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of natural hierarchy which concerned them (whether spiritual, intellectual, etc.) and the shifting popular notions of *kāzās* and *āmm* resting on such visible (and variable) criteria as rank, birth, wealth, race, etc.

31. Certainly mystical "literature" in this sense must be understood as excluding the sacred or revealed writings (in this context, especially the Koran), which are distinguished — among other things — by their "operative" or revelatory dimensions (e.g., in prayer, dhikr, etc.) and by their inexhaustible potential meaning, which continues to expand precisely in proportion to one's degree of spiritual advancement. For al-Ghazālī's conception, cf. the recent translation of his *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān, The Jewels of the Qur'an*, by M.A. Quasem, London, 1983.

## Beatific Vision and Poetic Imagery

in Bahā' Walad

William Chittick

The name Bahā' Walad (a. 1230) has been seen if not remembered by everyone with an interest in Persian Sufi poetry. It is hardly possible to read about the great Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī without hearing how his father — Bahā' Walad — set out for Mecca before the approaching Mongol invasion and eventually ended up in Konya as "sultan of the learned." Few have bothered, however, to look at Bahā' Walad's *Ma'ārif* (Gnoses), which is usually mentioned in passing in such accounts. Among orientalists, A.J. Arberry called attention to this "precious record" of "many remarkable mystical experiences. . . described in remarkably fine and eloquent Persian." He translated the first twenty sections (26 of 612 pages) in his *Aspects of Islamic Civilization*.<sup>1</sup>

The editor of the *Ma'ārif*,<sup>2</sup> the contemporary Iranian authority on Rūmī, Badi' al-Zamān Furūzāfar, has described in some detail in his introduction the parallels between Bahā' Walad's prose and Rūmī's poetry. A thorough study of these parallels could easily fill a large volume. There is little doubt that the *Ma'ārif* is the single most important literary influence on Rūmī after the Koran and the Hadith. Traditional accounts relate that he used to read it constantly before the coming of Shams-i Tabrizī.<sup>3</sup>

Leaving aside the question of the innumerable concrete instances in which parallels are to be found between the language and imagery of Rūmī and his father, it may be fair to say that what unites the two mystics in spirit and mode of approach is the perception of a divine beauty infinitely worthy of love reflected in all creatures. Everything beautiful and delightful belongs to God and should serve to incite our love for Him, the one true Beloved. God can be seen in this world — just as He will be seen in the next — not in His infinite Essence, but in His never-ending and never-repeating self-manifestations or “theophanies” (*tajallī*).<sup>4</sup> “Gaze upon the heavens and upon the world,” says Bahā’ Walad, “for God cannot be contemplated except through His creations.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, for Bahā’ Walad, “The perfection of the believer’s faith lies in the vision of God.”<sup>6</sup>

Without vision, knowing Thee is impossible. Those who deny Thy vision have not known Thee. . . One might say that unbelief is not to see Thee, while Islam is to have that vision.<sup>7</sup>

Every sweet and desirable thing in this world and the next derives from God’s theophany. Thus Bahā’ Walad questions the well-known proposition that paradise is the prison of the Sufi, who desires only the “Gardener,” not the “Garden.”

It is proper that the “houris, palaces, gardens, and fountain” consist of the different states of seeing God. Each time you see Him, you find a different taste (*mazah*).<sup>8</sup>

Whether in this world or the next, we “taste” God only in His theophanies. Bahā’ Walad tells how he went to a mosque where an account of the houris and palaces of paradise was being recited from the Koran. Through such verses, he says, God speaks as

follows:

If you love Me, I have manifested My love in these things. Learn My love song from the brows of the bright-eyed houris and the translucent water of the heart. Contemplate Me in their delicious fountain, and in them study My heart-ravishing qualities. You will not reach the beauty of My Essence without them. In this world I have created these sweet things in keeping with nature and desire, while in the next world I have created those things as the reward for My good pleasure. Hence in both worlds you should see these faces in the remembrance of My love. All of these things in this world are My faces, and all in that world are my beauties. So keep your eyes on the forms of Allah, and in your heart turn round about the realities. When you gain strength in these assemblies from seeing the beauty of My lovely maidens and servant girls, then you can see My Beauty. Keep your heart fixed in Allah’s Spirit and, within the phenomenal things, your eyes fixed upon Allah’s Beauty.<sup>9</sup>

For Bahā’ Walad, as for Rūmī, the vision of God in all creation takes place in infinite variety and never-ending joy. Both attempt to describe the diversity of forms within which they perceive the divine theophany, and it is here that poetical imagery is born. The vision of God takes place at the level of “thought” (*andīshah*) — which, as Rūmī makes clear, is identical with “imagination” (*khayāl*).<sup>10</sup> — so the mind of the visionary becomes a fountain of fresh and ever-renewed images overflowing into language, whether prose or poetry. Bahā’ Walad describes how his thoughts take on “imaginal” form in many passages. One gradually reaches the conclusion — as with Rūmī — that everything he says fits into a radiant tapestry woven of the never-ending images of God’s self-manifestation.

I thought: These parts of mine have found several

thousand neighbors. These letters of my thoughts, like green herbs and saffron: from which breast have they sprung up? Or like ants: whose colored cheeks have they run out on, falling upon one another in my breast? Then I saw that Allah is working alone behind this curtain of the Unseen. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Thought is like a fountain that Allah causes to boil. If sweet water boils up, I see that green herbs, bounties, and flowers spring up in the body's sanctuary, . . . but if salt water boils up, the body's earth becomes barren and useless. I keep on looking at Allah to see which sort of water He will give to the earth of the body.<sup>12</sup>

I saw that the parts of my thoughts, plans, and perceptions are like birds and sparrows and gnats standing before Allah. One could say that He has placed a chain around the neck of each. . . . I looked again and saw that Allah opened up my parts: He showed to me a hundred thousand multicolored flowers, then opened up the parts of the flowers and showed me a hundred thousand herbs and flowing waters and wafting breezes, and He opened up the breezes and showed me a hundred thousand freshesses.

The reader may have noticed that I have been employing the word "Allah" in translation rather than "God." The reason for this is that Bahā' Walad himself is using the term "Allah," which sounds almost as strange in Persian as it does in English. Persian Sufis — Rūmī for example — rarely use this name in their writings except in the context of various Arabic phrases. Bahā' Walad, it seems, consciously employs this name to call attention to the practical side of his mystical perceptions. They are not taking place in a vacuum, but as an adjunct to the "remembrance" or "invocation" (*dhikr*) of God's holy Name. This becomes clear, for example, in section 94 translated below. Or take the following passage:

The tongue is the key to the heart. The more the

tongue moves in the invocation of Allah, the more the heart opens up and the more precious things appear within it. You might say that the invocation of Allah is the east wind bringing news of the Beloved. It delights the earth of the dead body and fills it with gardens and orchards. Water flows down before the body's house and blossoms settle in the meadow of each organ and part.<sup>14</sup>

Or once again:

If you enter into the invocation of Allah, the orchard of your parts will blossom, the garden of your spirit will begin to laugh, and the east wind of your spiritual state will start to blow.<sup>15</sup>

In the following five sections from the *Ma'ārif*, the above themes are clearly reflected. In lieu of trying to provide a commentary on other teachings and images that may be unfamiliar, I refer the reader to my *Sufi Path of Love*, where detailed explanations can be found within the context of Rūmī's teachings for such themes as spirit and body, form and meaning, outward and inward, existence and nonexistence, separation and union, the divine Attributes and Acts, congeniety, revelry and winedinking, the garden of spring, and the physical attractions of the beloved.

Such a nonexistence contains and surrounds my parts from all six directions. So how should my parts be alone, without an intimate friend?

*Fasl 89*

I thought: Since the creature has no congeniety (*jiniyyat*) with Allah, how can it become intimate, happy, and at ease with Allah? Allah inspired into me: "Since the creature derives from One who gives it existence, and that is I, how should I not be its intimate? After all, if, existence cannot be at ease with the giving of existence, how can it come into existence? How can the one be harmed by the other? If existence is not at rest with the giving of existence, with what can it be at rest? Since My Will, Act, Attribute, Creativity, and Mercy are connected to the creature — if it is not intimate with Me, with whom can it be intimate? After all, are not all these longings, loves, and intimacies from Me? Are they not My creations? So how should there not be intimacy with Me, since intimacy is My Act? All the words between lovers, their whispered secrets, their touching, their companionship — I bring all this into existence. So how can the existent not be at ease with the Giver of existence? And with whom does it want its intimacy to last other than with Me?" Therefore invoke (*dhikr migiy*) and be intimate with Allah and His Attributes. Read the Koran and witness the reality of intimacy: "Allah: there is no god but He." Since no will but Allah's has any effect, and since He has willed what the creature wills, how should the willed not have intimacy with the Willer? "The Living." Since He lives forever, how should He not be intimate with living things? "The Self-Subsistent." He creates you constantly and puts your activity in order. How should you have no words and secrets and intimacy with Him? "Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep" (Koran 2: 255). Since at no time is He unaware, how is it you cannot present your state to Him? Let lovers be awake! Are you then the beloved that you should now be sleeping? Your existence is like a sprig of sweet basil in Allah's hand — all the blossoms of your longings and the leaves of your secrets

*Fasl 88*

My spirit became busy with my body: "My head hurts" and such things. It was crawling out from under the body while I looked on. I watched the flowers — intellect and perception — while the spirit constantly banged against the tree, scattering the flowers and throwing them down in bunches. Once I was out of the body's skin, whenever a form came to me I pulled myself out of it, going into the world of Allah and ineffability. I went into Allah's Attributes, lifting myself up and saying, "I have been delivered from all pain." Suddenly I saw Allah, standing beyond nonexistence, while He made nonexistence surround all things. As He brought the things out from nonexistence, I saw them happen. I returned to Allah's Attributes and to the Effects: green herbs, flowing water, and beautiful hours. I said, "Let me open up all these sweet, sweet things to each other. I will smash and throw aside everything that is form and grasp on to the taste of the ineffable meanings, just as the reality of the spirit demands, and just as Allah has no definable qualities." Now Allah has made this infinite nonexistence worthy of love. A hundred thousand beauties, longings, passions, loves, views, plans, choices, infatuations, captivations, varieties of faculties, kinds of sweet lives, stratagems, ruses, embraces, kisses, and sweet meetings — Allah has pulled all these over the face of nonexistence. A person is needed who can gaze upon nonexistence, tears running down his cheeks in his love for it.

must be with Allah!

*Fasl 94*

I said, "Allah, Thou hast promised, 'No crawling creature is there upon the earth but its provision rests upon Allah' (Koran 11:6). Thou hast brought me up by way of outward doors, so give me my provision from Thyself — for Thou hast not given me ease through phenomenal things. I want witnesses. I want witnesses, and bounties, and music (*sarrāḥ*), and esteem, and strength, and will." God inspired into me: " 'Allah' and 'He is Allah' consist of the sweet things, the objects of desire, and the wills of all creatures, and more. Drink from Me without end, like a bee from flowers, so that all your parts may become honey. For We are the Life-Giver: 'giving life' takes place only through sweet things and objects of desire. And We are the Slayer: 'slaying' takes place only through separation from sweet things and objects of desire. As much as sweetness comes, existence appears; as much as sweetness goes, annihilation appears. All the forms of paradise — the hours and wide-eyed maidens — pasture on Us. Spirits are our droplets of sweat; all means of access to sweet things and objects of desire are like foam before us. As much as you can, drink from Us through the cup of the invocation of Allah. Once you become drunk and languid from Our wine, we will give you the sweetness of sleep, like the Seven Sleepers (cf. Koran 18: 9ff.). Drink from Us and give thanks for Our intoxication: give news of our sweet things to the creatures that We may give you more."

I said, "Praise belongs to Allah." In other words, "This eminence is not finished for me, since Allah's control and Allah's act are in my parts. He pulled me up out of non-existence and gave me existence. He controls my parts, and I know that he is controlling me. This state is the most cherished of states in my eyes, for in this attribute I go to Allah. Now I voice praise and with each breath I fill myself with this state. I am unaware of the creatures or of other states. I cut myself off from all familiarities. You might say that I voice that praise for the tastes of Allah: For all

these letters of love and all these laudations are expressed for the bits of Allah's tastes. Now like brides in love I weep: 'Oh Allah, deprive me not of Thy tastes! For I have no one but Thee. "Leave me not solitary, while Thou art the best of inheritors" (Koran 21: 89).'"

When any existent thing's companionship with Allah decreases, the perfection of its state is transformed into imperfection; just so, when a king turns his face away from a lovely bride, she withers. Allah has a companionship with the intellect, and the taste of all its objects derives from that; so also with sense perception. So Allah's controlling me in all my parts — and likewise Allah's Act — none of it takes place without His Attributes, like Mercy and Generosity. These Attributes are all Light and have effects upon light in those colors which I have seen. So in every one of my parts flow streams of light, like molten gold: They run on from Allah's Attributes. Since Allah works in my every part and since all thoughts and all tastes come into being from Allah, all have turned their faces toward Allah, who is like a handsome king sitting among new brides. One nibbles on his back, another kisses his shoulder, and still another presses herself against him. Or like children: So many pearls, who gather around their young father and play with him. Or like pigeons and sparrows: they come down around the person who feeds them and land upon him wherever they can. Just as all the atoms of the universe turn round about Allah's Beauty, so my plans and thoughts turn round about Allah, glorifying and praising Him.

*Fasl 96*

I was reciting, "Glory be to Thee." I said: The meaning of "Glory be to Thee" is this: If your heart goes to beauty, "Beauty without imperfection is here." If your heart goes to property, "Riches without imperfection are here." If it goes to position, "Position without imperfection is here." If it likes to listen to music and people's speech, "Speech without imperfection is here, mercy and people's speech, without imperfection is here, mercy and kindness without imperfection are here,": and so on with all the Attributes,

down to where He says, "I am the Protector" (cf. Koran 59:23): "A chicken does not watch over its chicks like I keep My friends under My wing." [All of this] lest you despair, saying, "Allah is not of my kind. He will not give me intimacy with the sweetness of His Beauty." For you will not find from any kind whatsoever the sweetness that comes from Allah. "Glory be to Thee": Allah says, "Whoever you love and seek is not without imperfection — splendid and faultless am I alone. Bring love here!" ["If God were to remove the veils,] the Splendors of His Face would incinerate [the eyes of all creatures who gazed upon Him"]. This is what the "Splendors of the Face" are all about. I said: O Allah, the fault is my own being. My imagination and vision veil me from Thee while I see Thee. Oh Allah, the shirt of my existence and senses has been pulled up over my head, while the Splendors of Thy Face are beyond this shirt of existence. I want to strike off this cloak of self-existence that has come over my face and head, for seeing Thee is all joy and revelry. To be veiled from this love and deprived from this vision are the descending degrees of hell given sensory form. I have been shown the attribute of faultlessness and the sign of splendor so that I may become quick in love. For "worship" is to demonstrate love. The goal is to be restless in that Beauty and to seek It, nothing more. So when I become weary of seeking Thee, oh Allah, within the clothing of my existence — Thy veil — and when I become slow in my seeking, I hold my parts before Thee like cups: "Oh Allah, in these cups bring into being the power and taste of seeking Thee, for I live through this taste of seeking. If not for this taste of seeking I would be dead." Love for the various kinds of beauty, music, and green herbs is like the morning breeze giving news of Joseph: "Oh Jacob, will the morning breeze suffice you without the Presence of Allah? Come to your Joseph and see what may be!"

Fasl 104

When I awaken from sleep I see the whole world as Allah's Thou-ness. When I begin to stir, I take Allah's

Thou-ness in my embrace to see what will come to hand and enter my senses from it. In the same way, a king moves, awakens from his sleep, and imagines that he is alone. But when the bride's locks, her face, and her parts touch against him, he knows she is his intimate; he is at ease and begins to speak to her. I too begin speaking with whatever may be at hand about Allah's Thou-ness. I enter into the sweet, good, and beautiful things of Allah. Each instant I mix with Allah's Thou-ness and gaze upon its inward wonders. I see its wonders and drink the wine of each one's taste such that I remain senseless until late. In the same way, the sweetest state of Moses was theophany and "Show me [that I may behold Thee]" (Koran 7:143). Each moment I take Allah's Thou-ness into my embrace: "When My servants ask thee about Me — I am near" (Koran 2: 186). Every moment I have the ardor of Jesus, the ecstasy of Moses, the certainty of Muhammad — upon them all be peace —, the unveilings and the ease of the saints, the beauty of the beloveds, and the state and sweet prosperity of their lovers. I have been given two feet to run to those sweet things of theirs. I gaze upon those wonders and say, "Oh Allah, give me of these, for Thou hast brought them into being from the Unseen. Thy bounty has made them such — give also to me. [Say] 'Be', so that it may be (Koran 36:81) and also come into being for me. Oh Allah, Thou hast given ardor and sweetness to the prophets, the spheres, and the planets. Give me the repose, sleep, and ease of sweetness."

The sweet things of the outward world take replenishment from the sweet things of the inward world, and the inward takes replenishment from Allah's Attributes. Hence the doors to the everlasting garden known as Paradise are Allah's Attributes, and in each kind of sweet thing in the world, one door — Allah's Attribute — is opened, so that He may breathe into it and increase it. So come, let me throw myself before those doors of Allah's Attributes and enter into that Paradise, so that I may no longer remember the world but remember Allah and belong to Allah.



I was remembering Allah. I said: As long as Allah does not love me, how can I love Allah? Love from one side is impossible. One hand cannot clap. In the same way the inclination of the hours of Paradise toward its inhabitants is Allah's Love. One might say it is Allah who does the embracing, just as when two forms embrace each other, that is the love of two spirits. But at the level of the spirit's reality and meaning, embracing cannot take place.

## NOTES

1. New York: A.S. Barnes, 1964, pp. 227-255.
2. Two volumes, Tehran: Majlis, 133-38/1954-59.
3. On the influence of Bahā' Walad and Shams on Rūmī see Chittick, "Rūmī and the Mawlawyyah," in S.H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality II* (vol. XX of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, New York: Crossroad, forthcoming).
4. For Rūmī's explanations of these points, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, SUNY Press, 1983, pp. 294ff.; on the fact that all beauty belongs to God and all love returns to Him, see pp. 200ff.
5. *Ma'arif I*, p. 104.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20; cf. Arberry, *Aspects*, pp. 247-248.
10. cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, pp. 248ff.
11. *Ma'arif*, pp. 31-32.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

## The Art of the Ginān Narrative

Azim Nanji

*Gināns* are the most significant part of the legacy of Nizārī Ismā'īlism in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent and represent almost the entire indigenous literary heritage that was developed and preserved in the community. The followers attribute the origin of the *gināns* as well as their own conversion to Islam to a continuing line of Ismā'īlī *pīrs* and *dā'īs*, whose work of preaching and conversion in the Sub-Continent can be traced from at least the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. By the early part of this century, the corpus of the *ginān* tradition, having accumulated over several centuries, became stabilized and no new compositions have since been added.<sup>1</sup>

*Gināns* continue to play a vital role in the religious life of Nizārī Ismā'īlis of Indo-Pakistani origin, many among whom migrated in the last two centuries to Africa and more recently to Britain, the Continent and North America. In these widely scattered communities, as among Ismā'īlis in India and Pakistan, they continue to be preserved, learned and recited as part of a living legacy and an uninterrupted expression of religious teaching and devotion.

In addition to their significance for Ismā'īlī studies, the *gināns* constitute an important segment of literary expressions of Muslim