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## 6 Divine and Human Love in Islam

WILLIAM C. CHITTICK

ISLAM BEGINS with the two-part Shahadah, the “bearing witness” that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God’s messenger. The second part acknowledges the historical reality of the religion established by the message known as the Qur’an. The first part, called the sentence that “asserts unity”—*tawhīd*—declares the unique, ahistorical reality of the divine Being. In the Islamic perspective, this twin truth—the unity of God, and the specific, historical consequences that follow upon this unity—was taught by all prophets, traditionally said to number 124,000. To each of them God revealed the message, “There is no god but I, so worship Me.”<sup>1</sup> God’s unitary reality is everywhere and always the same, but “worship” or “service” (*ibāda*) varies according to circumstances, for “God never sent a messenger save in the tongue of his people.”<sup>2</sup>

Nowadays, discussions of Islamic teachings typically gloss over the ahistorical foundation of the message and focus instead on sorting out the social and political implications of the second part of the Shahadah. This is to say that both Muslims and outside observers stress the Shariah, the law that came to be established on the basis of the Qur’anic message, and neglect the Haqiqah, the Reality that gave rise to both the universe and prophetic guidance. Law, however, deals with activity and society; it has nothing to say about God Himself or His love for creation.<sup>3</sup> The jurists (*fuqahā’*)—the specialists in the Shariah—have never discussed love in their capacity as jurists; to speak of legislating or adjudicating love is ludicrous. Thus, in order to investigate the role of love in the tradition, we need to look at the writings of theologians, philosophers, Sufis, and poets.<sup>4</sup> It is they who look

at the Haqiqah beyond the Shariah, the Reality that gave rise to the Law. It is they who explain that God's love for human beings animates the universe and guides people to live their lives in conformity with that love.<sup>5</sup>

When we look closely at the universal message of the prophets—"There is no god but I, so worship Me"—we can see that its two clauses correspond to the two parts of the Shahadah. The meaning is simply that all reality derives from the Real; human beings must therefore strive to accord with the Real. Muslim theologians sometimes unpack the implications of this message in terms of God's two "commands" (*amr*), one of which gave rise to the universe and the other to the moral realm. The first is commonly called "the engendering command" (*al-amr al-takwīnī*) and the second "the prescriptive command" (*al-amr al-taklīfī*). The first is addressed to all things and is mentioned in Qur'anic verses like, "His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be!,' and it comes to be."<sup>6</sup> Notice here that God is motivated to issue this command by "desire" (*irāda*),<sup>7</sup> which the tradition takes as a synonym for creative love. The engendering command is rooted in *tawhīd*, the basic sense of which can be understood in terms of the divine attributes: "There is no god but God" means that there is no life but God's life, no knowledge but God's knowledge, no truth but God's truth, no reality but God's reality, no love but God's love. All contingent reality—"everything other than God" (a common definition of the universe)—derives from God, who is the source of all, the sustainer of all, and the ultimate goal of all.

As for the prescriptive command, it follows on the authority established by the second part of the Shahadah, "Muhammad is God's messenger." The Qur'an presents this command as various dos and don'ts that provide the basis for worship, law, morality, and spiritual transformation.<sup>8</sup>

The engendering command brings the universe into existence, and it takes everything back to God. This dual movement is commonly called "the Origin and the Return" (*al-mabda' wa'l-ma'ād*), or the descending and ascending "arcs" (*qaws*) of the circle of existence. Likewise the prescriptive command implies two movements: the descent of guidance (*hudā*) from God, and the ascent of souls to God. These movements are expressed mythically in the defining "nights" of Islam's infancy, both of which received the shining of the divine light. During "the Night of Power" (*laylat al-qadr*),<sup>9</sup> God sent Gabriel, the angel of revelation, to deliver the message: "a Book We have sent down to you, so that you may bring forth the people from the darknesses into the light."<sup>10</sup> During "the Night of the Ladder" (*laylat*

*al-mi'rāj*), Gabriel carried the Prophet made His servant journey by night to the Furthest Mosque [in Jerusalem] through the heavenly spheres to the outermost edge of paradise. There he left the created realm, and entered the realm of the Real. He then instituted the basic Islamic ritual, so that others could also climb the ladder to the Real. This ladder is the believer's ladder."

Both Sufis and philosophers have used this type for the spiritual transformation. It produced a vast literature on the subject, including personal accounts by seekers who climbed the steps (accounts that may well have inspired Dante's *Divine Comedy*). The ascending steps are the virtues and character traits that need to be traversed without God's help. The descending steps and the prescriptive command have been the only means to reach the goal.

In short, there are two basic ways to reach the goal. The engendering command, it is the way of the Return. In terms of the prescriptive command, it is to love God as he loves them.

## THE DIVINE FORM

Muslim theologians speak of God in terms of His names, from Qur'anic verses or hadiths. There are 99 names said to number ninety-nine in the texts. Numerous commentators have highlighted the fundamental reality of everything else. The names and attributes are anthropomorphic, for human beings can think of God in terms of the principle of *tawhīd*, however, reminding us of the Being and its concomitant attributes. The names are anthropomorphic because they are

the Reality that gave rise to the Law. It is human beings who animate the universe in conformity with that love.<sup>5</sup> The central message of the prophets—“There can be seen that its two clauses correspond in meaning is simply that all reality must therefore strive to accord with the commandment. Let us unpack the implications of this commandment” (*amr*), one of which gave rise to the moral realm. The first is commonly known as *al-amr al-takwīnī* ) and the second as *al-taklīfī* ). The first is addressed to the Prophet in verses like, “His command, when He says, ‘Be,’ and it comes to be.”<sup>6</sup> Notice here the commandment by “desire” (*irāda*),<sup>7</sup> which is creative love. The engendering commandment of which can be understood in the sense of “There is no god but God” means that there is no truth but God’s knowledge, no love but God’s love. All creation is in God” (a common definition of the Origin, the source of all, the sustainer of all,

which follows on the authority established by the Prophet Muhammad is God’s messenger.” The commandments and don’ts that provide the structure for spiritual transformation.<sup>8</sup>

The movement of the universe into existence, and its return to the Origin, is commonly called *al-ʿawd al-ʿalī* (*al-ʿawd al-ʿalī*), or the ascending and the descending. Likewise the prescriptive commandment of the descent of guidance (*hudā*) from the Origin. These movements are expressed mythologically in the infancy, both of which received the message of the Night of Power” (*laylat al-qadr*),<sup>9</sup> the Prophet’s mission, to deliver the message: “a Book which you may bring forth the people from the darkness into the light” (“the Night of the Ladder” (*laylat*

*al-miʿrāj*), Gabriel carried the Prophet to Jerusalem: “Glory be to Him who made His servant journey by night from the Holy Mosque [in Mecca] to the Furthest Mosque [in Jerusalem]!”<sup>11</sup> From there Gabriel took him up through the heavenly spheres to “the lote tree of the far boundary,”<sup>12</sup> on the outermost edge of paradise. Then Muhammad parted from the angel, left the created realm, and entered the Eternal Light.<sup>13</sup> On his return, he instituted the basic Islamic ritual, the daily prayers (*ṣalāt*). When asked if others could also climb the ladder to God, he responded, “The daily prayer is the believer’s ladder.”

Both Sufis and philosophers have taken the night journey as the archetype for the spiritual transformation that is the goal of praxis.<sup>14</sup> Sufism has produced a vast literature on the stages of the journey to God, as well as personal accounts by seekers who climbed the ladder in the Prophet’s footsteps (accounts that may well have provided the literary models for Dante’s *Divine Comedy*). The ascending steps were invariably explained as human virtues and character traits that need to be actualized if people are to escape from their own shortcomings. This is not to say, however, that the path can be traversed without God’s help. The whole point of focusing on prophecy and the prescriptive commandment has been to show that divine grace provides the only means to reach the goal.

In short, there are two basic ways of looking at God’s love. In terms of the engendering commandment, it is the motive force of both the Origin and the Return. In terms of the prescriptive commandment, it invites human beings to love God as he loves them.

## THE DIVINE FORM

Muslim theologians speak of God in terms of names and attributes derived from Qur’anic verses or hadiths (sayings of the Prophet). The divine names are said to number ninety-nine, though many more are mentioned in the texts. Numerous commentaries were written on the names, always highlighting the fundamental reality of God and the derivative reality of everything else. The names and attributes are of course anthropomorphic, for human beings can think of God only in terms of themselves. The principle of *tawhīd*, however, reminds us that God alone possesses true Being and its concomitant attributes. People conceive of God in terms of themselves because He conceives of them in terms of Himself. He is anthropomorphic because they are theomorphic. When the Prophet said,

“God created Adam in His form (*ṣūra*),” he was not simply reiterating the biblical statement, but also clarifying the Qur’anic designation of God as the Form-giver (*al-muṣawwir*),<sup>15</sup> who “formed you, and made your forms beautiful.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Arab logicians employed the word *taṣawwur* (derived from the same root) to render the notion of “concept”; its literal meaning is “to give form to something within oneself.” It is God who “conceives of” all things—who “gives form to them in Himself”—before saying “Be!” to them.

The Qur’an describes God as possessing “the Most Beautiful Names” (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*) and it calls Him “the Beautiful-doer” (*muḥsin*). It says, “He made beautiful everything that He created.”<sup>17</sup> The Prophet said, “God is beautiful (*jamīl*), and He loves beauty.” The notion that all love is directed at beauty (*jamāl, ḥusn*) permeates the tradition. As for man, God “taught him all the names” (Qur’an 2:31) and created him “in the most beautiful stature.”<sup>18</sup> Among all existent things, man alone was created in the form of Him who is named by the Most Beautiful Names. Other creatures were created by the activities of specific names, so they can be “signs” (*āyāt*) of God’s life-giving, His gentleness, His might, His beneficence; only human beings can be signs of the Beautiful per se, embracing all of the Most Beautiful Names without exception. This is why Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209)—a prolific author of Arabic and Persian books that gave love a high profile—tells us that human beauty is differentiated from every other sort of created beauty because it displays the radiance of the divine Essence, whereas other creatures manifest only the activities of God’s attributes.<sup>19</sup>

When the Qur’an says that God created man in the most beautiful stature, it goes on to say that God “sent him down to the lowest of the low.”<sup>20</sup> This can be read as a reference to Adam’s fall, though Muslim scholars have rarely understood the fall as pointing to moral corruption. Rather, it demonstrates both human election and human need. After all, at the very beginning of the Qur’an’s retelling of the myth, God announced to the angels that He would be appointing a vicegerent in the earth.<sup>21</sup> Having created Adam, He placed Adam in paradise. Then, by issuing the command, “Fall down!”<sup>22</sup> He sent His newly appointed vicegerent to the realm for which he was created. Adam’s “sin” was a onetime act of disobedience,<sup>23</sup> quickly forgiven by God, who then made him a prophet to guide his children. Moreover, the Qur’an provides Adam with an excuse for disobeying the divine command not to approach the tree: “He forgot,”<sup>24</sup> which is hardly surprising, for “Man was created weak,”<sup>25</sup> and “There is none strong

but God.” Despite the divine form on the Form-giver, so they are forged needy toward the two commands, bestowal of guidance.

The secret of climbing the ladder of ascent and to open oneself up to the most clearly in prophetic guidance is light is infinite and the human form steps on the ladder in many ways, numbers—7, 40, 100, 1001. They are the prelude to the journey “in God” back to the world, and a foundation in the posthumous realms as well, just endless.

The more theoretical analyses of the act” (*khuluq*), not least because the “Surely you have a tremendous character” was used by philosophers to translate “morals.” Using either of these terms in English, however, obscures *khuluq*’s meaning. In the normal, unvoiced sense, the same way. Their common source is intimately tied to God’s creative act, not so much moral qualities or ethics of a person’s being. Morals and ethics pertain to subjectivity. This does not imply, however, far from it. In Islamic theology, calling God saying that He is creating the universe undergoes constant change and transformation. God is to harness the ongoing flow of character traits” (*safsāf al-akhlāq*) in the *al-akhlāq*). Hence Muhammad used creation beautiful, so make my character the most beloved of you to God is the most

Theologians often speak of the character of His ethics, but His names and attributes. Adam when He created Adam in His form. The Prophet is quoted as having said

but God.” Despite the divine form of human beings, they are contingent on the Form-giver, so they are forgetful and heedless. They remain forever needy toward the two commands, that is, the bestowal of being and the bestowal of guidance.

The secret of climbing the ladder to God is to empty oneself of self-centeredness and to open oneself up to the divine light, which has appeared most clearly in prophetic guidance. The process is never-ending, for the light is infinite and the human form finite. Teachers have described the steps on the ladder in many ways, often enumerating them in archetypal numbers—7, 40, 100, 1001. They also say that the journey “to God” is only the prelude to the journey “in God.” Many discuss a third journey “from God” back to the world, and a fourth journey “with God” in the world. In the posthumous realms as well, journeying can have no end, for God is endless.

The more theoretical analyses of human transformation focus on “character” (*khuluq*), not least because the Qur’an says, addressing Muhammad, “Surely you have a tremendous character.”<sup>26</sup> The plural of this word, *akhlāq*, was used by philosophers to translate the Greek notion of “ethics” and “morals.” Using either of these terms to translate the Arabic word back into English, however, obscures *khuluq*’s shared etymology with *khalq*, “creation.” In the normal, unvoiced script, the two words are written exactly the same way. Their common source indicates that a person’s character is intimately tied to God’s creative act and that character traits (*akhlāq*) are not so much moral qualities or ethical principles as the modalities of a person’s being. Morals and ethics pertain primarily to objective reality, not to subjectivity. This does not imply, however, that character traits are fixed—far from it. In Islamic theology, calling God “Creator” is tantamount to saying that He is creating the universe always and forever, so everything undergoes constant change and transformation. To climb the ladder to God is to harness the ongoing flow of creation in order to transform “base character traits” (*safsāf al-akhlāq*) into “noble character traits” (*makārim al-akhlāq*). Hence Muhammad used to pray, “O God, Thou hast made my creation beautiful, so make my character beautiful too!” He also said, “The most beloved of you to God is the most beautiful of you in character.”

Theologians often speak of the character traits of God, meaning not His ethics, but His names and attributes. It is these that God instilled into Adam when He created Adam in His form and taught Adam the names. The Prophet is quoted as having said, “Become characterized by God’s

was not simply reiterating the Qur’anic designation of God as named you, and made your forms the word *taṣawwur* (derived of “concept”; its literal meaning “to conceive of”). It is God who “conceives of” himself—before saying “Be!” to

ing “the Most Beautiful Names” beautiful-doer” (*muḥsin*). It says, “The Prophet said, ‘God is the notion that all love is directed toward Him.’” As for man, God “taught him” “in the most beautiful form” alone was created in the form of the Most Beautiful Names. Other creatures were created, so they can be “signs” (*āyāt*) of His beneficence; only human beings embrace all of the Most Beautiful Names. Rūzbiḥān Baqlī (d. 1209)—a scholar who gave love a high profile—distinguished between every other sort of created being and the divine Essence, whereas other creatures are God’s attributes.<sup>19</sup>

and man in the most beautiful state, down to the lowest of the low.”<sup>20</sup> Adam’s fall, though Muslim scholars often attribute to moral corruption. Rather, it was a human need. After all, at the very beginning of the myth, God announced to the angels that He would appoint a vicegerent in the earth.<sup>21</sup> Having created the world, He then, by issuing the command, appointed vicegerent to the realm for Adam as a onetime act of disobedience,<sup>23</sup> and made him a prophet to guide his children. Adam’s fall was with an excuse for disobedience: “He forgot,”<sup>24</sup> which is a weakness,<sup>25</sup> and “There is none strong

character traits!" (*takhallaqū bi-akblāq Allāh*). The famous theologian Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) dedicates the last section of the introduction to his book on the divine names to "clarifying that the servant's perfection and salvation lie in becoming characterized by God's character traits and adorned by His attributes and names to the extent conceivable."<sup>27</sup> Al-Ghazālī and many others insist that people must strive to be God-like. Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (d. ca. 1000), author of the first Arabic treatise on love from a largely Sufi perspective, says that when someone loves God,

God beautifies his character traits, for He bestows upon him a robe of honor from His love and character traits from His character traits. He dresses him in a light from His light, a beauty from His beauty, a splendor from His splendor, a generosity from His generosity, a forbearance from His forbearance, a kindness from His kindness, a munificence from His munificence, and so on with the other attributes. Thus he becomes characterized by God's character traits.<sup>28</sup>

For their part, the philosophers speak of "becoming similar to God" (*al-tashabbuh bi'l-iāh*) or even "deiformity" (*ta'allub*, from the same root as the word *Allāh*). The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' ("Brethren of Purity"), a group of highly influential tenth-century sages, explain in these terms why people should search for wisdom:

The furthest goal of philosophy . . . is becoming similar to God in keeping with the capacity of mortal man. . . . It consists of four qualities: First, knowledge of the realities of the existent things; second, firmly knotted belief in sound views; third, becoming characterized by the beautiful character traits and praiseworthy tempers; and fourth, pure practices and beautiful acts.<sup>29</sup>

Avicenna (d. 1037), the greatest of the Muslim Peripatetics, agrees. In his "Book of Salvation" (*Kitāb al-najāt*), for example, he employs the term "deiformity" only once, but as the last word of the text.<sup>30</sup> He is referring to the station of Muhammad, but the implication is clear: Lovers of wisdom will never achieve ethical and moral perfection until they become God-like. Deiformity remained the underlying goal of the search for wisdom, which helps explain the title "Foremost of the Deiform" given to Mullā

Ṣadrā (d. 1640), whom many consider the "greatest teacher of the Arabī (d. 1240), the "greatest teacher of the Arabī, the most influential theologian and philosopher of the Islamic Golden Age. His philosophy, which sums up the issue as follows: "The goal sought by the servant is 'becoming characterized by the divine attributes, which is different, but the meaning is the same."

## MERCY

To speak of God's love for creation is to speak of His mercy. In Qur'anic terminology. Several divine attributes overlap with that of English "love": generosity (*jūd*), gentleness (*lutf*), and compassion. The word for God's loving care for His creation is *rahma*, typically translated as "mercy." The word derives from the same root as the characteristics of a caring and loving parent. In this sense the word was lost on no one, even the philosophers, at least because of their antipathy to the word "father." The Prophet, however, has said: "God created this hadith:

God created a hundred mercies for the heavens and the earth, each one better than the other. It is between the heaven and the earth that there is mercy in the earth. Through the mercy of God, the children, and birds and beasts will be resurrected on the day of resurrection come. Those who are given those mercies.<sup>32</sup>

Among all divine attributes, mercy is the most important notion of "God" (*Allāh*). One of the most famous verses of the Qur'an, the verse, "Call upon God, or call upon the angels, or call upon the messengers, or call upon, to Him belong the Most Gracious Names." The formula of consecration, which begins with the word "Bismillah," should initiate a Muslim's every act. The word "Bismillah" is a divine name derived from the word



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Ṣadrā (d. 1640), whom many consider the greatest of all philosophers. Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240), the “greatest teacher” of the Sufis and arguably the most influential theologian and philosopher of the second half of Islamic history, sums up the issue as follows: “The philosophers allude to the fact that the goal sought by the servant is becoming similar to God. The Sufis say ‘becoming characterized by the traits of the names.’ The expressions are different, but the meaning is the same.”<sup>31</sup>

## MERCY

To speak of God’s love for creation, we need to say something about Qur’anic terminology. Several divine attributes have semantic fields that overlap with that of English “love,” including friendship (*walāya*), munificence (*jūd*), gentleness (*lutf*), and forgiveness (*maghfira*). In discussions of God’s loving care for His creatures, however, the most prominent attribute is *rahma*, typically translated as mercy, compassion, or benevolence. The word derives from the same root as *rahim*, “womb,” and designates the characteristics of a caring and compassionate mother. The etymological sense was lost on no one, even if theologians avoided stressing it, not least because of their antipathy toward the Christian notion of God as “father.” The Prophet, however, had no such inhibitions, as illustrated by this hadith:

God created a hundred mercies on the day He created the heavens and the earth, each mercy of which would fill what is between the heaven and the earth. Of these He placed one mercy in the earth. Through it mothers incline toward their children, and birds and beasts incline toward each other. When the day of resurrection comes, He will complete this mercy with those mercies.<sup>32</sup>

Among all divine attributes, mercy is most closely associated with the notion of “God” (*Allāh*). One of the most often cited proof-texts for this is the verse, “Call upon God, or call upon the All-Merciful—whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.”<sup>33</sup> Notice that the formula of consecration, which begins almost every chapter of the Qur’an and should initiate a Muslim’s every action, contains two of the four Qur’anic divine names derived from the word *rahma*: “In the name of God, the All-

Merciful (*al-rahmān*), the Ever-Merciful (*al-rahīm*).<sup>34</sup> Ibn 'Arabī points out that this formula expresses God's nature. All divine names refer back to "God" and can be divided into two basic categories: the gentle and the severe (or the beautiful and the majestic, or those that stress immanence and those that stress transcendence). Thus, the word "God" designates the divine Reality not only as merciful but also as wrathful. Nonetheless, as the Prophet insisted (and various Qur'anic verses imply), "God's mercy takes precedence over His wrath." The formula's two names of mercy emphasize that every quality of existence, even wrath, serves the benevolent purposes of a wise and loving Creator.<sup>35</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī also explains that mercy is the Qur'anic equivalent of *wujūd*, "existence" or "being," the typical philosophical and theological designation for the absolute reality of the Real. He uses the term "Breath of the All-Merciful" (*nafas al-rahmān*), taken from a prophetic saying, to designate the luminous divine Spirit, the effusion of Real Being that animates the universe as the result of the divine command "Be!" He develops an elaborate cosmology based on the Qur'anic notion that all creatures are divine words, articulated, as he says, in the All-Merciful Breath, which is the underlying substance of the universe. His foremost disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 1274), commented on a series of sayings in which the Prophet tells us that "the womb" is attached to the divine throne (which encompasses the universe) and that it is a "branch of the All-Merciful." This is because the very existence of the universe is nothing but the mercy about which God says, "My mercy embraces everything."<sup>36</sup>

Given the Qur'anic notion of mercy as God's essential attribute, it is not surprising to find it highlighted as a key human virtue, not least because the Qur'an says that God sent Muhammad, whom it calls a "beautiful model,"<sup>37</sup> as "a mercy to the worlds."<sup>38</sup> Mercy, however, is not exactly love, for God has mercy on human beings, not the other way around. In Islamic languages, God can be the object of love (*mahbūb*), but not the object of mercy (*marhūm*).<sup>39</sup>

## DIVINE LOVE

Two Qur'anic words are typically translated as "love." The first is *wudd* (or *mawadda*), from which we have the divine name *al-wadūd*,<sup>40</sup> which means both lover and beloved. The second is *ḥubb* (or *maḥabba*), which becomes much more prominent in the later literature. Although the Qur'an does not mention a divine name from the root, the later literature

commonly refers to God by three names: *mahbūb* (beloved), and *ḥabīb* (lover). *ḥabīb*, is not used in the Qur'an but *ḥubb* is. It is said to designate a more intense love, used for erotic love, so the legitimacy of referring to God was much debated. Many authors refer to God as *ḥubb*, or as an even more appropriate name, *ḥubb al-ḥubb*, for God, precisely because God's supreme quality is love.<sup>41</sup> A fourth word, *hawā*—captivity—was condemned by the Qur'an and the ḥadīth. It is a generic word for "love" in later literature. This term appeared on what Western scholars call the Sufi lexicon, though there is no clear demarcation between it and the Islamic context.<sup>43</sup>

Numerous definitions and etymologies of love are offered in the texts, though most of them. 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī (d. 1131) and Ibn 'Arabiyya (d. 1350), insist that love is beyond definition, by way of "tasting" (*dhawq*).<sup>44</sup> The II<sup>nd</sup> century work *Quiddity of Love* (*Fi māhiyyat al-ḥubb*) is "intense yearning for unification." This term pertains specifically to the soul and the body. One should speak rather of contact, connection. The literature often targets the word "unification." It agrees that the goal of two lovers is unification, but it is whether one can speak of the "union."

The dispute over unification often arises from a discussed Qur'anic verse about *ḥubb*. The apparent meaning of this verse is that God is His beloved, and man is a lover who loves God. He is both lover and beloved, as are humans. The root of *tawḥīd*, the divine names Lover and Beloved, "God" and "There is no beloved but God." Human attributes gain their reality from God. The Qur'an suggests some sort of duality in God's nature. His Essence is simply love. Al-Daylamī p

The root of love is that God is love, which is among His abiding

l (*al-rahīm*).<sup>34</sup> Ibn 'Arabī points  
 ture. All divine names refer back  
 as categories: the gentle and the  
 e, or those that stress immanence  
 as, the word "God" designates the  
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the Qur'anic equivalent of *wujūd*,  
 ophical and theological designa-  
 He uses the term "Breath of the  
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 anic notion that all creatures are  
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 God was much debated. Many authors considered it either a synonym  
 for *ḥubb*, or as an even more appropriate designation for man's love of  
 God, precisely because God's supreme reality demands the most intense  
 love.<sup>41</sup> A fourth word, *hawā*—caprice, whim, or passion—is roundly con-  
 demned by the Qur'an and the hadiths, but is sometimes discussed as  
 a generic word for "love" in later times.<sup>42</sup> Gradually an extensive litera-  
 ture appeared on what Western scholars have called "profane love," even  
 though there is no clear demarcation between "sacred" and "profane" in  
 the Islamic context.<sup>43</sup>

Numerous definitions and etymologies for the various "names and titles"  
 of love are offered in the texts, though many authors, whether Sufis like  
 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 1131) or theologians like Ibn Qayyim al-Jaw-  
 ziyya (d. 1350), insist that love is beyond definition and can only be known  
 by way of "tasting" (*dhawq*).<sup>44</sup> The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', in their treatise "On the  
 Quiddity of Love" (*Fī māhiyyat al-'ishq*), suggest that the best definition  
 is "intense yearning for unification,"<sup>45</sup> adding that "unification" (*ittiḥād*)  
 pertains specifically to the soul and spirit, not to bodily things, where we  
 should speak rather of contact, contiguity, and mixing.<sup>46</sup> The later litera-  
 ture often targets the word "unification" as inappropriate,<sup>47</sup> but everyone  
 agrees that the goal of two lovers is to come together. The disputed issue  
 was whether one can speak of the "coming together" of God and man.

The dispute over unification often circled around the most frequently  
 discussed Qur'anic verse about *ḥubb*: "He loves them, and they love Him."<sup>48</sup>  
 The apparent meaning of this verse is that God is a lover who takes man as  
 His beloved, and man is a lover who takes God as his beloved. Hence God  
 is both lover and beloved, as are human beings. When considered in terms  
 of *tawḥīd*, the divine names Lover and Beloved mean "There is no lover but  
 God" and "There is no beloved but God," so loverness and belovedness as  
 human attributes gain their reality from God. Lest these two divine names  
 suggest some sort of duality in God, authors often stress that God in His  
 Essence is simply love. Al-Daylamī puts it like this:

The root of love is that God is eternally described by love,  
 which is among His abiding attributes. He is always gazing

upon Himself for Himself in Himself, just as He is always finding Himself for Himself in Himself. In the same way, He loves Himself for Himself in Himself. Here lover, beloved, and love are a single thing without division, for He is Unity Itself, and in Unity things are not distinct.<sup>49</sup>

In his "Treatise on Love" (*Risāla fi'l-ʿishq*), al-Daylamī contemporary Avicenna, provides a philosophical explanation of the same point. First he says that God is the Necessary Being and the Absolute Good, so all contingent being and relative good derive from His Reality. God is not only infinitely lovable, but also infinitely loving. Moreover,

The First Good perceives Itself in act always and forever, so Its love for Itself is the most perfect and most ample love. There is no essential distinction among the divine attributes in the [Divine] Essence, so love is identical with the Essence and with Being, by which I mean the Sheer Good.<sup>50</sup>

The two most famous Persian prose classics on love also address the unity of love. The first is *Sawānīh* ("Apparitions"), written by Amīd Ghazālī (d. 1126), the younger brother of the famous theologian, and the second *Lamāʾāt* ("Flashes"), by Fakhr al-Dīn ʿIrāqī (d. 1289), a poet and second-generation student of Ibn ʿArabī. ʿIrāqī tells us that he wrote his book in the style of *Sawānīh*, and he often expands on Aḥmad Ghazālī's famously allusive expressions. The latter wrote, for example, that the divine Essence "is Lover, Beloved, and Love," but "Lover and Beloved are derived from Love."<sup>51</sup> ʿIrāqī put it this way:

"Lover" and "Beloved" are derived from "Love," and, in the abode of Its exaltation, Love is pure of all specification; in the sanctuary of Its own entity, Love is too holy for nonmanifestation and manifestation. It wanted to manifest Its own perfection, which is identical with Its Essence and attributes, so It presented Itself to Itself in the mirror of Lover and Beloved. It disclosed Its own beauty to Its own gaze. Gazing and being gazed upon made apparent the names "Lover" and "Beloved," the description "Seeker" and "Sought."<sup>52</sup>

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Despite the clear sense of the verse of mutual love—that both God and man are lover and beloved—most early theologians, including the main-stream Ash’arites (who are notorious for their abstracting mind-set), denied the apparent meaning, claiming that God’s utter transcendence made love between Him and creation impossible. In contrast, many later theologians, such as the Hanbalites Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, dedicated a good deal of attention to proving that the verse means what it says.<sup>53</sup> Among the many who rejected the Ash’arite position was Aḥmad Sam’ānī (d. 1140), scion of a famous family of scholars from the city of Marv in eastern Iran. His only known book is a long Persian commentary on God’s ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names. He points out that the verse of mutual love is the only place in the Qur’an where a divine quality is ascribed equally to God and man. He cites a series of verses stressing God’s greatness and man’s smallness, God’s omniscience and man’s ignorance, God’s power and man’s weakness. But, he says, “When God gave news of love, just as He affirmed it for Himself, so also He affirmed it for us.”<sup>54</sup>

In the course of his commentary, Sam’ānī is able to explain practically every one of the divine names in terms of mutual love, developing along the way an elaborate spiritual anthropology.<sup>55</sup> His language is extraordinarily poetic, and indeed, he articulates most of the themes that were soon to dominate the rich Persianate tradition of love poetry as represented by authors like ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa’dī, and Ḥāfiz, as well as a host of other poets in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. In Sam’ānī’s view, “He loves them” is the determinant of human destiny, for God loves human beings always and forever. He imagines God as saying,

“Do not suppose that Our business with you belongs to today, or Our talk with you pertains to right now. There was no world, and there was no Adam; there were no substances, and there were no accidents; there was no Throne and no Footstool, no paradise and no hell, no Tablet and no Pen—and I was talking to you without you.”<sup>56</sup>

Aḥmad Ghazālī also stresses the eternal primacy of “He loves them”:

Is it not enough for man that his specific quality is to be a beloved before being a lover? Is this a small favor? “He loves them” threw

so much food at the beggar before he ever showed up that he will enjoy himself into endless eternity, with plenty left over.<sup>57</sup>

Like the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and many early Sufi authors, Aḥmad Ghazālī speaks of unification (*ittihād*) as the goal of love, though he prefers the word "union" (*wiṣāl*). In the following, he alludes to the Qur'anic verse, "O people, you are the poor toward God, and God is the Rich, the Praiseworthy!"<sup>58</sup> which is the source of the term "(spiritual) poverty" (*faqr*), a synonym for "Sufism."

The Beloved says to the lover, "Come, become Me! If I were to become you, then we would need a beloved. The lover would grow, and need and needfulness would increase. But if you become Me, the Beloved will grow—all will be Beloved, not lover, all will be unneedingness, not need, all will be riches, not poverty, all will be help, not helplessness."<sup>59</sup>

Khawāja 'Abdallāh Anṣārī (d. 1088), author of a classic Arabic text on the ladder to God, *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* ("The Way Stations of the Travelers"), often speaks of the mysteries of union in his Persian prayers, which are marvels of early prose. Among them is this: "O God, all love is between two, so there is no room for a third. In this love, all is You, so there is no room for me."<sup>60</sup>

#### GOD AS LOVER OF MAN

*Tawḥīd* tells us that there is no love but the Creator's love: His love is real and eternal, and it creates the universe and everything within it. Beginning around the twelfth century, the most commonly cited scriptural reference to creative love is a saying ascribed to the Prophet, according to which David asked God why He created the universe. God replied, "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved (*hubb*) to be recognized, so I created the creatures that they might recognize Me." In place of "love," some versions of this saying have "desire" (*irāda*), the attribute mentioned by the Qur'an when it speaks of the engendering command.

According to this hadith, the object of God's love is "recognition" (*ma'rifa*). In explaining the meaning, authors point out that the "Hidden Treasure" alludes to the divine Essence inasmuch as It embraces all

possibilities of existence, possibilities designated by the divine names. In the Hidden Treasure "disclosed Itself." The term is often translated as "theophany"—disclosure. Moses asks God to show Himself, and God is able to see Him: "And when his Lord called him from within the cabinet, He made it crumble to dust, and Moses was in the open sight of his Lord."

If something is to recognize the Beloved, that something must already have been characterized by the Beloved. The one that fills this bill is the human being, who is characterized in the form of "God," the divine possibility. When man truly recognizes the Beloved, his characterization by the divine name is complete with self-recognition. This is the meaning of the term, constantly quoted in Sufi texts, "He is the Lord."

Creative love propels the universe forward, that is, on both the descending and ascending movement seems to contradict the concept of "unification," but unification is impossible. It is directed toward recognition, that is, toward beings other than God who are capable of "self-disclosure as manifestation" (a term used by Ibn Arabī) and "self-disclosure as consciousness" (a term used by Rūmī). It can only be actualized fully by human beings. As Ibn Arabī says, "None of us there is but a reflection of the Lord." 'Arabī, other creatures are the same. We alone are not fixed; we alone can fall—this is precisely why the Prophet said, "God. It cannot force us to love Him, but He can station and make us no different from Him." These terms:

God created every creature with power, but He created Adam with the demand of love. He created the Strong, but He created you

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possibilities of existence, possibilities whose general characteristics are designated by the divine names. In order to make Itself known, the Hidden Treasure "disclosed Itself." The word here, *tajalli* or "self-disclosure"—often translated as "theophany"—derives from a Qur'anic passage in which Moses asks God to show Himself, and God replies that Moses will not be able to see Him: "And when his Lord *disclosed Himself* to the mountain, He made it crumble to dust, and Moses fell down thunderstruck."<sup>61</sup>

If something is to recognize the Hidden Treasure when It discloses Itself, that something must already have knowledge of It. The only creature that fills this bill is the human being, who was "taught all the names" and created in the form of "God," the divine Reality inasmuch as It embraces all possibility. When man truly recognizes God, he is recognizing his own characterization by the divine names. God-recognition goes hand in hand with self-recognition. This is the message of the famous prophetic saying, constantly quoted in Sufi texts, "He who recognizes himself recognizes his Lord."

Creative love propels the universe both centrifugally and centripetally, that is, on both the descending and the ascending arcs. The centrifugal movement seems to contradict the definition of love as "yearning for unification," but unification is impossible without difference. If God's love is directed toward recognition, that can only come about when there are beings other than God who are capable of recognizing Him. Thus God's "self-disclosure as manifestation" (*tajalli-yi zuhūri*) is the prelude to His "self-disclosure as consciousness" (*tajalli-yi shu'ūri*),<sup>62</sup> the latter of which can only be actualized fully by human beings. They alone have the capacity to become characterized by all of His character traits. In the Qur'an the angels say, "None of us there is but has a known station,"<sup>63</sup> and, says Ibn 'Arabī, other creatures are the same, with the exception of human beings.<sup>64</sup> We alone are not fixed; we alone can rise in consciousness, and we alone can fall—this is precisely why the prescriptive command invites us to love God. It cannot force us to love Him, however, for that would fix us in a station and make us no different from angels. Sam'ānī makes the point in these terms:

God created every creature in keeping with the demand of power, but He created Adam and his children in keeping with the demand of love. He created other things in respect of being the Strong, but He created you in respect of being the Lover.<sup>65</sup>

The engendering command creates the universe: "Be!" says God, and all things come to be. The prescriptive command addresses those who are not fixed in station, providing instructions on how to love their own Creator and yearn for union with Him, how to act in a manner that will allow them to ascend in consciousness and achieve self-recognition. The texts refer to the ascent by many names, such as the "voluntary return" as contrasted with the "compulsory return." In Sufism, it is often called "dying before you die," a major theme of teachers like Rūmī. It is nothing other than giving up egocentricity and becoming characterized by the divine attributes. It is to follow the Prophet on the ladder to God.

By issuing the engendering command, God disclosed Himself through the properties and traces of His own Most Beautiful Names. Ibn 'Arabī writes,

Know that the divine beauty through which God is named "Beautiful" and by which He described Himself in His messenger's words, "He loves beauty," is in all things. There is nothing but beauty, for God created the cosmos only in His form, and He is beautiful. Hence all the cosmos is beautiful.<sup>66</sup>

In loving the beauty of created things, God is in fact loving the manifestation of the Hidden Treasure. In other words, He is loving Himself. Al-Ghazālī, who summarized and systematized much of the earlier discussion of both "religious" and "profane" love in Book 36 of his classic *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*Reviving the Sciences of the Religion*), explains that God's love for Himself is demanded by *tawhīd* or the fact that, as he often puts it, "There is nothing in existence but God" (*laysa fi'l-wujūd illa' Llāh*).<sup>67</sup>

He is the All, and nothing else [truly] exists. When someone loves only himself, his acts, and his compositions, his love does not transgress his essence and the concomitants of his essence inasmuch as they are connected to his essence. Thus, God loves only Himself.<sup>68</sup>

God issues the engendering command out of love for all things, for He is beautiful, and He loves His beautiful creation. In the same way, His love motivates Him to issue the prescriptive command, but in this case He loves human beauty, for man alone is capable of recognizing all of the Most

Beautiful Names, loving Him who is beautiful, and He loves His beautiful names as his own character traits. This command shares God's love with the moral and spiritual ascent by climbing the ladder to self-realization. It is for those who do what is beautiful,<sup>69</sup> who repent and turn to God who are just.<sup>73</sup> It also tells us that God loves the just, the pious, the lovers of corruption,<sup>75</sup> transgressors,<sup>76</sup> the humble, the proud,<sup>79</sup> the boastful.<sup>80</sup> In short, the command—beneath the rituals, rules, and regulations—gives the instruction, "Become characterized by the Most Beautiful Names."

In his "Treatise on Love," Avicenna explains that the Absolute Good to create the universe is motivated by love.<sup>81</sup> He tells the tale of the Hidden Treasure and Its creation of human beings in the rational world, which typifies his writings. Along the way Avicenna also employs the favorite Sufi term "self-discipline" and its activity.

Each of the existent things loves the Absolute Good by its inborn love, and the Absolute Good loves them. Their reception of Its self-discipline, however, is disparate. The true reception of Its self-discipline is the most perfect way possible. The Absolute Good says, "If the Absolute Good would be received from It . . . , so would be received from It . . . of every existence. . . . The love of the Absolute Good for its own excellence is the most excellent. . . . The reception of Its self-discipline by deiform souls, so beloveds. To this refers what has been said, when God's servant is such that, when God's servant is such that, I love him."<sup>82</sup>

Al-Ghazālī dedicates a good portion of his work to the love of God for human beings, explicitly rejecting it as a form of self-love. However, less, he says that in God's case the word "love" means something different from what it means in man's case. This is how



the universe: "Be!" says God, and all command addresses those who are not know how to love their own Creator in a manner that will allow them self-recognition. The texts refer to "voluntary return" as contrasted it is often called "dying before you i. It is nothing other than giving up ed by the divine attributes. It is to d.

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Beautiful Names, loving Him who is named by them, and actualizing the names as his own character traits. This is why the Qur'an frequently associates God's love with the moral and ethical perfections that are achieved by climbing the ladder to self-realization. It tells us that God loves those who do what is beautiful,<sup>69</sup> who repent,<sup>70</sup> who trust,<sup>71</sup> who are godfearing,<sup>72</sup> who are just.<sup>73</sup> It also tells us that God does *not* love wrongdoers,<sup>74</sup> workers of corruption,<sup>75</sup> transgressors,<sup>76</sup> the immoderate,<sup>77</sup> the treacherous,<sup>78</sup> the proud,<sup>79</sup> the boastful.<sup>80</sup> In short, the basic message of the prescriptive command—beneath the rituals, rules, and regulations—is the prophetic instruction, "Become characterized by the character traits of God!"

In his "Treatise on Love," Avicenna explains that love motivates the Absolute Good to create the universe and that "no entity is devoid of love."<sup>81</sup> He tells the tale of the Hidden Treasure's love to be recognized and Its creation of human beings in the rather complex philosophical style that typifies his writings. Along the way and contrary to his usual custom, he employs the favorite Sufi term "self-disclosure" to refer to God's creative activity.

Each of the existent things loves the Absolute Good with an inborn love, and the Absolute Good discloses Itself to Its lovers. Their reception of Its self-disclosure and their conjunction with It, however, is disparate. The utmost limit of nearness to It is the true reception of Its self-disclosure, I mean, in the most perfect way possible. This is what Sufis call "unification." . . . If the Absolute Good did not disclose Itself, nothing would be received from It . . . , so Its self-disclosure is the cause of every existence. . . . The love of the Most Excellent for Its own excellence is the most excellent love, so Its true beloved is the reception of Its self-disclosure. This is the reality of Its reception by deiform souls, so it can be said that they are Its beloveds. To this refers what has been narrated in the reports that, when God's servant is such and such, "He loves Me, and I love him."<sup>82</sup>

Al-Ghazālī dedicates a good portion of Book 36 of the *Ihyā'* to God's love for human beings, explicitly rejecting its denial by the Ash'arites. Nonetheless, he says that in God's case the word means something different from what it means in man's case. This is how he sums up his argument:

God's love for the servant is that He brings him near to Himself by fending off distractions and acts of disobedience, purifying his inner self from the turbidities of this world, and lifting the veil from his heart so that he witnesses Him "as if"<sup>83</sup> his heart is seeing Him.

As for the servant's love for God, that is his inclination to grasp the perfection without which he is destitute and lacking. So, he must yearn for what escapes him, and when he grasps something of it, he takes enjoyment. Yearning and love in this meaning are absurd for God.<sup>84</sup>

Although al-Ghazālī breaks with the excessive transcendentalism of his Ash'arite predecessors, he does not accept all the implications of divine immanence. In contrast, Ibn 'Arabi insists throughout his voluminous corpus that a true understanding of *taḥḥīd* demands full acknowledgment of both transcendence and immanence—or "declaring incomparability" (*tanzīh*) and "asserting similarity" (*tashbīh*). He explains, for example, that a lover demonstrates his sincerity by taking on the attributes and qualities of his beloved, and that this is just as true of God as it is of man. To demonstrate his point, he cites a series of hadiths (the last of which parallels Matthew 25:41–45):

The sincere lover is he who passes into the attributes of the beloved, not he who brings the beloved down to his own attributes. Do you not see that God, when He loves us, descends to us in His hidden gentleness by means of that which corresponds to us and above which His eminence and greatness are high exalted? He descends to "happily receiving" us when we come to His house in order to confide in Him; "joy" at our repentance and our return to Him after we turned away from Him; "wonder" at the young man who lacks sensual desire when he should be controlled by it, even though he has that by God's grace; being our deputies in our hunger, thirst, and illness, and placing Himself in our stations. When one of His servants is hungry, He says to the others, "I was hungry, but you did not feed Me." He says to another of His servants, "I was ill but you did not visit Me." When the servants ask Him about this, He replies to them, "Verily so-and-so was ill; if you had visited him,

you would have found Me w  
you had fed him, you would  
is one of the fruits of love, w

'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492),  
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you would have found Me with him. So-and-so was hungry; if you had fed him, you would have found Me with him. . . .” This is one of the fruits of love, when He descends to us.<sup>85</sup>

‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492), a great Persian poet and master of philosophical prose, was highly influential in the later Persianate expression of Islamic teachings from Turkey to China. In his *Lawā’ih* (“The Gleams”), a classic summary of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings, he explains that *tawḥīd* demands the coming together of God and man in love:

In respect of the Essence, the Unlimited has no need for the contingent. Nonetheless, without the contingent, the names of Divinity cannot become manifest and the attributes of Lordship cannot be realized.

O You whose beauty has incited my yearning and seeking,  
Your soughtness is a branch of my seeking!

If not for the mirror of my loverness,  
the beauty of Your belovedness would not have appeared.  
No, rather the lover is the Real and the beloved He, the seeker is the Real and the sought He. He is the sought and the beloved in the station of Unity’s gathering, and the seeker and the lover in the level of differentiation and manyness.<sup>86</sup>

In his monumental description of the “four journeys” of human souls in their quest for perfection, the philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā, “Foremost of the Deiform,” devotes a long section to the role of love in creation. The overall picture he provides resonates with the notion of the descending arc of manifestation and the ascending arc of realized consciousness. He sums it up when he says,

Thus have we established that love pervades all existent things in the order of their existence. . . . All of them, in keeping with their appropriate perfections, seek the perfections of the Being that is necessary by Its Essence and become similar to It inasmuch as they actualize Its perfections. Thus the Author—holy are His names!—is the final goal of all existent things and the

furthest limit of their levels. Love and yearning are the cause of both the existence and the continuity of the existent things in their possible perfections. Were it not for love and yearning, no newly arrived thing could arrive newly in the bodily world, and no being could enter into the world of generation and corruption.<sup>87</sup>

## HUMAN ELECTION

Few people actualize their full potential to love God and to be loved by Him. Those who do are sometimes called “perfect human beings” (*insān kāmil*), an expression derived from the Prophet’s saying, “Many among men have become perfect, and among women, Mary and Āsiya [the wife of Pharaoh].”<sup>88</sup> The tradition maintains that the most perfect of all human beings was the Prophet Muhammad, followed by the other prophets, such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and then by the “friends” (*awliyā*) of God, and finally by the believers generally. Given Muhammad’s primacy, a good deal of the discussion of God’s love for creation centers on his person—though it needs to be kept in mind that the whole point is to insist that everyone has the potential to climb the ladder by following in his footsteps. It is commonly said that God’s specific love for Muhammad brought the universe into existence, and God is quoted as saying, “But for thee [O Muhammad!], I would not have created the spheres.” Sa’id al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 1296), who wrote both a Persian and an Arabic commentary on the 760-verse *Poem of the Way* of Ibn al-Fārid (d. 1235), the greatest Arab poet of love, summarizes the theoretical discussion when he says,

The root of love is the reality of “I loved to be recognized.” The lover is the One Divine Essence, and the beloved is the complete appearance and total manifestation of the perfections of the divine names. The perfect mirror of this beloved as it is in itself can be nothing but the human reality, in both form and meaning. This is because the human reality has a perfect all-comprehensiveness and a complete correspondence and receptivity [vis-à-vis God], while all other creatures fall short of this. This point is alluded to in the often quoted divine words addressed to Muhammad: “But for thee, I would not have created the spheres.”<sup>89</sup>

On the philosophical level, the beloved was explained in terms of *al-Muḥammadiyya*), the uncreated by names such as “the Muhammad” “the First Self-Disclosure.” This un theologians call the *Logos*, the div type of both the universe and the c the notion lurking in these verses o of the dervishes, as practiced by hi

Heaven circles round about I  
jump up, so that we also m  
Look what God said: “If not  
Muhammad the Chosen is

When the discussion focuses on is considered the only creature wh pose in creating the universe, becom character traits, and achieve the st proof of this is that he was chose message. His wife ‘Ā’isha, when as (*khuluq*), replied, “His character v to remember, is God’s speech, the culminating message of the line of 124,000 individuals to Adam. The “the recitation,” but it also means ond meaning was understood as a of divine self-revelation in the fina when he writes, “The character of becoming characterized by the div

As God’s beloved, Muhammad v Speech and to undertake the Night, the goal of every lover: union with lowing his Sunnah—the beautiful an important role in the tradition. T ‘If you love God, follow me, and C people want to actualize the full brought each of them into existenc

On the philosophical level, the notion of Muhammad as God's supreme beloved was explained in terms of "the Muhammadan Reality" (*al-ḥaqīqat al-Muḥammadiyya*), the uncreated prototype of creation, also designated by names such as "the Muhammadan Light," "the Reality of Realities," and "the First Self-Disclosure." This uncreated Reality is what many Christian theologians call the *Logos*, the divine self-expression *in divinis*, the prototype of both the universe and the divine form known as man.<sup>90</sup> One can see the notion lurking in these verses of Rūmī (as well as in the whirling dance of the dervishes, as practiced by his followers):

Heaven circles round about love—

jump up, so that we also may circle.

Look what God said: "If not for thee, I would not have created."

Muhammad the Chosen is the quarry of love.<sup>91</sup>

When the discussion focuses on the Muhammadan Reality, the Prophet is considered the only creature who was able to actualize God's full purpose in creating the universe, become totally characterized by all the divine character traits, and achieve the station of perfect deformity. The mythic proof of this is that he was chosen to receive the Qur'an, God's plenary message. His wife 'Ā'isha, when asked after his death about his character (*khuluq*), replied, "His character was the Qur'an."<sup>92</sup> The Qur'an, we need to remember, is God's speech, the divine *Logos* in the form of a book, the culminating message of the line of prophecy, which extends back through 124,000 individuals to Adam. The word "Qur'an" (*qur'ān*) famously means "the recitation," but it also means "that which brings together." This second meaning was understood as a reference to the all-comprehensiveness of divine self-revelation in the final message. Ibn 'Arabi has this in mind when he writes, "The character of God's Messenger was the Qur'an and becoming characterized by the divine names as his own character traits."<sup>93</sup>

As God's beloved, Muhammad was able to act as the receptacle for God's Speech and to undertake the Night Journey. During the journey, he achieved the goal of every lover: union with his beloved. This helps explain why following his Sunnah—the beautiful model that he established—plays such an important role in the tradition. The Qur'an says, "Say [O Muhammad!]: 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you.'"<sup>94</sup> In other words, if people want to actualize the full implications of the creative love that brought each of them into existence, they need to observe the prescriptive

command by climbing the ladder in Muhammad's footsteps. Muhammad is a "mercy to the worlds" because God's light is too intense to allow access to Him without His chosen intermediary. As 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī explains, "Seeing the sun of 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth' (Qur'an 24:35) without the mirror of Muhammad's beauty burns away the eyes. But, with that mirror, one can study the sun's beauty constantly."<sup>95</sup>

The fact that God loves us all—that He says "Be!" to the entire creation—does not mean that every human being will reap immediate benefit, nor does it demand posthumous felicity (*sa'āda*). As Sam'ānī puts it, "When you say, 'He loves them,' your own shirt collar says, 'You've got nothing over me.'"<sup>96</sup> Even those who suffer the wretchedness (*shiqā'*) of hell are the objects of God's love, for He created them out of love and preserves them in existence for the same reason. Another way to think of this is in terms of the Qur'anic verse, "He is with you wherever you are."<sup>97</sup> God is Emmanuel, "God-with-us," but we are not necessarily with Him. The goal of our existence is precisely to recognize the Hidden Treasure and love God so that we can be with Him as He is with us. This is "unification," or rather, realized *tawhīd*.

Lovers should follow Muhammad because, as we saw in the just-quoted verse, the fruit of following him is that God will love them in return: "Follow me, and God will love you." In a well-known hadith, the Prophet quotes God as saying, "When My servant approaches Me through good works [i.e., by following Muhammad], I will love him, and when I love him, I will be his hearing through which he hears, his eyesight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks."<sup>98</sup> This again is the unification achieved by love.

Despite the emphasis of most texts on earning God's love by following the Prophet, many authors stress God's unconditional love. No matter how much credit God may give people for their efforts to achieve perfection, ultimately "There is no agent but He," as al-Ghazālī frequently reminds us. In His infinite mercy, He created people with all their imperfections, knowing full well that they would fall short of angelic purity. The Prophet made the point rather clearly: "If you did not sin, God would take you away and replace you with a people who do sin, and then He would forgive them."<sup>99</sup> The Qur'an also makes the point, in a verse that jurists and preachers sometimes prefer to ignore: "Despair not of God's mercy! Surely God forgives all sins."<sup>100</sup> The manner in which God's love for man trumps every other consideration plays a major role in Sam'ānī's commentary on

the divine names. For example, when God told them that He w Sam'ānī explains God's answer:

The angels said, "What, work corruption there and He was not doing that. He (Qur'an 2:30). In other words You know their disobedience your glorification, you make My forgiveness, I make man 'I know what you do not know the purity of their belief in good works are barefoot, I know what you do not know matter what they are, I love

#### MAN AS LOVER OF GOD

We saw that the first half of the v be read in terms of both the eng In other words, it can refer to God cific love for human beings, which worthy by following the Prophet verse, "They love Him," can refer bestowed on all creatures the ene the divine attributes and charact what they truly are. And, by sendi how to acknowledge and actuali said, "I loved to be recognized," and indeed all creatures would lov would also recognize who it is th with the appropriate love is what ers in varying degrees. It is precis about differentiation among hu "Disparity of degree in people's lo of their felicity in the afterworld. and greater in preferment' (Qur'a

Muhammad's footsteps. Muhammad's light is too intense to allow access to it. As 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī says, "The light of the heavens and the earth' Muhammad's beauty burns away the light of the sun's beauty constantly."<sup>95</sup> He says "Be!" to the entire creation and being will reap immediate benefit (*sā'ada*). As Sam'ānī puts it, "The Prophet's shirt collar says, 'You've got to get out of the wretchedness (*shiqā'*) of hell and get them out of love and preserves them in another way to think of this is in the presence of God wherever you are."<sup>97</sup> God is not necessarily with Him. The goal is to reach the Hidden Treasure and love God. This is "unification," or rather,

as we saw in the just-quoted hadith, "God will love them in return: 'Follow the Prophet, and he will love you.'"<sup>96</sup> In another hadith, the Prophet quotes the Prophet as saying, "Whoever loves Me through good works, I will love him, and when I love him, I will show him My eyesight through which he sees, and My foot through which he walks."<sup>98</sup>

Learning God's love by following the Prophet is a conditional love. No matter how hard one's efforts to achieve perfection, the Prophet al-Ghazālī frequently reminds one to be humble with all their imperfections, far from angelic purity. The Prophet said, "If you do not sin, God would take you to Paradise; if you do sin, and then He would forgive you." In a verse that jurists and theologians despair not of God's mercy! Surely the Prophet's love for man trumps the love of the angels in Sam'ānī's commentary on

the divine names. For example, the Qur'an says that the angels objected when God told them that He was going to place a vicegerent in the earth. Sam'ānī explains God's answer:

The angels said, "What, will You place therein one who will work corruption there and shed blood?" God did not reply that He was not doing that. He said, "I know what you do not know" (Qur'an 2:30). In other words, "I know that I will forgive them. You know their disobedience, but I know My forgiveness. In your glorification, you make manifest your own activity, but in My forgiveness, I make manifest My own bounty and generosity. 'I know what you do not know,' which is My love for them and the purity of their belief in loving Me. Although outwardly their good works are barefoot, inwardly their love for Me is pure. 'I know what you do not know,' which is My love for them. No matter what they are, I love them."<sup>101</sup>

#### MAN AS LOVER OF GOD

We saw that the first half of the verse of mutual love, "He loves them," can be read in terms of both the engendering and the prescriptive commands. In other words, it can refer to God's general, creative love and to God's specific love for human beings, which intensifies when they make themselves worthy by following the Prophet. In a similar way, the second half of the verse, "They love Him," can refer to both commands. By saying, "Be!" God bestowed on all creatures the energy of love, an intense desire to actualize the divine attributes and character traits through which they come to be what they truly are. And, by sending guidance, God teaches human beings how to acknowledge and actualize their innate love for Him. When He said, "I loved to be recognized," He knew full well that all human beings and indeed all creatures would love Him, but that does not mean that they would also recognize who it is that they love. Recognition of God along with the appropriate love is what characterizes prophets, saints, and believers in varying degrees. It is precisely this recognition and love that bring about differentiation among human individuals. Thus al-Ghazālī says, "Disparity of degree in people's love is the cause of the disparity of degree of their felicity in the afterworld. 'Surely the afterworld is greater in ranks and greater in preferment' (Qur'an 17:21)."<sup>102</sup>

The philosophers often explain that all things love God whether they know it or not. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' put it this way:

It has been clarified that God is the First Beloved, and that all existent things yearn for Him and aim for Him. "And to Him the whole affair is returned" (Koran 11:123). For, in Him is their existence, their abiding, their subsistence, their continuity, and their perfection, because He is the Sheer Existent, and He has eternal subsistence and continuity and everlasting completeness and perfection.<sup>103</sup>

Suhrawardī (d. 1191), the founder of the Illuminationist school of philosophy, agreed with his predecessors on love's universal presence. He says, for example, "The First is the lover of His own Essence, and He is also the beloved of His own Essence and of everything else—all contingent things."<sup>104</sup> In summing up a long explanation of what he means, his commentator remarks, "So, all things are lovers and yearners—'He loves them, and they love Him.'"<sup>105</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī speaks of omnipresent love when he says, "None but God is loved in the existent things. It is He who is manifest in every beloved to the eye of every lover—and nothing exists that is not a lover. So, all the cosmos is lover and beloved, and all of it goes back to Him."<sup>106</sup>

Sam'ānī makes the point in a passage that reflects the positive Qur'anic evaluation of all prophetic revelation:

If you go to the Sufi lodge—burning for Him. If you go to the lane of the taverns—the pain of not having found Him. If you go to a Christian church, everyone is on the carpet of seeking Him. If you go to a Jewish synagogue, all are yearning for His beauty. If you go to a Zoroastrian fire-temple, all are burned by His majesty. If you look at His familiars, all are wounded by His drunken eyes and the glances of His beauty. If you look at those estranged from Him, they are tied down by the bond of His exaltation and majesty.<sup>107</sup>

Ḥāfiẓ (d. 1390), typically considered the greatest poet of the Persian tradition, epitomizes universal love in this couplet:

Everyone's seeking a beloved  
whether sober or drunk,  
everywhere's the house of love  
whether mosque or synagog

Rūmī frequently talks about the difference between the two. He compares carefully between "real love" and "false love" based on recognition of Him—real love is love that has not yet reached its goal, while false love compares the latter to a wooden bridge. In real love, people's character traits develop and their hearts lead them back to true love. False love is a metaphor is the bridge to the real. Rūmī, al-Quḍāt takes the same approach. Rūmī, the most famous of mythic lovers, his love leads him for climbing the path to God.

Do you know why all these lovers  
in the path? So that day-by-day  
mature and he may gain the  
entering God without a veil. . .  
for Laylā be made into a riding horse  
for her would mature him and  
load of love for God.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout his writings Rūmī encourages us to look beyond the veils and curtains and to look upon the Reality that is disclosing itself.

In man there is a love, a pain  
if a hundred thousand worlds  
would still gain no rest or ease  
totally with every kind of craft  
astronomy, medicine, and other  
their goal has not been attained  
are like a ladder. The rungs of the ladder  
evidence and stay—they're for



All things love God whether they  
in this way:

First Beloved, and that all  
aim for Him. "And to Him  
(11:123). For, in Him is their  
presence, their continuity, and  
Sheer Existent, and He has  
and everlasting completeness

The Illuminationist school of phi-  
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everywhere's the house of love,  
whether mosque or synagogue.<sup>108</sup>

Rūmī frequently talks about love's omnipresence. He also differenti-  
ates carefully between "real love" (*'ishq ḥaqīqī*)—that is, love for God  
based on recognition of Him—and "metaphorical love" (*'ishq majāzī*),  
which is love that has not yet reached the stage of true discernment. He  
compares the latter to a wooden sword that a warrior gives to his son. As  
people's character traits develop and mature, they find that all metaphori-  
cal love leads them back to true love, for, as the Arabic proverb has it, "The  
metaphor is the bridge to the reality" (*al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqa*). 'Ayn  
al-Qudāt takes the same approach when he says that God gave Majnūn, the  
most famous of mythic lovers, his intense love for Laylā in order to prepare  
him for climbing the path to God:

Do you know why all these curtains and veils have been placed  
in the path? So that day-by-day the lover's vision may become  
mature and he may gain the ability to carry the load of encoun-  
tering God without a veil. . . . God ordained that Majnūn's love  
for Laylā be made into a riding beast for his nature, so that love  
for her would mature him and give him the ability to carry the  
load of love for God.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout his writings Rūmī advises his readers to gain the capacity to  
look beyond the veils and curtains, to see through the metaphor and gaze  
upon the Reality that is disclosing Itself.

In man there is a love, a pain, an itch, and an urgency such that,  
if a hundred thousand worlds were to become his property, he  
would still gain no rest or ease. These people occupy themselves  
totally with every kind of craft, artistry, and position; they learn  
astronomy, medicine, and other things, but they find no ease, for  
their goal has not been attained. . . . All these pleasures and goals  
are like a ladder. The rungs of a ladder are no place to take up res-  
idence and stay—they're for passing on. Happy is he who wakes

up quickly and becomes aware! Then the long road becomes short, and he does not waste his life on the ladder's rungs.<sup>110</sup>

More than most teachers, Rūmī brings the theoretical discussion of love down to everyday experience. He is especially adept at showing that the pain, heartache, and suffering that characterize human existence follow directly on the engendering command, which results in the separation of lover and beloved. This is why he begins his famous *Mathnawī*, sometimes called "the Qur'an in the Persian language," with the verse, "Listen to the reed as it complains, telling the tale of separation."<sup>111</sup> The poem's twenty-five thousand couplets are dedicated to explaining that every hunger, thirst, desire, and longing is in fact love for the Source who, in loving us, brought us out from the Hidden Treasure and called upon us to love Him in return.

In one of his prose works Rūmī explains that before entering this world, we were like fish swimming in the ocean, unaware of the water. When the ocean wanted to be recognized, it threw us up on dry land. Now we flip and flop, suffering the pain of love for the ocean. Once we go back where we came from, we will have the same situation as we did at first, but we will live in the joy of recognition and union, a joy that we could never have actualized without our exile.<sup>112</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī makes the same point in terms of the circle of existence, composed of the two "arcs" or "bows" (*qaws*) mentioned in the Qur'an's account of Muhammad's climb to God, when he was "two bows'-length away, or nearer."<sup>113</sup>

Suppose that the lover and beloved are one circle, cut in half by a straight line, such that it appears as two bows. If this line that appears to be there, but is not, falls out of the diagram at the moment of meeting, the circle will appear as one, as it is. The secret of "Two Bows' Length" will become plain. . . . But, there is something more to say: You should know that, although the line falls away from the circle, the circle will not appear as it did at first. The property of the line will not vanish. Though the line will disappear, its trace will remain.<sup>114</sup>

Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (d. after 1126), who wrote one of the longest premodern Persian commentaries on the Qur'an, meditates throughout the book on the secrets of the mutual love between God and man. He, like

Rūmī's teacher Shams-i Tabrīzī, for example, his remarks on the ver

Be careful not to suppose  
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Adam saw an infinite beau  
the eight paradises was no  
its belt and said: "If you e  
lover of that." . . .

The command came: "T  
lane of love, leave paradise,  
lovers have to do with the

Your love came to my door  
I didn't open it, so it burnt

In several passages of his co  
refers to Adam's purposeful decis  
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By God the Tremendous!  
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scales. Paradise began to sh  
zen man!"

O noble youth! If tomo  
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have fallen short of Adam  
father sold for one grain o  
settle down there?<sup>118</sup>

Al-Ghazālī begins his long cha  
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who wrote one of the longest  
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etween God and man. He, like

Rūmī's teacher Shams-i Tabrīzī, read the Qur'an as a love letter.<sup>115</sup> Take, for example, his remarks on the verse, "Satan made them slip therefrom":<sup>116</sup>

Be careful not to suppose that Adam was taken out of paradise to abase him. It was not that. Rather, it was because of the grandeur of his aspiration. The petitioner of 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, compared to which the beauty of the eight paradises was nothing. His great aspiration tightened its belt and said: "If you ever want to be lover, you must be a lover of that." . . .

The command came: "Now that you have stepped into the lane of love, leave paradise, which is the house of ease! What do lovers have to do with the safety of the Abode of Peace?" . . .

Your love came to my door and knocked.  
I didn't open it, so it burnt it down.<sup>117</sup>

In several passages of his commentary on the divine names, Sam'ānī refers to Adam's purposeful decision to leave Paradise. The "grain of wheat" in the following is the Islamic "apple"—the forbidden fruit:

By God the Tremendous! They placed the worth of paradise in Adam's hand. There was no bride more beautiful than paradise among all the existent things—it had such a beautiful face and such a perfect adornment! But the ruling power of Adam's aspiration entered from the world of the Unseen Jealousy. He weighed the worth of paradise in his hand and its value in the scales. Paradise began to shout, "I cannot put up with this brazen man!"

O noble youth! If tomorrow you go to paradise and look at it from the corner of your heart's eye, in truth, in truth, you will have fallen short of Adam's aspiration. Something that your father sold for one grain of wheat—why would you want to settle down there?<sup>118</sup>

Al-Ghazālī begins his long chapter on love in the *Ihyā'* by saying that it is the highest rung on the ladder of spiritual ascent:

Love for God is the furthest goal among the stations and the highest pinnacle of the degrees. After reaching love, later stations, like yearning, familiarity, and contentment, are among its fruits and consequences. And all the stations before love—such as repentance, patience, and abstinence—are introductions to it.<sup>119</sup>

In defining human love, al-Ghazālī says that it is “the inclination of one’s nature toward a pleasurable thing,”<sup>120</sup> and he stresses that no one can love anything without knowing it first.<sup>121</sup> He then provides a long analysis of five basic causes of human love, which he summarizes as follows:

- (1) Man’s love for his own existence, its perfection, and its subsistence.
- (2) His love for those who act beautifully [*iḥsān*] toward him in what relates to the continuity of his own existence, helping its subsistence, and protecting it from harm.
- (3) His love for those who act beautifully in general, whether or not they act beautifully toward him.
- (4) His love for all things that are beautiful in essence, whether these be outward or inward forms.
- (5) His love for those with whom he has a hidden, inner affinity [*munāsaba*].<sup>122</sup>

Al-Ghazālī then turns to an even longer discussion in which he applies the principle of *tawḥīd* to these five sorts of love, showing that the seeker needs to recognize who it is that he truly loves. Since there is no god but God, (1) there is no existence and no bestower of existence but God, (2–3) all beautiful activity goes back to God as the Beautiful-doer, (4) none is truly beautiful but God, and (5) man’s deepest affinity is with God, in whose form he was created and by whose character traits he is characterized.<sup>123</sup> Later on in the same chapter, having cited many anecdotes about the pains and sacrifices that people willingly undertake because of love for other people, he again applies the principle of *tawḥīd*:

These and similar things are acknowledged as true in love for fellow creatures, so it is even more appropriate that they be seen as true in love for the Creator. After all, inner insight is more truthful than outer eyesight, and the beauty of the Lordly Presence is

more complete than any other  
the universe is a loveliness of

Among the many authors who  
knowledge in loving God is Ibn al-  
clearest and most systematic treatise

Nothing allows people to reach  
of the perfection and beauty  
of recognition, and recognition  
... Every lover is a recognizer  
a lover [*muḥibb*]  
—I mean, a lover  
when recognition reaches perfection  
continuous through recognition  
the same as the recognizer, and  
lover, with no difference. The  
firmly rooted, the attributes  
to the lover. This self-disclosure  
the constancy of the love, and  
the constancy of the recognizer  
self-disclosure, the recognizer  
are unified, and each of them  
succession.<sup>125</sup>

Ibn al-Dabbāgh also explains  
must go on forever. He has in mind  
increase in knowledge.<sup>126</sup>

The many attributes witness  
count, and they cannot be numbered  
Rather, they follow one another  
in perception. Each attribute  
the lover is always striving to  
form of his Beloved appears  
as to enjoy it. When he perceives  
higher, for the Beloved’s self-  
ing drives the lover to embrace

more complete than any other beauty. Or rather, every beauty in the universe is a loveliness deriving from that beauty.<sup>124</sup>

Among the many authors who stress the importance of recognition and knowledge in loving God is Ibn al-Dabbāgh (d. 1296), author of one of the clearest and most systematic treatises on love in Arabic.

Nothing allows people to reach complete love but recognition of the perfection and beauty of the Beloved. . . . Love is the fruit of recognition, and recognition is the cause and occasion of love. . . . Every lover is a recognizer [*ʿarif*], but not every recognizer is a lover [*muḥibb*]<sup>125</sup>—I mean, at the beginning of recognition. But, when recognition reaches perfection, and when love becomes continuous through recognition's continuity, then the lover is the same as the recognizer, and the recognizer is the same as the lover, with no difference. This is because, when recognition is firmly rooted, the attributes of the Beloved disclose themselves to the lover. This self-disclosure becomes constant through the constancy of the love, and love becomes constant through the constancy of the recognition. . . . Through witnessing and self-disclosure, the recognizer's love and the lover's recognition are unified, and each of these two stations yields the other in succession.<sup>125</sup>

Ibn al-Dabbāgh also explains why the lover's journey to his Beloved must go on forever. He has in mind the Qur'anic commandment to seek increase in knowledge.<sup>126</sup>

The many attributes witnessed from the Beloved are beyond count, and they cannot enter in upon the lover all at once. Rather, they follow one another in keeping with the increase in perception. Each attribute demands a trace in the soul, so the lover is always striving to seek increase. When a beautiful form of his Beloved appears to him, he yearns to perceive it so as to enjoy it. When he perceives it, he seeks to perceive what is higher, for the Beloved's self-disclosures have no end, and yearning drives the lover to embrace them all. In yearning to achieve

them all, he suffers pain, and in gazing upon the beauty of what he witnesses from his Beloved, he lives in joy.<sup>127</sup>

The fact that God is the only true object of love does not lead our authors to conclude that human beings should abandon the world and become ascetics. The principle here is that man should love what God loves and dislike what God dislikes. Those who love God also love His beautiful creation. As al-Ghazālī says, “When love for God dominates over someone’s heart, he loves all of God’s creatures, for He created them.”<sup>128</sup> Sa’dī, the great love-poet and moralist, makes the same point when he begins a *ghazal* with the line,

I delight in the world  
because the world delights in Him,  
I love the whole cosmos  
because the whole cosmos comes from Him.<sup>129</sup>

Among the specific things that God loves is the prescriptive command, because it guides His creatures to love Him in return. Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), a famous early Sufi, explains this point in an aphorism. By “this world” (*al-dunyā*) he means not the cosmos as beautiful divine creation, but the fleeting preoccupations and misguided loves that prevent people from remembering and loving God. Thus the Prophet said, “This world is accursed—accursed is everything within it, save the remembrance of God.”<sup>130</sup> When one remembers and loves God, this world is His self-disclosure, constantly displaying the divine beauty.

The mark of love for God is love for the Koran, the mark of love for God and love for the Koran is love for the Prophet, the mark of love for the Prophet is love for his Sunnah, the mark of love for the Sunnah is love for the afterworld, the mark of love for the afterworld is hatred for this world, and the mark of hatred for this world is that you take nothing from it but the provisions that convey to the afterworld.<sup>131</sup>

As Annemarie Schimmel has illustrated copiously in her book on the manner in which the Prophet was understood in premodern Islamic culture, love for Muhammad was the most prominent of the lesser, praiseworthy

loves, for it is he who is the beautiful on the ladder to God.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, he embraces not only his acts and deeds in union with God. This is why a saying in my words, the Tariqah (path to God, Supreme Reality) is my inner state.<sup>133</sup>

## THE SUFFERING OF LOVE

Love demands pain. This is one of the reasons why love, so much so that many chapters on “martyrdom” that is achieved by dying, typically taking inspiration from a chaste, conceals the secret, and does not say that love demands pain seen for God must be perfect bliss? But when people “shall have what their hearts are faced with separation from what is beautiful. As Anṣārī points out, the problem is more painful than that the beloved

Not only that, but the prescriptive command and struggle. Why, after all, would a lover simply on his say-so? Yes, the lover passes out her favors so easily. Aḥmad

The Beloved flees from the lover, small. Just as the lover must give of himself, so also the Beloved must give to the lover. As long as She has not counted him as beloved within and counted him as beloved, She has not received him totally.

The Qur’an frequently speaks of love, though typically it poses them in terms of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) was asked about love for God grows up, he replied, “I witness that the faithful have love for God more intensely’ (Qur’an 2:165).

loves, for it is he who is the beautiful model whose Sunnah guides people on the ladder to God.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, as this culture knew so well, his Sunnah embraces not only his acts and deeds, but also his inner attitudes and his union with God. This is why a saying was attributed to him, "The Shariah is my words, the Tariqah (path to God) is my deeds, and the Haqiqah (the Supreme Reality) is my inner state."

### THE SUFFERING OF LOVE

Love demands pain. This is one of the great themes of the literature of love, so much so that many chapters and even a few books celebrate the "martyrdom" that is achieved by dying in the pain of unconsummated love, typically taking inspiration from a famous hadith: "He who loves, remains chaste, conceals the secret, and dies, has died a martyr."<sup>133</sup> At first sight, to say that love demands pain seems harsh—don't we imagine that love for God must be perfect bliss? But perfect bliss is promised for paradise, when people "shall have what their souls desire."<sup>134</sup> In the meantime they are faced with separation from what they love, and nothing is more painful. As Anṣārī points out, the problem is straightforward: "O God, what is more painful than that the beloved be rich, and the lover poor?"<sup>135</sup>

Not only that, but the prescriptive command calls for effort, exertion, and struggle. Why, after all, would a lovely woman accept a man's petitions simply on his say-so? Yes, the lover wants union, but the beloved does not pass out her favors so easily. Aḥmad Ghazālī explains why:

The Beloved flees from the lover because union is not something small. Just as the lover must give himself over to not being himself, so also the Beloved must give Herself over to his being Her lover. As long as She has not consumed him completely from within and counted him as belonging to Herself, and as long as She has not received him totally, She will flee from him.<sup>136</sup>

The Qur'an frequently speaks of the trials and tribulations of love, though typically it poses them in terms of faith (*īmān*). When al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) was asked about "the root love" from which all other love for God grows up, he replied, "It is the love of faith, for God bears witness that the faithful have love in the verse, 'Those who have faith love God more intensely' (Qur'an 2:165)."<sup>137</sup> Concerning faith, the Qur'an asks,

“Do people think they will be left to say, ‘We have faith,’ and they will not be tested?”<sup>138</sup> In explaining this verse, Maybudī cites the hadith, “The most severe in tribulation are the prophets, then the most excellent, and so on.”<sup>139</sup> Rūmī frequently refers to the same hadith to demonstrate that Muhammad was the greatest lover of God. After all, he says, “Whoever is more awake has greater pain, whoever is more aware has a yellower face.”<sup>140</sup> True lovers alone know the meaning of pain. Anṣārī wonders, “O God, since You had the fire of separation, why did You need the fire of hell?”<sup>141</sup> Along these lines, Aḥmad Ghazālī says, “In reality, love is affliction. In love intimacy and ease are foreign and borrowed. The truth is that in love separation is duality, and the truth is that union is oneness. All the rest is the fantasy of union, not its reality.”<sup>142</sup>

Love, in short, demands separation. Through it, God acquaints His lovers with their true Beloved, teaches His fish about the ocean, instills human beings with His own character traits, and turns forgetful mortals into loving, compassionate, deiform souls. Thus, Ibn ‘Arabī writes,

The Beloved keeps Himself absent from the lover for the sake of imparting knowledge and teaching courtesy in love. For, if the lover is truthful in his claim when God tests him by the absence of what he loves, a movement of yearning to witness Him will appear in him, and thereby he will display his truthfulness. Then he will rise up in station, and his reward of bliss in his Beloved will be multiplied.<sup>143</sup>

In his commentary on the divine names, Sam‘ānī is especially eloquent in describing the lover’s pain. Typical is the following:

The experienced lover, his heart given to the wind, steps out on the path and devotes his whole self to the quest, driven by the assaults of yearning, the heat of ecstasy’s flames, and the burning fire of love. Wherever he looks, he sees nothing but the object of his quest. He intends nothing but that object and sees nothing but his desire. He inscribes the figure of reality across the face of imagination, but from the quarters of the Divine Majesty blows a wind that turns all his suppositions into scattered dust.<sup>144</sup>

In short, love for God burns away all the illusions of “the real world.” It throws people into the fire of pain and suffering so that they may find their

true Self. In explaining the me  
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It drives home the sword o  
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There remains “but God,”  
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#### A FINAL WORD

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true Self. In explaining the meaning of the verse, "Those who have faith love God more intensely,"<sup>145</sup> Maybudī writes,

The Lord of the Worlds says, "The love of the faithful for Me is not like the unbelievers' love for idols, such that every once in a while they incline toward another. Rather, the faithful never turn away from Me and never incline toward anyone else. If they turned away from someone like Me, they would never find themselves, no matter how hard they tried."<sup>146</sup>

According to 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, "Wherever love may be, it is a fire that does not let anything settle down. It burns whatever it reaches and makes it the same color as itself."<sup>147</sup> This fire of love is lit by *tawhīd*, for there is no beauty but God, no beloved but God, no life but God, no joy but God. As Ibn al-Dabbāgh explains, "Love is a fire in the heart that burns away everything except the Beloved."<sup>148</sup> This is what lovers understand from the universal prophetic message, "There is no god but I, so worship Me." They see that pain and suffering will continue until love incinerates all transitory wants, desires, hopes, and fears and nothing is left but the true Beloved. Rūmī distills this teaching into the following verses, in which he compares the "No" of the Shahadah to a sword:

Love is that flame which, when it blazes up,  
 burns away everything except the Subsistent Beloved.  
 It drives home the sword of "No" in order to slay other than God.  
 Look closely—after "No" what remains?  
 There remains "but God," the rest has gone.  
 Bravo, O great, idol-burning Love!<sup>149</sup>

#### A FINAL WORD

I can sum up the picture of love drawn by Muslim lovers in these terms: Love is the very Reality of God Himself. It gives rise to the universe and permeates all of creation. God singled out human beings for special love by creating them in His own form and bestowing on them the unique capacity to recognize Him in Himself and to love Him for Himself, not for any specific blessing. The mark of this capacity is that they alone are addressed by the prescriptive command and offered the choice of loving Him or rejecting Him. The engendering command instills them with love,

but He cannot force them to recognize who it is that they truly love without depriving them of their humanity. As the Qur'an puts it, "There is no coercion in religion,"<sup>150</sup> for coerced love is no love at all. Those who accept the call of the prescriptive command should not expect an easy road. Falling in love is the beginning of pain, not its end. Nonetheless, the more intense the pain, the greater the joy. This is why Rūmī tells us that lovers prefer the pain inflicted by the Beloved to anything else.

Marvelous pain You stir up that becomes the cure of my pains!  
Marvelous dust You stir up that refreshes my eyes!<sup>151</sup>

*Tawhīd*, Islam's founding principle, negates false reality and presents God as the only Lover and the only Beloved. Prophecy, the first corollary of *tawhīd*, explains that becoming characterized by the divine character traits provides the means to participate fully in God's love by loving Him and loving others as oneself. Compassion, brotherhood, ethics, morality, and justice can only be actualized if one receives a luminous robe of honor woven from the divine attributes; beautiful character traits, which are nothing but the embodiment of the divine names, are not, and cannot be, human possessions, for there is no beauty but God's beauty. Over Islamic history, the most popular spokespersons for virtue, goodness, and love have not been theologians and jurists, but rather those saintly souls who lived lives of loving-kindness and compassion. Among them were great poets who sang of love, figures like Ibn al-Fāriḍ in Arabic, Rūmī and Sa'dī in Persian, and Yunus Emre in Turkish. The intense love and compassion that radiates from their lives and poetry has inspired people for centuries to love "the whole cosmos," as Sa'dī put it, and it has helped them to understand that God's love for man is in fact the heart of the Qur'anic message.

## NOTES

1. Qur'an 21:25.
2. Qur'an 14:4.
3. Not only that, but in the past decades the Islamic legal tradition has to a significant degree been usurped by engineers and doctors, convinced that the Qur'an provides clear-cut, precise, even "scientific" instructions that can be imposed on any society, by force if need be. For a fine summary of the case against this puritanical and very modern "fundamentalism," see Khalid Abou El-Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperOne, 2007). Karen Armstrong summarizes in

her book *The Battle for God* (New York: Random House, 2004) the arguments showing that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians have taken an approach to their religions.

4. By "theologians" I mean not only those who have taken this approach, but also other Muslim thinkers and scholars, including philosophers and mystics, but especially those known by this term, the Sufis. Those whose primary concern is the divine Reality. These labels, however, are not the figures in Islamic history have been used by Sufis. The best early text on love is by Abu'l-Hasan al-Daylamī (d. 1092), translated by Norman Bell and Hasan Mahmūd (New York: State University Press, 2006). A great overview of Sufism on love, and any overview of Sufism, is provided in *The World, and God in the Stories of the Sufis* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), especially 360–614. For a more detailed discussion of *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, see Norman Bell (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); and for a more detailed discussion of Sufism, From Rabi'a to Ruzbihan, see Norman Bell (New York: State University Press, 1979), 209. Bell's book provides a deeply rooted in theoretical teaching of love theory. For Rūmī, see William C. Chittick, *Rumi: A Biography* (Albany: State University Press, 1998).
5. Among theologians, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) is a good point, declaring that love for God is the highest form of worship. Joseph Norman Bell, *Love Theory: The Sufi Path to Divine Love* (New York: State University Press, 1979), 209. Bell's book provides a deeply rooted in theoretical teaching of love theory.
6. Qur'an 36:82.
7. Often this word is translated as "will," but in other contexts others are the subject. This tactic of translating scripture into apologetic theory is common. The Qur'an's translation of the word as "will" is interpreted, trans. Arthur J. Arberry (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1964), translating it as "will" shows that the word is "will" (*irāda*), unfettered by want, and is the highest form of worship.
8. For the two commands, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path to Divine Love* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 209. Bell's book provides a deeply rooted in theoretical teaching of love despite his reputation as the best early text on love. The two commands the "creative, engendering command" and "the religious, law-giving desecrating command" are discussed in *Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, by Norman Bell (New York: State University Press, 1979), "the engendering command" (*al-amr al-dīnī*); see *Rawḍat al-muhimmīn* (New York: State University Press, 1979), 209.
9. Qur'an 97:1.
10. Qur'an 14:1.

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 approach to their religions.

4. By "theologians" I mean not only the representatives of Kalām (apologetic theology) but also other Muslim thinkers who unpacked the theoretical implications of God's unity, including philosophers and Sufis. By "philosophers" (*falāsifa*) I mean specifically those known by this term because of their respect for Greek philosophy, and by "Sufis" those whose primary concern was to establish a personal relationship with the divine Reality. These labels, however, are by no means mutually exclusive; many figures in Islamic history have simultaneously been theologians, philosophers, and Sufis. The best early text on love bringing together the views of these three approaches is by Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (d. ca. 1000), *A Treatise on Mystical Love*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell and Hasan Mahmood Abdul Latif Al Shafie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006). A great deal has been published specifically about Sufi views on love, and any overview of Sufism is likely to touch on the topic. The most detailed historical discussion is provided by Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Dīn 'Attār* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003), especially 360–614. For a quick scholarly survey, see Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazālī and al-Dabbāgh* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); also Carl W. Ernst, "Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, From Rabi'a to Ruzbihan," *Sufi* 14 (1992): 16–23. Many of the Sufi poets were deeply rooted in theoretical teachings about love, a point that Ritter makes repeatedly. For Rūmī, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).
5. Among theologians, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) was especially explicit on this point, declaring that love for God is the foundation of all religion and all scripture. See Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 209. Both Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, and Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, provide useful discussions of philosophy's contributions to love theory.
6. Qur'an 36:82.
7. Often this word is translated as "will" when God is the subject, and "desire" when others are the subject. This tactic, however, ignores the literal sense of the word and turns scripture into apologetic theology. Bell and Shafie, for example, object to Arberry's translation of the word as "desire" (in this verse and elsewhere in his *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry [London: Allen & Unwin, 1955]) and claim that translating it as "will" shows that it refers to "the totally free exercise of God's creative will (*irāda*), unfettered by want, lack, need, or purpose (*gharaḍ*)" (*Treatise*, 9).
8. For the two commands, see William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 291ff. Ibn Taymiyya, much interested in love despite his reputation as the grandfather of Muslim fundamentalism, called the two commands the "creative, engendering desire" (*al-irādat al-khalqīyyat al-kawnīyya*) and "the religious, law-giving desire" (*al-irādat al-dīniyyat al-shar'īyya*); see Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, 66. His student, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, calls them "the engendering command" (*al-amr al-kawnī*) and "the religious command" (*al-amr al-dīnī*); see *Rawḍat al-muhibbīn* (Aleppo, Syria: Dār al-Shaw'ī, 1397/1977), 65.
9. Qur'an 97:1.
10. Qur'an 14:1.

11. Qur'an 17:1.
12. Qur'an 53:14.
13. For a graphic presentation of the light symbolism, see M.-R. Séguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet* (New York: George Braziller, 1977), which provides fifty-eight color reproductions from a fifteenth-century Turkish manuscript.
14. Avicenna, for example, wrote a treatise describing the Night of the Ladder as a model for achieving intellectual perfection. See Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sinā), with a Translation of the Book of the Prophet Muḥammad's Ascent to Heaven* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).
15. Qur'an 59:24.
16. Qur'an 40:64.
17. Qur'an 32:7.
18. Qur'an 95:4.
19. *Abhar al-āshiqīn*, ed. Henry Corbin and M. Mo'in, in Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi, *Le Jasmin des Fidèles d'Amour* (Tehran: Institut Franco-Iranien, 1958), 35. For Rūzbihān's views on love, see Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1996).
20. Qur'an 95:5.
21. Qur'an 2:30.
22. Qur'an 2:38.
23. Qur'an 20:121.
24. Qur'an 20:115.
25. Qur'an 4:28.
26. Qur'an 68:4.
27. For a translation of the book, see David Burrell, *al-Ghazālī on the Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names of God* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992).
28. Al-Daylamī, *Kitāb 'atf al-alif al-ma'lūf 'ala'l-lām al-ma'tūf*, ed. J. C. Vadet (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1962), 93. For Bell and Shafie's translation of this passage, see *Treatise*, 140.
29. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), 3:30.
30. In Avicenna's *Shifā'*, this passage is found in a late chapter called, "On the Acts of Worship and Their Benefit in This World and the Next." See Michael E. Marmura, *The Metaphysics of the Healing* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 370.
31. *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (1911; repr. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:126, line 8.
32. Muslim, *Tawba* 21. In providing sources for the hadiths, I give the minimal information, recognizable to specialists, but little help to those without a knowledge of Arabic (there are no reliable English translations of the hadith collections). The numbering of the hadiths follows that established by A. J. Wensinck, J. P. Mensing, and J. Brugman in *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane* (Leiden, Germany: E. J. Brill, 1936–69). The references that I give are by no means exhaustive.
33. Qur'an 17:110.
34. The other two are *al-rāḥim*, the Merciful, and *arḥam al-rāḥimīn*, the Most Merciful of the merciful.
35. See "The Hermeneutics of Mercy," in William C. Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabī: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), chap. 9, specifically p. 133.
36. Qur'an 7:156. On Qūnawī's discussion, see Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), chap. 7, especially p. 220.

37. Qur'an 33:21.
38. Qur'an 21:107.
39. This word is used for a deceased.
40. Qur'an 85:14.
41. Al-Daylamī addresses the argument and Bell and al-Shafie discuss some.
42. Lois Anita Giffen, in *Theory of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), discusses authors who attempted to be complete for sixty to eighty "names and kinds" to "Kinds and Stages of Love," fifteen different theologians and philosophers.
43. In *Theory of Profane Love*, Giffen analyzes also deal with religious texts she could exclude texts that she could.
44. For a good sampling of definitions.
45. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 3:272.
46. *Ibid.*, 3:273.
47. For something of the debates over.
48. Qur'an 5:54. This verse is almost who cited it knew perfectly well. Some Western scholars, trying to translate and give us, for example. But this obscures the sense in which.
49. Al-Daylamī, *Kitāb 'atf al-alif*, 36.
50. Husayn al-Ṣiddiq and Rāwiyya J. Fikr, 2005), 54. Cf. Emil L. Fackel *Studies* 7 (1945): 208–28, specifically.
51. N. Pourjavady, ed., *Sawānih* (Tehran: 1980), 10. On love as the Divine work, *Sawānih: Inspirations*, 88–89.
52. Jawād Nūrbakhsh, ed., *Lamā'at* 1353/1974), 5–6; for a translation of the son, *Fakhrūddīn 'Iraqi: Divine F*.
53. Bell, *Love Theory*, 74, 209.
54. Najib Māyil Hirawī, ed., *Rawḥ* Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Fa
55. For a review of some of this *The Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: 1992), 12.
56. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 83.
57. Pourjavady, *Sawānih*, 12.
58. Qur'an 35:15.
59. Pourjavady, *Sawānih*, 16.
60. Cited in Maybudi, *Kashf al-asrār* Dānishgāh, 1331–39/1952–60).
61. Qur'an 7:143.
62. The terminology is from Lāhijī, *M*.

- see M.-R. Séguy, *The Miraculous* (1977), which provides fifty-eight Turkish manuscripts.
- the Night of the Ladder as a model Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in the Ascent of the Prophet Muhammad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
- in Ruzbehan Baqli Shirazi, *Le Jaseer-e-iranien* (1958), 35. For Rūzbihān's *Ascent and the Rhetoric of Sainthood* (1996).
- al-Ghazālī on the Ninety-Nine Most Holy Names* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992).
- al-ma'ūf*, ed. J. C. Vadet (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1993). For Bell and Shafie's translation (1993): 30.
- ate chapter called, "On the Acts of the Next." See Michael E. Marmura, *The Young University Press*, 2005, 370. (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 2:126, line 8.
- adiths, I give the minimal information without a knowledge of Arabic (adith collections). The numbering of (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 2:126, line 8.
- anane (Leiden, Germany: E. J. Brill, 1992), 111-36.
- ham al-rāhimīn*, the Most Merciful (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 2:126, line 8.
- C. Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 133.
- Shiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook of Islamic Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 133.
37. Qur'an 33:21.
38. Qur'an 21:107.
39. This word is used for a deceased person, like the English "late."
40. Qur'an 85:14.
41. Al-Daylamī addresses the arguments concerning the use of the word 'ishq in *Treatise*, and Bell and al-Shafie discuss some of the historical context in their introduction.
42. Lois Anita Giffen, in *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), part 2, chap. 3, finds that authors who attempted to be comprehensive in discussing love provided definitions for sixty to eighty "names and kinds" of love. In *Love Theory*, Bell dedicates a chapter to "Kinds and Stages of Love," including five tables comparing the terminology of fifteen different theologians and Sufis.
43. In *Theory of Profane Love*, Giffen points out that all twenty authors whose books she analyzes also deal with religious themes. She seems to have chosen "profane" so that she could exclude texts that she deemed to be "mystical," itself a problematic word.
44. For a good sampling of definitions, see Bell and Shafie, *Treatise*, chap. 4.
45. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 3:272.
46. *Ibid.*, 3:273.
47. For something of the debates over its use, see Bell and Shafie, *Treatise*, xxxix-xl.
48. Qur'an 5:54. This verse is almost invariably cited in this form, even though everyone who cited it knew perfectly well that these two clauses are part of a longer sentence. Some Western scholars, trying to be faithful to the Qur'anic context, add words to the translation and give us, for example, "a people whom He loves, and who love Him." But this obscures the sense in which the verse is being read.
49. Al-Daylamī, *Kitāb 'atf al-alif*, 36-37; and Bell and Shafie, *Treatise*, 59.
50. Ḥusayn al-Ṣiddīq and Rāwīyya Jāmūs, eds. *Risāla fi'l-'ishq* (Damascus, Syria: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 54. Cf. Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," *Medieval Studies* 7 (1945): 208-28, specifically 214.
51. N. Pourjavady, ed., *Sawānih* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān, 1359/1980), 10. On love as the Divine Essence, see Pourjavady's remarks in his translation of the work, *Sawānih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits* (London: KPI, 1986), 88-89.
52. Jawād Nūrbakhsh, ed., *Lamā'āt* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni'matullāhī, 1353/1974), 5-6; for a translation, see William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Fakhrūddīn 'Iraqlī: Divine Flashes* (New York: Paulist Press, 1971).
53. Bell, *Love Theory*, 74, 209.
54. Najīb Māyil Hirawī, ed., *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fi sharḥ asmā' al-malik al-fattāḥ* (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1368/1989), 519.
55. For a review of some of this theory, see "The Fall of Adam" in William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 111-36.
56. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 83.
57. Pourjavady, *Sawānih*, 12.
58. Qur'an 35:15.
59. Pourjavady, *Sawānih*, 16.
60. Cited in Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār wa 'uddat al-abrār*, ed. 'A. A. Hikmat (Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1331-39/1952-60), 7:310.
61. Qur'an 7:143.
62. The terminology is from Lāhijī, *Mafātih al-i'jāz fi sharḥ Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Muḥammad-

- riḏā Barzgar Khāliqī and 'Iffat Karbāsī (Tehran: Zuwwār, 1381/2002), 16. The general notion of God's creative activity as a darkening of awareness, and the human ascent to God as a reawakening of that awareness, is found in most schools of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Historians of ideas like to point out the parallel with Neoplatonic notions (and one should not forget parallels with Hindu schools like Samkhya-Yoga).
63. Qur'an 37:164.
  64. Strictly speaking the *jinn*, whom the Qur'an pairs with man as "the two weighty ones," are also not fixed. For a translation of Ibn 'Arabī's discussion, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 295.
  65. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 223.
  66. *Futūḥāt*, 2:542, line 19.
  67. For a summary of this chapter and a survey of earlier views on love, especially those of Sufis like Shaqīq al-Balkhī, Abu'l-Naṣr al-Sarrāj, and the woman saint Rābi'a, see Abrahamov, *Divine Love*. Al-Ghazālī himself wrote a version of the chapter in his abbreviation of his Arabic tome, *Kīmīyā-yi sā'ādāt*, [*The Alchemy of Happiness*], trans. Jay R. Crook (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2002), specifically section 39; this was also published separately as *Al-Ghazzali on Love, Longing and Contentment*, trans. Muhammad Nur Abdus Salam (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2003).
  68. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 1993), 4:474.
  69. Qur'an 2:195.
  70. Qur'an 2:222.
  71. Qur'an 3:159.
  72. Qur'an 3:76.
  73. Qur'an 49:9.
  74. Qur'an 3:140.
  75. Qur'an 5:64.
  76. Qur'an 5:87.
  77. Qur'an 7:31.
  78. Qur'an 8:58.
  79. Qur'an 16:23.
  80. Qur'an 31:18.
  81. Al-Ṣiddīq and Jāmūs, *Risāla fi'l-īshq*, 54; Fackenheim, "Treatise on Love," 214.
  82. Al-Ṣiddīq and Jāmūs, *Risāla fi'l-īshq*, 82, 87–88; Fackenheim, "Treatise on Love," 225, 228.
  83. These two words allude to the famous hadith of *iḥsān* or "doing what is beautiful," according to which the Prophet said, "*Iḥsān* is to worship God *as if you see Him*, for if you do not see Him, He sees you."
  84. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 4:476.
  85. *Futūḥāt*, 2:596, line 6. For the sources of the hadiths, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 392n33.
  86. *Abdorrahmān b. Ahmad Jāmi: Les Jaillissements de Lumière; Lavāyeh. Texte persan édité and traduit avec introduction et notes*, par Yann Richard (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1982), 102. See also the English translation of the text in Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 174.
  87. *al-Asfār al-arba'a* (Tehran, 1282/1865–66), 679.
  88. Bukhārī, *Anbiyā'* 32, 46; *Faḍā'il Ashāb al-Nabī* 30; Muslim, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba* 70.
  89. Farghānī, *Mashāriq al-darāri*, ed. S. J. Āshtiyāni (Tehran: Anjuman-i Islāmī-yi Hikmat wa Falsafa-yi Irān, 1358/1979), 60. For a discussion of the *ḥaḥ* in the *ḥaḥ* on love, see E. Homerin, *'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb* (Paris: Paulist Press, 2001). For a comment on the intellectual descendant of Ibn 'Arabī, see Chittick, *al-Fāriḍ's al-Khamriyah and al-Qaṣṣ* (Tehran: Documentation Center, 2005).
  90. The discussion of the Muhammadan *ḥaḥ* often taking a mythic form. See, e.g., Chittick, *Classical Vision of Existence in Classical Islamic Thought* (Tehran: Documentation Center, 2005).
  91. B. Furūzānfar, ed., *Kulliyāt-i Shams* (Tehran: Farhang-i Farhang, 1957–67), vv. 12295–96.
  92. Muslim, *Musāfirīn* 139.
  93. *Futūḥāt*, 3:61, line 2.
  94. Qur'an 3:31.
  95. 'Afif 'Usayrān, ed., *Tambīdāt* (Tehran: Farhang-i Farhang, 1957–67), 104–5.
  96. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 295.
  97. Qur'an 57:4.
  98. Bukhārī, *Riqāq* 38. Meditation on the *ḥaḥ* is a discussion of two sorts of "nearness" to God: one in which the faculties, and the other in which the heart is united to God. See Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 325–326.
  99. Muslim, *Tawba* 9, 11.
  100. Qur'an 39:53.
  101. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 224–25.
  102. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 4:464.
  103. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 3:286.
  104. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī, *Mīrāth-i Maktūb*, 2003, 17.
  105. *Ibid.*, 368.
  106. *Futūḥāt*, 2:326, line 19. Ibn 'Arabī has a chapter on the *ḥaḥ* in his books. His most concentrated discussion of the *ḥaḥ* is in *Treatise on Love*, "Recognizing the station of love." See Chittick, *Traité de l'amour* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1982), 102. See also Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabī*, chaps. 2–3.
  107. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 35–36.
  108. *Dīwān*, the ghazal whose first rhyme is *ḥaḥ*.
  109. 'Usayrān, *Tambīdāt*, 104–5.
  110. B. Furūzānfar, ed., *Fihī mā fihī* (Tehran: Farhang-i Farhang, 1957–67), 104–5.
  111. R. A. Nicholson, ed., *Mathnawī* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1908), 102.
  112. Tawfiq Subḥānī, *Majālis-i sab'a* (Tehran: Farhang-i Farhang, 1957–67), 102. See also Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 7.
  113. Qur'an 53:9.
  114. Nūrbakhsh, *Lama'āt*, 27; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 295.
  115. See William C. Chittick, *Me & Rumi* (Lexington, KY: Fons Vitae, 2004), 156.
  116. Qur'an 2:36.

Zuwār, 1381/2002), 16. The general awareness, and the human ascent to in most schools of Islamic philosophy the parallel with Neoplatonic notions (schools like Samkhya-Yoga).

with man as "the two weighty ones," discussion, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of*

earlier views on love, especially those Rarrāj, and the woman saint Rābi'a, self wrote a version of the chapter in *saādāt*, [*The Alchemy of Happiness*], the Islamic World, 2002), specifically *Al-Ghazzali on Love, Longing and Salam* (Chicago: Kazi Publications,

474.

heim, "Treatise on Love," 214.

Fackenheim, "Treatise on Love," 225,

of *ihsān* or "doing what is beautiful,"

to worship God as if you see Him, for

ths, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowl-*

s de Lumière; *Lavāyeh. Texte persan*

nn Richard (Paris: Les Deux Océans,

the text in Sachiko Murata, *Chinese*

(New York Press, 2000), 174.

o; Muslim, *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥāba* 70.

Tehran: Anjuman-i Islāmī-yi Hikmat

wa Falsafa-yi Irān, 1358/1979), 606–7. For translations of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's major poems on love, see E. Homerin, *Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ: Sufi Verse, Sainly Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001). For a commentary on one of these poems by a fourteenth-century intellectual descendant of Ibn 'Arabī, see E. Homerin, *The Wine of Love and Life: Ibn al-Fāriḍ's al-Khamriyah and al-Qayṣari's Quest for Meaning* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2005).

90. The discussion of the Muhammadan Reality has many variations, the earlier versions often taking a mythic form. See, e.g., Gerhard Böwering's study of al-Tustarī, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), chap. 4.
91. B. Furūzānfar, ed., *Kulliyāt-i Shams yā dīwān-i kabīr* (Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1336–46/1957–67), vv. 12295–96.
92. Muslim, *Musāfirin* 139.
93. *Futūḥāt*, 3:61, line 2.
94. Qur'an 3:31.
95. 'Afif 'Usayrān, ed., *Tambīdāt* (Tehran: Dānishgāh, 1341 [1962]), 103.
96. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 295.
97. Qur'an 57:4.
98. Bukhārī, *Riqāq* 38. Meditation on the full text of this hadith gave rise to an extensive discussion of two sorts of "nearness" (*qurb*) or union, one in which God is the servant's faculties, and the other in which the servant is God's faculties. See, for example, Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 325–31; also Chittick and Wilson, *Fakhriddin 'Iraqi*, 138–39, 142–43.
99. Muslim, *Tawba* 9, 11.
100. Qur'an 39:53.
101. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 224–25.
102. *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, 4:464.
103. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 3:286.
104. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Manṣūr Dashtakī, *Isḥrāq Hayākil al-nūr*, ed. 'Alī Awjābī (Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 2003), 17.
105. *Ibid.*, 368.
106. *Futūḥāt*, 2:326, line 19. Ibn 'Arabī has a great deal to say about love in various passages of his books. His most concentrated discussion is found in chap. 178 of the *Futūḥāt*, "Recognizing the station of love." This has a French translation by Maurice Gloton, *Traité de l'amour* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986). For a few of these teachings, see Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabī*, chaps. 2–3.
107. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 35–36.
108. *Dīwān*, the ghazal whose first rhyming word is *sirisht*.
109. 'Usayrān, *Tambīdāt*, 104–5.
110. B. Furūzānfar, ed., *Fibi mā fīhi* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1969), 64. See also A. J. Arberry, *Discourses of Rumi* (London: John Murray, 1961), 75.
111. R. A. Nicholson, ed., *Mathnawī* (London: Luzac, 1925–40), book 1, verse 1.
112. Tawfiq Subḥānī, *Majālis-i sab'a* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kayhān, 1379/2000), 121–22; see also Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 70–71.
113. Qur'an 53:9.
114. Nūrbakhsh, *Lama'āt*, 27; Chittick and Wilson, *Fakhriddin 'Iraqi*, 98.
115. See William C. Chittick, *Me & Rūmī: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2004), 156.
116. Qur'an 2:36.

117. Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:161–62.  
 118. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 90.  
 119. *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, 4:427.  
 120. *Ibid.*, 4:431.  
 121. *Ibid.*, 4:430.  
 122. *Ibid.*, 4:436.  
 123. *Ibid.*, 4:444.  
 124. *Ibid.*, 4:507.  
 125. Hellmut Ritter, ed., *Kitāb Mashāriq anwār al-qulūb wa mafātih asrār al-ghuyūb* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1959), 11–12.  
 126. Qur'an 20:114.  
 127. Farghānī, *Mashāriq*, 28.  
 128. *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, 4:480.  
 129. M. Muṣaffā, ed., *Dīwān-i Sādī* (Tehran: Kānūn-i Ma'rifat, 1339/1960), 780.  
 130. Tirmidhī, *Zuhd* 14; Ibn Māja, *Zuhd* 3.  
 131. *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn*, 4:481.  
 132. Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).  
 133. Giffen devotes a chapter to "The Martyrs of Love" and also describes a fourteenth-century "alphabetically arranged dictionary containing the accounts of those who died of pure but tragic love" (*Theory of Profane Love*, 33–34). Al-Daylamī provides a good selection of anecdotes on the topic in *Treatise*, chaps. 22–24.  
 134. Qur'an 41:31.  
 135. Ḥāmid Rabbānī, ed., *Munājāt* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi 'Ilmī-yi Ḥāmidī, n.d.), 20.  
 136. Pourjavady, *Sawānih*, 25. Persian has no gender (and no capital letters), so pronouns are ambiguous; this helps explain why Persian poetry has always spoken to every lover, whether the object of love was "true" or "metaphorical."  
 137. Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-abdāl* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-sā'ada, 1971), 10:78.  
 138. Qur'an 29:2.  
 139. Bukhārī, *Marḍā* 3; Tirmidhī, *Zuhd* 57; Ibn Māja, *Fitan* 23.  
 140. Nicholson, *Mathnawī*, book 1, v. 629.  
 141. Rabbānī, *Munājāt*, 16.  
 142. Pourjavady, *Sawānih*, 17.  
 143. *Futūḥāt*, 2:653, line 25.  
 144. Hirawī, *Rawḥ*, 51.  
 145. Qur'an 2:165.  
 146. Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:447.  
 147. 'Usayrān, *Tamhīdāt*, 97.  
 148. Farghānī, *Mashāriq*, 21.  
 149. Nicholson, *Mathnawī*, book 5, vv. 588–90.  
 150. Qur'an 2:256.  
 151. Furūzānfar, *Kulliyāt-i Shams*, v. 15136.

## 7 The Humanity of Divine Love

### *The Divinity of Human Love*

VIGEN GUROIAN

LOVE IS PERSONAL, and thus draws others into its orbit. Gregory of Nyssa observed that the Holy Spirit is an "indivisible community,"<sup>1</sup> a perfect communion in which love is given and each receives love in the same communion is not mere diversity of unity such that the three are not Being (*Ousia*), three divine Persons of the divine nature (or being) before God. Yet neither are the Persons distinct. The Father is the *arche*, the Father, writes the twentieth-century theologian Vladimir Lossky, "that distinguishes the Father from the Son in love."<sup>2</sup> Out of the ground of his love, the Father eternally begets the Son and the Holy Spirit. In and through his love, the Father is the common being of all three Persons. In the Incarnation, the Son, who is the very Image of the Father in an act of self-donation for the salvation of the world. The Holy Spirit, who is the Son into the world, breathes



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