

# Khwāja Khord's Treatise on the Gnostic

by William C. Chittick

Among the well-known Indian Sufis of the seventeenth century is Shaikh Aḥmad Serhendi (d. 1034/1634), a Naqshbandi shaikh called in the Subcontinent 'Mojadded-e Alf-e Thāni', 'The Renewer of the Second Millennium.' His criticism of Ebno'l-'Arabi's *waḥdato'l-wojud*, or 'Oneness of Being', in the name of *waḥdato'sh-shohud*, or 'Oneness of Witnessing', has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention, even if research still has to be carried out before the full extent and significance of this debate is clarified. Because of the importance Serhendi has assumed in the eyes of posterity, he has overshadowed most of his contemporaries. But the influence of Serhendi's ideas was much more limited than is often supposed, and most Sufi authors continued to travel in the mainstream of Ebno'l-'Arabi's school. Among important contemporaries of Serhendi who deserve serious scholarly attention and evaluation, one may mention 'Abdo'l-Jalil Elāhābādi, 'Aqel Khān Rāzi, Firuz aṣ-Ṣufi al-Shaṭṭāri, 'Isā ibn Qāsem Jondo'llāh, Mollā Shāh Akhun, Maḥmud Khwoshdahān Cheshti, and Moḥebbo'llāh Mobārez Elāhābādi, the last being the most outstanding spokesman for Ebno'l-'Arabi's doctrines in the Subcontinent at any time.

Serhendi was the disciple of Khwāja Moḥammad Bāqi Be'llāh (d. 1012/1603), who was born in Kabul and established the Naqshbandi Order on a firm footing in Delhi. He wrote a good deal of Persian poetry in Sufi style. Although the hagiographical literature tells us that Bāqi Be'llāh accepted his disciple's criticisms of

Ebno'l-'Arabi, there are reasons for doubting that this was actually the case. For example, it is surely not irrelevant that Bāqi Be'llāh's two sons, 'Obaydo'llāh, or Khwāja Kalān, and 'Abdo'llāh or Khwāja Khord, born four months apart in 1010/1601, did not accept Serhendi's criticisms and continued to maintain the superiority of *waḥdato'l-wojud* over *waḥdato'sh-shohud*. Bāqi Be'llāh died at the age of forty when his sons were two years old, and he entrusted them to the care of Serhendi, who later initiated them into the Naqshbandi Order. But neither of them was inclined to follow Serhendi's interpretations of Ebno'l-'Arabi's teachings, and the two established an independent Naqshbandi center in Delhi (Rizvi 1978-83, Vol. II, p.249).

Khwāja Khord wrote a number of short treatises "to popularize the principles of *waḥdato'l-wojud*," as Rizvi puts it. He even wrote to Shaikh Moḥammad Ma'ṣum, Serhendi's son, "in an effort to convince him of the superiority of *waḥdato'l-wojud*" (*ibid*, p. 250). One of the most important books of Khwāja Khord is the Arabic *Fawā'eḥ* ('Fragrant Scents'). Although Rizvi tells us simply that it "contains some information about Sufism" (*ibid*, p. 16), it presents, in fact, a high level discussion of many points of Ebno'l-'Arabi's metaphysical and practical teachings and includes certain rather veiled criticisms of Serhendi's position, stating, for example that "the 'Witnessing' (*shohud*) which is opposed to 'Being' (*wojud*) is not worthy of consideration." Khwāja Khord is also the author of a number of short Persian

treatises, including *Nur-e waḥdat* ('The Light of Oneness'), *Partaw-e 'eshq* ('The Radiance of Love') and *Parda bar andākht wa pardagi shenākht* ('The Curtain Thrown Back and the Curtained One Recognized').<sup>2</sup> *Nur-e waḥdat* deals in simple and poetic style with the basic aim of the traveler to pass beyond multiplicity into Unity. *Partaw-e 'eshq* discusses the nature of divine love in an ecstatic style, somewhat reminiscent of 'Erāqi's *Lama'āt*, but with few references to the specific terminology of Ebno'l-'Arabi's school. *Parda bar andākht wa pardagi shenākht* summarizes briefly and clearly the basic teachings of the school on different types of knowledge and the stations of the spiritual path.

Khwāja Khord presents the epitome of his views in a treatise called 'Aref, 'The Gnostic'. The style is identical with that of the three Persian treatises mentioned above. What follows is a translation based upon a single manuscript found in the Salar Jung Museum and Library in Hyderabad-Deccan.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that the term 'gnostic' or 'knower' has often been used in Sufi writings to refer to a person who has attained to the highest degrees of spiritual realization. Many examples of how the word has been used can be found in Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh's *Sufism: Meaning, Knowledge, and Unity* (1981). But Khwāja Khord's discussion of the qualities of the gnostic refers directly to the specific teachings of Ebno'l-'Arabi and his followers. The gnostic is the master who has traversed the spiritual path and passed beyond all states and stations, dwelling in the highest of all stations, the 'station of no station' (*maqām lā maqām*) (see Chittick 1989, pp. 375-381). He stands with Bāyazid, who was asked, "How are you this morning?" He replied, "I have no morning and no evening. Morning and evening belong to him who becomes delimited by attributes, and I have no attributes."

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## The Gnostic

Brother, the gnostic does all good works, without any desire on his part, and he avoids all bad works, without denying any bad work. He mixes with everyone, without becoming attached, and he is far from everyone, without any distaste. He considers God the same as all things and sees Him in all, without calling any of them God, and he finds God beyond all things, without the entrance of duality. The gnostic's persuasion is different from all persuasions, without his considering any persuasion as being other than his own persuasion. He maintains all persuasions without becoming sullied by any. He desires God without suffering pain, and he sometimes becomes heedless of God, without finding heedlessness in anything other than presence. In heedlessness itself he is present, and in presence itself he is heedless. The gnostic's contemplation in women is greater than his contemplation in other loci of manifestation. The property of following the most perfect prophet, Moḥammad – God bless him and his family and give them peace – has a complete joy, without pain, in the state and persuasion of the gnostic, in all situations and all works. In all pains he has complete enjoyment without enjoyment. The gnostic is both the Real and the creature. He finds God in servanthood itself, and he finds that servanthood is Godhood Itself. The gnostic has nothing to do with servanthood or with Godhood, since his reality lies beyond Godhood and servanthood.

If you should ask the gnostic, "Do you know anything and do you find anything?", he will answer, "I find nothing and I know nothing." If you say, "Is anything unknown to you and is anything sought by you?" He will answer, "Nothing is unknown to me and nothing is sought by me. Everything is known to me and in me." The gnostic knows everything and knows nothing.

The whole business of the gnostic

is opposite within opposite and bewilderment within bewilderment, and concerning this opposite within opposite and bewilderment within bewilderment he has no thoughts or ideas. He is self in self, self from self, and self to self, there being no free choice in the midst. Whatever happens in the cosmos is neither according to the gnostic's desire nor against his desire, neither sought by the gnostic nor rejected by him.

'Gnostic' is no more than a name. Rather, he is identical with the object of gnosis. 'Object of gnosis' is no more than a name. Rather, it is the gnostic himself, while 'gnostic' and 'object of gnosis' are no more than two illusory names. Where is the gnostic, where the object of gnosis? This is the reality of the state – it has no reality. This is the final end of the object of gnosis – it is identical with bewilderment and ignorance. Where is the gnosis, where the bewilderment? Both are lost in the reality of the essence of the gnostic. That which is known from the gnostic is g, n, o, s, t, i, c. The rest is all he, for he is both known and unknown, neither known nor unknown. Since the gnostic has left the reckoning of space and time, this world and the next world are one to him; heaven and hell are one in his eyes.

Listen, for brief words will now be spoken. There is no room for details. The brief of it is this: Remember God without making God your idol. Forget yourself without becoming heedless of yourself. Put the *Shari'a* into practice without considering any individual desire or goal. Avoid the works forbidden by the *Shari'a* without having any doubt about them and without finding dislike for them in yourself. Acquire praiseworthy and beautiful attributes without being attached to them. Be content with whatever happens without being attached to anything. Take advantage of the joys allowed by the *Shari'a* without being heedless of the manifestation of the Reality or claiming gnosis and contemplation. Be

neither present nor heedless. Be neither servant nor God. Be neither existent nor nonexistent. Hold fast to following the most perfect prophet, Moḥammad, the Messenger of God – God bless him and his family and give them peace! – without considering Moḥammad other than the Real or restricting the Real to Moḥammad. Know that Moḥammad is the Real and the Real is Moḥammad. The Real, the Real, the Real! Moḥammad, Moḥammad, Moḥammad! This is perfection, perfection, perfection! And God knows the reality of the state, and He is identical with the reality of the state. Peace, and completion.

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## Notes

1. Several books have been written about him, e.g., Friedman (1971), and most recently, Ansari (1986).
2. The first two were printed in a rather bad edition (*Rasā'el-e setta-ye dharuriya*, Delhi: Maṭba'a-ye Mojtabā'i, 1308/1891, pp. 79-91 and 92-100). The third is available only in manuscript.
3. Salar Jung Museum, A. Nm. 858/3. Cf. H. M. Ashraf (1983, p. 176). The text is published in the Persian edition of *Sufi*, No. 4, pp. 22-24.

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