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Love as the Way to Truth¹

by William C. Chittick

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Let me begin by trying to capture something of the outlook of the great teachers who have been called "Sufis." In order to do this, I need to talk about the mythic vision that inspires the Islamic perspective and underlies its teachings and practices. This mythic vision can be summed up in two words: descent and ascent. God descended to Muhammad, and Muhammad ascended to God.

God "descended" by speaking to a mortal, and the mortal "ascended" by taking God's speech to heart and making himself worthy of entering into God's presence. God's descent by speaking is called the "Qur'an." Muhammad's ascent by embodying the Qur'an is called the "*mi'raj*" (literally, "ladder;" also *isra'*, "the night journey"). Both descent and ascent are associated with Gabriel, the angel of revelation (descent) and guidance (ascent). It was Gabriel who brought the Qur'an down upon Muhammad, and it was Gabriel who took Muhammad back up to God.

Islamic teachings and practices unpack the implications of descent and ascent. The Muslim understanding of God, the world, and the human soul, for example, is summed up by the "three principles" of faith, which are God's unity (*tauhid*), prophecy (*nubuwwa*), and the return to God (*ma'ad*). The declaration of God's unity stands behind all Islamic beliefs and practices: the fact that One God orchestrates the

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universe is taken for granted. It is this One God who revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad, and this revelation provides the model for understanding "prophecy," the second principle of faith. The same God lifted Muhammad up into His own presence, and this lifting up provides the model for understanding the "return," the third principle.

All schools of Islamic thought share these three principles—whether Sunnis or Shi'ites, jurists, theologians, philosophers, or Sufis. Where the schools differ is in their interpretation. What exactly do the three principles mean? How exactly can they be applied to the human situation? I will illustrate what I have in mind by focusing on the third principle, the return to God. I do so not least because it is this principle that is probably the most helpful if we want to understand the defining characteristics of Sufi teachings and practices.

Already in the Qur'an, the return to God is discussed from two standpoints. Some theologians came to label these as the "compulsory return" and the "voluntary return." The compulsory return is the fact that all things are necessarily taken back to their Creator. Scholars sometimes translate the Arabic word "*ma'ad*," which means "return," as "eschatology." This makes sense, however, only if we are looking at the compulsory return, which follows a trajectory that includes death, the events that occur in the grave, the end of the world, the resurrection, and the entrance into paradise and hell.²

When we consider the voluntary return, we see that the issue is not "eschatology," because the discussion does not concern death or the afterworld. Rather, the issue is delineating the sorts of thinking and activity that can ensure a happy return to God. The various schools of Islamic law (*fiqh*) try to show people the best way to conduct themselves so that they can embody the teachings of the Qur'an, avoid hell, and go to paradise. Dogmatic theology (*Kalam*) wants to make sure that people have right thoughts about God so that they will be able to keep their minds firmly fixed on obeying Him and His Prophet. Philosophy is concerned with developing the potential of the soul, acquiring virtue, and actualizing the intellect, which is the divine light that brought the universe into existence.

² There are *hadiths* that explain the events after death explicitly in terms of the celestial spheres traversed by the Prophet on the *mi'raj*. And it should not be forgotten that, during the night journey, the Prophet was taken on a tour of hell and paradise.

In discussing the return to God, Sufism is differentiated from the other schools by the stress that it places on ascending to God here and now. The Sufis take the *mi'raj* as the model for finding God's presence in all things already in this life. They acknowledge that Muhammad journeyed to God in his body, but they insist that Muslims can and must follow him in spirit. The Sunnah or "practice" of the Prophet was not simply his outward acts, but also his ascent to God. In contrast, the theologians and jurists by and large understood the *mi'raj* as the exclusive privilege of Muhammad. They held that no one else can journey to God before death.

In one common way of reading the significance of the *mi'raj*, the Islamic rites are seen as the participation of the believers in Muhammad's ascent. Those who take this position can cite a well-known saying attributed to the Prophet, "The daily prayer is the *mi'raj* of the believer" (*al-salat mi'raj al-mu'min*). By performing the prayer and observing the other ritual and moral obligations in this world, the believers reenact the ascent to God achieved by the Prophet and prepare the way for a happy return after death. In the Sufi view, this reenactment of the *mi'raj* can turn into an actual ascent into God's presence. They provide a good deal of literature describing their own ascents to God or explaining to others how to climb the ladder. As is well known, a number of scholars have suggested that such Sufi writings inspired Dante in the Divine Comedy.



Let me now turn to love as a means to reach the truth. The underlying question is this: How can love help one to achieve a *mi'raj* already in this life?

Before I begin to suggest an answer, I need to remind you that the Islamic languages provide us with a vast literature on love for God, most of it written by Sufi teachers. Like other Islamic themes, the scriptural basis for loving God goes back to the Qur'an. However, as in the Christian West, love does not come to play a primary role in explanations of the spiritual life until about the twelfth century. During that century, there appeared several great teachers who placed love at the center of human concerns. They explain, often in poetry or extremely beautiful



Before looking at Sam'ānī's understanding of love, I need to say something about the word "truth." Certainly the Sufis consider love as a means to reach truth. But we need to keep in mind that this "truth" has little to do with logical reasoning or conformity with so-called "facts." The word "truth" designates God himself. I take the word as the translation of the Arabic *ḥaqq*, a word that the Qur'an employs 250 times. In a half dozen of these instances, the word is explicitly a name of God. *Ḥaqq* is both a noun and an adjective, so we can translate the divine name *al-ḥaqq* as "the Truth" or "the True." But the meaning is in fact much broader than these two English terms suggest. Depending on the context in the Qur'an, we can also translate the word as real, right, correct, proper, appropriate, and just (and as the corresponding nouns).

When God is called *al-ḥaqq*, "the Truth," this signifies that the only genuine truth is the truth that is God. Every human attempt to understand truth or to express truth or to actualize truth can at best be an approximation. Nothing other than God is really True and truly Real. Every human situation is necessarily mixed with uncertainty if not falsehood.

Sam'ānī provides a brief definition of the name *ḥaqq* in his commentary. He says that it designates God as "an existent that can never be annihilated" (438).⁵ In other words, the Truth is the eternal, absolute, and infinite reality of God. Everything else falls the test of truth and reality, because everything other than God is temporal, relative, and finite.

Most of Sam'ānī's remarks on the divine name "Truth" explain that God's true reality is totally different from the false and illusory reality that is attributed to the world and to created things. He tells us that the real qualities and characteristics of the Truth can be grasped by meditating upon the divine names, which are precisely the designations that God has given to Himself in the Qur'an.

⁵ Page numbers refer to Sam'ānī, *Rawḍ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā' al-malīk al-fattāḥ*, edited by Najīb Māyīl Harawī (Tehran: Shirāz-i Inshā'āt-i Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1368/1989).

prose, how love becomes the force that actualizes the encounter with God in this life. From this century onward, love is a constant theme in Sufi literature, so much so that some Sufi teachers would claim that Sufism and love for God are the same thing.

Many of the figures who brought love to the center of the Sufi quest were writing in Persian. Some of them, like Sanā'ī (d. 1131) and 'Aṭṭār (d. 1221), were poets. The best known of the poets is no doubt Rūmī (d. 1273). In prose, the classic exposition of love was written by Ahmad Ghazālī (d. 1126), the younger brother of the famous theologian, Abū Hāmid Ghazālī (d. 1111). Today, however, I want to look at a relatively unknown theologian who spoke about love in terms that became standard for Sufi writings. This is Ahmad Sam'ānī, who died at the young age of 46 in the year 1140. He has left us with a single prose work in Persian, a lengthy commentary on the ninety-nine most beautiful names of God. The book is called "The Refreshment of the Spirits: Explaining the Names of the All-Conquering King" (*Rawḍ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā' al-malīk al-fattāḥ*).³

As you know, the Qur'an mentions that God possesses "the most beautiful names" (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), and it refers to God by many names. Theologians frequently wrote commentaries on the names of God, and they enumerated them in various ways. Commonly, however, they listed ninety-nine names, based on a saying of Muhammad that specifies this number. In the early centuries, many such commentaries were written in Arabic. Sam'ānī's "Refreshment of the Spirits" seems to be the first that was written in Persian.

Little is known about the author except that he belonged to a family of well-known scholars. His Sufi affiliation is proven by his frequent quotations from great Sufi teachers and the fact that he explains the path of love in a manner that accords with the teachings of many earlier and later Sufis. His perspective is deeply akin to that of Rūmī, who began composing poetry a hundred and some years after Sam'ānī's death.⁴

³ For more on Sam'ānī, see Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2000), Chapter 9, which describes in some detail Sam'ānī's understanding of Adam's fall.

⁴ This I say on the basis of a long familiarity with Rūmī's writings and my repeated astonishment at my first reading of Sam'ānī when I came across imagery and themes that I had thought were specific to Rūmī.



How then does love offer a path to the Truth? To begin with, we need a definition of love. In his commentary on the divine name *al-wadūd*, “the Loving,” Sam’ānī cites an Arabic definition of love (*mahabbah*) by one of the early Sufi masters, and he then translates it freely into Persian. We can take his translation as his own understanding of the meaning of the word:

Hāshim Muhāsibī said, “The path of love is a path in which you busy yourself totally with the Beloved. You expend your soul, your heart, and your body in His path. You seek to conform to Him secretly and openly. You do not injure yourself by attending to your own share. Rather, you place His share before yours. Once you have done all this, you will know that you are thrown down by incapacity, and you will recognize that you are broken by shortcomings.” (408)

In short, love is to devote oneself totally to the Truth. It is to give up all thought of ease and personal gain, and it is to undergo gladly the suffering and torment that come when one fully recognizes one’s own distance and separation from God, who is the only truth and reality. Love might be called the existential corollary of “poverty” (*faqr*), which is the human fact of being nothing in face of God. As the Qur’an puts it, “O people, you are the poor toward God, and God—He is the rich, the praiseworthy” (35:15).

This word “poverty” (*faqr*, *darwīshī*), we need to remember, is commonly used by Sufis to name their own path to God—much more commonly than they use the word *Sufism* (*tasawwuf*). For the Sufis, “poverty” designates the actual human situation. However, heedlessness and ignorance make people forget that they possess nothing of their own; what is “theirs” is in fact on loan to them from the Truly Real. People falsely attribute truth and reality to themselves. The goal of the Sufi path is to remember and realize true human poverty before God. It is this sort of poverty that Muhammad was alluding to when he said, “Poverty is my pride” (*al-faqr faibrī*).

In Persian, the meaning of “poverty” is often explained by the word *niyāz*, which one can translate as “need.” Sam’ānī talks about need as the basic attribute of the lover of God. He explains that the lover’s need gradually intensifies and develops into other qualities that pull him up the ladder to the Truth. In one passage, he tells us that we should not

think that Muhammad’s *mi’rāj* began from Mecca or Medina. Rather, it began early in his career, and it was noticed by the people when they began calling him “Muhammad the trustworthy.” As God pulled him forward on the path, Muhammad advanced to the station of prophecy, then to the station of being God’s messenger. Only then did he fully actualize the attribute of poverty. Finally, Gabriel took him to Jerusalem, and then he rose up through the heavens, where he reached the station of extreme nearness that the Qur’an calls “two bows’ length” (53:9).⁶ Sam’ānī writes,

He was taken to the Jerusalem mosque and then, with one pull, God took him to “Two Bow’s Length.” At that point the jealousy of the Lord let down the exalted curtain before the virgin mysteries, and He gave no news to the people save this: *He revealed to His servant what He revealed* [53:10]. . . . That great man alone knew the flavor of that wine. (267)

In short, if the lover is to climb up to the Truth in the footsteps of the Prophet, he needs to nourish and develop his need. Sam’ānī writes in this same passage,

In this path, you must have truthful need, hot seeking, and unsettled pain. The first station in the path of seeking is need. The great ones of the religion have said that need is the messenger of the Truth to the servant. When the germ of need is planted in the servant’s breast, it pulls him toward the divine Presence.

When for a time the seeker takes painful steps on the path of need, his need turns into aspiration. . . . The masters of the path agree that when love comes out from the pavilion of the Unseen, it finds no home in which to dwell except the aspiration of those who desire God. . . . Need turns into aspiration, aspiration becomes seeking, and seeking pulls into the highway of the realities of “There is no god but God.” Then they bear the drum of good fortune at the court of God’s kingship—“Whoever seeks Me finds Me.”

That is when God’s call goes out: “O everything high! O paradise, hell, Throne, and Footstool! Clear the path for My seekers, for they are My prey, and it is I whom they are seeking and striving for. If they jostle against you, nothing of you will remain.”

You should consider these levels and degrees that I have mentioned as a *mi’rāj* in this path. No one takes a step on this path except in the measure of his desire, and then he has a *mi’rāj*. The prophets had both an outward and an inward *mi’rāj*, but the saints have a *mi’rāj* that takes them only to inwardness. (266-67)

⁶ The symbolism of the expression “two-bows’ length” is analyzed in great detail by Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī. Sam’ānī frequently mentions the phrase as an allusion to the *mi’rāj* (e.g., *Raḥīb*, pp. 76, 151, 271, 273, 307, 314, 329, 414, 544, 545).

⁷ Underlined passages are from the Qur’an, with chapter and verse cited in brackets.



If need and love are the motive force that brings about progress on the path to God, we can still wonder how an insignificant lump of clay, molded of sin and shortcoming, can desire to reach the Absolute Truth. What is it about the human breast that allows it to give birth to love? Sam'ānī answers that in the last analysis, love is God's own attribute. Human love is a reflection and shadow of divine love. On their own, human beings are ignorant, neglectful, and heedless. They have no capacity to love the Infinite Truth that is God. Their love for Him rises up from His love for them.

Like many other Sufis, Sam'ānī traces the birth of human love to the principle enunciated in the Qur'anic verse, "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54).⁸ It is God's initial love for human beings that stirs up man's subsequent love for God. Moreover, God is eternal, so His love is also eternal, which is to say that it precedes the existence of both man and the world. According to Sam'ānī, by saying that He loves human beings, God is saying, "Never have I not been God, and as long as I have been God in My Godhead, I have loved you" (595). Or again:

In eternity without beginning the good-pleasure that is *He loves them* was busy with *They love Him* without your intervention. (534)

In short, human love arises from the fact that God loved human beings in all eternity. His beginningless love for them had nothing to do with their virtue or vice, their obedience or disobedience, their good or their evil. It has no cause on the human side, because it pertains to

⁸ Most commonly, Sufis quote the verse in this form. Less often, they comment upon the whole verse, the text of which reads, "O believers, if any of you turns away from his religion, God will assuredly bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward the believers, disdainful toward the unbelievers, men who struggle in the path of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher." For Sam'ānī's explanation of the whole verse, see *Ra'ub*, p. 619-20.

the eternal reality of God Himself? Sam'ānī writes,

In one of the scriptures it was revealed, "I have created the whole world for you, and I have created you for Me."

Who knows what has been placed in this clay? "I have created the hearts of My servants out of My good-pleasure. I kneaded the earth of My loved ones with the pure water of My good pleasure, and then I tied the body to the saddle-straps of the heart and sent it into the world of form. Next I sent to the meddlesome body a policeman — religious prescription and exhortation. I said, 'Let your eyes be controlled by the policeman of religious prescription, and let your heart be the sitting companion of the sultan of love. . . . O handful of dust and clay! *He loves them, and they love Him.*" God did not say, "because of their obedience." He did not say, "because of their worship." He detached and purified love from every cause. (203)

In discussing the unique importance of love in the path to God, Sam'ānī points out that love is the only word used by the Qur'an to set up a parity of relationship between God and man. He cites several Qur'anic verses that stress the difference between God and His creatures—such as divine knowledge and human ignorance, divine power and human weakness, divine exaltation and human lowliness, divine everlastingness and human evanescence, divine life and human death, divine unity and human multiplicity. "However," Sam'ānī writes, "when God gave news of love, just as He affirmed it for Himself, He also affirmed it for us—*He loves them, and they love Him.*" In continuing his explanation, Sam'ānī alludes to the title of his book, "The Refreshment of Spirits." It is love, he says, that refreshes the human spirit and provides the ease, release, and joy of encountering God:

Here there must be a secret that will increase the refreshment of the lovers' spirits: Knowledge, power, life, holiness, everlastingness, and unity are the attribute of God's Essence, and God's Essence is holy and incomparable. . . . When we look at the human essence, we see that it is tainted and distracted. It is a muddiness, a dark water, a clay, so those other attributes appear within it.

⁹ This discussion of God's love for human beings focuses on the theological principle of transcendence—the fact that creation has no effects on the Creator—as well as on the fact that "God made man in His own image" because of His love for that image. Sam'ānī is perfectly aware that the Qur'an also talks about a second modality of divine love, according to which God loves good and virtuous people and does not love wicked and vicious people. Space constraints prevent me from developing that side of his teachings here. For the issue in general, see S. Murata and W. C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House), pp. 285-88.

Nonetheless, the site of love is the heart, and the heart is pure gold. It is the pearl of the ocean of the breast, the ruby of the mine of understanding. No hand other than God's has ever touched it, and no one else's eye has ever fallen upon it. The witnessing of God's majesty has polished the heart, and the burnisher of the Unseen has placed its seal upon it, making it bright and limpid. Since the heart's work has all of this, the Presence of Divine Exaltation has a love for it . . . So, our love abides through His love, not His love through our love. (519-20)

Note how Sam'ânî stresses the importance of the heart. In the Qur'an and much of Islamic literature, the heart is the center of awareness, consciousness, and understanding. Only secondarily does the word designate emotional states and the physical organ. For Sam'ânî the heart is the kernel of the human spirit from which the mystery of love sprouts up. It is the human manifestation of God's love for man. Sam'ânî writes,

In truth and in truth! If this talk [of love] had no affinity with the heart, the heart would not be the heart. If the sun of this talk did not rise from the horizon of the souls, this child of Adam would be like other existent things.

At first is this talk, in the middle this talk, at the end this talk. Today there is this talk, in the grave this talk, tomorrow this talk.

What is all this? A secret in a symbol, a symbol in a secret, a gentleness in a severity, an unwilling within a veil, a light in a heart, a gaze toward a heart. What indeed came from this heart that was worthy for this gaze? . . .

"I adorn paradise with My loved ones, I adorn My loved ones with the heart, and I adorn the heart with My own beauty. You had to come into being so that the world would become luminous, you had to enter into existence so that My Lordliness would become manifest. When the prophets became prophets, it was because of burning for you. When the angels became angels, it was because of love for you. When I brought the noble Qur'an out from the curtain of jealousy into the desert of exaltation, it was for the ease of your hearts. Moses at Mount Sinai was a trace of the attraction of your hearts. The Two Bows' Length of Muhammad was the result of the love of your breasts.

"If you bring an act of obedience, do not look toward the reward, for you are simply performing the right of *they love Him*. If I bestow a gift, I do not look at your acts, for I am performing the right of *He loves them*." (595-96)

This then is the basis of love: We love God because God loves us, despite the fact that God made us, as the Qur'an puts it, from "stinking mud" (15:26). In loving us, God does not love the mud, but rather His own perfection and beauty, which become manifest only in the human heart. This explains why, in the Qur'an, God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam—not to his clay, but to his heart,

which is God's beauty within him:

Adam's essence is the depository of the mysteries of the Unseen. Otherwise, how could a handful of dust have such worthiness that the residents of the precincts of holiness and the preachers of the pulpits of intimacy should prostrate themselves before him? Is a handful of worthless clay and water given such respect that God should say to trustworthy Gabriel, unshakable Michael, and masterful Seraphiel, "*Prostrate yourselves to him*" [2:34]? No, no—that handful of clay had a jewel-box through the mystery of the heart.

Noble youth! Every intelligent man in the world has bitten the fingers of wonder with the teeth of bewilderment: Why is it that He loves this handful of dust and clay? By the right of the Truth! He loves only Himself, for everyone who loves his own handwork loves himself. (164)

Sam'ânî expands on this idea in explaining why the famous Sufi al-Hallâj said, "I am the Truth." Al-Hallâj was not talking about water and clay. Rather, he was speaking of the mystery of love in his heart.

When Hallâj said "I am the Truth," he gave voice to the secret that is the goal of all those who profess God's unity, the gazing place of all the lovers. Do you suppose that it was a secret that rose up from *stinking mud*? No, the secret went far beyond clay. "I am the Truth" does not allude to the clay of *stinking mud*. Rather, it alludes to his beginningless prosperity. Because of that prosperity, he was pure of human nature. Otherwise, the claim "I am the Truth" does not rise up from the capital goods of earth. The secret meaning of these words is "I stand forever through the Truth." (425)

In short, the only way to explain man's love for God is the fact that God loves man. This divine love has no cause other than God's concern for the welfare of His creatures.

O dervish! If you gather a large amount of copper and iron and then throw a speck of the alchemical elixir on it, it will all become pure gold. Copper and iron are such that they possess no trace of the mystery of alchemy, but once the alchemy has acted upon them, they become pure gold.

You and I were a handful of dust. Adam was only a handful of clay. He had not yet seen the mold of power and had not yet come out from behind the curtain of subtle workmanship. The secret of knowledge had not yet shone its light upon him, and the divine descent had not yet become his specific attribute. The oyster of ruling authority had not yet become the container for the pearl of his secret, and the sun of majesty had not yet risen on his days from the constellation of beauty. The mystery of union, the reality of meaning, and the subtlety of love had not yet shown their faces to him. But, once these meanings became manifest and once the pearls of these realities were deposited in the spirit of his heart, if you had said that Adam is "earth," you would have wronged him. If you had said that he is *stinking mud*, you would have scorned him.

Alchemical elixir is the work of creatures. If it is suitable for turning iron into gold, how could love, which is the attribute of the Truth, not purify earth of its opacity and not make

it the crown on the head of the celestial spheres? If the earth that you shape yields roses, how can it be surprising that the earth that God shapes yields a heart? Yes, it was earth, but then the gentleness of the Truth came and dominated over the earth. Had it been nothing but earth, all of it would have been *Adam disobeyed* [20:121]. And, had it been nothing but gentleness, all of it would have been *Surely God elected Adam* [3:33].

Noble young man! When a Muslim judge issues a verdict, he does so on the basis of just witnesses and truthful testimony. Earth testifies with the tongue of *Adam disobeyed*. The gentleness of the Truth then comes forward and testifies with the tongue of *Then He chose Him* [20:122]. What do you say? Does earth—which was not, and which once again will not be—give better testimony, or does the gentleness that is the attribute of the Truth? (234)

Sam'ânî frequently explains that the mystery of love is centered on man because God created him in his own image. Man alone is the locus in which all of the divine attributes become manifest, so he alone is able to display the fullness of God's reality. When God loves this full expression of his own attributes, He is loving his own beauty. But the diversity of attributes that appear in man becomes manifest as contradictory characteristics. Sam'ânî commonly sums these up as "clay and heart" —*gîl* and *dîl*. If there were only heart, there would only be presence with God, and if there were only clay, there would be no possibility of love, need, and aspiration. This is why Sam'ânî can say that the whole business of love depends upon clay.

I conclude by citing a relatively long passage in which Sam'ânî explains that the true glory of the human state lies precisely in the abject qualities of clay, which draw down the loving gaze of God. It is this gaze of love that brought the world into existence in the first place. It was this gaze that sent the prophets to human beings. And it is this gaze that now acts as the wing of Gabriel, taking people back on the flight to God known as the *mi'raj*.

Dear friends! Know that, in reality, were there no earth, there would not be all this passion, there would not be all this tumult. Were there no earth, there would be no joy, and were there no earth, there would be no grief. Were there no earth, there would be none of this talk and none of this pain.

Noble youth! Earth is itself an expression for the pain and the reality of love. . . . Hell with all its chains and punishments is the surplus of the grief of earth. Paradise with all its bounties and blessings is the excess of the mystery of the caress of earth. The curse of Satan is one of the traces of the perfect majesty of earth, and the trumpet of Seraphiel is made ready by the yearning of earth. The resurrection is stirred up by the secrets of earth, and the Scales [of the final judgment] are the result of the straight-seeing of earth. . . . The Throne with all its greatness is eager for the resting place of earth, and the Footstool with

all its elevation wishes to be wounded by the footstep of earth. The invisible request is prepared in the name of earth, and the divine power is the master of the work of earth. The lordly workmanship is the handresser of the beauty of earth, and the divine love is the food of the secrets of earth. The exalted severity is the policeman of the disturbance of earth, and gentleness and mercy are entrusted with the special gaze of earth. The eternal attributes are the provisions and necessities for the road of earth, and the pure, holy, transcendent Essence is witnessed by the hearts of earth. *They desire His face* [6:52].

What I am talking about does not pertain to the present moment. There was no earth, but there was this gentleness toward this handful of earth. . . . *He loves them* is the gift of the pure Unseen to earth, and *They love Him* is the gift of earth to the pure Unseen. *He loves them* went out ahead, and *They love Him* came along behind. Supposing that *He loves them* had not gone before, then *They love Him* would never have been found.

Earth had not yet come, but the pure gentleness had prepared the gift for earth. No mouth was there, but the wine was ready. No head was there, but the hat was shaped. No foot was there, but the road was paved. No heart was there, but the gaze was steady. No sin was there, but mercy's storehouse was full. No obedience was there, but paradise was adorned. "Grace came before water and clay."

Come, O Muslims, let us talk about the beginningless! Let us all smell the rose of gentleness in the beginningless garden! Let us all drink the beginningless wine! Let us all wear the shirt of the beginningless covenant!

Rise up—let us make our souls and hearts a path.

The caravan is going, let us set out on the road!

Let us all enter into the desert of love,

let us all make a foot out of Gabriel's wing!

Let us all light a torch with the fire of love,

let us all incline toward the hope of union! (292-4)