



## Divine Love in Early Persian Prose\*

WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

Readers of this journal are no doubt familiar with Persian poets like ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī, famous for their celebration of love. What is much less well known is that the theological vision shared by these poets was given explicit formulation by a series of prose works written in the century leading up to ʿAṭṭār, who died in 1221. If we try to understand the teachings of the poets without this theological background, it is difficult to grasp what they are saying. To illustrate what I have in mind, I want to look at a few short passages drawn from this early period.

The most famous Persian classic on love appeared during the lifetime of Sanāʿī (d. 1131), the first major poet of love. This was a short book called *Apparitions* (*Sawānīḥ*) by Aḥmad Ghazālī, who died in 1126, fifteen years after his illustrious brother, the theologian, philosopher, and Sufi Muḥammad Ghazālī. Aḥmad's *Apparitions* is relatively well known and has been translated into English,<sup>1</sup> so here I will look at two other scholars whose significance has been underrated or ignored. One is ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī from Herat, who died forty years before Aḥmad, in the year 1088. He is the author of the classic Arabic description of the stages on the path to God, *The Way Stations of the Travelers* (*Manāzil al-sāʾirīn*). He also wrote a great deal in Persian, much of it addressing the role of love in the spiritual life. The second is my favorite Persian author of the twelfth century, Aḥmad Samʿānī, from Merv in today's Turkmenistan, who died at the young age of forty-six in the year 1140. He wrote a six hundred-page Persian commentary on the most beautiful names of God called *Rest of the Spirits: Explaining the Names of the All-Opening King* (*Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmāʾ al-malik al-fattāḥ*). I consider it the most important and detailed prose discussion of love in the Persian language, and also perhaps the most beautiful. If scholars have not noticed that the book is about love, this is perhaps because of the title, which suggests that it is a theological tome. I have little doubt that figures like ʿAṭṭār and

\* This is the text of a lecture presented to the Temenos Academy on 18 March 2013.

1. *Sawānīḥ: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (London: KPI, 1986).





Rūmī knew the book, because their imagery, symbolism, and rhetorical tone resonate with its contents.

#### THE NATURE OF LOVE

Before looking at texts, let me say something about the basic words for love in the literature. Although there are several terms, most discussion revolves around two Arabic words, *ḥubb* and *‘ishq*. *Ḥubb* is used frequently in the Qur’an, but *‘ishq* is not mentioned. In early discussions, *‘ishq* is typically differentiated from *ḥubb* by saying that *‘ishq* designates an intense, excessive, or passionate love. Experts in Kalam—dialectical theology—took the position that it was not legitimate to talk about God’s love for man or man’s love for God using the word *‘ishq*, but for the most part philosophers and Sufis ignored their objections. For example, both Avicenna and the Brethren of Purity used *‘ishq* as the generic term for love in their treatises on the topic, and the subtitle of Aḥmad Ghazālī’s *Apparitions* is ‘On *‘Ishq*’. In any case, philosophers and Sufis generally treated the two words as synonyms. In their view, all love is ultimately God’s love, no matter what word is used. If the divine nature of love is obscure for most people, this is because of their lack of insight into the realities of things. Rūmī epitomizes this position with the verse,

For the elect, *‘ishq* is a tremendous eternal light;  
for the common people, *‘ishq* is form and sensuality.<sup>2</sup>

Practically no one in the literature attempted to define love. They took the position that either you are a lover, in which case you know what it is, or you are not, in which case it cannot be explained to you. Instead of attempting to define the word, they typically described ‘the signs and symptoms of love’. For example, after a page explaining various distinctions that can be drawn between God’s love for man and man’s love for God, Sam‘ānī takes the standard position: ‘All these words are reports and narratives. As for the reality, love is a state that cannot be expressed in words’.<sup>3</sup> In speaking of love’s symptoms, authors

2. Rūmī, *Kullīyyāt-i Shams yā dīwān-i kabīr*, ed. B. Furūzānfar, 10 vols (Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1336–46/1957–67), verse 18197.

3. Sam‘ānī, *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā’ al-malik al-fattāh*, ed. Najīb Māyil Hirawī (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ‘Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1368/1989), p. 465. For the sentence in



resort to many images and symbols, one of the most common of which is fire. As Sam'ānī says, 'Love in its essence is fire, and every fire has a flame. The flame of love's fire is yearning. And what is yearning? The thirst of hearts to encounter their beloved.'<sup>4</sup>

#### THE SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS

I should also point out that discussions of divine love have three basic reference points in scripture, two from the Qur'an and one from the Hadith. Of course there are many other Qur'anic verses and hadiths that mention love, but these three passages are cited more than any others, and with good reason, for they set down three themes that are constantly discussed: first, love as a divine and human reality; second, the path whereby one becomes a true lover; and third, the goal of love.

The first of the two Qur'anic verses is cited more than any other: 'He loves them, and they love Him' (5:54).<sup>5</sup> The second is addressed specifically to the Prophet and clarifies his role in love for God: 'Say: "If you love God, follow me; God will love you"' (3:31). The hadith (drawn from Bukhārī, the most authoritative collection) quotes the words of God concerning those who strive in His path: 'The servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his eyesight with which he sees, his hand with which he holds, and his foot with which he walks.'

In discussions of love, the first of these two Qur'anic verses is typically interpreted to mean that God loves human beings eternally and that, whether people know it or not, they love Him and cannot not love Him. Most people, however, are confused about the object of their love, so they fall in love with beloveds that cannot live up to love's reality. As a result, their love for that beloved turns stale or disappears entirely, and they turn their attention elsewhere. If they are to find their true beloved, they need to follow the divinely established guides, as mentioned in the second Qur'anic verse: 'If you love God, follow me; God will love you'. Only if people engage in the path of

---

context, see Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 295.

4. Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, p. 358; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 301.

5. These two clauses are in fact part of verse 5:54, but most often the verse is cited in this abbreviated form. See Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 9.



following the Prophet will God love them in return and grant them the union that they crave, the point at which He will say, 'I am his hearing with which he hears, his eyesight with which he sees'.<sup>6</sup>

A fragment of text published in Anṣārī's collected Persian works provides a commentary on this hadith of union with God. What he says sums up much of what he writes elsewhere about love and also prefigures many of the themes that come up in the later literature. Notice that in the midst of his explanation he refers to 'the Sufi'. He does not mean Sufi in the modern meaning of the term, where it can designate any member of a Sufi order. Rather, he is referring to the extremely rare individual who has reached union with God in this life. Elsewhere he compares such an individual to the phoenix, the name of which is famous throughout the world, even though no one has ever seen one.

Abū Hurayra, Ibn ʿAbbās, Mālik, and ʿĀ'isha all narrated from the Messenger that he said, 'God says, "So much does My servant seek nearness to Me through supererogatory works that I love him. When I love him, I am his hearing, so he hears through Me; his eyesight, so he sees through Me; his tongue, so he speaks through Me; his feet, so he walks through Me; his hands, so he takes through Me; his heart, so he knows through Me".'

The servant is a pretext in the midst, and the Real is one. The flood of lordhood arrives and the dust of mortal nature disappears. The Reality increases and the pretext decreases. With the first breeze the body burns, with the next the heart. Then the spirit remains limpid, delivered from water and clay.

Light does not mix with dust, nor dust with light. Dust goes back to dust, light to light. The tongue becomes lost in remembrance, remembrance in the Remembered. The heart becomes lost in love, love in Light. The spirit becomes lost in face-to-face vision, and face-to-face vision is far from explication.

6. Notice that the texts are in fact speaking of two sorts of divine love, unconditional and conditional. In terms of the verse of mutual love, divine love is unconditional, for 'God loves them' without specification. In terms of the verse of following, God's love for man depends on the proper human response to God. The same discussion often goes on in terms of the two sorts of divine mercy implied in the formula, 'In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful'. See Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 10–11, 30–31.



The Real's share reached the Real and Adam's share reached Adam: water and dust to annihilation, duality to nonexistence, Adam and Eve gone.

Invisible, the lightning of Oneness took the servant away from water and dust. He looked at himself: 'It is I', but it was the Real. It was He who gave witness with 'Who are you?'

When someone is a mortal man he is not a Sufi, for a Sufi is quit of mortal nature. He is not an Adamite. 'You did not throw when you threw, but God threw' (Qur'an 8:17) makes clear who he is. 'I blew into him of My spirit' (15:29) shows who he is.

The Sufi is the spirit and the spirit is the Sufi. The spirit stands through the Real, and the body through the spirit. When the Uncreated stands in the created, the Reality becomes limp. The created comes to naught in the Uncreated, for water and dust cease to be, and Adam and Eve go.

When the Reality becomes limp, I-ness turns into a loan. What is I-ness? Saying 'You and I, I and you'. If you are with the Reality, who is the Real? If He is the Real, the Real is one, not two. As long as there is duality, that is in relation to Adam and Eve. When duality disappears, the one is God. But not every eye has face-to-face vision.

Listen with reverence, for it is the time of explication: Who was there first? Today it is the same. The rays come from the sun, the sun is in heaven.<sup>7</sup>

#### MUTUAL LOVE

In order not to get too dispersed in the various byways of love, I want to focus on the relationship between God and man set down in the verse, 'He loves them, and they love Him'. This is typically understood in terms of *tawhīd* or divine unity, which is expressed most succinctly in the formula, 'There is no god but God'. The first half of the verse says, 'He loves them', thereby affirming that God is a lover. Since there is no god but God, this means that there is no lover but God, and anything else to which love can be ascribed is not really a lover. Or, it is a lover by way of metaphor, or by divine fiat. It follows that when the second half of the verse says, 'They love Him', we should understand

7. Anṣārī, *Majmū'a-yi rasā'il-i fārsī*, ed. Muḥammad Sarwar Mawlā'ī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1377/1998), pp. 398–9; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 427–8.



that human love must be a derivative of divine love, a point frequently made in the texts. In one passage Sam<sup>ʿ</sup>ānī puts it this way:

God held the beauty of His love before the hearts of the great ones, and the luminous traces of the beauty of unqualified love appeared in the mirror of their hearts. So, our love abides through His love, not His love through our love.

The mirror image subsists through the beauty of the form, not through the subsistence of the mirror. If you take the form away, the image will go. If the sultan of 'He loves them' should put on the shirt of exaltation and unneediness, nothing but wind would remain in the powerless hands of 'they love Him'.<sup>8</sup>

The verse of mutual love says that God loves 'them', a pronoun that is usually taken to mean all human beings. God is eternal and His attributes do not change, so this means that God loves human beings always and forever. Sam<sup>ʿ</sup>ānī draws out the implications of eternal love in many passages of his book. For example:

In terms of sonship our lineage goes back to Adam, but in terms of love it goes back to beginningless gentleness. God cannot have children, but He can have those whom He loves. When this verse came, 'He does not give birth, nor was He given birth to' (112:3), it cut off every sort of child. When this verse came, 'He loves them, and they love Him' (5:54), it established every sort of love.<sup>9</sup>

In another typical passage, Sam<sup>ʿ</sup>ānī stresses that God loved human beings before they came into existence. This is found at the beginning of his commentary on the divine name *al-laṭīf*, 'the Gentle':

*Laṭīf* means knowing and it also means beautiful-doer. God says, 'God is gentle to His servants' (42:19). Which beautiful-doing is beyond the fact that you were in the concealment of nonexistence, and He was taking care of your work with bounty and generosity? You were in the concealment of nonexistence, and He chose you out from the whole world. You were in the concealment of non-

8. Sam<sup>ʿ</sup>ānī, *Rawḥ*, p. 520; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 306–7.

9. Sam<sup>ʿ</sup>ānī, *Rawḥ*, p. 204; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 34.



existence, and He was taking care of your work without any precedent intercession, without any subsequent benefit, without taking any trouble in the present state, and without making anything incumbent in the future. He was tossing the secret hook of 'He loves them' into the ocean of 'they love Him' [5:54].<sup>10</sup>

In still another discussion of mutual love, Sam'ānī points out that people take themselves much too seriously. They forget that they have been put where they are by God's love and that He wants nothing but good for them. No matter what happens, His love will stay in charge. Notice the way in which Sam'ānī talks of love as a derivative of ontology. He is one of many authors, like his contemporaries the Ghazālī brothers, who are bringing the notion of Being into the center of Islamic theology. And by theology I do not mean simply Kalam, which remained relatively marginal in Islamic society, but Sufism and philosophy as well.

In the Beginningless the approval of 'He loves them' was busy with 'they love Him' without your intervention. Today you have being, but you are far from the midst.

By the right of the Real! The food of hearts and souls is His Being. Otherwise, no one would ever find subsistence. Tomorrow, when all find subsistence in that abode, they will not find it through their own being. They will find it through the food of His Being. If someone in this abode were to reach the stage where his food is the contemplation of His Being, death would be forbidden to him . . .

Let us come back to the talk of the work that 'He loves them' had with 'they love Him' in the Beginningless, without you. Which day was that? There was still no garment of existence, no dust or clay, no universe or Adam. Was that proclamation made by your bounteousness and answered by your gentleness? . . .

It is the custom of those who practice archery to set up a field. On one end is a target, and on the other end another target. There are two targets, and one archer. Where does God give a mark of the words I just said to you? 'He is the First and the Last' [57:3]. Even more explicit is what He said to Muhammad: 'You did not throw when you threw, but God threw' [8:17].

10. Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, p. 241; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 13–14.



O chevalier! When the scales of the Majestic Unity and the Perfect Divinity are brought forth, created nature does not weigh an iota, nor half an iota. Know that in reality, 'None carries the Real but the Real'. You were wanted so that you could be a spectator.<sup>11</sup>

In Persian-speaking lands over the centuries, Anṣārī has been most famous for his *munājāt* or whispered prayers. These are exquisite supplications in which he addresses God in simple, poetical prose. One collection of these has been translated into English,<sup>12</sup> but in fact many more examples are found in the literature. One of the richest sources of these prayers is the ten-volume Qur'an commentary written by Sam'ānī's contemporary, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, one of Anṣārī's followers. The book, called *Unveiling of the Secrets (Kashf al-asrār)*, is a great repository of spiritual teachings but has only recently begun to attract the attention of Western scholars.<sup>13</sup> In these prayers, Anṣārī often calls on God to place him once again in the situation that he had in the realm of the beginningless, when he did not yet exist. Here is an example:

O God, where will I find again the day when You belonged to me, and I was not? Until I reach that day, I will be in the midst of fire and smoke. If I find that day again in the two worlds, I will profit. If I find Your Being for myself, I will be pleased with my own nonbeing.

O God, where was I when You called me? I am not I when You remain for me.

O God, when You call someone, do not make manifest the offenses that You have concealed!

O God, You lifted us up and no one said, 'Lift up!' Now that You have lifted up, don't put down! Keep us in the shadow of Your gentleness! Entrust us to none but Your bounty and mercy!<sup>14</sup>

11. Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, pp. 534–5; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 424–5.

12. Anṣārī, *Intimate Conversations*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

13. See Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

14. Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa 'uddat al-abrār*, ed. 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, 10 vols (Tehran: Dānīshgāh, 1331–39/1952–60), v.232; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 33.





## CREATIVE LOVE

One of the many questions that are commonly answered by referring to God's love is the reason for creation. Given that God possesses all reality for all eternity, why would He bother to create a universe that is of no use to Him, one that contains human beings who are generally misfits? Well, the typical answer runs, He is motivated by His eternal love, which gives of itself by its very nature. In later Sufi literature—I mean from the thirteenth century onward—this discussion typically cites a saying in which God says, 'I was hidden treasure and I loved to be recognized. Hence I created the creatures so that I might be recognized'.

This saying is usually called a *ḥadīth qudsī*, that is, words of God quoted by the Prophet Muhammad. In fact it is not found in the early books. Ibn ʿArabī, who was a master of the science of Hadith, neatly solves this problem by acknowledging that even though it has not reached us by transmission from the Prophet, divine unveiling has shown him that the Prophet did in fact say it.<sup>15</sup> In any case, references to the saying before Ibn ʿArabī generally make it a conversation between David and God. Many such conversations were cited in books on worship and prayer, as for example in al-Ghazālī's *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*.<sup>16</sup>

Anṣārī mentions the saying about the Hidden Treasure twice in his book on the lives of the Sufis, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, but he says nothing about its source and does not elaborate on its meaning. In another Persian work, however, he seems to have it in mind at the very beginning, even if he does not refer to it. This is a thirty-page treatise called *The Book of Love (Maḥabbat-nāma)*. It may be the earliest independent Persian work on love, preceding that of Aḥmad Ghazālī by a generation. It is composed of twenty-eight short chapters describing stages

15. *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyya*, 4 vols (Cairo: n.p., 1911), ii.399, line 28; see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), p. 391 n. 14.

16. For a few examples, see al-Ghazālī, *Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment: Kitāb al-maḥabba waʾl-shawq waʾl-uns waʾl-riḍā; Book 36 of The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. Eric Ormsby (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), pp. 91–8, 114–16, 134, 149, 151, 191–2. It is worth noting that Samʿānī never mentions the saying about the Hidden Treasure in his long book on love. Maybudī cites it twice in his commentary on the Qurʾan, but without suggesting that it is hadith. In the first instance he puts it in the context of the David literature, and in the second he cites it without source. See Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 18–19.



## 138 WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

attained by the lovers in their quest to achieve union with God. The introduction consists of a mythic account of the origin of the universe. We can take it as a commentary on the Hidden Treasure:

Know that every expression and allusion is a dispersion and a tale, but all togetherness is beyond speech and hearing. Love is the share of unification, and dispersion the share of bodies.

In those days, there was neither father nor mother, in those times the children were missing. In what preceded all precedents, before the togetherness and difference that were hidden and not yet apparent, there was neither before nor after, neither wretchedness nor felicity.

There were no way stations or stations in love, no travelers on the road, no disparity in footsteps, none of the darkness of blight and distance, none of the clouds of presence and absence, no ascending traces or descending imagination. The bazaar of union was stagnant and the edict of separation void, for there was no trace of the images of creation. The beauty of 'He loves them' had no use for the mole of 'they love Him'.

Her own face had itself as a moon,  
her own eye had itself as collyrium.

\*

If I don't apply My light's collyrium to your eyes,  
how will you perceive My magnificent Presence?

He wanted to make apparent the hidden pearls of love's oyster and to pick out some of the gems. Thus it was that He made everyone's hard cash apparent and separated the elect from the commoners. The divine desire and glorious solicitude decreed that the sun of 'He loves them' would shine and the rose of 'they love Him' would bloom. All beings would then seek refuge in the sun's brightness and each would find the road to its own destination.

From the sphere of love the sun of unification shone on the world of the realities and meanings. In conjunction with the sun, they saw the seeable. The folk of the attributes gazed at the sun with the eye of imagination. The sun's felicity had raised the banner of brightness and left nothing concealed. This was at the time when He said, 'And We made covenant with Adam before' (20:115). It was not yet



the moment for the masters of allusion, nor yet the days for the lords of expression.

When the spirit became spirits and the individual individuals, some were commoners and some elect. The folk of the realities and meanings, who had the edict of love from that sun's effusion, were placed under the sun's guardianship. They took up residence in the field of face-to-face vision, far from union and separation.

The folk of attributes and forms, who saw that their eyes had insight because of that Presence, cut themselves off from seeing because of defective eyes. In the measure of their own eyesight, they cut away what surrounded them. Some drowned in the ocean, some burned in the fire, some yearned for the cup, some leaned on pleasure. So it is that everyone tells tales and narrates traditions.<sup>17</sup>

#### SEPARATION AND UNION

The first half of the verse of mutual love, 'He loves them', is typically understood to mean that God loves human beings specifically. Hence it is not surprising that the Qur'anic story of Adam, the primordial human being, plays a major role in the literature. Sam'ānī constantly explains the events surrounding Adam's creation as references to God's love for human beings and to the unique human ability to love God in return. Thus, for example, Adam fell from paradise not because he was a sinner but because he knew it was no place for lovers.<sup>18</sup> After all, every lover knows that love brings pain and suffering. The bounties, blessings, and bliss of paradise were distracting Adam from yearning for his Beloved, so he went down to the house of tribulation, where he could focus on the pain of separation that lies at the heart of love's drama. Sam'ānī writes,

17. *Maḥabbat-nāma*, in Anṣārī, *Majmū'a-yi rasā'il-i fārsī*, ed. Muḥammad Sarwar Mawlā'ī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1377/1998), pp. 337–9; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 310–11.

18. Anṣārī had already made this point, as in this passage: 'Be careful not to think that Adam was taken out of paradise because of his lowliness. It was not that. Rather, it was because of the grandeur of his aspiration. The petitioner of passionate love came to the door of Adam's breast and said, "O Adam, the beauty of meaning has been unveiled, but you have stayed in the abode of peace". Adam saw an infinite beauty, next to which the beauty of the eight paradises was nothing. His great aspiration tightened its belt and said, "If you ever want to fall in love, you must fall in love with that".' Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, i.162; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 86.



Adam's makeup was adorned with a hundred thousand ornaments and the garden of his loveliness and beauty was pruned. Love, which was the original bosom friend, drinking from the same cup and goblet, looked on from afar. The tree to which Adam stretched out his hand was named the tree of love. The love kneaded into Adam took his reins and pulled him straight to the tree. . . .

The tree of love was a stranger in paradise, and, at the beginning of the era, Adam was also a stranger in paradise. 'And every stranger is a kinsman to the stranger.' The stranger fell back on the stranger. They took one hot breath. The heat of their love's fire burned the eight paradises. Now what could be done? They had to wrap their arms around each other's necks and turn their faces to the abode of the tested.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most common themes of Sufi literature is that the seeker needs to overcome the ignorance and willfulness of the individual soul, the *nafs*, before he or she can be fully open to God's love. As the texts repeat constantly, no one will achieve union with God so long as he is stuck in the duality of 'you and me'. Anṣārī puts it nicely in one of his prayers:

O God, all love is between two, with no room for a third. In this love, all is You, with no room for me. If this work is from my side, I have nothing to do with it. If it is from Your side, all is You. What business have I to meddle and make claims?<sup>20</sup>

The literature on love sometimes quotes a purported hadith, 'The soul is the greatest idol'. Rūmī points out that love burns away idols and, when it finishes its work, only the Beloved remains. The closest thing to a definition of love in Rūmī's *Mathnawī* is found in the following three lines, in which he is referring to the sword of *tawhīd*, 'No god but God', which slices away all otherness and leaves God in His oneness:

Love is that flame which, when it flares up,  
burns away everything except the Everlasting Beloved.  
It drives home the sword of 'No god' in order to slay other than God.

19. Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, pp. 600–1; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 352.

20. Maybudī, *Kashf*, vii.309–10; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 270.



Look closely—after ‘No god’ what remains?  
 There remains ‘but God’, the rest has gone.  
 Bravo to you, O great, idol-burning Love!<sup>21</sup>

Sam‘ānī frequently explains the manner in which love incinerates illusion and otherness. The following is typical:

Know that in reality no fragrant herb subtler than the herb of love grew in the meadow of lordhood and servanthood. It is love that conveys a man to the Beloved—everything else is a highway robber on the Path. All the attributes of the *tawhīd*-voicers fall apart in *tawhīd*, and all the attributes of the lovers come to naught in love. *Tawhīd* remains without description, and love remains without attribute.

All the lovers stood up and stepped forth in love, . . . but no one dared to take a breath. They knew that even if the seven heavens and the seven earths were to become their instructors, they would not be able to ask for the subtle gifts that He gave them without their asking.

When the lovers gazed on their own incapacity and His exaltedness, He, in His gentleness, placed the gift of vision on top of that. If love’s final end is not vision of the Beloved, then to speak of love is a metaphor.

Here, however, there is a rule: Love for Him does not come together with scattered desires in the same heart. The obligation of the body is prayer and fasting, and that of the heart is love. . . .

Love comes from gazing at the divinity. Whoever finds purity finds it through His glorifiedness, and whoever finds love finds it from His divinity. Whoever sees recognizes, whoever recognizes clings, and whoever clings burns. Those who are burnt can no longer burn. Those who recognize Him recognize Him through Him, and those who love Him love Him through Him.<sup>22</sup>

Let me conclude by citing one more passage from Sam‘ānī. He is explaining why lovers will reach their goal only after love’s fire has

21. Rūmī, *The Mathnawī*, edited by R. A. Nicholson, 8 vols (London: Luzac, 1925–40), Book 5, verses 588–90.

22. Sam‘ānī, *Rawḥ*, pp. 461–2; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 300–1.



burnt away their selfhoods. In the last paragraph, he refers to the ultimate fruit of love, which will never be tasted before the resurrection.

Love is the talk of the burnt, not that of the self-made. Fire wants something already burnt in order to catch. That orb of light, that illuminator of the dark night, that master of hospitality toward His speaking companion Moses, that narcissus of the bosom friend Abraham—He wants the burnt!

If you put a thousand precious silks before stone and iron, the fire will not catch, for they have the frivolity of color. If you bring new cloth, that will be of no use, for it has the smell of existence.

Fire comes out from the curtain of concealment into the open and throws out sparks. When it does not see any confidant, it pulls back its head until it finds something already burnt. Then it catches and brightens the world.

In the same way, the fire of love will never catch in any self-seeing man of wealth or any refractory sultan. Rather, it will catch in a person so burnt that, if you test him by poking your finger on a spot of his heart, it will fall to pieces.

So, for the fire to get going you need the burnt. If you try with Byzantine or Baghdadi silk, that won't do. If you use new cloth, the fire will hardly catch. You need a worn-out patch, halfway between existence and nonexistence—distracted and bewildered between effacement and affirmation.

First the patch is thrown to the edge of nonexistence, but the structure of its parts is kept together. Once it has been chastised by the passing of time and trampled underfoot by the days, you bring it and wash it clean. Then you strike fire in it so that its parts may be put to work and burn. Then you place a heavy burden on it and keep it in a solid cupboard. With the tongue of its state the fire will say, 'I have burned it, and a day will come when I will brighten it'.

'O luminous fire, this burnt cloth is black and dark. What do you want with it?'

It said, 'Yes, so it is, but it has my brand.'

Today, the fire of 'He loves them, and they love Him' has been struck in your heart and you have been burned by love. Just as they put a heavy burden on that burnt cloth, so also they will put the heavy burden of death on your parts and members. Then they will keep you in the cupboard of the grave, contemplating the gentle-



ness of the One. After that, tomorrow, when the light of the King's gaze appears in the world, it will catch in you and give you a beauty such that next to you the full moon will be worthless. No longer will the moon have any standing, nor will the sun have any light. Where is this expressed? 'Faces on that day radiant, gazing on their Lord' (Qur'an 75:22-23). 'And when you see, you will see bliss and a great kingdom' (76:20).<sup>23</sup>

23. Sam'ānī, *Rawḥ*, pp. 301-2; Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 302-3.

