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*SUBMITTED:* 2014-06-24  
*PRINTED:* 2014-06-24 13:52:34  
*REQUEST NO.:* REG-10045973  
*SENT VIA:* Manual  
*EXTERNAL NO.:* 7940521

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VDX Number 7940521

Our Number 7940521

Printed Date 19 Jun 2014

⑤ BP189. H47 1999

\* Vol. 1 please \*

Request From Carleton University Library

## Bibliographic Details

Author Edited by Leonard Lewisohn

Title The Heritage of Sufism, Volume 1

ISBN/ISSN

Control Number

Date of publication 1999

## Article Details

Article Title The Myth of Adam's Fall in Ahmad Samani's Rawh al-arwah

Article Author William Chittick

Pagination unsure

Date

Note

Name Mohammed Rustom

Patron Barcode OOC-000806536

Patron Status OOCEF

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# THE HERITAGE OF SUFISM

## VOLUME I

### *Classical Persian Sufism*

*from its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)*

EDITED BY LEONARD LEWISOHN



ONEWORLD  
OXFORD

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1999  
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THE HERITAGE OF SUFISM  
VOLUME I

Oneworld Publications  
(Sales and Editorial)  
185 Banbury Road  
Oxford OX2 7AR  
England

<http://www.oneworld-publications.com>

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Previously published by Khaniqahi Nimamullahi Publications 1993

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*Reproduction of the illustrations in this  
volume has been made possible by a generous grant  
from the British Institute of Persian Studies.*

ISBN 1-85168-188-4

Cover design by Design Deluxe

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Sufi is not an 'indweller' (*hulūlī*). Whatever is God implies that his indwelling is also unification. In this station, whatever you have heard from him, you have really heard from God.

Ah! Whoever desires to hear the divine mysteries without any mediation, may say 'Hear them from 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadāni'—which has the meaning [of the *ḥadīth*] "God speaks from the tongue of 'Umar.'" If it were possible for anything among created, living beings to be excluded from the hearing, sight, knowledge, and power of God Almighty, it would be possible that it also be excluded from the hearing, vision and power of such a wayfarer.<sup>161</sup>

In this imaginal realm envisioned by 'Ayn al-Qudāt, a life spent in 'quest of annihilation' is not in vain, for the worst misfortune or calamity a man or woman may suffer is neither corporeal death nor physical adversity, but imprisonment in selfhood. 'Ayn al-Qudāt's description of mystical death leads him far beyond conventional Islam, for when denuded of 'selfhood', the dictates of the religious law no longer apply to the mystic. Faith becomes vision and the outer letter of the Scripture becomes a vividly interiorized audition. This is the 'Christian death' of which Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh spoke, the passion for which pervades mystics of every denomination and religion.

*Such are the laws of Eternity, that each shall mutually*

*Annihilate himself for others' good, as I for thee.*

*Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches*

*Is to impress on men the fear of death, to teach*

*Trembling & fear, terror, constriction, abject selfishness.*

*Mine is to teach men to despise death & to go on*

*In fearless majesty annihilating Self... & put off*

*In Self annihilation all that is not of God alone...<sup>162</sup>*

161. T 300, nos. 393-94.

162. William Blake, *Milton* 38: 35-41, 47-48.

# V

## The Myth of Adam's Fall in Aḥmad Sam'ānī's *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*

William C. Chittick

### INTRODUCTION

Sufi literature is still largely unexplored. Many texts have long been recognized as classics and many others have been brought to light by contemporary scholars, but still others are lying neglected in manuscript libraries or private collections waiting to be discovered. The fact that these works are unknown does not mean that they are unimportant. A case in point is *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fi sharḥ asmā' al-malīk al-fattāḥ* by a contemporary of Ghazālī and Sanā'ī, Aḥmad Sam'ānī, who died in 534/1140. Manuscripts of this book of more than 600 pages exist in several libraries. Some of the great contemporary scholars of Persian literature, such as Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar and Muḥammad Taqī Dānīshpazhūh, have noticed the work, but no one paid much attention to it until it was published in 1989 by Najīb Māyil Hirawī.<sup>1</sup> Now that the text is readily available, anyone can see that it deserves to be counted as a major classic of Persian Sufi literature.

Although Aḥmad Sam'ānī is unknown to most contemporary scholars, information on his life is not difficult to find. He was a member of a famous family of Shafī'ite scholars from Marv. His father, Abū'l-Muẓaffar Manṣūr ibn Muḥammad (422-489/1031-

1. *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fi sharḥ asmā' al-malīk al-fattāḥ* (Tehran: Shirkat-i intishārāt-i 'ilimī wa farhangī 1368). See pp. xv-xxii for the remarks of Furūzānfar (from his *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī-yi sharīf* [Tehran: Dānīshgāh 1346-48 A.H./1967-69], vol. 3, pp. 915-17) and Dānīshpazhūh, *Majalla-yi dānīshkada-yi adabīyyāt wa 'ulūm-i insānī* (Tehran) 5/2-3, pp. 300-312 (as cited in *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, pp. xvii-xxii).

1096), was the author of a commentary on the Koran and a number of books on *Ḥadīth*, jurisprudence, and *Kalām*. Ahmad studied with his father and with his eldest brother, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Mansūr (d. 510/1116-17). This brother was in turn the father of the most famous member of the family, 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Muḥammad Sam'āni (d. 562/1166-67), the author of the well-known genealogical work *al-Ansāb*. In this work 'Abd al-Karīm describes his uncle Ahmad as an eloquent preacher, a good debater, and a fine poet—qualities that are apparent in *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*. In the year 529/1134-35, 'Abd al-Karīm tells us, the two of them traveled together from Marv to Nishapur to hear the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim.<sup>2</sup>

Commentaries on the divine names were common in Arabic,<sup>3</sup> but *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* seems to be the first detailed and systematic work of its kind in Persian. Sam'āni discusses 101 names under seventy-four headings. In each case, he begins by explaining the literal meaning of the name or names in question. Then he lets the inspiration of the moment take his hand. The result is a series of extraordinary meditations on basic themes of Islamic spirituality.

*Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* shows that Sam'āni was a master of all the religious sciences. But it is the Sufi dimension of Islam that shines most clearly in the form and content of his work. Sam'āni frequently quotes Sufi poetry (including verses from Sanā'i) and composes many verses and ghazals himself. However, his prose is often more poetical than the poetry, and he must be considered one of the truly great prose writers of the Persian language. He writes with utter spontaneity and joy, while illustrating all the techniques of a first-rate stylist. His writing is not particularly simple—certainly it is more difficult than the Persian of the Ghazālī brothers or 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī. But the musical qualities and the beauty of the text are astounding. Without doubt he wrote the book to be read aloud. When his nephew tells us that his uncle was an eloquent preacher, one can easily imagine him reciting passages of this work and

2. On the return journey, 'Abd al-Karīm parted from his uncle at Tūs and returned to Nishapur for a year, and then went on to Isfahan and Baghdad. He did not see his uncle again. *Rawḥ*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

3. See Daniel Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam* (Paris: Cerf 1988), a work that lists twenty-three Arabic works on this topic up to Ghazālī.

W. C. Chittick: *Aḥmad Sam'āni's Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* 339

producing in his listeners ecstatic states of the type that are often described in the hagiographic literature.

Sam'āni's work can best be compared with that neglected classic of Sufi literature *Kashf al-asrār*, the ten-volume Koran commentary by Maybudī, which was begun in 520/1126, some ten years before Sam'āni wrote *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*. But Maybudī's commentary reaches the heights of eloquence only in the third sections of the work, which deal with the Koran's inner meaning. Sam'āni maintains the same high level of inspiration and beauty from the beginning to the end of his text, descending into ordinary prose only at the outset of each section. In fact, I know of no other prose text with such originality, freshness, rich use of poetic imagery, and sense of humor.

*Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, like *Kashf al-asrār*, is a detailed early source for Sufi theoretical teachings. Sam'āni makes important contributions to many topics, including Islamic anthropology. He was certainly influenced by *Kashf al-asrār* and the *Rasā'il* of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*).<sup>4</sup> In turn, he must have inspired many of those who followed him. In all likelihood, Rūmī was familiar with his work. Rūmī's *Mathnawī*, written about 120 years later, is as close in style and spirit to *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* as any work in Persian literature.

Some of the qualities of Sam'āni's book may be illustrated through the examination of one of its major themes. The basic, underlying idea of the text is that human beings were created for the sake of love, and that all pain and suffering play the positive role of increasing people's desire for God. Like most Sufi theoreticians, Sam'āni stresses God's mercy, love, and compassion rather than His wrath and vengeance. The central idea of his work is summarized by the famous *ḥadīth*, "God's mercy predominates over His wrath."

Much of Sam'āni's discussion of God's mercy focuses on the

4. These works seem to be more important in forming the background of Sam'āni's teachings than the sources cited by Māyil Hirawi—such as Mustamīl Bukhārī's *Sharḥ-i ta'arruf* (*Rawḥ*, p. xxiii). For example, *Rawḥ*, pp. 63-64, is based on *Kashf al-asrār* (ed. 'A. A. Hikmat [Tehran: Dānishgāh 1331-39/1952-60]), vol. 8, p. 545. Cf. *Rawḥ*, pp. 292-293 and *Kashf*, vol. 8, pp. 374-375. For a passage that is probably based on the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's *Fi qawl al-ḥukamā' annā'l-insān 'ālam saḡhīr* (*Rasā'il* [Beirut: Dār Ṣādir/Dār Bayrūt 1957], vol. 2, pp. 456ff.), see *Rawḥ*, pp. 177-181.

key mythic event of human existence, the fall of Adam. Given the Koranic version of Adam's fall, Islam has never stressed its negative consequences as much as Christianity. Nevertheless, many Muslim authorities have seen the fall as a result of God's wrath and have stressed the rupture of equilibrium with the divine Reality that resulted. Sam'ānī does not forget that God is wrathful and severe in punishment, but he tends to leave the explication of this part of the divine message to others. He would not have stressed the positive sides to Adam's fall if opinions to the contrary were not common. Clearly, he has set out to counteract the idea that the primary motive for obeying God should be fear.

Sam'ānī's insistence that Adam's fall was rooted in God's mercy and forgiveness may appear surprising to some readers. One might immediately object that Sam'ānī makes sin into a virtue and encourages disobedience to the divine command. But this would be to forget Sam'ānī's own social and religious context and to read his text in terms of our own contemporary situation, in which institutionalized forms of religious discipline are looked upon as constrictions of freedom. Sam'ānī lived in a society where observance of the *Shari'a* was taken for granted. He is not suggesting that people should sin and be happy about it. Rather, he is asking them to look carefully at their own motivations for activity. Is it correct to follow the *Shari'a* simply because God tells us to, or because we want to avoid punishment? No, says Sam'ānī. Human activity must be motivated by love for God, just as God was motivated by love when He created the universe ("I was a Hidden Treasure, and I loved to be known"). In short, Sam'ānī writes in order to give his listeners a good impression of God. He wants to stir up love for Him in their hearts. He knows full well that such love will not lead to disregard for the *Shari'a*, but rather to a more serious and profound understanding of the *Shari'a* and a renewed dedication to putting it into practice. As the Koran puts it, "Say [O Muḥammad]! 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is Forgiving, Compassionate'" (Koran III: 31). The *sine qua non* of following Muḥammad is observing the *Shari'a* that he himself observed.

In order to illustrate Sam'ānī's theoretical orientation and stylistic peculiarities, I provide a few examples of his interpretation of Adam's fall, often with quotations from his own words. Unless



Adam with Joseph, Jonah and Noah. *Diwān-i Hāfiẓ*. Kashmir, 18th-century. B.L. Add. 7763, f. 19v. (Courtesy of the British Library).



close attention is paid to the details of his text, it is easy to overlook the fact that his rhetoric is at least as important as his theory. One always has to remember that he wrote *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* to be recited aloud and that its sound and imagery provide a good deal of its power. Although this imagery cannot be reproduced in English, much will be lost if no attempt is made to do so.

### ADAM'S FALL

Sam'āni's views on Adam's fall need to be understood in the context of the Koranic story, which I summarize here, stressing the details that Sam'āni finds especially important:

God decided to place a vicegerent or representative in the earth. Before creating the vicegerent, He informed the angels about His decision. They seemed to be taken aback, for they said, "What, will You place therein one who will do corruption there, and shed blood, while we glorify You in praise and call You holy?" (Koran II: 30). God simply replied that He knew something that the angels did not.

Having created Adam, God taught him all the names. These are the names of everything, or the names of God, or both, depending on various interpretations. God asked the angels the names, but they admitted their ignorance. God told Adam to teach the angels the names, and He reminded the angels that He had said that He knew something that they did not know. Then God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, and all did so, except Iblis.<sup>5</sup> When God asked Iblis why he refused, he said, "I am better than he. You created me of fire, and You created him of clay" (Koran VII: 12; XXXVIII: 76).

5. There is of course a good deal of discussion among theologians and other scholars as to whether or not Iblis was an angel. The position they take depends largely on how the terms 'angel' (*malak*) and 'jinn' are defined. Those who distinguish clearly between jinn and angels maintain that he was a jinn, on the basis of Koran XVIII: 50. But others do not draw lines so clearly and consider him one of the angels, or a certain kind of angel. Sam'āni does not bother with the distinction between angel and jinn, so he commonly refers to Iblis as an angel.

According to a *ḥadīth*, God kneaded Adam's clay for forty days with His own two hands.<sup>6</sup> Then He breathed from His own spirit into him. Perhaps at this point He offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they all refused. The human being—here the term *al-insān* rather than *ādām* is employed—carried the Trust, and, the Koran tells us in concluding the verse, "He is a wrongdoer, ignorant" (Koran XXXIII: 72). Within the same mythic time frame, God takes all of Adam's descendants out from his loins and addresses them: "Am I not (*alastu*) your Lord?" They all acknowledge His Lordship (Koran VII: 172). This is the "Covenant of *Alast*," a well-known theme in Sufi literature.

By this time God has created Eve as Adam's companion and placed the two of them in Paradise to roam freely wherever they desire. However, they are told not to approach 'this tree,' which the tradition identifies as wheat. Hence Sam'āni frequently alludes to Adam's selling Paradise for "one grain of wheat." When Adam and Eve eat the forbidden wheat, the cry goes up, "Adam disobeyed" (Koran XX: 121). This is a key event, Adam's "sin," if you like. But in keeping with the general Islamic perspective, Sam'āni never refers to this event as a "sin" (*gunāḥ*, *iḥm*, *dhanb*), but rather as a "slip" (*zillat*). Having slipped, Adam and Eve repent, saying to God, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (Koran VII: 23). God forgives them, and, the Koran tells us, "His Lord chose him" (Koran XX: 122). In other words, God appointed Adam as a prophet. In the same way, the Koran tells us that "God elected Adam" along with Noah and other prophets (Koran III: 33). Finally Adam and Eve are told, "Fall down out of it" (Koran II: 38). This is 'the Fall' proper, through which Adam and Eve go down to the earth.

It is important to note that Sam'āni almost never refers explicitly to Eve,<sup>7</sup> not because women are unimportant, but rather because he

6. Clearly, this is a great deal of attention for God to pay to a single creature, since in creating everything else, including the heavens and the earth, God simply says "Be," and the thing comes into existence. Moreover, as Sam'āni reminds us, the Koran tells us that a day with God is equivalent to a thousand of our years (Koran XXII: 47), so this forty days devoted to Adam is an extraordinary length of time.

7. Sachiko Murata quotes the only passage in which Sam'āni mentions (in passing) Eve in *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press 1992), p. 35.

is not interested in those elements of the myth that allow for a differentiation of gender roles.<sup>8</sup> When Sam'āni says "Adam," he follows the Koran and much of the Islamic tradition by understanding the word to refer to the first or archetypal human being, whose fundamental qualities are shared by all human beings.<sup>9</sup> Since Sam'āni is dealing with the question of what it means to be human, he can ignore the question of what it means to be a man or a woman. Adam's fall is the fall of everyone.

### ADAM'S CREATION

The first question that naturally arises is why God created Adam in the first place. In explaining this, Sam'āni keeps in view two basic categories of divine names that are frequently discussed in Islamic texts: names that refer to God's gentleness, beauty, mercy, and nearness, and names that refer to His severity, majesty, wrath, and distance.<sup>10</sup>

Unique among all created things, human beings can know God and His whole creation, since they alone were taught all God's names, both the names of majesty and the names of beauty. However, people do not come into the world knowing these names in any conscious way. Sam'āni points out that when Adam was in Paradise, he still had not yet fully actualized the knowledge of these names. He had come to know the meaning of the names of beauty and mercy, but he did not know the significance of the names of majesty and wrath. In order to gain this understanding, he first had to come

8. As soon as Eve is distinguished from Adam, a relationship is set up between them, and then one needs to discuss the nature of this relationship. From Sam'āni's point of view, this is a secondary matter, subordinate to the question of God's relationship with all human beings. The divine-human relationship is the focus of the myth, not the man-woman relationship.

9. This usage of the term Adam is of course Koranic. Note, for example, the following passage, which is addressed to all human beings. God is speaking: "We established you in the earth, and there appointed for you a livelihood; little thanks you show. We created you, then We shaped you, then We said to the angels, 'Bow yourselves to Adam'" (Koran VII: 10-11). Sam'āni frequently refers to Adam and then quotes relevant Koranic verses in which the dual form of the verb is being employed, since both Adam and Eve are at issue.

10. On the fundamental significance of these two categories of names for much of Islamic thought, see Murata, *Tao of Islam*.

W. C. Chittick: *Ahmad Sam'āni's Rawḥ al-arwāḥ* 345  
down to the earth.

God brought Adam into the garden of gentleness and sat him down on the throne of happiness. He gave him cups of joy, one after another. Then He sent him out, weeping, burning, wailing. Thus, just as God let him taste the cup of gentleness at the beginning, so also He made him taste the draught of pure, unmixed, and uncaused severity in the end.<sup>11</sup>

Since God is infinite, the possible modes in which the knowledge of His names can be realized are also infinite. This means that it is not enough for Adam himself to know God's names. Each of his children must also know the names in his or her own unique way. Only then can every potentiality of the original human constitution come to be actualized. One implication of this perspective is that Hell itself demands human existence in this world. Hell is nothing but a domain that is ruled almost exclusively by the names of wrath and severity, just as Paradise is ruled by the names of mercy and gentleness, while the present world is governed by the effects of both kinds of names. The fact that God is merciful and wrathful demands that there be both Paradise and Hell. Hence, Sam'āni tells us, God addressed Adam as follows when He wanted to explain to him why it was necessary for him to leave Paradise:

Within the pot of your existence are shining jewels and jet-black stones. Hidden within the ocean of your constitution are pearls and potsheerds. And as for Us, We have two houses: In one We spread out the dining-cloth of good-pleasure... In the other We light up the fire of wrath... If We were to let you stay in the Garden, Our attribute of severity would not be satisfied. So leave this place and go down into the furnace of affliction and the crucible of distance. Then We will bring out into the open the deposits, artifacts, subtleties, and tasks that are concealed within your heart.<sup>12</sup>

God's gentleness and severity are reflected in the two dimensions of Adam's nature, dimensions that the tradition calls 'spirit' and 'clay'. The attribute of gentleness is connected to spirit, while

11. *Rawḥ*, p. 199.

12. *Rawḥ*, p. 297, also cf. *Rawḥ*, p. 199, where Sam'āni makes the same point in more detail.

the attribute of severity is more closely bound up with clay. But to say this is not to devalue clay, for severity is also a divine attribute. Without clay, Adam would have been an angel, not a human being, and then he could not have performed the function for which he was created.

If there had been only spirit, Adam's days would have been free of stain and his acts would have remained without adulteration. But undefiled acts are not appropriate for this world, and from the beginning he was created for the vicegerency of *this* world.<sup>13</sup>

This last point is important, and Sam'āni often refers to it. The Koran states explicitly that God's purpose in creating Adam was to place a vicegerent in the earth. Adam could not have been the vicegerent if he had remained in Paradise.

Adam was not brought from Paradise into this world because of his slip. Even if we suppose that he had not slipped, he still would have been brought into this world. The reason for this is that the hand of vicegerency and the carpet of kingship were waiting for the coming of his foot. Ibn 'Abbās said, "God had taken him out of the Garden before putting him into it."<sup>14</sup>

If God created Adam to be a vicegerent in the earth, why did He not place him there immediately? Sam'āni offers several answers to this question. In the present context, he replies by having recourse to the nature of Paradise, which is dominated by God's attributes of mercy and gentleness. When Adam was first created, he was like a child, so he did not have the strength to bear God's wrath and severity. Hence God caressed and nurtured him for a while until he gained strength. Then He sent him down to this world, where the attributes of severity and wrath are displayed openly.

Adam was still a child, so God brought him into the path of caresses. The path of children is one thing, the furnace of heroes something else. Adam was taken into Paradise on the shoulders of the great angels of God's kingdom. Paradise was made the cradle

13. *Rawḥ*, p. 420.

14. *Rawḥ*, p. 313.

for his greatness and the pillow for his leadership, since he still did not have the endurance for the court of severity.<sup>15</sup>

One of the several virtues of Adam's fall is that it paved the way for his descendants to enter Paradise. Sam'āni tells us that God sent Adam out of Paradise with the promise that He would bring him back with all his children.

Then the creatures will all come to know that, just as We can bring Adam's form out of Paradise through the attribute of severity, so also We can bring him back through the attribute of gentleness.

Tomorrow, Adam will go into Paradise with his children. A cry will rise up from all the particles of Paradise because of the crowding. The angels of the world of the dominion will look with wonder and say, "Is this that same man who moved out of Paradise a few days ago in poverty and indigence?" Adam, bringing you out of Paradise was a curtain over this business and a covering over the mysteries... Suffer a bit of trouble, then in a few days, take the treasure!<sup>16</sup>

## LOVE

Like Rūmī and many other Sufis, Sam'āni finds the key to human existence in God's Love for human beings and human love for God. He frequently comments on the Koranic verse, "He loves them and they love Him" (Koran V: 54). Nothing other than human beings can love God with full love, since nothing else is made in God's own image.

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 Friend.<sup>17</sup>

Although the manifestation of Adam's greatness depends upon the outer dimension of his self known as 'clay' (*gil*), the true locus of his glory lies in the innermost dimension of his self known as 'heart' (*dil*), for the heart is where God looks and love for Him is born.

15. *Rawḥ*, p. 262.

16. *Rawḥ*, p. 91-92.

17. *Rawḥ*, p. 223.

The place of Love is the heart, and the heart is pure gold, the pearl of the breast's ocean, the ruby of the innermost mystery's mine. ... The divine majesty polished it by gazing upon it, and the bur-nisher of the Unseen placed its mark upon it, making it bright and pure. ... The traces of the lights of the beauty of unqualified Love appear in the mirrors of pious hearts. Human love subsists through God's Love.<sup>18</sup>

Love, it needs to be remembered, can never be separate from pain and anguish. Lovers yearn for their beloved, and the more difficult the beloved is to reach, the greater the lovers suffer. The goal of love is union, and the divine attributes that bring about union are those of mercy and gentleness. But just as love demands union, so also it demands separation. There can be no love without testing and trial. True love proves itself by becoming more intense when the beloved is far away. Hence the lover must experience the effects of the names of wrath and severity, since it is these names that manifest God's distance. In this world and in Hell, the effect of these divine names is affliction, pain, and suffering.

From the Throne down to the earth, no love whatsoever is sold except in the house of human grief and joy. Many sinless and pure angels were in the Court, but only this handful of dust was able to carry the burden of this body-melting, heart-burning verse: ["He loves them, and they love him"].<sup>19</sup>

Love is a divine quality that correlates with God Himself, who is both beautiful and majestic, merciful and wrathful, gentle and severe, near and distant. The angels are cut off from God's love because they cannot taste true distance, while the beasts are far from Love because they cannot experience true nearness. Human beings are woven from nearness and distance. All conflicting attributes are brought together within them. Only they can truly love God, within whom all opposites coincide.

In the eighteen thousand worlds, no one drank down the cup that holds the covenant of "They love Him" except human beings.<sup>20</sup>

18. *Rawh*, p. 223.

19. *Rawh*, p. 488.

20. *Rawh*, p. 488.

Human beings are the crown of God's creation, since they manifest the full range of the divine attributes. Without them the world would be a drab place indeed.

Before Adam was brought into existence, there was a world full of existent things, creatures, formed things, determined things — but all of it was a tasteless stew. The salt of pain was missing. When that great man walked out from the hiding-place of nonexistence into the spacious desert of existence, the star of Love began to shine in the heaven of the breast of Adam's clay. The sun of loverhood began to burn in the sky of his innermost mystery.<sup>21</sup>

What made Adam great was the fact that he carried the burden of the Trust. For Sam'ani, that Trust is love for God. Only Adam knew the secret of love, for it was the underlying cause of his own existence. He knew that his love could not be nurtured and strengthened until he tasted the pain of separation and severity. Hence he ate the forbidden fruit.

In keeping with God's munificence and generosity Adam was sent into Paradise, where he sat on the pillow of mightiness. The whole of Paradise was put under his command, but he did not look at it, because he did not see a speck of grief or of Love's reality. He said, "Oil and water don't mix."<sup>22</sup>

God was party, of course, to Adam's disobedience, because He had created him for the vicegerency, which is inseparable from Love. And the essence of Love is yearning and heartache. As Sam'ani remarks,

That Lord who was able to protect Joseph from committing an ugly act could have prevented Adam from tasting of the tree. But since the world has to be full of tumult and affliction, what could be done?<sup>23</sup>

When God offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, they all refused, since they did not know the secret of Love. But Adam, as a lover, thought only about his Beloved. Hence

21. *Rawh*, p. 295.

22. *Rawh*, p. 237.

23. *Rawh*, p. 296.

he did not bother to look at his own incapacity, even though the Trust was a heavy burden that was feared by all of creation.

The poor polo-ball in the field! Caught in the bend of the stick, it runs on its own head, sent by the hands and feet of the players. If it reaches this one—a stick. If it reaches that one—a stick. A frail handful of dust was placed in the bend of the polo-stick—the Almighty's severity. The ball rushes from the beginning of the field—the beginningless divine will—to the end of the field—the endless divine desire. At the front of the field, a banner is set up: "He shall not be questioned as to what He does, but they shall be questioned" [Koran XXI: 23]. At the back of the field stands a second banner: "He does what He desires" [Koran LXXXV: 16].

But a bargain was struck with the ball: "You look at the gaze of the Sultan, not at the striking of the stick." Those who looked at the striking of the stick fled from the court. "They refused to carry it" [Koran XXXIII: 72]. Then Adam, with a lion's liver, lifted up that burden. As a matter of course, he reaped the fruit... The heaven and the earth saw today's burden [*bār*]. But Adam saw tomorrow's royal court [*bār*]. He said, "If I do not carry this burden, I will not be shown into the court of Majesty tomorrow." Like a man, he jumped at the task. Hence he became the point of the compass of mysteries. In truth, the seven heavens and the earth have not smelt a whiff of these words.<sup>24</sup>

## ASPIRATION

The mark of lovers is their high aspiration. They strive only for their beloved, who is God. In order to reach Him, they must turn their gaze away from everything in the created universe, even Paradise.

Adam had aspiration in his head. He took and gave through his own aspiration. Whenever human beings reach something, they reach it through aspiration. Otherwise, they would not reach anything at all through what is found in their own constitution. When Adam was first brought into existence... the angels prostrated themselves before him, and the name of kingship and vicegerency was recorded in the proclamation of his covenant. The eight paradises were given to him alone. "O Adam, dwell, you and your spouse, in the Garden" [Koran III: 35]... His boundless aspiration placed him like a Sultan on the horse of Love. He took the arrow

of uniqueness from the quiver of detachment and stretched the bow to its limit. He shot the beautiful peacock of Paradise, which was strutting in the garden of Everlastingness. He knew that this was the path of the detached, the work of those with high aspiration, the court of those brought near to God. Time, space, entities, effects, traces, shapes, existent things, and objects of knowledge must be erased completely from in front of you. If any of these cling to your skirt, the name of freedom will not stick to you. As long as you do not become free, you can never be a true servant of God.<sup>25</sup>

Love, then, means to be free of everything in the created world for the sake of God. It is to serve God, nothing else. And only human beings are given a constitution that allows them to serve God in His infinite, all-comprehensive reality, embracing the attributes of both beauty and majesty, gentleness and severity. Sam'āni tells us that God addresses the angels and human beings as follows:

O Riqwān, Paradise belongs to you! O Mālik, Hell belongs to you!  
O Cherubim, the Throne belongs to you! O you with the burnt heart, you who carry the seal of My love! You belong to Me, and I belong to you.<sup>26</sup>

If human beings are to aspire to God, they need to be able to differentiate between God and everything else. Hence the key to human love and perfection is a discerning heart, one that sees God in the midst of the confusing multiplicity of creation. Adam provides the model for God's lovers, since he was not deceived even by Paradise.

In reality Love has taken away the luster of both worlds. In the world of servanthood, Paradise and Hell have value. But in the world of Love, the two are not worth a speck of dust. They gave the eight paradises to Adam, the chosen. He sold them for one

25. *Rawḥ*, p. 120.

26. *Rawḥ*, p. 598, compare the following, where Sam'āni begins by alluding to Iblis's claim to be better than Adam, because he was created of fire: "O accursed one, are you proud of fire? You belong to fire, and fire belongs to you. O Korah, are you proud of treasures? You belong to your treasures, and they belong to you. O Pharaoh, are you proud of the Nile? You belong to the Nile, and the Nile belongs to you! O you who declare My Unity. Are you proud of Me? You belong to Me, and I belong to you." (*Rawḥ*, p. 420).

grain of wheat. He placed the wares of aspiration on the camel of good fortune and came down to the world of heartache.<sup>27</sup>

Adam had to go to Paradise in order to see the best in creation. Having seen it, he could measure its worth against his own Beloved.

The root of every business is the discernment of value. The sultan of Adam's aspiration sat on the horse of his majestic state. Then it rode into the Garden to measure its worth. [In jurisprudence] there is a difference of opinion as to whether or not a person can buy what he has not seen. But no one disagrees that you cannot judge the value of something without having seen it.

"O Adam, what is entering Paradise worth to you?" He replied, "For someone who fears Hell, Paradise is worth a thousand lives. But for someone who fears You, Paradise is not worth a grain." Hence the wisdom in taking Adam to Paradise was to make his aspiration manifest.<sup>28</sup>

When Adam saw that Paradise had no value, he naturally decided to leave. But God had given it to him as his own domain. The only way to get out quickly was to break God's commandment and suffer His displeasure.

When Adam reached for the grain of wheat, it is not that he did not know what it was. On the contrary, he knew, but he made his own road short.<sup>29</sup>

## POVERTY AND NEED

Human love grows up out of need (*niyāz*) which Sam'ānī calls "a fire in the heart, a pain in the breast, and dust on the face."<sup>30</sup> If you have something, you do not need it. God possesses all perfections in Himself and has no needs. Only those who possess no perfections whatsoever can love God fully. To the degree that people find wealth and independence in themselves and see themselves as positive and good, they will be empty of love for God. The secret of Adam's love was that he saw himself as nothing. This helps explain

27. *Rawh*, p. 170.

28. *Rawh*, p. 314.

29. *Rawh*, 198, compare *Rawh*, p. 90, translated in Murata, *Tao*, p. 65.

30. *Rawh*, p. 186.

why the Sufis call their way the path of "poverty." As the Koran puts it, "O people, you are the poor toward God; and God—He is the Wealthy, the Praiseworthy" (Koran XXXV: 15). Sam'ānī quotes a great Sufi on the question of poverty and need:

Sahl ibn 'Abdallāh Tustari said, "I looked at this affair, and I saw that no path takes one nearer to God than need [*iftiqār*], and no veil is thicker than making claims [*da'wā*]." ...

Look at the path of Iblis, and you will see nothing but making claims. Then look at the path of Adam, and you will see nothing but need. O Iblis, what do you say? "I am better than he" [Koran VII: 12]. O Adam, what do you say? "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" [Koran VII: 23]. God brought all the existent things out from the cover of nonexistence into the open plain of His decree, but the plant of need grew only in earth. When this handful of earth was moulded, it was moulded with the water of need. It had everything, but it had to have need as well, so that it would never cease weeping before God's court.

Adam's constitution was moulded of need, and he received help from need. The angels had to prostrate themselves before him, and he was placed on the throne of kingship and vicegerency, while the angels near to God were placed next to him. But his need did not decrease by a single mote of dust. He was taken to Paradise, and this proclamation was made: "Eat thereof easefully, you two, wherever you desire" [Koran II: 35]. "The eight Paradises belong to you; wander freely as you wish." But his poverty did not disappear.<sup>31</sup>

Adam's need distinguishes him sharply from all other creatures, who are satisfied with what they have. Adam can never be satisfied, since he desires the Infinite.

They say that on the Guarded Tablet it is written, "Adam, do not eat the wheat." And in the same place it is written that he ate it. "Surely the human being was created grasping" [Koran LXX: 19]. The greed of Adam's children goes back to the time of Adam himself. Whoever is not greedy is not a human being. As much as a person eats, he has to have more. If someone eats something and says, "I'm full," he's lying. There is still more space.<sup>32</sup>

31. *Rawh*, p. 90.

32. *Rawh*, p. 156.

Adam's need for God grows up out of his recognition that he himself is nothing. This recognition of his own unreality distinguishes him from the angels, who think of themselves as something.

Before Adam, it was the time of the rich and the possessors of capital. As soon as Adam's turn arrived, the sun of poverty and need arose and indigence made its appearance. There was a group of creatures sitting on the treasure of glorification and calling God holy. They were auctioning off their own goods — "We glorify Thee in praise" [Koran II: 30]. But Adam was a poor man who came from the hut of need and the corner of intimate prayer. He had dressed himself in indigence and destitution. Poverty was his means, so in regret he raised up a cry in the court of the Almighty — "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" [Koran VII: 23].

O dervish! They take the rejected coin from beggars in place of good cash; they close their eyes to the transaction. But when it comes to the rich, they are very careful. No doubt, the angels of the dominion had many capital goods, but among these was a certain amount of self-praise. They had written down the notation of 'we-ness' [*nahnīyyat*] on the wares of their own obedient acts. Adam had no capital, but his breast was a mine for the jewel of need and an oyster for the pearl of poverty...

O angels of the dominion, O inhabitants of the precincts of holiness and the gardens of intimacy! You are all wealthy and possessors of riches, but Adam is a poor man, and he looks upon himself with contempt. Your good coin is adulterated, since you turn your attention and vision toward yourselves. Now you must place the good coin of your own works into the furnace of Adam's need. He is the assayer of the divine presence. 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam' [Koran II: 34].<sup>33</sup>

## HUMILITY

Adam's need implies that he recognizes his own incapacity and worthlessness. Need demands humility, which is the acknowledgment of human weakness and nothingness in face of the divine reality. Humility sees all good as coming from God, and all evil as coming from self.

33. *Rawh*, pp. 294-295.

Alms are given to the needy, and we are the needy. Our "good" is in fact slipping, while evil is our own attribute. Our father Adam was given the hat of election and the crown of being chosen. Then he fell prisoner to a grain of wheat. What then is the state of us children who have been left in the church of this world? "When the beginning of the bottle is dregs, what do you think its end will be?"<sup>34</sup>

But if our wine is all dregs, this is not our loss but our gain.

You should know for certain that the grain of wheat that Adam placed in his mouth was the fortress of his lifetime. Human nature demands looking, and whoever looks at himself will not be saved... That grain of wheat was made into Adam's fortress. Whenever Adam looked at himself, he looked in shame. He comes forward asking forgiveness, not in pride. In order for a person to be a traveler on the path to God, he must say, "Praise belongs to God," whenever he looks at God's giving success. And whenever he looks at his own actions, he must say, "I ask forgiveness from God."<sup>35</sup>

Because of his slip, Adam recognizes that his own shortcomings are the dominant reality of his own existence. He is nothing but dirt. Anything else comes from divine providence. Hence, far from being a fault, Adam's fall is his salvation and glory. When the Koran says that the human being was "a wrongdoer, ignorant" while recounting how he carried the Trust, this is not a criticism but a statement of his saving virtue. Likewise, the "soul that commands to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi'l-sū'*), which every human being must confront, makes possible the ascent beyond the heavens to God.

If a palace does not have a garbage pit next to it, it is incomplete. There must be a garbage pit next to a lofty palace so that all the refuse and filth that gather in the palace can be thrown there. In the same way, whenever God formed a heart by means of the light of purity, He placed this impure soul next to it as a dustbin. The black spot of 'ignorance' flies on the same wings as the jewel of purity. There needs to be a bit of corruption so that purity can be built

34. *Rawh*, p. 261-62.

35. *Rawh*, pp. 205-206, also compare *Rawh*, p. 624.

upon it. A straight arrow needs a crooked bow. O heart, you be like a straight arrow! O soul, you take the shape of a crooked bow....!

When they place the dress of purity on the heart, they show the heart that black spot of wrongdoing and ignorance so that it will remember itself and know who it is. When a peacock spreads out all its feathers, it gains a different joy from each feather. But as soon as it looks down at its own feet, it becomes embarrassed. That black spot of ignorance is the peacock's foot that always stays with you.<sup>36</sup>

The lesson that people need to learn from all this is that imperfection is part of human nature, that God knows this full well, and that no one should despair of God's mercy. At the same time, they have to take a lesson from the angels and never be proud of their own good works, for seeing oneself as good is to see wrongly, since all good goes back to God.

The angels had no slips, neither in the past nor in the future. But there would be a slip on Adam's part in the future, for God said, "And Adam disobeyed" [Koran XX: 121]. However, there is a secret hidden under this, for the angels saw that they were pure, while Adam saw that he was indigent. The angels were saying, "We call You holy" [Koran II: 30], that is, we keep our own selves pure for Your sake. Adam said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves." God showed him that the slip of him who sees the slip is better in His eyes than the purity of him who sees the purity. That is why God gave Adam the honor of being the object before whom prostration was made, while He gave the angels the attribute of being the 'prostrators'. Hence no obedient person should be self-satisfied, and no disobedient person should lose hope.<sup>37</sup>

## GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Human imperfection leads to the perfection of love. Awareness of imperfection keeps people from gazing upon themselves and allows them to turn all their aspiration toward the Beloved. At the same time, imperfection allows God to manifest His perfections. Without sinners, how could He be the Forgiver? Hence God's forgiveness

36. *Rawh*, p. 288.

37. *Rawh*, p. 406.

demanded Adam's fall. Sam'ānī sometimes quotes a sound *ḥadīth* of the Prophet that alludes to the role of God's forgiveness in bringing sin into existence: "If you did not sin, God would bring a people who do sin, so that He could forgive them."

The angels were honored by the Divine Presence. Each of them worshipped while wearing a shirt of sinlessness and an earring of obedience. But as soon as the turn of the earth arrived, they called out from the top of their purity and began to boast in the bazaar of 'me, and no one else'. They said, "We glorify Thee in praise" [Koran II: 30].

"O angels of the celestial dominion! Although you are obedient, you have no blind passion in your souls, nor do you have any darkness in your constitution. If human beings disobey, they have blind passion and darkness. Your obedience along with all your force is not worth a mote of dust before My majesty and tremendousness. And their disobedience along with all their brokenness and dejection does not diminish My domain. You hold fast to your own sinlessness, but they hold fast to My mercy. Through your obedience, you make manifest your own sinlessness and greatness, but through their disobedience, they make manifest My bounty and mercy."<sup>38</sup>

In one long passage, Sam'ānī cites accounts of several great prophets to show that each of them performed certain blameworthy acts. But this is not a sign of their imperfection, but rather of God's mercy. God wanted to provide human beings with excuses for their weaknesses. Sam'ānī begins with the prophet Adam:

The perfection of divine gentleness caused a mote to fall into the eye of every great person's days. Hence those who come after will have something to cling to. Adam fell on his head in the Abode of Sinlessness. The Almighty Lord had decreed a slip at first so that that abode would be an abode of sinners. Then if a weak person should fall on his head, he will not lose hope. He will say, "In the abode of subsistence, in the house of bestowal, in the station of security, and in the place of honor, Adam fell on his head, and the Almighty Lord accepted his excuse. In the abode of annihilation, in the house of affliction, and in the world of grief and trouble, it will not be strange if a weak person falls on his head and the

38. *Rawh*, p. 300.



Almighty Lord does not take him to task, but instead accepts his excuse."<sup>39</sup>

In short, Sam'ani sees the whole drama of the fall in terms of God's kindness and mercy. God desires to make human beings aware of their own nothingness so that they will put aside claims and open themselves up to His gentleness, love, and forgiveness.<sup>40</sup> I quote a final passage that summarizes his views:

Dervish, I will tell you a secret... In the row of purity they gave Adam, the chosen, a cup full of the unmixed wine of love. From the distant Pleiades to the end of the earth they set up the hat of his good fortune and the mirror of his magnificence. Then they commanded the angels of the celestial kingdom to prostrate themselves before him. But his magnificence, honor, eminence, good fortune, high level, and purity did not appear in that prostration. It appeared in "Adam disobeyed" [Koran XX: 121]. In certainty and in truth, these words extend higher than the Throne of God's majesty. Why? Because being treated kindly in the time of conformity is no proof of honor. Being treated kindly in the time of opposition is the proof of honor.

The chosen and beautiful Adam sat on the throne of majesty and perfection with the crown of prosperity on his head and the robe of bounty across his breast. The mount of beneficence was at the door, the pillars of his good fortune's seat were higher than the Throne, the umbrella of kingship was opened above his head, and he himself had raised the exalted banner of knowledge in the world. If the angels and the celestial spheres should kiss the ground before him, that is no surprise. What is surprising is that he fell into the pit of that slip. His straight stature, which had been pulled up by "God elected Adam" [Koran III: 33], became bent because "Adam disobeyed." Then from the heaven of eternal gentleness the crown of "Then He chose him" [Koran XX: 122] took wing. O dervish, if God had not wanted to accept him with all his defects, He would not have created him with all those defects...

Do not think that Adam was brought out of Paradise for eating some wheat. God wanted to bring him out. He did not break any commandments. God's commandments remained pure of being

39. *Rawh*, p. 309.

40. For Sam'ani's explanation of what was going on behind the scenes when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, see *Rawh*, p. 312, translated in Murata, *Tao*, p. 35. For his explanation of how God's mercy and forgiveness determine human existence, see *Rawh*, pp. 224-225, translated in Murata, *Tao*, pp. 138-139.

broken. Tomorrow, God will bring a million people who committed great sins into Paradise. Should He take Adam out of Paradise for one small act of disobedience?<sup>41</sup>

41. *Rawh*, pp. 150-151.