeing to her private needs but [actually] would go out to pray during the day disguised [lit., in her wraps] for fear of Pharaoh. She went on this way until Pharaoh murdered the wife of Hizqil.\*

While Asiya was looking out a window in Pharaoh's palace she saw the handmaiden of Hizqil's wife being tortured and killed. And when the handmaiden died Asiya saw the angels taking her spirit heavenward, for God Most High so desired as a result of her high estate and willed the best for her. Then [Asiya's] certitude about God and her conviction increased. While she was in that state, Pharaoh entered and informed her about the handmaiden of Hizqil's wife and told her what he had done to her. So Asiya said to him, "Woe to you, O Pharaoh, for the retribution awaiting you from God Most High." He replied, "Perhaps you are afflicted by the [same] demons [or madness] that got hold of your companion." She replied, "The demons do not have me in their grip; on the contrary, I have put faith in God my Lord and your Lord, the Lord of the universe."

So Pharaoh called for her mother and said to her, "The demons that possessed the handmaiden have taken your daughter." Then he swore, "You will either taste death or forsake the God of Moses." When her mother was alone with her, she asked [Asiya] to comply with Pharaoh's wishes. She refused and said, "You [both] want me to forsake God; no, by God, I will never do that!" So Pharaoh ordered that she be stretched between four stakes and tortured to death, may God have mercy on her. And that is the meaning of God's words, "Pharaoh, the one with [or Lord of] the stakes" [38:11].

Ibn 'Abbas [the noted traditionist] said that Pharaoh took his wife Asiya and then began to torment her so that she would join his religion. Then Moses passed by her while he was tormenting her and she complained to him by a hand gesture, so Moses called out to God that he might alleviate her suffering. After that she suffered no more from

\* Hizqil, Arabic for Ezekiel, is a name given in traditional lore to the anonymous "believer among Pharaoh's kin who had kept his faith secret" (40:28), who is said to have fashioned the floating cradle in which Asiya found baby Moses.

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Pharaoh's torture until she died from it. And in the midst of the torture she said, "Lord, prepare me a home in your presence in the Garden and save me . . ." [66:11; the remainder of the verse reads "from Pharaoh and his deeds and rescue me from those who do evil"]. So God revealed to her [with the words] "Lift up your head." She did so and had a vision of a girl in the Garden of pearls and she laughed. Pharaoh said, "Observe the madness that is upon her: she laughs even as she is being tortured."

## ***Munawi's Life of Rabi'a al-'Adawiya***

### **John Renard**

Rabi'a al-'Adawiya remains the most famous and popular Sufi woman of Islamic history. By far the best-known hagiographical account of this Friend of God is found in Farid ad-Din 'Attar's Persian *Recollections of the Friends of God (Tadhkirat al-awliya')*. Another treatment, never before translated into English, is that of 'Abd a-Ra'uf al-Munawi in *Shining Stars*. Here is an excerpt from Munawi's notice, a good source for comparison with the Rabi'a of 'Attar's often anthologized work. Munawi's method, not unlike that of 'Attar, is to gather in additive fashion a series of vignettes about the holy woman's words and deeds. Some of his anecdotes appear in variant forms in 'Attar's work. 'Attar begins his account by anticipating his readers' questions about his including one of Rabi'a's gender in a collection about men; Munawi, in contrast, makes no explicit mention of her gender, perhaps because Rabi'a is one of nearly three dozen women in his anthology.<sup>[4]</sup>

Of the Qays [tribe], then of Basra,<sup>[5]</sup> chief among worshippers and foremost of the penitent and humble [or supplicants] who live in fear of infidelity, she lived during the time of al-Hasan al-Basri, God be pleased with him. Among the women outstanding in virtue and piety, such as

Umm Ayyub al-Ansariya and Umm ad-Darda' and Mu'adha al-'Adawiya, she was noted for the depth of [her] asceticism, the abundance of [her] devotion, and the perfection of [her] integrity and self-denial. She used to perform a thousand ritual prostrations both day and night; so someone asked, "What is your goal in this?" She said, "I desire no reward for it; I do it so that the Messenger of God, may God bless him and give him peace, will delight in it on the day of Resurrection and say to the

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prophets, 'Take note of what a woman of my Community has accomplished.'" . . . [Here Munawi places an example of her prayer cited in part 2.]

Tradition has it that she used to perform the ritual prayer through the night; when dawn broke she rested quietly in her place of prayer for a while until dawn had passed, then she would rise energetically and say, "O soul, how long will you doze on and when will you bestir yourself? You are not far from sleeping a sleep from which there will be no revival until the call of the Day of Resurrection."

At a time when the daily income of his estate was eighty thousand dirhams, Muhammad Sulayman al-Hashimi wrote to the notables of Basra [in search of] a woman whom he might marry. They agreed unanimously on Rabi'a, God be pleased with her, so he wrote to her, "God has bestowed on me eighty thousand dirhams a day and I will give you that and that much more, so give me your answer." She wrote back to him, "Self-denial in this world is the body's rest, while craving for [this world] leaves a legacy of anxiety and sadness. So put your financial matters in order and prepare for your final destination. Make yourself your beneficiary rather than bequeathing your heritage to human beings. Let them divide among themselves the bequest of your dismissal of fortune and let death [be all that will] break your fasting. As for myself, had God granted me riches the like of yours and even more, it would not please me [enough] to make me distracted from the remembrance of God Most High for even the blinking of an eye. Peace."

Among the marvels she worked: A thief entered her apartment while she was sleeping. He took her clothes and went looking for the door; not finding it, he put [the clothes] down, and he found it. When he picked them up [again], [the door] again became invisible to him. This occurred many times; then a voice called to him: "Leave the clothes; we are looking after them and will not let you have them even if she is asleep." The mystic al-Buni said, "This is the underlying meaning in the word of the Most High, 'For every person there is a succession before and behind of beings who look after that person by God's command'" [13:11]. . . . [A second anecdote follows here.]

Someone asked her when the servant [of God] becomes satisfied. She

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said, "When trials give as much delight as blessings." She was a person of intense [spiritual] fear, so when she heard mention of the Fire she would pass out. She used to say, "Were the world the possession of a [single] man, it would not make him rich." "How so?" someone asked her. She replied, "Because it is passing away." They say she remained for forty years without lifting her head toward the heavens, out of modesty before God.

She used to say, "I never hear the call to prayer without being reminded that I am being called to the Day of Judgment. I never look upon the snow without being reminded of the final import of the pages [in the Book of Recorded Deeds]. And I never look at the locusts without being reminded of the Resurrection."

She said, "Our asking forgiveness requires [further] asking forgiveness for the lack of authenticity in [the request]."

Some people were disparaging this world in her presence, so she said, "The Messenger of God, God bless him and give him peace, said: 'One who loves something mentions it frequently.' Your mentioning this world is an indication of the falseness of your hearts; for if you were immersed in something other than this world you would not bring it up at all."

A man brought her forty dinars and said, "Ask me for help with the money to cover some of your needs." She wept, then lifted her head toward the heavens and said, "He knows that I am embarrassed to ask Him for things of this world, and He owns it! How could I accept such things from one who does not own them?"

When someone said to her, "Pray for me," she trembled and said, "Who am I? Obey your Lord and beseech Him and He will respond to the need."

Someone said to her, "Have you performed a deed you believe will be accepted from you?" She replied, "If there were such a deed, my fear is that it would return to me."

Sufyan ath-Thawri [d. 767], God be pleased with him, was with some of his brothers in religion and said, "Let's go to the educating woman with whom alone I find rest." And when he went in to her, Sufyan, God be pleased with him, raised his hands and said, "O God, I ask you for

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peace." [To Rabi'a] he said, "Why are you crying?" She replied, "You have moved me to tears. Are you not aware that peace in the midst of this world means repudiating the things of this world? How can this happen while you are immersed in and stained by those things?" [She said further to Sufyan], "Besides, you are but a finite sum of days, so that when a day passes, a part of you has gone; and when the part goes, the whole cannot be far behind: know this and act accordingly."

Someone asked her: "What is the innermost reality of your faith?" She replied, "I do not worship Him out of fear of His Fire, nor out of desire for His Garden, as though I were a wicked mercenary. I worship out of love for Him and desire for Him." Malik ibn Dinar [d. ca. 750] said, "I visited her and she said, 'How many are the desires whose delights are fleeting but whose consequences remain! O Lord, have you neither penalty nor pedagogy apart from the Fire?' And among her personal prayers: "My God, would you consume in the Fire a heart in love with you?" Came the answer, "Do not think ill of Us." And she used to recite:

Behold I have made You [God] the confidant of my deepest self [ *fu'ad* ];

I make my outward form the property of any companion who wants it.

For my outward form is familiar to the companion,

While the Beloved of my heart is intimately acquainted with my inmost

being. [6]

### ***Three Women of Iberia***



## **R. W. J. Austin**

Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240) was one of the most important religious and intellectual figures of medieval Spain. Born in the town of Murcia along the coast south of Barcelona, Ibn 'Arabi was part of a vast network of people linked to Sufi organizations. Two short biographical anthologies gather his recollections of the Sufis and spiritual guides he knew. Four of these spiritual guides were women. Here are excerpts from Ibn 'Arabi's recollections of three of them.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Shams, Mother of the Poor**

She lived at Marchena of the Olives, where I visited her often. Among people of our kind I have never met one like her with respect to the control she had over her soul. In her spiritual activities and communica-

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tions she was among the greatest. She had a strong and pure heart, a noble spiritual power, and a fine discrimination. She usually concealed her spiritual state, although she would often reveal something of it to me in secret because she knew of my own attainment, which gladdened me. She was endowed with many graces. I had considerable experience of her intuition and found her to be a master in this sphere. Her spiritual state was characterized chiefly by her fear of God and His good pleasure in her, the combination of the two at the same time in one person being extremely rare among us.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Nuna Bint Fatima Bint Ibn Al-Muthanna**

She came to the [Sufi] Way while still a young girl living in her father's house. I met her when she was already ninety-six years of age. . . . One day when I was with her a woman came to see her to complain of her husband who had gone away to Sidonia, two days' journey from Seville. She told us that her husband wanted to seek another wife in that place, which she found hard to accept. I asked Fatima whether she had heard the woman's plea and begged her to call upon God to restore her husband to her. She said, "I will make no supplication, but I will cause the chapter [of the Qur'an] 'The Opening' [Sura 1, al-Fatiha] to follow behind him and bring him back." Then I said, "In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate," and she recited the rest of the chapter. Then she said, "O chapter of 'The Opening,' go to Jerez de Sidonia to the husband of this woman and drive him back at once from wherever you find him and do not let him delay." She said this sometime between noon and the late afternoon.

On the third day the man arrived at his home. Then the woman came to inform us of his arrival and to thank us. I then told her to bring her husband to us. When he came we asked him what had brought him back. . . . He replied that he had left his house in the middle of the afternoon heading toward the municipal building for the marriage and that on the way he felt a constriction in his heart and everything suddenly seemed very dark to him. At this he became very anxious. Then he left that place and arrived in Triana before sunset, where he had found a

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boat for Seville. Thus he had sailed the day before and arrived in Seville that morning, having left all his baggage and effects behind in Jerez. He admitted that he still did not know why he had done it. I have seen various miracles performed by her.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **Zaynab Al-Qal'iyah**

From the fortress of the Banu Jamad, she was of those devoted to the Book of God, the foremost ascetic of her day. Although she possessed both great beauty and considerable wealth, she freely abandoned the world and went to live in the region of Mecca. . . . I had contact with her both in Seville and at Mecca. . . . When she sat down to practice the Invocation [*dhikr* ] she would rise into the air from the ground to a height of thirty cubits; when she had finished she would descend again. I accompanied her from Mecca to Jerusalem and I have never seen anyone more strict in observing the times of prayer than she. She was one of the most intelligent people of her time.<sup>[10]</sup>

## ***Holy Women of Morocco and Egypt***

### **John Renard**

Not long after Ibn 'Arabi had written his anthology, an Egyptian Sufi named Safi ad-Din ibn Abi 'l-Mansur ibn Zafir (1198–1283) wrote a similar work in Cairo. Safi ad-Din lived most of his life in Egypt and Syria. His work is a fascinating collection of sketches of more than 150 important Friends of God from all over Egypt, North Africa and Spain to the west, and Syria and the Hijaz (northwestern Arabian peninsula) to the east. Safi ad-Din is especially concerned with the spiritual qualities of his subjects, along with their lineages of initiation into the Sufi path. Here are his recollections of a Maghribi woman named Sitt al-Muluk and an Egyptian woman who lived near the pyramids of Giza.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **Sitt Al-Muluk**

I encountered a Maghribi woman of great [spiritual] estate, whom the Friends of God and religious scholars alike held in high regard, whose name was Sitt al-Muluk. She had come from the Maghrib [Morocco] in the company of Shaykh Abu Yusuf ad-Dahmani. She was visiting

the Holy House [Jerusalem; see fig. 23] at the time when the great shaykh and Friend of God 'Ali ibn Ghalas al-Yamani was there. [Ibn Ghalas] recounted:

"I was in the Sacred Sanctuary when suddenly I witnessed a cord of light pointing toward one of the domes of the Sanctuary. So I walked toward that dome and found inside it this woman, Sitt al-Muluk, and the light that I had seen, in her place of prayer. I proposed marriage to her for [the sake of spiritual] companionship and she accepted."

And this woman said to me [the narrator]: "'Ali ibn Ghalas entrusted to me an earthenware ewer and said to me, 'My sister, watch over it.' So I put it on a shelf in the house. One day while I was looking at it, it shattered suddenly into shards without moving at all and even though nothing had hit it. So I called on God and expressed my amazement at his command; I got up and collected [the pieces of] it, wrapped it in a cloth, and noted down the hour [of the occurrence]. A couple of days later word came that Shaykh 'Ali ibn Ghalas had died in Damascus at that very hour."

One day she said to me: "My son, I made out the sliver of crescent moon [whose appearance signals the beginning of the fast] of Ramadan, and at the moment of its appearance and my being sure of it, God Most High gave me insight into his Night of Power,\* as to which night it was and how to recognize it with certainty. And when the appointed night came, the Night of Power, I ran from it as a debtor flees a creditor. But its lights probed me and flowed forth from my eyes, and, when the night was spent, I said, 'I swear by your might, O Lord, and your majesty, what

need had I of your Night of Power when I was already with you?" And the great Friends of God who have seen her attest to her sanctity, may God be pleased with her!

### **The Holy Woman of Giza**

I encountered at Giza in Egypt a woman, one of God's fools [lit., one on the fringe of society], who for over three years had stood upright on her

\* Tradition places the inaugural revelation to Muhammad on the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan, called the Night of Power.

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 23.

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (692) is Islam's third holiest site, a reminder of Muhammad's exalted position of spiritual leadership, and the starting point of his Ascension to heaven after the Night Journey from Mecca on the twenty-seventh of Rajab.

feet in a spot of ground among the shoots of esparto grass. She sat down neither night nor day, neither winter nor summer; and she did not take shelter from the sun in summer nor from the rain in winter. The snakes took refuge around her; she ate what food was offered her, and she spoke with whomever addressed her. Hers was an amazing state.

### ***The Life of Sufi Badhni***

#### **Bruce B. Lawrence**

Shaykh 'Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith of Delhi (1551–1642) was a member of the Chishti Sufi *tariqa* (order) and author of *Chronicles of the Pious on the Secrets of the Righteous (Akhbar al-akhyar fi asrar al-abrar)*. His works were part of the burgeoning literary output of Indian Sufis whose tradition of writing had been an important ingredient in Islam's spread in the subcontinent. The work from which come these recollections of Sufi Badhni represents the expanding popularity of a long-traditional Islamic genre, the hagiographical anthology.

Shaykh Nizam ad-Din\* said that in Kaithal there was a saint whom they call Sufi Badhni. He was so completely ascetical that he went about totally naked. Shaykh Nizam ad-Din comments that according to Islamic law, any person who abstains from that minimal amount of food and water required to keep the body functioning, or who does not wear enough clothing at least to cover the private parts . . . is committing a punishable offense, but Sufi Badhni was a saint of such high character that he was exempt from these restrictions. . . .

Sufi Badhni loved the life of prayer. He sat in the mosque in front of the mihrab and had no other occupation but offering prayers day and night. One day some 'ulama' came to see him, as many people used to do. The shaykh queried the 'ulama': "Will there be prayer in paradise?" They answered: "Paradise is the abode of reward, where no desire will go unsatisfied, no need unfulfilled. Devotions are only necessary in this world." When Sufi Badhni heard that there would be no prayer in paradise, he exclaimed: "I'll have nothing to do with a heaven where there is no prayer," and then he added something in Hindi not fit to repeat.

Shaykh Nizam ad-Din continued to extol Sufi Badhni at some length. He related the following anecdote. There was a person who used to visit Sufi Badhni frequently. One day this friend, while climbing a mountain, met a man from the Unseen. He inquired of the mysterious stranger, "What sort of man is Sufi Badhni?" The stranger replied, "He is a great man, but alas . . .," and said no more. Then he immediately began to ask God for pardon, saying repeatedly, "God forgive me. God forgive me." The friend reported this conversation to Sufi Badhni. The latter quipped: "If the stranger had said, 'Sufi Badhni is a great man' and not asked for God's forgiveness in the same breath, I would have thrown him down the mountain so hard he would have broken his neck."

Shaykh Nizam ad-Din related another anecdote: "When Sufi Badhni was engaged in meditating on God, such a state would overcome him that his head, hands, and feet seemed to separate from each other. If some persons came to see him and chanced to find him in that condition, they

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\* Nizam ad-Din Awliya' (d. 1325), himself a prominent Chishti shaykh, wrote *Morals for the Heart (Fawa'id al-fu'ad)*, a premier example of the *mal'uf* genre.

would be terrified and run out of the mosque crying, 'Someone has murdered Sufi Badhni and cut him to pieces!' It is further reported that those who knew Sufi Badhni well would say, 'Don't worry—no one has been killed. This is just the manifestation of his special spiritual condition.' If the curious returned for a second look, they would find Sufi Badhni sitting peacefully before the mihrab."

Someone asked when Sufi Badhni lived, and Shaykh Nasir ad-Din\* told them that he lived in the time of Shaykh Farid ad-Din. † They say that no one ever saw a crow sitting on the dome of the mosque when he prayed, or even flying over it. God alone knows the truth of the matter.

There is a famous story that one time he and Shaykh Qutb ad-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki [d. 1232] were taken prisoner by the Mongols of Genghis Khan. One day the prisoners had become desperately hungry and thirsty. By a miracle, Qutb Sahib produced bread from his sleeve, and Sufi Badhni a jug of water, which they distributed among the prisoners. This was how Khwaja Qutb ad-Din received the name "Kaki" (bread) and Shaykh Sufi came to be known as Badhni, which in Hindi means "water jug."<sup>[12]</sup>

### ***Jabarti's Account of 'Ali al-Bayyumi***

## William Shepard

'Ali al-Bayyumi (1696–1769) was the founder of the Bayyumiya tariqa, one of the more popular Sufi orders in Egypt today. With his combination of scholarly ability and ecstatic behavior, 'Ali al-Bayyumi illustrated the kind of person a Sufi *wali* or Friend of God was expected to be in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Egypt. This passage is taken from the early-nineteenth-century historical chronicle of Shaykh 'Abd ar-Rahman al-Jabarti (1753–1825) entitled *Historical and Biographical Marvels ('Aja 'ib al-athar fi tarajim wa 'l-akhbar)*.<sup>[13]</sup> Note the difference in tone from earlier hagiographical works.

There died [in the year 1183 H. (=1768–1769)] the Imam, the wali, the pious believer, the ecstatic [*majdhub* ], the productive scholar [*'alim* ]

\* Nasir ad-Din Mahmud (d. 1356), called the "Lamp of Delhi," was a disciple of Nizam ad-Din and his successor as shaykh of the Chishti order.

† Farid ad-Din Ganj-i Shakar ("Sugar Treasure," d. 1265), was a Chishti shaykh known for his ascetical practices.

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Shaykh 'Ali ibn Hijazi ibn Muhammad al-Bayyumi, a follower of the Shafi'i school of religious law [*madhhab* ] and of the Khalwatiya and later the Ahmadiya [tariqas]. He was born about the year 1108 [=1695–1696 C.E. ]. He memorized the Qur'an at an early age and became a scholar, attending the lessons of the shaykhs [of his time] and studying Hadith under 'Umar ibn 'Abd as-Salam at-Tatawani. He was initiated into the Khalwatiya [tariqa] by Sayyid Husayn ad-Dimirdashi al-'Adili and followed its practices for some time. Then he was initiated into the Ahmadiya by several people. In time he experienced ecstasy [*jadhb* ] and hearts inclined to him, spirits were drawn to him, and people came to believe in him greatly. Many followed his [Sufi] way [tariqa] and recited his spiritual invocations [dhikr]. He attracted a large number of followers and disciples. He lived in the Husayniya [quarter]\* and held dhikrs in the mosque of az-Zahir [just] outside the Husayniya, where he was to be found regularly with his group, as it was near his house.

He was subject to [supernatural] experiences and strange states of ecstasy [*ahwal* ], and wrote a number of books, among them a commentary on *The Small Collection* [of hadith, by Suyuti; *Al-jami' as-saghir* ], a commentary on *The Aphorisms [Al-hikam]* by Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari [d. 1309],<sup>[14]</sup> a commentary on *The Perfect Person [Al-insan alkamil]* by al-Jili [d. ca. 1410], a work on the local Sufi orders,<sup>[15]</sup> especially on the Khalwatiya Dimirdashiya, written in 1144 [=1730–1731 C.E. ], a commentary on the *Forty [Hadith] [Arba'in]*, a brief popular collection] of an-Nawawi, a treatise on the Shari'a punishments [*hudud* ], and a commentary on the prayer formula of the Ahmadiya and on talismanic formulae. He spoke sublimely on Sufi practice [*tasawwuf* ], and when he spoke he was eloquent, clear, and dazzled his hearers.

He wore the same clothing in winter and summer, a white gown (or shirt) and a white skullcap about which he would a piece of red cloth as a turban. He would leave his house only once a week to visit the Shrine of Husayn, riding a mule with his followers going before him and following

\* One of the "popular" quarters of Cairo, just north of the walls of the original Fatimid city.

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him, proclaiming the unity [of God] and invoking [His name]. Often he would shut himself off for months meeting no one. He performed evident miracles [*karamat* ].

When he began to hold a dhikr every Tuesday in the courtyard of the Shrine of Husayn that lasted until after dawn, bringing his people as already mentioned, the '*ulama*' rose against him and objected to the way they dirtied the mosque with their feet, since most of them went barefoot and raised their voices very loudly. Working through some of the military chiefs, they almost managed to stop him, but Shaykh ash-Shubrawi, who greatly loved the ecstasies, opposed them and helped him. He said to the pasha and the chiefs, "This man is a great scholar and wali, and you must not interfere with him." At that time the shaykh had him give classes at the Azhar Mosque, and he lectured on the *Forty [Hadith]* of an-Nawawi in the Tibarsiya [section of the mosque]. Most of the '*ulama*' attended and were so impressed [by his learning] that they calmed down and the fire of discord was extinguished. . . . [Here he includes two first-person accounts of visions, presented in part 7 below.]

Here are some of his miracles [*karamat* ]: I have heard from trustworthy sources that he used to convert brigands from their criminal ways so that they became his disciples and some even fully initiated Sufis.<sup>[16]</sup> Sometimes he would chain them with a heavy iron chain to the pillars of the Zahir Mosque, and sometimes he would put a collar around their necks and discipline them as he saw fit. When he went riding they would follow him with weapons and staves. He had an awesome regal presence. When he took part in the dhikr at the Shrine of Husayn he would reach a state of excitement in which he would become as strong as a fierce wild beast, but when he sat down after the dhikr he would be extremely weak. Sometimes his face would appear to those present like that of a wild animal, sometimes like that of a calf and sometimes like that of a gazelle.

Mustafa Pasha [the Ottoman governor], when he was in Egypt, believed in him and favored him, and once when he visited him [Shaykh Bayyumi] said to him: "You will be called to the position of Grand Vizier at such-and-such a time," and it happened as he said. When he became

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grand vizier he sent orders to Egypt and had Amir 'Uthman Agha, the representative of the Sublime Porte,\* build for the shaykh the mosque that bears his name in the Husayniya [quarter], as well as a fountain, a primary school [*kuttab* ], and a domed mausoleum. When he died the prayers were said for him at the Azhar and there was a great funeral procession. He was buried in the tomb built for him in the domed shrine in the above-mentioned mosque.

## **Wisdom Literature**

One can trace the origins of Islamic wisdom literature back to the Qur'an and, in particular, to the sura named after the sage Luqman. After a complete, annotated translation of that sura, samples of the genre known as the aphorism from both Arabic and Persian sources exemplify the wide reach of popular wisdom literature in the form of moral advice.

### ***The Qur'anic Paradigm of Wisdom:***

#### ***Surat Luqman***

##### **Mustansir Mir**

Luqman is a Meccan sura. It is said to be fifty-seventh in the order of revelation, which suggests that it was revealed fairly late in the Meccan period. The sura's principal themes are monotheism

(dealt with in section 3, which speaks against idolatry) and the Last Day (section 4, which in presenting its arguments implicitly maintains that life in this world is not the only life there is).

The sura makes a direct appeal to young people. It was revealed at a time when the Islamic message had begun to draw the attention of independently minded Meccans—especially youths, who were relatively free from the pull of the tradition of idol worship and who were experiencing increasing pressure from their parents and the city elders to stay within the fold of the received, ancestral religion. The Qur'an is, on the one hand, encouraging Meccan youths to think for themselves and, on the other, warning the parents and elders who were trying to stop them from converting to Islam (see verse 33).

Finally, the sura is a type of wisdom literature to the extent that it highlights the relation between reason and revelation. While some Muslim scholars are of the view that Luqman was a prophet, the majority hold that he was not a prophet

\* Sublime Porte: the court of the Ottoman sultan, Topkapi Palace, Istanbul.

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but a wise man. The Prophet Muhammad is said to have remarked: "Luqman was not a prophet, but rather a servant of God who was given to reflection and had strong faith. He loved God, and in turn God loved him, bestowing wisdom upon him." The fact that prophecy is not one of the main themes of this sura is significant. The sura seems to be arguing (verses 12ff.) that Luqman's wisdom (*hikma*) led him to discover insights essentially similar to some of those furnished by prophetic revelation. In other words, reason, if used properly, brings one to the threshold of revelation and points to the same broad conclusions that revelation presents and confirms.

### **[I: Qur'an Guides the Righteous (1–11)]**

[1]Alif Lam Mim.\* [2]These are the verses of the Wise Book, [3]a guidance and a mercy for the doers of good deeds, those who establish salat and pay zakat. [4]It is these people who are truly convinced of the hereafter. [5]They are upon a[n excellent] guidance from their Lord, and it is they who are going to meet with success.

[6]There are some people, however, who opt for frivolous talk, so that, lacking all knowledge as they do, they might lead people astray from the Path of God, and so that they might make fun of them. † They have a humiliating punishment in store for them. [7]When our verses are recited to them, they turn away arrogantly, as if they did not hear them—as if they were hard of hearing! Give them the good news of a tormenting punishment!

[8]Those who have believed and done good deeds, there are gardens of bliss for them; [9]they shall live in them for ever—a true promise of God! He is the Almighty, the Wise. [10]He created the heavens without any pillars you could see: He cast mountains in the earth, lest it should go into a lurch, taking you along; and He spread in it all kinds of animals. And We sent down from the sky water, by means of which We grew in it all kinds of useful plants. [11]This is the creation of God! Now show me

\* Alif Lam Mim: such "broken" letters occur at the beginning of many suras, as in that of Joseph in part 1 above. Nothing can be said with certainty about their meaning. Many scholars simply regard them as the names of the suras in which they occur.

† Them: the object pronoun in Arabic refers to the verses of the Qur'an (verse 2, above). Alternatively, it could refer to the "Path of God" (verse 6), in which case "it" would replace "them" in translation.

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what has been created by those other than Him? The fact is that the wrongdoers are in plain error.

## [II: Luqman's Advice to His Son (12–19)]

[12]We gave Luqman wisdom—"Be grateful to God!"\* And he who shows gratitude does so for his own good. But he who disbelieves—God is Self-Sufficient, Praised.

[13]And when Luqman said to his son—he was giving him advice—"My son, do not associate anything with God; association is a great wrong indeed."

[14] † And We advised man concerning his parents—his mother bore him, suffering one debility after another, his weaning taking two years: "Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the return." [15]But if they should put pressure on you to associate with Me something you have no knowledge of, do not listen to them. Associate nicely with them in the world, though, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. Then you will come back to Me, and I shall apprise you of what you used to do.

[16]"My son, if there be something of the weight of a mustard seed, be it in a rock, in the heavens, or inside the earth, God will bring it forth; God is Subtle, Aware. [17]My dear son, establish salat, enjoin good and forbid evil, and be steadfast in any adversity you might face; this, ‡ indeed, is one of the acts of resolution. [18]Do not be wry-faced with people, and

\* "Be grateful to God!": that is, wisdom begins with the recognition that one must be grateful to God. Herein lies the essence of the wisdom Luqman received from God.

† The whole of verses 14–15 is parenthetical. The theme of monotheism, which is a right of God over human beings, and the theme of kindness toward parents, a duty of human beings in relation to one another, go together in the Qur'an. As a modern Qur'an commentator has noted, Luqman talks about the first right but, since he is advising his own son, omits, out of modesty, mention of his own right as a parent. God, however, supplies the omission in the form of a parenthetical remark, hence the shift of person (in verses 12–14) from "he" (Luqman) to "We" (God).

‡ This: The demonstrative could refer exclusively to the act of remaining steadfast in the face of a difficulty, or it could be a compact reference to the several acts of establishing prayer, enjoining good and forbidding evil, and persevering in the face of difficulties.

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do not walk on the ground with a swagger; God does not like anyone who is vain, conceited. [19]Be modest of carriage, and keep your voice low; the most disgusting voice, indeed, is that of a donkey."

## [III: Monotheism—Argument Against Idolatry (20–27)]

[20]Have you not seen that God has pressed into your service what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, and has so amply bestowed on you His blessings, both obvious and hidden? And yet there are some people who would wrangle about God—without knowledge, guidance, or a book that would shed light! [21]When it is said to them, "Follow that which God has sent down," they say, "Rather, we shall follow what we have found our forefathers practicing." Even if Satan were inviting them\* to the punishment of flames?

[22]One who turns his face to God in submission, being a doer of good deeds, surely holds on to the Firm Loop. † And with God rests the conclusion of all matters. ‡ [23]But he who disbelieves, let not his disbelief grieve you. To Us is their return, and then We shall apprise them of what they have done; God is aware of the secrets of the hearts. [24]We shall give them a meager provision [in this world], and shall then drag them over to a harsh punishment [in the next].

[25]If you should ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" they would surely say, "God!" Say, "Praise be to God!" Most of them do not know, however.



[26]To God belongs what is in the heavens and the earth: God alone is the Self-Sufficient, Praised One. [27]Even if all the trees of the earth were to become pens, and the ocean were to be augmented after that by seven

\* Them: The object pronoun could refer to those being addressed by the Qur'an or, preferably, to their forefathers, in which case their present-day followers would also be included by implication.

† Loop: The image is that of someone grasping the loop at the end of a rope and is thus saved from tripping, falling, or drowning.

‡ And . . . matters: more literally: "And to God is [to be referred] the conclusion of all matters."

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more oceans,\* the Words of God † would not be exhausted: God is Powerful, Wise.

#### **[IV: The Last Day—Supporting Argument (28–34)]**

[28]Neither creating you nor raising you up is any different than a single individual: ‡ God is One Hearing, Watching. [29]Have you not seen that God injects night into day and injects day into night, and holds the sun and the moon in subjection—each coursing along up to a designated time—and that God is aware of what you do? [30]This is so because God alone is the true deity and those other than God they call upon are the false ones; and He alone is the Exalted One, the Great.

[31]Have you not seen that ships sail in the ocean by the grace of God, in order that He might show you some of His signs? In [all of] this, indeed, there are signs for all those who are truly steadfast and grateful.

[32]And when they are enveloped by waves that are like canopies, they call upon God, making submission to Him exclusively. But when He conveys them safely to the land, some among them keep to the straight path.§ The only people who stubbornly reject Our verses are those who are perfidious, ungrateful.

[33]O people, fear your Lord and dread a day when a father shall be of no avail to his child, nor is a child going to be of any avail whatsoever to his father. God's promise is true, so life in this world must not lead you into deception. Neither must the Deceiver [Satan] lead you into deception about God.

[34]Knowledge of the [Last] Hour rests with God only. He [alone] sends down the rain, and He [alone] knows what is in the wombs. No

\* The ocean . . . more oceans: that is, if the ocean were to become ink and, after its depletion, were to be replenished by seven more oceans of ink.

† Words of God: The Arabic phrase *kalimat Allah* refers to descriptions of the praiseworthy attributes and marvelous acts of God.

‡ Neither . . . individual: that is, creating all of you or raising all of you from the dead is no more difficult for Him than creating or raising up from the dead a single individual.

§ Some . . . path: The implication is that only some keep to the straight path, whereas the rest forget the commitment they made at the time of crisis.

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individual knows how he is going to perform tomorrow, and no individual knows in what land he will die. God is Knowledgeable, Aware.

#### **Morals for the Masses**

Here are two examples of the form called the aphorism. The first is a selection from an Arabic collection attributed to 'Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad and fourth of the Rightly Guided

Caliphs regarded as paragons of virtue (fig. 24). The second is from a Persian source, and the sayings are attributed to a thirteenth-century Indian Sufi.

## ***Aphorisms of 'Ali***

### **Peter Heath**

Collections of moral maxims and proverblike utterances have often been attributed to central religious figures. Here is an abridged version of such a collection, called the "Aphorisms of 'Ali" ("Amthal 'Ali"). A noteworthy feature of the text is its acrostic structure: sayings are grouped not according to thematic content but according to the alphabetical order of the Arabic letter with which each begins. This anonymous, undated compendium is taken from an anthology of short collections of wise sayings and literary and moral prose treatises.<sup>[17]</sup> As is often the case with proverbs, these sayings are religious and "Islamic" largely by virtue of their association with an important religious figure.

### **The Aphorisms of Our Lord 'Ali (May God Honor His Countenance) According to the Number of Letters in the Alphabet**

In the Name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and Blessings on our Lord Muhammad and on all of his Family and Companions.

Now then: These words are from among the sayings of the Leader of the Pious, the Heir to the Apostle of the Lord of the Worlds, the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (May God honor his countenance), according to the letters of the alphabet. There is a symbolic hint in the meaning of each of these letters. Each saying is arranged according to the twenty-nine letters [of the Arabic alphabet],



[Full Size]

Figure 24.

Names of Muslim leaders cover this seventeenth-century Syrian decorative tile panel symbolizing the Gateway to Paradise, representing the symbolic presence of exemplary figures: across the top from right to left are Allah, Muhammad, Abu Bakr, 'Umar (the first and second caliphs); at lower right, 'Uthman (third caliph), and lower left, 'Ali (fourth caliph). The panel in the center says "Glory to God." Note the lamps hanging in the three arches, recalling the imagery of the prayer rug and mihrab panels.

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Frederick  
F. Thompson, 1915 (15.76.3).

according to the saying's beginning. Peace be on whomever follows the Mahdi.

### ***The Letter Alif***

Whoever consoles you in distress is your brother.

Act well toward whoever seeks you harm, so that you guide him.

The soul finds rest through renunciation.

***The Letter Ba'***

Cheer your soul with the news that success follows steadfastness.  
Sell this world for the next and you will profit.  
A person weeping out of fear of God is a delight to the eye.

***The Letter Ta'***

Delaying misdeeds is part of drawing near [to God].  
At life's end you perceive what escaped you at its beginning.  
Slackness in prayer is a sign of feeble faith.

***The Letter Tha'***

Three deadly perils are greed, lust, and naivete.  
A third of faith is modesty, a third intelligence, and a third generosity.  
The spirit is maintained through food, the soul is maintained through  
mystical ecstasy [*fana'*].

***The Letter Jim***

A person's beauty lies in wisdom.  
The promenade of vanity lasts an hour.  
The promenade of truth lasts forever.

***The Letter Ha'***

A person's wisdom is his succor.  
A person's modesty is his shield.  
A person's wrath can destroy him.

***The Letter Kha'***

Fear God and you will be safe from everyone else.  
The best of friends is one who guides you toward virtue.  
An empty heart is better than a full purse.

***The Letter Dal***

The proof of one's intelligence is speech; the proof of one's upbringing,  
deeds.

Government of the vile is an affliction for humanity.  
The coin of the miser is a stone.

***The Letter Dhal***

Remembrance of saints makes Divine Compassion descend.  
The humiliation of poverty is dear to God.  
Remembrance of death purifies the heart.

***The Letter Ra'***

Your sustenance will seek you out, so be at ease.  
The messenger of death is birth.  
Relating prophetic traditions relates one to the Prophet (May God bless  
and keep him).

***The Letter Zay***

The passing away of knowledge is easier than the death of scholars.  
The asceticism of commoners can lead one astray.  
The corners of this world are weighed down with calamities.

***The Letter Sin***

Thinking the worst is part of prudence.  
Immorality is a desolation from which there is no salvation.  
The leaders of the community are the religious jurists.

***The Letter Shin***

The disgrace of knowledge is boastfulness.  
A pinch of knowledge is better than a pound of work.  
A cure for madness is reading the Qur'an.

***The Letter Sad***

The health of the body is in fasting.  
The prayers of the night are the splendor of the day.  
The ignorant's health is his only shelter.

***The Letter Dad***

The tongue's lash is harsher than the teeth's bite.  
The heart's destitution is more severe than the hand's.  
The world is narrow for those who hate one another.

***The Letter Ta'***

A long, pious life is one of the bounties of the prophets.  
One whose hopes are short lives long.  
Blessed is the one who has no family.

***The Letter Za'***

The oppression of kings is better than the guidance of the people.  
The shadow of the sultan is like the shadow of God.  
The crooked person remains crooked.

***The Letter 'Ayn***

The defect of speech is prolixity.  
An intelligent enemy is better than an ignorant friend.  
Memorize books without condensing them.

***The Letter Ghayn***

The price of those who trust in God has increased [because of their scarcity].

An intelligent youth is better than an ignorant elder.

One who has enraged you over nothing has cheated you.

***The Letter Fa'***

One who is safe from his own evil has triumphed.

A person's redemption lies in veracity.

Every heart has a preoccupation.

***The Letter Qaf***

Accepting the truth is part of religion.

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Strength of heart is part of correct faith.

Consider your actions and you will be saved from mistakes.

***The Letter Kaf***

A generous infidel is preferable to a stingy Muslim.

Being ungrateful for a blessing eliminates it.

May white hair suffice as an illness.

***The Letter Lam***

Fame does not come from frivolity.

Every enmity can be reconciled except the enmity of envy.

If the believer saw death and its bitterness, he would not despise hope and its illusions.

***The Letter Mim***

The drinking trough of pleasure is crowded.

The meeting place of learning is a garden.

The meeting place of the noble is the citadel of speech.

***The Letter Nun***

The light of the believer is nightfall.

Forgetting death is the heart's rust.

Sleep in good faith and you will lie in the softest bed.

***The Letter Ha'***

Fleeing from yourself is more beneficial than fleeing from a lion.

Making a stew is not the same as eating it.

The greedy person has perished without even knowing it.

***The Letter Waw***

The responsibility of giving alms generously is greater than merely being rewarded for it.

The governance of the idiot soon passes.

Solitude is better than an evil companion.

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### ***The Letter Lam Alif***

A person without honor is without religion.

The envier never finds rest.

The corrupt person is never esteemed.

### ***The Letter Ya'***

A fearful person finds safety when he faces what he fears.

A person enters the abodes of the great through trustworthiness.

The heart's despair is the soul's repose.

This completes the Aphorisms of 'Ali (May God honor his countenance).

## ***Sayings Attributed to Mu'in ad-Din Chishti***

### **Bruce B. Lawrence**

Treating an enormous range of everyday matters of conduct, the Aphorisms of 'Ali are directed to a very broad public. Some collections of wise sayings, such as those attributed to the Indian city of Ajmer's premier Friend of God, Shaykh Mu'in ad-Din Chishti (d. 1236; see fig. 25), have a slightly narrower public in mind. Although they also include counsel of a more general sort, these aphorisms focus on the demanding aspects of interior demeanor expected of individuals intent on a life of spiritual seeking. Employing a literary conceit that claims the authority of a great teacher, the text begins by explaining the alleged origin of the sayings in the conversations the shaykh had with his disciples. <sup>[18]</sup>

Among the holy, celestial dicta of Mu'in ad-Din in *Guidance of the Mystics [Dalil al-'arifin]* that Khwaja Qutb ad-Din Bakhtiyar Oushi [d. 1235] compiled from the conversations of his master—may God sanctify his secret—are the following:

The heart of the lover is set ablaze with love. Everyone who enters the domain of love is scorched. It should not be avoided, since there is no loftier fire than the fire of love!

Listen to the voice from the incoming waves; it is loud. But when the tide goes out, the voice becomes silent.

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 25.

The tomb of the influential thirteenth-century Indian religious leader Mu'in ad-Din Chishti (d. 1236) in Ajmer, India, shown here on a calendar poster, is an important place of pilgrimage.

Courtesy of Carl Ernst.

I heard from the tongue of Khwaja 'Uthman Haruni—may God sanctify his secret—that those who befriend God Almighty, even though for a time they become veiled from Him in this world, will not remain veiled.

I have heard from the tongue of Khwaja 'Uthman Haruni that everyone in whom these three qualities are to be found—it is certain that God Almighty has befriended him. First, generosity like the generosity of the ocean. Second, compassion like the compassion of the sun. Third, humility like the humility of the earth.

The company of the righteous is better than a righteous deed, just as the company of the evil is worse than an evil deed.

That disciple is firm in his resolve to repent when the angel on his left

side records no sin for him during a period of twenty years! (The recorder of these lines attests that some of the early saints also spoke such words and the truth of the meaning of these words is such that some of the latterday scholarly Sufis have said:) Repentance and seeking forgiveness are indispensable for the spiritual development of the disciple, and the recording of sins, once repentance and seeking forgiveness are evident, is impossible since by nature such a person can commit no sin. And for this reason they have made it incumbent [on disciples] to



recite the prayer seeking forgiveness just before going to sleep, in order that the recording of sins from the previous day, having been suspended due to the mercy of God Almighty, will not become manifest.

From the blessed tongue of Khwaja 'Uthman Haruni I have heard the question, "Who is the one who has attained [spiritual] poverty? It is the one for whom in the world of annihilation [*fani*] nothing remains [*baqi*]."

The sign of love is that you obey [unconditionally], and not out of fear that the Friend is near.

There is this rank for the mystics that when they reach it, they see the entire world and all that is in it between two of their fingers.

The mystic is one who whatever he wants he acquires, and whatever he asks he obtains an answer from God.

The lowest stage and degree of the mystic, with respect to love, is that the divine attributes appear in him. The highest degree for the mystic, with respect to love, is that if someone requests something of him, he provides it through the power of saintly miracles.

For years we are engaged in this work, and in the end we obtain nothing but awe [*haybat*] [at God's power].

Your sin serves no function except to bring despair and distress to your fellow Muslim.

For the people of intimate knowledge [*ma'rifa*] worship takes precedence over [the desires of] their lower selves.

The sign of having recognized God Almighty is that you flee from people and remain silent in [your] intimate knowledge.

The mystic does not achieve intimate knowledge till he forgets the signposts of intimate knowledge.

The mystic is someone who banishes from his heart whatever is without God, so that he remains alone and apart, just as the Friend is alone and apart [from all others].

The sign of perversity is that someone sins and still hopes that I will accept [him as a disciple].

The sign of a mystic is that he remains silent and sad.

Whoever finds grace discovers [the meaning of] generosity.

The dervish is every servant [of God] who chances on someone in need and does not leave him wanting.

The mystic on the path of love is someone who has freed his heart from both worlds.

The most precious of things in this world is that dervishes sit with other dervishes, and the worst of things is that dervishes remain separated from other dervishes, especially when there is no cause for their separation.

Someone trusts in God who flees from the affliction and distress of people, and also listens to no complaint from another, nor tells any story about another.

The foremost of the mystics are those who are most agitated.

The sign of the mystic is that he befriends death, forgoes comfort, and eschews intimacy, [because he is immersed] in remembrance [*dhikr*] of his Lord.

When God Almighty revives the lovers, He grants them the vision [of their revival] through His own lights.

The people of love are those who, without the mediation of a teacher, hear the speech of the Friend.

The mystic is someone who, when rising in the morning, has no recollection of the previous evening.

The best of times are those unsullied by the whispers of the tempter.

Knowledge is a vast ocean, intimate knowledge but a wave of that ocean. Where then is God, where His servant? Knowledge is God's domain; intimate knowledge, His servant's.

Mystics are suns, suns that shine over the entire world, and the effulgence of the world, all of it, is due to their lights.

A person should not go from one halting place to the next until he

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takes leave [of his host] at the end of prayer; for the "ascent of the [ordinary] believer is his very prayer"!

## Encountering the Exemplary Persons

### Storytelling as Entertainment

Many millions of Muslims over the centuries have received the bulk of their religious education as part of their family entertainment. Storytelling, now an all but lost art in many parts of the world, has been one of the most important vehicles for spreading values, and it continues to do so in traditional societies. Here we have selections of stories that have come to us in two very different ways. The first is a traditional Afghan tale handed down orally and recorded by anthropologist David Edwards. The second group of anecdotes were written down much nearer to their point of origin and collected in a literary anthology.

#### ***Telling Tales:***

#### ***A Miracle of Mulla Hadda***

##### **David Edwards**

Najmuddin Akhundzada, who is usually referred to as the Mulla of Hadda or Hadda Sahib, was one of the most important Muslim figures in Afghanistan in the latter half of the nineteenth century. A disciple of the Akhund of Swat, Najmuddin spent most of his adult life at the *khanaqa* (Sufi residence) that he founded in Hadda, outside of Jalalabad, but he also lived a number of years with the Shinwari and Mohmand tribes. Most of Najmuddin's life was spent engaged in the practice of *tasawwuf*, or Sufism; indeed, he was the most important Sufi figure on the Afghan side of the Afghan/Indian frontier during this time. He also gained considerable renown as an opponent of the great Afghan king Abdur Rahman Khan, who ruled from 1880 to 1901.

Although various documentary sources refer to Najmuddin, he is best remembered in Afghanistan through countless miracle stories about him and his disciples. The following story concerns a journey purportedly made by Najmuddin to Mount Qaf (Koh-i Qaf)\* and was told to me by the descendant of one of Najmuddin's closest disciples. This is one of the most fabulous stories

\* The mountain range that encircles the entire earth, the goal of all mystic journeys.

told about Najmuddin, the majority of tales being content to describe the saint's magical production of an endless supply of rice from a simple pot or his transformation of a sack of corn into a sack of gold. Few stories that are told these days speak of places like Koh-i Qaf, and to the degree that this one does it can be taken as unrepresentative of Afghan miracle stories. At the same time, the story is no less interesting for being unrepresentative, and illustrates the continuing link of present stories to much older traditions.<sup>[19]</sup> The account begins:

There are many miracles of Hadda Sahib. Mawlana Abdul Baqi, who was Hadda Sahib's servant and lived his entire life in the same room with Hadda Sahib, told the following story:

After the evening prayers, Hadda Sahib would come back to his room, perform three hundred prayers, and recite fifteen verses of the Qur'an.

One night, Hadda Sahib was sitting on his prayer carpet with the door closed. I was wrapped in my blanket but still awake. All of a sudden I heard someone say, "Salam 'alaykum," and Hadda Sahib replied, "Wa 'alaykum as-salam."

I looked out from under my blanket to see who it was. I hadn't seen the door open, and no one could fit through the small opening in the ceiling. How could anyone have entered? Then I saw that it was a snake, and his head was on Hadda Sahib's prayer carpet.

Hadda Sahib said, "What do you want?" The snake said, "Dear sir, I have come from Koh-i Qaf."

He said, "Why have you come?"

The snake said, "I have come from Peristan [the Land of the Fairies]. I want to marry a man's daughter, but she is from a noble family. Her father will not allow me to marry her. I know that she is devoted to you and that she has received *tariqat* [mystical teaching] from you, so I am asking you to go with me to Bagh-i Haram [the Forbidden Garden]."

Hadda Sahib said, "Where is Hadda and where is the Forbidden Garden?"

The snake said, "Dear sir, you ride on my shoulder, and in the blink of an eye I will deliver you there."

Hadda Sahib said, "I will give you a letter, and your problems will be over."

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"But if you don't go yourself," the snake replied, "there will be no solution."

(For this reason, Hadda Sahib felt obliged to go with him. Abdul Baqi said that) at this moment, when I realized that Hadda Sahib was ready to go with him, I threw off my blanket and sat up in my bed. Hadda Sahib said to me in Afghani [Pakhtu],

"There is much time left before morning prayers. Go back to sleep."

I said, "Dear sir, I can't sleep anymore if you're going. I don't want to sleep if you're going to leave me behind."

He said, "Where are you and where is the Forbidden Garden?"

"I don't want to stay if you're going," I replied, and then he told me, "Okay, if you accept my advice. Perform your ablutions and say two sets of prayers."

He permitted me to say my prayers on his prayer carpet, and when I had finished, the snake placed his head on the carpet. He turned himself into his original shape [that of a dragon] and made himself ready for Hadda Sahib to sit on his wing. But Hadda Sahib said, "God has not made me so useless that I must go on your back. Put Abdul Baqi on your shoulder and come along."

(Abdul Baqi swore by God that when they reached the Forbidden Garden all of the people—even the king of the place—were standing to receive Hadda Sahib, even though it was the middle of the night. His spiritual quality [*ruhaniyat*] was so extraordinary that even the king of those people was present to welcome Hadda Sahib.)

When we reached there and had sat down, we saw that they had prepared all sorts of different fruits from the garden. I said to myself, "Who will believe me when I go back to Hadda?" Then I took a sample of every unfamiliar fruit I could find, and I tied them in my handkerchief so that I could bring some memento back with us.

In one night, Hadda Sahib performed seventy wedding ceremonies. When all those people who were engaged to the daughters of rich men heard the news that Hadda Sahib was there, they came to him, and he performed seventy marriages. When these weddings were finished, Hadda Sahib said that he would go back. They strongly insisted that he stay with them, but Hadda Sahib said that he wouldn't be delayed any further.

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In short, I took my handkerchief. The dragon put me back on his shoulder. The dragon was the prince of Peristan. Soon we were back in Hadda, and the roof and ceiling of our room rose up so that no one would know [we had been gone]. When Hadda Sahib and I were sitting back in the room, the roof and ceiling returned to their place. The mulla was reciting the morning call to prayer.

I was in a hurry to tell the others that we had gone to the Forbidden Garden, but as we left for the mosque Hadda Sahib said, "Be careful not to tell anyone what we did."

My next thought was to open the handkerchief in front of the others so that they would ask about the fruit. When I opened the handkerchief, however, I was amazed that all of the fruit had turned into the same kind of fruit we have in our own land. Even if I swore, no one would believe me. This was one of his extraordinary actions.

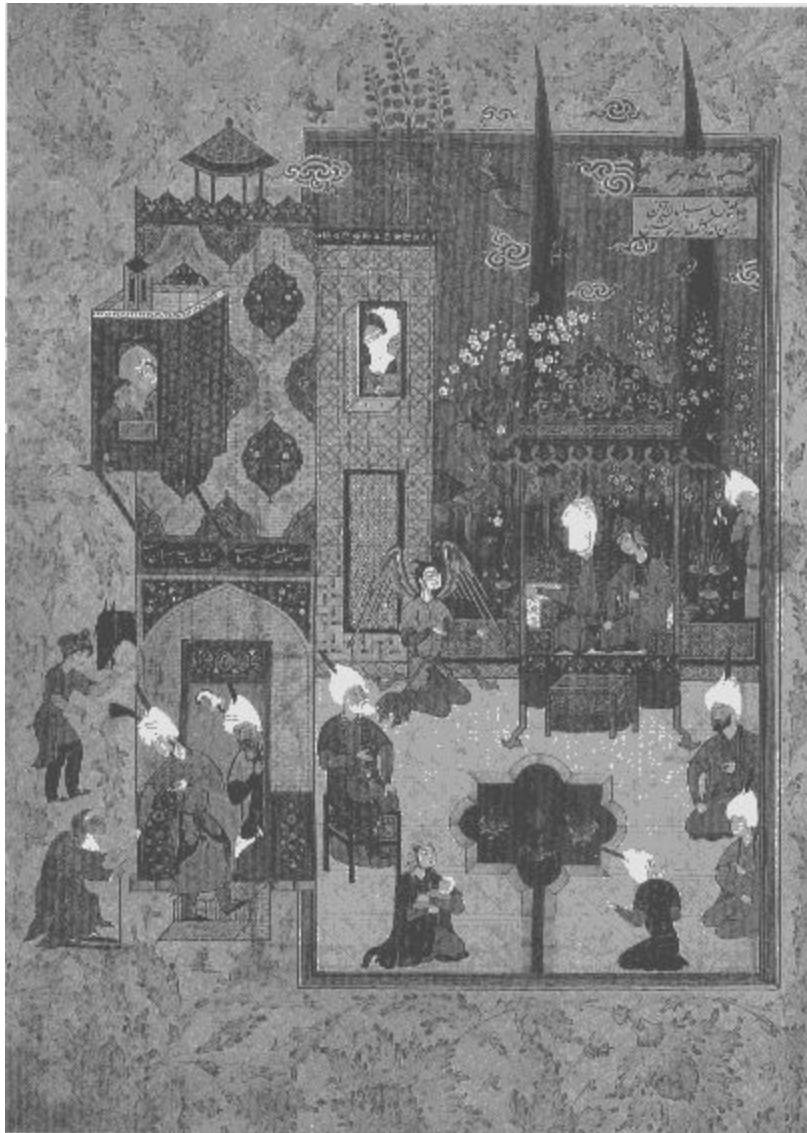
## ***Edifying Anecdotes:***

### ***Ziya'ad-Din Nakhshabi***

#### **Bruce B. Lawrence**

Ziya'ad-Din Nakhshabi (d. 1350) is perhaps best known for his delightful fifty-two-"night" narrative cycle *Tales of a Parrot* (*Tuti nama*),<sup>[20]</sup> but he also penned a number of other works, including *The Path of the Devotees* (*Silk as-suluk*), a collection of miscellaneous sayings and anecdotes of individuals known for their piety. The author was born in central Asia (in present-day Uzbekistan); he moved to India sometime in the first quarter of the fourteenth century and joined a Sufi group headed by Shaykh Hamid ad-Din Nagauri (d. 1276), centered in Badaon not far from Delhi. Nakhshabi's anecdotal style is part of an ancient heritage of moralizing vignettes featuring famous religious figures. He does not shrink from the occasional caustic observation, but his overriding purpose is to provide a blend of entertainment and morally uplifting reflection. His call to "Listen, listen!" is a characteristic of the raconteur's insistent and enthusiastic style.<sup>[21]</sup> Note the role of prophets (fig. 26) and Friends of God as exemplars in Nakhshabi's anecdotes.

Listen, listen: One time Moses—may peace be upon him—was given a divine order: "Select the righteous ones from among your people." Moses gave the call, and many came forward. Then he was ordered to go back



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 26.

In this Iranian miniature painting from a manuscript of Jami's *Haft Awrang* (Iran, 1556–1565), the prophet Joseph is enthroned with his bride Zulaykha after their mystical marriage, a story told by a number of famous Muslim poets.

Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 46.12.188.

and select the most righteous of them, and Moses chose seventy. Again he was ordered to go back and select the most righteous of these, and he chose seven. Then God told him to go back

still another time, and from the seven, Moses chose three. "These three," thundered the voice of God, "these three are the most odious of all in My eyes because, when they heard the call for the righteous, they counted themselves."

O my dear friend, this is such a Way that one is better off if he disobeys than if he obeys. In the realm of law, it is the defendant who is put behind bars, but in the Way, the prosecutor is imprisoned.

Nakhshabi, until you look to yourself,

No other Sufi will do this work for you.

Everyone must examine himself—

No one else can do this work for him.

My dear friend, they call those people who neglect their sins the living dead. Before this time there were people who, on hearing of the sins of others, got heated up . . . and yet you do not become agitated even on account of your own sins. It is an ancient custom that at the time the roses bloom, people divert themselves with various kinds of frivolities. Every year, as the time of the blooming of roses drew near, Ma'ruf Karkhi,\* who is an example for every age, became upset and would exclaim: "The time of the rose has come; once again, people will engage in foolishness."

One evening, a dervish who was a beginner in the Way was saying his prayers in a mosque. He began to cry aloud, but his heart was back in the peace and quiet of his cell. From a corner he heard a voice saying, "Dervish, your prayer does not find favor with me. Hour after hour you are sending messages of contentment to your cell, while to me you are giving everything that is sordid."

They gave Adam the seven heavens; and he fled from them all in one day—but they made a particle of love to appear in him, and the eternity of heaven remained fixed in him. Alas! The fall of Adam was due to his preoccupation with love, and the sin of Iblis [the Devil] was due to his self-contentment.

\* An early Sufi of Baghdad, d. 815.

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Nakhshabi is without heart's ease—

For the pain of the heart is none other than the light of the heart.

The contented heart is a sign of idleness:

For the lovers there is no contentment of heart.

People asked Rabi'a of Basra, "Do you hate Iblis?" "No," she replied. "How can this be?" they asked. "I have so much love for the Friend," she declared, "that I take no notice of enemies."

One saint was asked: "What is this world like?" "This world," he replied, "is so insignificant that there is nothing like it."

One man came to a dervish and said: "I would like to stay with you for some time." "When I am no more," queried the dervish, "with whom will you stay?" "I will remain with God," answered the man. "In that case," said the dervish, "consider me gone, and from this moment on, remain with God."

One time a worldly man asked for a drink at the house of a dervish. He was given water that was neither cool nor clean. "This water," he complained, "is very warm and dirty." "Aye, sir," replied the dervish, "we are prisoners, and prisoners never drink good water."

After his death, Yahya Mu'adh\* appeared in a dream. He was asked: "How is it with you?" "When I arrived," he explained, "they asked me, 'What have you brought with you from the world?' I replied: 'I am coming from a prison—and what can one bring from there? If I had anything, after seventy years in prison it would certainly have been used up.'"

One time a group of disciples asked a master: "Which way should we take to reach God?" "What way have you been traveling on that the Way is not known to you?" answered the master.

What man is so courageous that he is not irritated by the cowardly?

When the virtuous die, a treasure goes out of the world. One of the masters of the Way said, "For a decade I shed tears of water; another, tears of blood; and for the last ten years I have been laughing."

They saw Shibli after his death in a dream (see note page 63). They

\* Yahya ibn Mu'adh ar-Razi (d. ca. 871) was a Sufi from Rayy, near Tehran in Iran, noted for his preaching.

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asked him: "How did you acquit yourself before Munkar and Nakir?"\* He replied: "If you had been there, you would have seen how they left me in the end. They queried me: "Who is your God—tell us!" I replied: "My God is the One who commanded you and your brothers to prostrate yourselves before my father [i.e., Adam; cf. 2:34], and I, together with all my brothers who were still in his loins, saw you. "We'd better be going," said the angels; "we asked him about himself, and he replied on behalf of all the descendants of Adam."

Listen! Listen! One time a poor grocer who thought the heavenly scales had a counterweight like his own saw a man who was riding a lion and using a snake for a whip. "All this is very easy," said the stranger; "the real task is to sit on both sides of the scales and do the work of God."

Ibrahim ibn Adham †—may peace be upon him—often said: "We go out in search of poverty, and at every turn wealth appears before us." One time a man said to him: "I know the world is corrupt, and since it is full of people, in the end someone is sure to prevent me from doing my work." "And what is that work?" asked the saint. "My work," he replied, "is to fill the world with people of religion—for now that people of religion have become few, the world has become corrupt."

Khawaja Junayd ‡ appeared to people in a dream, and they asked him: "How far have you progressed in your work?" "The work of the upper world," he replied, "is more difficult than we imagined [when we were] in the world below."

Listen! Listen! A saint wished to go to the bazaar to make some purchases, but the coin he had weighed first in his house was found to weigh less in the bazaar, and he began to cry. When people asked the reason for his weeping, he answered: "When what is right in the house today is

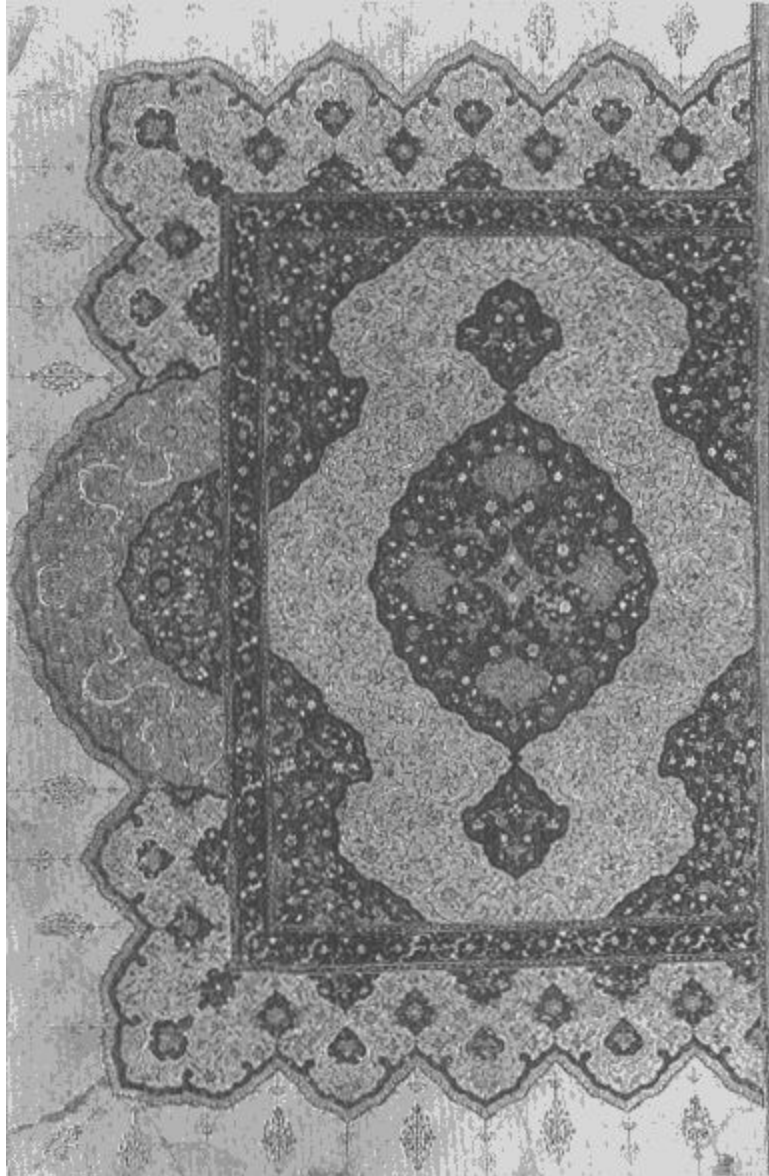
found wanting in the bazaar, how can the reckoning of this world be correct tomorrow in the world beyond?"

\* Munkar and Nakir are the two angels who interrogate the dead in the grave.

† Ibrahim (d. ca. 790) was an early Sufi from Balkh in central Asia legendary for his asceticism.

† Junayd (d. 910) of Baghdad is traditionally held to be the founding father of "sober" mysticism.

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 27.

A sixteenth-century Persian manuscript frontispiece illumination, typical of the adornment of elaborately illuminated and illustrated texts of poetry, is a fine example of the infinitely repeatable floral and



geometric patterning known as arabesque.

St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 387:52.

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of the Apostle of God and the evidence that has come on the authority of the leaders of the Companions and Followers [of the Prophet].

## ***Al-Ghazali:***

### ***Treatise on the Intimate Knowledge of God***

#### **William Shepard**

Al-Ghazali's *Treatise on the Meaning of the Intimate Knowledge of God (Risala fi bayan ma'rifat Allah)* represents a major theologian's attempt to establish principles from which one might interpret accounts such as these above. Part 1 presented Ghazali's views on interpreting Scripture. Here he argues for a theoretically consistent way of approaching the issue at the heart of many of these accounts, namely, in what sense one speaks of having an intimate knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of a God who is by definition beyond human knowing.<sup>[9]</sup>

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The treatise of the Imam, the Proof of Islam, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali on the meaning of the knowledge of God.

2. You have asked me—may God grant you success—concerning a matter on which you have doubts. This is that no one, however great his knowledge and understanding, has attained complete knowledge of all bodily and spiritual entities, nor does he know them as they really are. If so, then how can we accept anyone's claim to know God as He really is along with [or: by means of] His attributes? The one who makes such a claim limits God and makes Him finite, since his knowledge would have to encompass God's essence, and whatever encompasses something must be before it and after it, outside of it and within it. But God Almighty says, "He [God] is before everything and after everything. . . ."\*

3. The answer. We must know, first of all, that no one has true knowledge of God Almighty except God Almighty Himself, nor does anyone but Him know the secret essence of His sublimity. One should not be

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\* Q 57:3. The full verse in a more literal translation reads: "He is the first and the last, the outward and inward, and He knows everything." I have modified the translation in the text to show the relevance of the verse to Ghazali's argument.

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surprised at this, for I say that no one truly knows an angel except an angel, and indeed no one truly knows a prophet except a prophet, and indeed no one truly knows a scholar except a scholar. In fact, if a student has not attained his teacher's level of scholarly knowledge, he does not truly know his teacher, and if he has attained his teacher's level he still does not know the teacher as the teacher knows himself.\* For he first comes to know what his teacher knows, and perceives that within himself, then he knows his teacher by analogy with himself since he knows that he has the same knowledge as his teacher has. Indeed, I say it is inconceivable that the condition experienced by one who has slaked his

desire in sexual intercourse be truly known by someone else because complete knowledge of that condition comes only by direct experience. Nor is it conceivable that anyone should know what he essentially is before he is completely like him; † the most that can be conceived is that he can affirm the existence of something whose essence and true nature are unknown to him.

4. How can a human being aspire to know God Almighty when he cannot truly know his own soul, but only knows his soul, in most states, by its actions and its attributes, and does not perceive its essence. Indeed, if a human being wanted to perceive completely the true nature and essential attributes of an ant or a bug, he could not do so. The most he could attain would be to know by sight their shape, their color, their bodily composition and how they differ in external matters. As for the various ways in which the soul of a bug differs from the soul of an ant, and from which the differences in bodily composition and attributes arise, he cannot know them.

5. If one could conceive that there was someone or something that was like God (may He be exalted above that), one could say that one knows God with true knowledge by analogy with his own self, which he has first known and to which he compares the inner nature of someone else, just as a scholar knows another scholar by analogy with himself.

\* Or possibly: he does not know the teacher as the teacher knows him (the student).

† More literally: that anyone should know his quiddity or essence (*mahiya*) before he has his attributes.

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6. I say that humankind exists in different stages: the first stage is that of a fetus, then that of an infant, then that of one at the stage of discrimination, then that of one at the stage of reasoning, then that of one of the Friends of God Almighty. The fetus does not perceive the states of its soul, nor can it know the state of the infant; nor does the infant know the state of one who has reached the level of discrimination; nor does the latter, as long as he has reached only the level of discrimination, know the state of one who can reason; nor does the one who perceives the objects of reason by reason know the Friend of God's state of mystical revelation other than by inference. Nor does the Friend of God know the state of the prophet, since the stage of prophecy is beyond that of *wilaya* [sainthood]; nor does the prophet know the angel as the angel knows himself; nor does the angel know God as God knows Himself. Each stage has its own perfection, and one from whom the next stage is veiled cannot know the essential nature of that stage.

7. At most, he may have a logical proof that confirms its existence. If you know this, then know that the furthest possible extent of the creatures' knowledge is that they know that this marvelous, ordered universe needs a Director who is living, powerful, and knowing, who does not resemble the universe, and whom the universe does not resemble. Thereby the creatures prove the existence of something from which creation has issued, but this is knowledge of His action and not knowledge of His essence.

8. Also, they prove the existence of the attributes of life, knowledge, and power, but this is knowledge of the attributes and not knowledge of the true nature. It is not even knowledge of the true nature of the attributes, but rather a kind of analogy, for if humans did not label them as knowledge, life and power, they could not recognize the evidence that proves the fact of their existence.

9. Likewise, they prove that it is impossible for God to be originated, have a body, have accidents, and so forth, but this is knowledge of what God is not, not knowledge of what He truly is.

10. The creatures' knowledge of God is only in these three ways, though they may differ in the degree and manner of knowledge, <sup>[10]</sup> and in the amount known, but all of that derives from knowledge of the need

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of the universe for a maker, not knowledge of the true nature of His essence.

11. At this point, if the mystic [*arif*] penetrates further, what he comes to know by a way that it would take too long to present here is the impossibility of the creatures' attaining true knowledge of God's essence; that is as far as the mystics can go. Then they say: the failure to attain is itself an attainment. For when a person knows that, of necessity, one cannot attain to the essence of God's sublimity, then he has attained to his greatest possible perfection, for this is the highest degree of human perfection.

12. At this point, if the mystic says: I do not know Him, he is telling the truth in one sense; and if he says: I know Him, he is telling the truth in another sense. He is like a person who is shown some handwriting and is asked whether he knows the one who wrote it. He knows that the writer exists, is living, able [or powerful], knowing, hearing, and seeing, since one cannot produce writing without these qualities. He also knows that he is not an inanimate thing, a plant, or a beast. So he says: Yes, I know him. But he could also say: Even though I know all this, I do not know him.

13. This mystic has two conditions. In one condition he says: I do not know God Almighty; in the other he says: I know only God. He is telling the truth in both conditions. In the first, when his mind attempts to grasp the essence of God he is overcome with bewilderment and at that point he says: I do not know Him.

14. In the second condition, when he looks at His works as His works, he sees nothing in existence except God, may He be revered and exalted, and His works, and then he says, I know nothing except God Almighty and there is nothing on earth except Him, and properly speaking, He is everything. Now, if one looks only at the sun and its light spread throughout the universe, and his mind does not observe the things lit up by it insofar as they are things or animals, it is as if he sees only the sun. In such a condition the mystic experiences "expansion" [*bast*] as a result of the divine lights he beholds which have radiated their effects onto him. The other condition is that of "contraction" [*qabd*]. Therefore the master of the Apostles and leader of the mystics, may God bless him and grant

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him peace, said: Reflect on the creation of God, do not reflect on His essence.

15. This is a matter we could discuss for a long time, since the mystic would never exhaust the oceans of knowledge that God has poured forth into him even if he should live as long as Noah, upon whom be peace. All the knowledge of the mystics is in relation to the knowledge of God Almighty less than a drop of water in relation to all the oceans of the world. Indeed, in relation to God it is infinitesimal. But this answer is enough to resolve the doubt. It has been shown in what sense a human being can undertake to know God. The original question was wrongly put; if this is recognized, then nothing should seem strange.

## **Evaluating Experience**

Muslims have written extensively on two dimensions of the search for clarity upon which all seekers must embark in view of the human proclivity for self-deception. The first dimension is the theory of spiritual guidance, or Science of Hearts, as it was called; the second is the actual experience and practice of spiritual direction that affords spiritual companionship for journeyers on the inner path.

### **The Science of Hearts**

Here are samples of the views of two influential South Asian Muslims on preliminary concerns and theoretical aspects of spiritual guidance.

#### ***Sharaf ad-Din Maneri:***

#### ***A Letter on the Qualities of Spiritual Guides***

##### **Paul Jackson**

Muslim authors since Tabari and Ghazali have developed extraordinarily sophisticated canons and methods by which to evaluate the most subtle of spiritual experiences. Because of the inherent difficulty in this "science of hearts," Muslim spiritual tradition has held in high esteem the role of the shaykh/*pir* or spiritual guide in assisting seekers to plumb the depths of their own souls. Maneri, introduced along with one of his letters in part 2, writes again, this time about how one recognizes an authentic spiritual guide. He touches on various



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 63.

Scenes of solitary religious seekers have been popular subjects for artists; in this Safavid ink drawing, a dervish meditates in the mouth of a cave.

St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 83.42.

related issues, such as the nature of a guide's spiritual authority and how to deal with the fact of every guide's sinful humanity. Like his earlier-quoted letter, this one is sprinkled with citations from various Persian teachers and mystical poets. Maneri deals with several aspects of the theme in turn, referring to specific questions raised by his addressee. <sup>[11]</sup>

God Most Exalted has said: "You [Satan] shall have no authority over My servants" [15:42]. Whoever has entered the world of the heart has escaped from the clutches of being a worshipper of Satan and has become a religious leader fit to be imitated. Spiritual guidance is entrusted to such a person, not to someone who is still enmeshed in the world of the selfish soul [*nafs*] and

has not yet reached the world of the heart. Men of God are of one kind, while Satan's minions are of another. Do you know what the virtues of men of God are?

Since they are placed in the divine presence,

Anything unsuited to Him is trampled under foot.

Everybody's desire arises from his conscience:

He who embraces God and abandons others becomes a guide.

You quaffed one draught[draught] in front of the cup-bearer:

Whatever is left, let it remain behind.

Anyone who is caught up in the darkness of the selfish soul is an abode of demons. Whatever makes its appearance from him is for the sake of his prone-to-evil soul. Even if he looks devoted, nevertheless demons reside within him. Whatever he turns his hand to will be tainted by what is within him. If he wants to come up with some work untainted by any demon, then he will have to entrust the bridle of his own work into the hands of one whose name is inscribed in "You shall have no authority over My servants" [15:42]. So if he says, "Do this, but don't do that," then his command would not be that of Satan, for there is no way by which Satan can enter his heart. Whatever emerges from a heart closed to Satan would be divine, not devilish.

Consider his every word a powerful secret:

Consider his every action a deed of God.

Become his dust and you will be a king:

Become his, and do whatever you wish.

You might ask at this stage, "Was there ever anybody in this world to whom Satan had no access?" O brother, there is nobody whom Satan did not seek to influence! There were a hundred and twenty thousand examples of prophethood. All of them were wounded by him. It is one

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thing, however, to be his special tenant, and quite another to be occasionally wounded by him, by way of testing, and to arise lion-hearted.

Give me your heart and see how you capture mine:

Read my face for yourself and see a lion.

If you had your very own horse and your slave mounted it in order to take it to water, would you say that it had become his? No, by God, not at all!

With regard to the sin of Adam all persons are equal, but "the best of those who sin are those who repent." What distinguishes and is necessary for a guide is not that he should be sinless. Rather, what is necessary is that spiritual guides should have trodden the Way to God and become aware of the reality of what is involved. For example, if you wish to acquire knowledge from someone, it is not necessary for him to be sinless. What is needed is that he possess that knowledge. Sinlessness is required for prophets, not for spiritual guides. Prophets have trodden the Path of God in sinlessness and with His grace because Divine Wisdom has made this demand with regard to prophecy, no matter how difficult or dangerous this Way may be. What would you say to the Distinguished One who is endowed with the quality of "He guides whom He will and leads astray whom He will" [39:24]? It would not be difficult or dangerous to associate as a disciple with that Distinguished One.

What safety is there on a path of fire?

What blame is there for a mad man?

It is for the moth to associate with the candle and cotton in the production of fire. You know how dangerous this is. "The sincere ones are in great danger."

On this side, need: on that, utter needlessness:

On what basis do You play the lover with me?

Moreover, for others, a guide who has fully trodden the Path of God and seen the reality of the work or a prophet needs to be present. This way of proceeding would be without danger, for spiritual guides have nothing more than the quality of guidance, yet it suffices.

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If you have pain, a guide will appear:

His words will be a key to unlock your pain.

An intermediary has arisen for this people:

What he says will naturally be correct.

This is the meaning of those who say that worshipping a spiritual guide is better than worshipping God. By way of explanation they say that a guide is a better protector for someone than God is, but we do not know whether they understand the meaning of this or not.

O brother, do you have any idea of what is meant by "the qualities of men," for they eat and sleep and put on clothes; they have wives and children and go to the bazaar. "What kind of a messenger is this who eats food and walks through the bazaars" [25:7] is the criticism of the worshippers of external form by way of blame. Moreover, they know in their hearts things to

which, for you and me and the likes of us, there is no access. Khwaja Sana'i\* has praised them thus:

Those who sell their lives are almost nothing:

Those in Sufi garb are the ancient meeting place.

We devoted ones are fully engaged in striving:

We intimate knowers are all belief.

"God does whatever He wills" with a sense of care:

It is up to the servant to be fully obedient.

It is seen in alchemy that, in the presence of an elixir, copper becomes gold. Everyone with a heart who receives a love-filled glance from that Heart is endowed with eternal life.

One glance from the Friend equals happiness untold:

I am waiting to feel such a glance.

It has also been said:

I do not know what sort of men these were:

Work never satisfied them for a moment.

Inevitably they became the King's servants:

The elite of the people became their world.

Their pain is not acquired: it is bestowed:

For such pain could not possibly be acquired.

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\* The Persian poet whose parables appeared in part 4.

O brother, on the Day of Resurrection such a heart will appear like the sun in today's world. Anybody who performs some service for one of them, no matter what, or has a good opinion of one of them, will be under his protection in the age to come. The work of masters of the human heart is greater than can be expressed or put into writing and be comprehended by your feeble intellect or mine. Listen to how a poet has put it:



I sat at the head of the table of generosity,

Having kindled a fire of both worlds.

There is a place at the head of the Path for the best of them,

While the path to [God's] throne and footstool is a couch.

Say: "What can a member of this group say and what can he write?"

Of what use is the sun to the eyes of a bat,

Or a rose garden for an imprisoned cock?

It is not necessary that there be one in the whole world but it is fitting that there be ten, or twenty, or a hundred. Nor is it necessary for him to be in a city. It is fitting that he be in a village. Abu 'l-Hasan Kharaqani was from a village but had the perfection acquired by traveling a thousand years along the Path. It is said that if someone reaches that perfection or not, "God gives His grace to whom He wills." If someone says, "Assuredly one of them will be the most perfect," then say: "This is to be expected." It is also proper that ten, twenty, thirty, or forty, more or less, should be in one stage and this cannot be known, except by a distinguished person who has been honored above all men. At that time he will consider how many they are and which stage each one is in. Investigators of reality, however, say that the Prophet spoke in this fashion: "The thought had not occurred to me on any day that I have met all the saints of God. On that day, however, I saw a saint I had never seen before." How can this control apply to anyone else? There is a hint in this tradition that you should pass beyond your knowledge and come to your helplessness. It would be better for you that you be one of the saints of the Lord or men of God to whom speech has come. They have been praised thus:

Do away with everything connected with self-esteem,

Then you will acquire the knowledge of needlessness.



[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 64.

*Sama* ' showing dervishes in various states, ecstatic dancing, weeping, and fainting; from the *Divan* of Hafiz (ca. 1490, Timurid).

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Rogers Fund, 1918 (17.81.4).

Their eyes are fixed upon the sanctity of Adam;

Their names extend to the ends of the earth.

In ecstasy, ecstasy itself has passed away:

Why and wherefore no longer find a place.

One in seclusion, in the abode of every secret,

Is without need of all needlessness.

Don't you see that the joy of all mystics, the most excellent of the

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Arabs and Iranians [i.e. Muhammad], on the Night of the Ascension reached the stage of proximity to God and of miracles. He came forward with "I cannot praise You as You have praised Yourself." Moreover, the one who, after the prophets, was the most favored and perfect of all the people, namely the Righteous One par excellence, Abu Bakr, said: "I understand my Lord by means of my lord." My appointed guide said: "Helplessness in understanding is understanding." Whenever a disciple is one in reality, not merely in outward form, then this occurs.

In love of You, helplessness is the master's secret:

In your land bondage is the doorway to freedom.

Being a guide along Your Path is common:

Grief for You is gladness for Your lovers' souls.

In what has been described above, one question claims our attention: How can a helpless beginner know that a particular person is a master of the heart and is of that group whose name, "My devotee is not for you like a king over them," has gone ahead, or is nothing but a pretender?

O brother, in tracing back this question one ends up at the problem of what is preordained and measured out. There can be no anxiety along his path for a person who, from the beginning, has been clothed with the robe of felicity and union as perfectly as Bayazid or Uways Qarani. As for another one without any wealth, has not a black blanket been woven for him? All these things are a form of restriction for him, and they will all be found on his path. "All things for which he has been created are rendered easy" is fulfilled.

The future of two men is settled in heaven:

One becomes a lord, and the other, a weaver.

He knows no increase apart from the garments of kings,

While the other weaves nothing except a black blanket.

Khwaja 'Attar has said:

Whatever the master puts in writing

Can be read by a child at school.

Speech is necessarily cut short there:

Escort and traveler fall behind: the Way remains.

As it is said, the pen reached this point and broke. This is what is meant.

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Another matter you raised is this: Would you say a devotee can acquire intimate knowledge of God by himself, without a guide, or not? The answer is: If by this knowledge you mean that he knows about the being and oneness of God, then this is attainable by means of his own intellect without a guide. Yet if by this knowledge you mean the perfection of the travelers in their knowledge of the Lord Most Exalted, such as the perfection of Bayazid or that of Uways Qarani or of Khwaja Ma'ruf Karkhi, then there is an agreement that this also, through self-struggle and asceticism, is also attainable alone, without a guide or escort, but it is rare, and of a low degree.

How can a blind man walk straight?

It is dangerous for him to proceed without a staff

If you come to the Way without an escort,

Then all will say: "You will fall along the Way."

In *The Ornament of the Friends of God*<sup>[12]</sup> it is related that the Apostle said that in every age there will be forty persons with hearts like that of Moses; and seven persons with hearts like that of Abraham. At the end of the tradition, he says that there will be one person with a heart like that of Israfil.\* There will also be a community known as Uwaysians. They will not have any need for a guide. Prophecy, [such] as was bestowed upon Khwaja Uways Qarani, nourishes them in their cells without the intermediary of a guide. Even though he had not seen the Lord of the prophets in his external appearance, nevertheless he obtained instruction from him. This, however, is a rarity.

At the very least, such aptitude and ability are not often found. What is mostly found and more customarily seen is that it is acquired in the shape of the spiritual wealth of a guide and escort. Every perfection that you would like to acquire is a perfection of the travelers [themselves]. What I say in this matter is to study methodically and with great attention what pertains to the world of the heart, not the explanation of those caught up in custom and habit, for they come out with stories and fables—but God knows best! The result of the words of that group is no

\* Israfil is the angel who will sound the final trumpet.

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more than the words and explanations that roll off their tongues. On the other hand, the words of this group are from the heart, not acquired; from the world of "my Lord trained me," not that of "my Lord taught me" [12:37]; from the revelation of secrets, not the abundance of repetition; and from what has been seen and tasted, not what has been read or heard. The insight of

masters of the heart is an understanding and appreciation of another kind, which is hidden from externalist scholars.

The taste and grasp of masters of the heart is special,

For their knowledge exceeds that of both worlds.

Whoever is immersed in understanding that work

Throws himself into an ocean of mysteries.

When that understanding arises like revelation

Whatever he writes will reflect what is correct.

It has also been put thus:

"He shows His face to them along the Way":

Who can explain well what this means?

### ***Sayyid Ahmad Khan:***

#### ***Treatise on Visualizing the Shaykh***

##### **Bruce B. Lawrence**

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) was a major religious and intellectual figure in nineteenth-century Delhi. He came from a long line of Muslims affiliated with the Mujaddidi Naqshbandi Sufi tariqa, and was thus heir to a strong tradition of seeking spiritual guidance. His father was even buried adjacent to the grave of his spiritual mentor, his shaykh. In 1852 Sir Sayyid wrote a short Persian treatise called the *Epistle Explaining the Practice of Visualizing the Shaykh (Namiqa dar bayan-i mas'alat-i tasawwur-i shaykh)*. Ahmad Shahid, a prominent reform-minded neo-Sufi leader, had condemned the practice of visualization as tantamount to idolatry, and Sir Sayyid set out to defend the practice as theologically acceptable. Using a type of deductive argument, he begins with the proposition that keeping good company brings about good results in an individual, and then argues that meditating on the image of the shaykh is a form of spiritual companionship. It should be noted that this text represents earlier views of the author, and is included here because of its thematic interest, not as a key to Sayyid Ahmad Khan's overall system of thought. After a brief self-effacing introduction, the author continues:<sup>[13]</sup>

##### **First Preface**

It is the unanimous opinion of both the elect and the common people that company produces an effect. If you sit with a good person, you yourself become good. If you sit with an evil person,

you raise the veil from the face of that which is abhorrent. This is a fact which from one corner of the world to another no one will deny—whether you ask a Parsee or a Christian, a Sufi or a strict Muslim. On this point the poet has said:

The company of the righteous will make you righteous [ *salih* ].

The company of the wicked will make you wicked [ *talih* ].

Sufficient for me in this matter is the tradition of the Prophet, in whose path my heart has become dust, even as my life has been sacrificed upon that throne of heaven. Imam Bukhari\* has related on the authority of Abu Musa [a transmitter of hadith] that the Prophet of God once said:

The company of good and evil persons is like the difference between the seller of musk and the blower of bellows. The seller of musk comes to you and you buy from him, and you find in what you have bought a pleasant odor. But the blower of bellows burns your clothes with his bellows, and leaves behind a disgusting odor.

Hence, about the effect of company, commonly known as the benefit of company, no one can add to what the Prophet has already said on this subject.

## Second Preface

When you have enjoyed the benefit of company you will know that this benefit neither resides in the physical parts of the body, nor is it related to what you see with the outer eye or can identify by the eye, hand, or foot. Otherwise it would be impossible for the blind to accomplish anything, and likewise for the person who lacks hands or feet. But this is not the case. Whether one is learned or ignorant, if God unexcelled has opened the inner eye, what loss does that person suffer from the shutting up of these two piebald eyes? Similarly, one whose hand has been held by the hand of God cannot be a failure because he lacks a bodily hand or foot. In

\* Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 870) compiled one of the two most famous collections of hadith.

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this dust-laden curtain and in this appearance without existence, that is, the body, there is a luminous witness to the One to whom pertains the basis of all that is, and all the marvels that we possess are from Him. The benefit of company is located in Him, just as it is derived from Him.

## Third Preface

It is a matter of common agreement that as long as admiration of the doer is not implanted in you, whatever he does will not influence you. Moreover, people have given different names to that which is implanted according to the nature of their admiration for the doer. Those whose souls have been burnt in the fire of passion [*ishq*] call it love [*mahabbat*], while those who know the traditions of devotion [*adab-i iradat*] call it faith [*aqidat*]. In truth, to receive the benefits of company you have to have faith in the doer. For the place where the pleasures of company may be obtained is the same for everyone, since the perceptive faculty is influenced by the amount of rain that God sends down, just as it is influenced by the seed and care that the tiller of the land provides. Above all, the perceptive faculty is influenced by the predetermined receptive capacity; for unless the receptive capacity—whether one calls it love or faith—has been created in you, love will not influence you. In the words of Sa'di:\*

Rain in whose nature there is no contradiction

Causes tulips to grow in the garden and thorns in the desert. [\[14\]](#)

(That is to say, the difference is not in the amount of rain, but in the capacity to receive.)

The last benefit of the company of the Prophet is to obtain perfect faith, but that is not possible without first possessing love. From Anas ibn Malik † it is related that the Prophet said: "No one believes until I become more precious to him than his soul, his family, and all the people in the world." In the same tradition, 'Umar ‡ is reported to have said: "O Prophet

\* Sa'di of Shiraz (d. 1292) wrote poetry and didactic literature in Persian. (See fig. 58.)

† Anas ibn Malik (d. ca. 710) was a Companion of the Prophet and noted Traditionist, or transmitter of hadith.

‡ 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644) was the second "Rightly Guided Caliph" and a Companion of Muhammad.

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of God, you are more precious to me than everything except my soul which is lodged within me." Then the Prophet said, "You are not a believer until I have become more precious to you than even your soul!" Then 'Umar said: "O you to whom the Book was revealed, surely you are more precious to me than my soul which is lodged within me." Then the Prophet said, "O 'Umar, your faith has been perfected."

The early Muslims raised up Abu Bakr to the highest position, but they threw down Abu Jahl,\* who always challenged the Prophet. The reason for that presence and absence of the gem of the evening light [i.e., Islam] was acceptance of the mark of love for the Prophet. The Prophet was the same to both, just as his company was available to both. The one took hold of the firm rope and progressed to the highest post. From the hand of the other the firmest hand slipped out [see Q 2:255, 31:21]; and he did not reach even the lowest rung of the ladder that leads to the attainment of perfect faith.

Hence the beneficiary should make love of the benefactor obligatory on himself so that between their two souls there may come into being a relationship the import of which will be evident to both. It is perhaps for this reason that Sufis have named this station "annihilation [*fana'*] in the shaykh." The disciple who does not achieve this station can produce no result, nor can he, in turn, influence others. We blind people grope our way into this worship, while it is left to the professional craftsmen to say what it really contains. In the words of the poet Sa'di:

Kings know best the policy of government.

Beggars sit in the corner; Ahmad, don't complain.

#### Fourth Preface

The principal way to obtain the benefactor's love is to remember Him continually. As God says in the Qur'an: "Then remember me, even as I remember you" [2:152]. The traditions that support this line of thought are so numerous that space does not permit their citation. What is meant

\* Abu Jahl (Father of Ignorance) was the nickname early Muslims gave to 'Amr ibn Hisham (d. 624), a Quraysh tribesman bitterly opposed to Islam.

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can also be realized by the intellect. Who brought Layla before Majnun\* and who dressed Shirin in black out of grief for the death of Farhad? † For those who are acquainted with physical love not a single day passes that the pleasure of remembering the Beloved does not come to mind. Indeed, it is this imagined embracing and this projected union which brings the Beloved out into the marketplace and makes her so much like the Lover that the Beloved, in fact, becomes the Lover. In the words of the poet:

Love is that homeless creature

Who brings you to my house.

Remembrance [*dhikr*] requires you to visualize that He is He, in order that you do not become separate from Him. Look into yourself and reflect. Then you will discover that He is in your heart, and that it is in remembering Him that your love and your taste and your desire and your passion become excited.

But the projected picture of the Beloved should not be fixed in your mind or adorned with human attributes. Rather, visualization is necessary for remembrance in the same way that remembrance is necessary for visualization. The end result of both is Love.

There is a tradition in which Hasan ibn 'Ali ‡ said: "I asked Khali Hind ibn Abi Halah, since he knew the form of the Prophet, to describe something of his attributes to me, that I might become attached to him. That is to say, I adopted love on account of that image of the perfect beauty of the Prophet."

Now, when you have understood these Prefatory Remarks, understand further that our Naqshbandi saints—may the mercy of God be upon all of them—have ordered this same silent meditation [*muraqaba*], because the visualization of the shaykh is necessary for the *murid* [seeker, aspirant], both in the actual state of remembrance and otherwise. It is through sincere and continuous remembrance alone that love of the

\* Majnun (literally, be-jinned) was the moonstruck lover of the enchanting Layla who went mad in his unrequited love.

† Farhad was a sculptor who fell in love with Shirin, wife of King Khusraw, and flung himself from a mountain to his death in desperate longing.

‡ Hasan ibn 'Ali (d. 669) was the second Shi'i Imam, brother of Husayn, the protomartyr (d. 680).





[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 65.

Pensive dervish with begging bowl and staff  
(Iran, late 15th cent., Timurid).

New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.30).

shaykh wells up in the heart of the murid, till gradually the stage of annihilation in the shaykh takes place. At that stage there develops a relationship between the perceptive faculty of the shaykh and the murid, in which the benefit of the company and guidance of the shaykh takes root in the perceptive self of the murid. The base perceptive self is then purified and cleansed and brought to higher stages. In this station

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whatever I might say about the image of the shaykh would be justified. If I say that the image of the shaykh is a cushion for receiving the mercy of God, I would have spoken the truth, and I presume to say that without the image of the shaykh I shall not find a way to God or the Prophet, then I would be right.

Now this love of the shaykh is probably of two kinds: inherited and intentional, the second coming by deliberate visualization and intentional remembrance. I call the first compulsory and the second voluntary, but with respect to the result there is no difference between them.

Nonetheless, liars have concluded that these saints in the state of *muraqaba* presumed the shaykh to be present and seeing and knowing and cognizant at all times and in every condition. And by *muraqaba* they mean the same thing, namely, that the shaykh is present and looking at us without intermediary and is aware of the condition of the one who remembers him without any intermediary or without any physical cause.

God forbid that the pure skirt of these saints should be stained with such belief. To the contrary, as you know, the state of *muraqaba* is derived from the state and special devotions [*waridat*] of the companions of the Companions and Followers and Followers of the Followers of the Prophet. The traditions of the Prophet are in support of this practice, and the 'ulama' attach the same meaning to the invocation [*khitab*]: Prayers and peace be upon you, O Prophet, together with the mercy of God and His blessing.

How then can this practice be an innovation [*bid'at*] and proscribed by the shari'a, especially since these saints regard *muraqaba* as an instrument and intermediary for higher purposes? As long as purification of the soul is achieved, together with annihilation in the Prophet—which I hope it may be the good fortune of all true believers to attain—I have no objection against anyone following this practice. What we have known is enough for us, though the ignorant may beat their heads against the rock.

And what Mawlana Isma'il [Shahid] has said in *The Straight Path* [*Sirat-i mustaqim*] is also worth noting in this connection. To my

\* Shah Isma'il Shahid (d. 1831) was an important Naqshbandi author of Delhi, grandson of Shah Wali Allah (d. 1762).

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knowledge he was a man of attainment, and however much his writing was like this [i.e., condemning *muraqaba* and those who practiced it], he was in the service of those who regarded diligence in *muraqaba* as a binding duty day in and day out, and to his last breath he viewed those same Naqshbandi saints as his own pride and he never walked on the path of doubt toward them.

And may peace be upon those who are obedient to the guide.

## Traveling Companions

### *Hasan Palasi's Encounter with Shaykh Kujuji*

#### Leonard Lewisohn

Firsthand accounts of the experience of spiritual guidance provide unique insight into the practice of the science of hearts. The memoir Hasan Palasi composed in honor of his shaykh, Khwaja Muhammad Kujuji (d. 1279), is one such account. Palasi calls the whole work "A Gift for Novices and Largess for Adepts." Originally written in Persian, the work was translated into Arabic in hopes of wider circulation. After the Persian original was lost, it was retranslated back into Persian early in the fifteenth century. Shaykh Kujuji was a widely renowned spiritual director of his day. In a section of his work evidently referring to events of the early 1270s, Palasi has gone from his home city of Tabriz to the village of Kujujan, in present-day Azarbaijan in the Caucasus, for an extended visit with his spiritual guide. We join his narrative just after his arrival there.

Palasi explains: <sup>[15]</sup>

Now, I had vowed to myself that I would eat nothing for the first three days of my visit to the master. When the time for the midday meal came, the servant brought in a tray of food. The master looked at the victuals and stretched out his hand and ate a few morsels. I ate nothing. He remained silent, partaking of a small bit of the food, and since I ate nothing, he motioned to the servant to collect the meal cloth.

When the servant had gathered up the cloth, the master began to speak, asking many strange and marvelous questions concerning the problematic passages and the deeper allegorical meanings of the Glorious Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions related to the divine Reality which is

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[\[Full Size\]](#)

Figure 66.

Seeker receiving spiritual direction: album painting  
(India, Jahangir's reign [1605–1627], Mughal).

St. Louis: St. Louis Art Museum, 386.52.

the inner dimension of the religious Law. I answered these questions as best I could, according to what God vouchsafed me at that time.

The content of these answers I myself did not even understand, for they had never before occurred to me, nor had I ever heard their like from anyone else nor read them in any book! This experience reached

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such an intensity and degree during that time that from those words that sprung from my lips, such enthusiasm, purity of humor, and joy penetrated my heart that I wondered, "How is it that these divine mysteries are being expressed by *me*?"

The I realized that in reality the source of these words and the elucidation and materialization of these mysteries and allegories by medium of my tongue was all due to the grace of the spiritual regard and blessed breath and the heightened willpower of the reverend master.

In this manner, I remained three days in the company [of the master] and ate nothing either day or night. When the servant brought us food, the master would eat a few small morsels and then tell him to take the rest away, since I was not eating anything.

The dawn of the fourth day broke. We said our morning prayers, following which, as was the master's custom, he lit a candle, lowering his head in meditation, and his disciples and companions followed suit, and an absolute vow of silence on everyone's part was observed, and no other litanies or invocations were recited until the sun had risen one spear's length above the horizon.

When the fourth day had dawned, raising his head forth from his meditation, he turned toward me and requested that I continue my discourse.

"Oh Mawlana, today, I will ask the questions and it is your turn to reply," I rejoined. "My speaking over the past few days has given you ample opportunity to become acquainted with my character. Now you should speak too, so that I can get to know you. As the adage goes: 'Speak until you make yourself known, for a man is hidden behind his tongue,' [and] 'Regard what is being said, not who is saying it.'"<sup>\*</sup>

"The author of these maxims, whoever he was," interjected the venerable master, "spoke well. For a man's speech is a clear sign of his perfection. Yet when his discourse springs from his own heart's conviction and enthusiasm [not when it comes from books or when he quotes from others], those who are alien to his theosophical sensibility will not understand what he says simply by listening to him, nor will they recognize the measure and worth of his speech.

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\* The first sentence is a hadith of the Prophet and the second is a saying of 'Ali.

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In the workshop of spiritual poverty\* paralogicality and sophistry abound, and this sort of discourse has upset and made unstable countless numbers of people. Each wise man has his own just 'measure' and each person's 'measure' is always changing and transforming according to his outer and inner conditions and states. However, the interior measure, when set on the balance, is far more reliable and superior

[than that of the exterior] and the judgment made by the interior being is much more accurate and reliable than that which exterior being passes.

Since the measure that one's interior being possesses rests upon a truthful and dependable basis, it is in this that the wise man trusts, for this inner measurement is steadier than the outer judgment. Now, the proper measure of things can be assessed in respect to four things:

One relates to the spiritual station of the apprehension of the realities of Existence, in respect to which those who specialize in spiritual matters differ. Another relates to the means through which such apprehension is obtained, and again, the opinions and views of people differ in this matter. Another relates to how one should conduct oneself with God, the Creator. This, in turn, depends upon the amount of insight each person has, as well as upon his or her previous faith. Another relates to how one should conduct oneself with people, and this all depends upon how one considers each [social] context.

From the foregoing it should be recognized that spiritual levels are quite varied. Therefore, if you find someone on a certain level, you shouldn't pass any definite judgment on him until you examine and test out his inner state and rub the circumstances of his temperament on the touchstone of what lies in the interior. . . .

All that you have told me [Shaykh Kujuji says to Palasi] over the past few days, of occult sciences, exotic mystical lore, refined expressions, and sublime symbolic allusions, would make you—that is, if you yourself had been actually endowed with these same qualities, ethical character, social conduct, and mystical states—the leader, and leading light of this day. However, when I look at you from the standpoint of my own spiritual

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\* An apparent allusion to organized and institutionalized "Paths" or "Orders" of Sufism, another epithet for which was *faqr* (spiritual poverty).

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insight, I must confess that all your words and deeds, and both your inactivity and motion stand in utter contradiction to your true talents and knowledge!

Thus, it is now quite clear to me that wisdom is substantially different from inner reality of the sage, and that intimate knowledge [of God; *ma'rifat* ] is substantially different from inner reality of the mystic, and theological knowledge [*'ilm* ] is substantially different from inner reality of the knower. An exception to this rule would be, of course, the knowledge one ascribes to God, the Almighty. Although God's knowledge pertains to the Transcendent Oneness of his Essence, his attributes are neither in disparity with, nor separate from, his Essence, insofar as within his Essence there is absolutely no multiplicity.

Now, it sometimes happens that one finds a person who is in reality a simpleton, narrating one of the questions pertaining to mystic-philosophical wisdom. On other occasions, one sees someone who is merely a scholar, rather than a mystic, relating something to do with intimate knowledge [of God]. On other occasions, you find a person who speaks of theological knowledge who is, in reality, an ignoramus himself!

[Shaykh Kujuji continues speaking to Palasi:] "Oh teacher, which of these two groups do you belong to? The first group, who are aware of their ignorance, or the second, who are not apprised of their ignorance?"

[Palasi then describes his reaction:] As soon as the Shaykh—peace be upon him—had uttered these words, every limb and muscle in my body began to shiver and tremble. All my hair stood up on its end.

My heart suddenly felt drowned in woe and grief. I had never experienced the anguish with which at that moment my heart was filled.

"O Shaykh," I cried, "I belong to that group of scholars who are apprised of their own ignorance! What you said in regard to me is all completely true! You have truly recognized who I am. I realized then that I was a sick person and perceive now that there is no other clever physician, genuine master, or benign and responsive teacher to redeem me from this malady other than you. So heal me! My entire inner and outer being is devoted to and convinced of your love. I submit myself to you, so find the cure for my ailment!"

The master (may God sanctify his soul) replied: "The first medicine

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you must take is Sincerity [*sidq*]. I have informed you of the psychological sickness that I observed in you. You too have confirmed my diagnosis, saying that I spoke truly. If you are really sincere in validating my assessment of your condition, then your cure is simple and the remedy within reach."

"I am totally sincere, O Master," I hastened to say, "in my confirmation of your diagnosis, and anyway, your own heart is conversant enough with my illness to ascertain this."

He said, "You have spoken truly—and have done well to have spoken so. I myself witnessed the proof of your sincerity: for your very skin crept and all the limbs of your body shook. That itself was a sign that fear and awe of God touched your heart and proves the sincerity of your engrossment in finding the object of your quest. Such fear also indicates God's grace and solicitous regard for you, evincing the fact that the Light of God is now focused on you and that God Almighty is Himself holding parley with you—although of that you are as yet incognizant. This fear and trembling is a definite sign of your certitude [*yaqin*] and spiritual realization [*tahqiq*]. It is God's gauge and criterion, for in this state the gates of hope and faith are opened unto the devotee by God.

There is no other way to God, the Almighty, except by His Light. The way toward Him can never be fared except through grace of His Light. This Light derives from the lights of divine Union and Presence. Whenever this Light is manifested to the heart of the faithful devotee, everything besides God is consumed away. This Light is the natural result of the dread that fills the heart of the faithful. [Then the shaykh cited Qur'an 39:23–24:]

'God has sent down the fairest discourse as a Book, consimiliar in its oft-repeated pairs of truths whereat shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts soften to the remembrance of God. That is God's guidance, whereby He guides whomsoever He will; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he.'<sup>[16]</sup>

And now I understood what it meant to taste directly the relish and delight of mystical states. In fact, by means of his spiritual control [*ta'arrufat*] the entire ground of my being began to quake and was stirred

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to motion. Alternative mystical states and spiritual shapes were revealed to me, so that unto my spirit the window of imagination was opened. Then I heard an address that disclosed to me many mysteries

and matters of the invisible realm, experiencing countless visions, dreams, and revelations, still without understanding their interpretation. Yet in none of this did I abide or rest, nor in any station did I pause or stop, until some time had passed and my commotion, agitation, and intoxication at last settled and became tranquil.

And then the venerable master—my God hallow his soul—exercised his spiritual initiative [*ta'arruf*] upon me once again. My spirit, which had been smothered in the placenta of interest and love for friend and kin, so that my body of light lay becalmed and immobile in the ocean of physical kinship, was then reawakened by him. I quickened. Just like a person bound in shackles, from whose feet chains are suddenly released, the bonds from the soul were unloosed and I began to stir. Although bold as a lion I set out on the quest, all the movement I made at this time was but total rest, my search appeared to me to be but utter serenity.

In this manner, I advanced from station to station until I had put both the "blessed" and the "wretched" behind me in the dust—until I reached a place where the light of divine unity enveloped my entire being and I passed away from my selfhood in the reality of detachment, and became so drunk that I was entirely bereft of self.

Now, the master was a clever physician, and was able to use the physic of his sainthood to effect my cure as soon as I experienced this state. While the eye of my heart was opened, he took care to safeguard my physical constitution so that my body did not become disabled. Although I was engaged in spiritual voyage and flight, he made me mount the litter of the body. While in this state, I rubbed the eye of my heart and opened the eye of spiritual insight when, glancing aloft, I beheld face to face the object of my quest and witnessed Reality.

At once I saw that I was myself my own leader and guide, and even if I was in bliss, much of the state to me was strange and wondrous.

Turning to my venerable and veracious master, I cried, "O master, what weird spectacles are these? What is the truth of these phantasies?"

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But the master merely bid me be silent, causing me to be possessed by intensely tormenting fear and dread. Yet by the power of his inner being, I remained steadfast.

"You have studied the sciences of moral limitations and prophetic customs,"\* he admonished me, "so bring to mind what you know, have studied and memorized. Confront the vision you are now witnessing with that knowledge. You are going to be annihilated from self. If you have really been burnt up and consumed, then that [knowledge] has also been consumed away. So ask from your own self the reality of what remains [of that knowledge]. For it will soon come to pass that you will learn everything you need to know from [within] yourself without ever asking anyone else."

So some of these matters I understood through the process of methodical progression on the Sufi Path [*suluk*], and others I verified by way of divine intimation and tutelage. Although luminous snares lay before me, I yet witnessed how the remainder of all living creatures and creation was annihilated in the reality of [the qur'anic dictum] "Everything is perishing but his Face" [28:88].

Then I saw that behind all my master's discourses lay the speech of God, and thus gained certitude of the fact that all his biddings and forbiddance during the stages where veils had beclouded me and on those levels where I was subject to secondary causes were true and correct. In this state, I also

witnessed how everything was saying, "There is none like unto Him" [42:11], and God [in reply] was saying, "I am like unto no thing."

When I considered everything, I saw that all spiritual realities [*haqa'iq*] had a place within me—in such a manner that I could obtain the object I sought from them, and the goal which all things sought was also realized through me.

After that, I transcended the "realm of physical things" and found myself alone with nothing from the realm of things beside me. Now, at

\* I.e., you are aware of ethical injunctions that determine a human being's relationship to God, and are aware of your obligation in respecting those who train you and lead you in prayer and the danger of transgressing these boundaries, even if your spiritual experience seems to lead you elsewhere.

this station, gazing within with the eye of spiritual insight, I beheld how every other spiritual guide [*murshid*] is always accompanied by his disciples and followers, with his regard focused upon his own states and circumstances, but that my own master (God's mercy be upon him) could not be classified by any description, nor did he fit under any rubric. That is to say, he was not within "direction" or "place," since he did not see with the eye nor hear with the ear.