

Sam^ʿānī on the Secret of Love in Adam's Felicitous Sin

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About twenty-five years after the death of al-Ghazālī in 1111, a Shafi'i jurist named Aḥmad Sam^ʿānī (d. 1140) wrote a 500-page Persian masterpiece commenting on the divine names. He was a member of a prominent scholarly family in Merv (in present-day Turkmenistan), a city that at the time rivaled Baghdad. His father Manṣūr was a well-known scholar and wrote ten books, three of which have been published recently—a Qur'ān commentary and two long works on jurisprudence. Like his father and elder brother before him, Sam^ʿānī taught at the Nizamiyya Madrasa in Merv. I like to think that he based his book, *The Repose of the Spirits (Rawḥ al-arwāḥ)*, on his lecture notes for a course on theology. It seems to be aimed at students familiar with the basic elements of the curriculum—Qur'ān, Ḥadīth literature, and jurisprudence—and now prepared to reflect on the meaning of the transmitted knowledge.

Sam^ʿānī does not follow the pattern of Arabic books in this common genre, for he avoids linguistic analysis and theological abstractions and instead spends most of his time addressing the repercussions of the divine names in the human soul. He makes constant use of imagistic language, poetry, anecdotes, stories of the prophets, accounts of Muḥammad and his Companions, and sayings of the great Sufi teachers. The result is one of the most wide-ranging expositions of Islamic spirituality ever written. The book and its author, however, were almost completely forgotten until the text was published in 1989. In 1992 I introduced a few of its teachings about Adam at a conference on Persian Sufism organized by our late and dear friend Leonard Lewisohn, and later I quoted many excerpts in my study of love in Islamic literature. Most recently I published a translation of the entire text.¹ Here I would like to review some of the themes Sam^ʿānī discusses

1. William C. Chittick, 'The Myth of Adam's Fall in Aḥmad Sam^ʿānī's *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*,' in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), pp. 337–59; *idem*, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); *idem*, *The Repose of the Spirits: A Sufi Commentary on the Divine Names* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019). For Sam^ʿānī's exposition of the lessons taught by the Qur'ānic account of Moses,

in his explanation of human nature as presented in the Qur'ānic account of our common ancestor. His basic point is clear: God created Adam and the Adamites out of love, and this alone is sufficient to understand their reality and destiny.

BEGINNINGLESS LOVE

The Muslim evaluation of Adam differs markedly from what is typically found among Christians, so Muslim scholars seldom looked upon Adam's fall as having grave negative consequences. The Qur'ānic story begins with God's announcing to the angels that He was placing a vicegerent in the earth. The angels wonder why He was choosing someone who would work corruption and shed blood, 'while we glorify Thy praise and call Thee holy' (2:30). God responds that He knows something that they do not know. He creates Adam, teaches him all the names, asks the angels to name the things, and, when they cannot, has Adam tell them the names. Then He commands the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, and they all do so. Iblis (Satan) had earned a place among the angels through his piety and had even been appointed as their teacher, but his pride leads him to refuse to obey God's command, so he is sent down from heaven. God places Adam in the Garden and tells him and his spouse to partake freely of its blessings, but not to approach 'this tree' (which the tradition identifies as wheat). Having eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve are forgiven and sent down to the earth, where Adam is appointed as the first prophet. Sam'ānī sums up the creation story in the following passage:²

The sultan of power picked up a handful of dust from the earth: *'Surely God created Adam from a handful that He took from all the earth.'* He molded him with the beautiful-doing of giving him form: *Surely We created man in the most beautiful stature* [95:4]. He brought him into the fermentation of bringing to be: *'He fermented Adam's clay in His hand for forty mornings.'* He sat the spirit-king

see *idem*, 'Moses and the Religion of Love,' in *Islamic Studies and the Study of Sufism in Academia: Rethinking Methodologies*, ed. Y. Tonaga and Ch. Fujii (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 2018), pp. 101–18. The two articles can be found at <williamcchittick.com>.

2. Throughout these passages, italics indicate that the text is in Arabic rather than Persian. Qur'ānic citations are indicated by chapter and verse in square brackets; sources for most of the other Arabic passages can be found in the notes to *Rest of the Spirits*.

on the royal seat of his makeup: *And I blew into him of My spirit* [15:29]. In the kingdom of the Beginningless He read the edict of his vicegerency and sultanate: *'I am setting in the earth a vicegerent'* [2:30]. He recorded the names of all existent things with the pen of eternal gentleness on the tablet of his spirit. He commanded the glorifiers and hallowers of the palisades of holiness and the gardens of intimacy to prostrate themselves before the throne of his good fortune: *'And when We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam!"'* [2:34]. With one abandonment He hung the teacher of the angels on the gallows of admonition in front of Adam's magnificent throne and bound the collar of the curse and rejection around his neck: *'Upon thee shall be My curse until the Day of Doom!'* [38:78]. (46/63)³

For many Muslim scholars, it was clear that God's motive in creating human beings was love. Philosophers like Avicenna found the root of this love in the very reality of the Necessary Existence.⁴ Sufis and theologians tended to base their understanding on the Qur'ān, quoting two verses on love more than any others. Those who wanted to stress God's unconditional love highlighted the verse, 'He loves them and they love Him' (5:54), reading it as a statement of God's eternal reality and man's innate nature. Those who wanted to stress that God privileged Muḥammad over other prophets—to the extent, many claimed, that his message abrogated their messages—typically gave pride of place to the verse, 'Say [O Muḥammad!]: "If you love God, follow me; God will love you"' (3:31). They understood this to mean that God's love for human beings is conditional upon their following the Sunnah of the Prophet. Sam'ānī belongs to the former group of scholars, even if he often highlights Muḥammad's exalted rank. Tellingly, he discusses the verse of unconditional love in over thirty passages, while he mentions the verse of conditional love only once.

In the Beginningless *He loves them* had work with *they love Him* without you. Which day was that? There was still no garment of existence, none of this dust and clay, no universe or Adam. That

3. The first page number refers to Chittick, *Rest of the Spirits*; the second to the Persian text edited by Najib Mayel Heravi, *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ fī sharḥ asmā' al-malik al-fattāḥ* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa Farhangī, 1989). <<http://irfan-lit.tufts.ac.jp/>>

4. For Avicenna's views, see Chittick, *Divine Love*, pp. 284–7.

proclamation was made by His bounteousness and answered by His gentleness. (420/535)

First the beginningless request set out to seek us, then we began to seek. Otherwise, we knew nothing of love's secret. (242/307)

Had He in His generosity and bounty not invited this handful of dust-dwelling, rascally dust to the court of His eternity and spread out the carpet of bold expansiveness in the house of guidance, how could this woebegone of existence, this speck of impure dust, have the gall to put his foot on the edge of the carpet of the King of kings? (12/17)

[God says,] 'You should not suppose that Our work with you pertains to today or Our talk with you pertains to now. There was no world and no Adam, no substances and no accidents, no Throne and no Footstool, no paradise and no hell, no Tablet and no Pen—and I was talking to you without you.' (61/83)

They said to a dervish, 'Who are you?'

He said, '*I am the son of the Beginningless.*'

In respect of sonship our lineage goes back to Adam, but in respect of love it goes back to the beginningless gentleness.

God cannot have children, but He can have those whom He loves. *He begets not, nor was He begotten* [112:3] came and cut off every sort of child. *He loves them and they love Him* came and affirmed every sort of love. (156/204)

What I am talking about does not pertain to now. There was no dust, but there was gentleness toward this handful of dust . . .

He loves them is the offering of the pure Unseen to dust, and *they love Him* [5:54] is the gift of dust 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 out before, you would not have found *they love Him*.

Dust had not yet come, but pure gentleness had prepared an offering for dust. There was no mouth, but the wine was ready. There was no head, but the hat was shaped. There was no foot, but the road was paved. There was no heart, but the gaze was steady. There was no sin, but the storehouse was full of mercy. There was

no obedience, but paradise was adorned. *Solicitude comes before water and clay.*

O Muslims, come, let us all talk only about the Beginningless! Let us all smell the roses of gentleness in the beginningless meadow! Let us all drink of the beginningless wine! Let us all wear the shirt of the beginningless covenant! (231–2/293)

Just as love designates the beginningless reality of the Real, so also God's forgiveness has no beginning, for Adam's forgetfulness is inherent to his reality, known to God for all eternity.

He called you weak so your shortcomings would be effaced: '*And man was created weak*' [4:28]. (423/539).

'When We affirmed friendship for you in the Beginningless, We drew the line of pardon around you. If you had to be sinless, We would have created you sinless. We created you as you had to be.' (338/426)

'Even if many great sins overcome you, the Creator's love will not leave you, for the sin is your attribute, and the love His attribute . . .

'My servant, though your craft is disobedience, My attribute is forgiveness. You will not abandon your craft. Why would I abandon My attribute? . . .

'When you put something into water, it becomes wet. This is not because of your command, but because of water's nature. When you throw something into fire, it burns, not because of your instruction, but because of fire's attribute. The sun and the moon give light, not out of kindness to you, but because that indeed is their work. I too—I forgive, not because of your excellence, but because that is My attribute.' (268/337)

O chevalier, He created all existent things at the request of power, but He created Adam and the Adamites at the request of love....

The Exalted Lord wanted to clothe this speck of dust in the shirt of existence-giving, sit him on the chair of vicegerency, bind the collar of finding on the neck of his eminence with His munificence, and string the gemstone of knowledge on the necklace of his felicity: *And He taught Adam the names, all of them* [2:31]. The angels of the Dominion said, '*What, wilt Thou set therein one who will work corruption there, and shed blood?*' [2:30].

The preacher of eternal gentleness came to the pulpit of the Will and gave them their answer: '*There is no consultation in love.*' . . .

'What weight will your glorification have if I do not accept it? How will their sins harm them if the cupbearer of gentleness places the goblet of pardon's limpid wine in their hands? *Those—God will change their ugly deeds into beautiful deeds* [25:70].

Why do you look at the fact that they have remained in the opacity of slips? Look at the fact that the limpidness of My pardon belongs to them.' [Muḥammad said,] '*If you did not sin, God would bring a people who did sin, and then He would forgive them.*' (172/223)

ADAM'S CHOSENNESS

Those who hear talk of the infinite divine reality often wonder why a transcendent God would have created a corruptible universe, given His utter lack of need for anything. But this would be to ignore the divine attributes of love and mercy.

When the basis of judging the world is the lordly unneediness and the perfection of the kingly beauty, then in reality the existence of creation is a useless bother. However, *He created us so that we would benefit from Him, not so that He would benefit from us.* He brought us into existence for the sake of our portion and share, even though His exalted and majestic Presence is pure of portions and shares. The attribute of bounty rose up seeking the obedient, the attribute of severity rose up seeking the disobedient, and the attributes of majesty and beauty rose up seeking lovers.

O chevalier, it is incumbent on a rich man to give alms to the poor. If we suppose that the deserving man does not sit and ask at the door of the rich man's house, then it is incumbent on the rich man to take alms to the door of the poor man's hut. The unneedy in reality is the Real, and the poor in reality are we. (11/16)

From the thirteenth century onward Sufi literature typically explained God's motivation for creating the universe in terms of a purported ḥadīth in which God says that He was a Hidden Treasure, so He loved to be recognized and known. Since He created human beings in His own form, they are the only creatures that have the capacity to know and love Him for Himself and not for any ulterior motive. Sam'ānī mentions the ḥadīth of the Hidden Treasure only once, at the

beginning of a short allegory about a dervish—namely the poor and needy human soul—who falls in love with a king.

There was a king who had perfect beauty. One day he said to his vizier, 'I have this perfect beauty—isn't there anyone burnt who can come into give-and-take with my beauty? "*I was a hidden treasure, so I desired to be recognized.*"' (170/221)

When the shirt of existence was put on this center-point of dust-dwelling dust in keeping with the affair of generosity and munificence, the secret of love appeared: '*I am the King and I invite you to become kings! I am the Alive and I invite you to live!*'

O dervish, if He had not given you kingship, no recognition of Him would have come to you, for no one recognizes a king but a king. Where does the splendid scripture allude to this good news? '*Then We made you vicegerents*' [10:14]. '*And He made you kings*' [5:20].

He made you a king and He gave you a kingship. This kingship is a concise, subtle expression of the Possessor of Majesty's kingship. A throne of love was built from your spirit and a footstool of truthfulness was set up as your heart. A tent was erected in the desert of your makeup as the dwelling-place for the cavalry of your imagination. Your brain was placed before you as a Guarded Tablet. Your five senses were turned into the angels of your heavenly dominion's make-up. Your intellect was made into a moon and your knowledge a sun, shining on the sphere of your body. Through all of these you were made a king. In the tongue of prophecy, this was expressed in these terms: '*Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you will be asked about his sheep.*' (120/158–9)

Many Muslim scholars read the Aristotelian maxim, 'The first in thought is the last in act', as a philosophical version of the ḥadīth of the Hidden Treasure. 'The first in thought' is the Hidden Treasure, and 'the last in act' is Adam and his children, the only creatures capable of knowing and loving God as He is. This in effect is an Islamic logos doctrine, for it holds that Muḥammad, the most perfect of Adam's children, was God's first thought and final goal. Sam'ānī cites a well-known ḥadīth and then explains it in terms of this maxim:

'We are the last and the preceders.' What the philosophers say is, '*The first in thought is the last in act, and the last in act is the first*

in thought. Whatever is prior in thought is posterior in act, and whatever is posterior in act is prior in thought. A man says, 'I want a house to keep the cold and heat away from me.' First he lays down a foundation and raises the walls. Then he puts up the roof. The roof was prior in thought but posterior in act.

The secret of the beginningless gaze was Muḥammad and Muḥammad's community. Several preliminaries and intermediaries were needed to make that beauty appear in creation. (482/616–17)

The Muḥammadan beauty appeared first in Adam. As Samʿānī puts it, 'In terms of form Muḥammad was an Adamite, but in terms of reality Adam was a Muḥammadan' (184/236). Sufi teachers often called God's first thought 'the Muḥammadan Light.' Samʿānī explains how this light gave rise to Adam in the following passage. The 'Tariqah' is the path to God as taught by the Sufi masters. It is typically contrasted with the Shariah, the revealed law as codified by the jurists.

What was this handful? It was a curtain behind which was prepared the light of Muḥammad. *Then God commanded that this light be curtained within seventy thousand veils so that it would not be seen or witnessed, lest its brightness extinguish the light of the sun and the moon. When the light was curtained, He mixed it with the soil that was the soil of Muḥammad and deposited it in the soil of Adam, so it sparkled on his forehead.*

Adam had to pack his bags from the adorned Firdaws⁵ because of the tumult and turmoil of that light. It said to Adam, 'Pack your bags, for you cannot sit still if you have not traveled the road.' By the decree of the Tariqah's jealousy the light in Adam's clear forehead charged forth, upsetting the eight paradises and striking against Adam like a knocker on the door. Were it not for the tugging and pulling of that light, Adam would have been happy with the paradisial hours . . .

'O Adam, given how many are hungry, thirsty, and waiting on the limpid bench of your solid loins, it is not beautiful to eat alone. Leave this place and give out the call, "Come and get it!" Then someone burnt will come from Ethiopia, someone pain-stricken from Byzantium, someone sorrowful from Persia. We will set up the

5. *Firdaws*, cognate with English 'paradise', is one of several Qur'ānic designations for paradise.

House of Sorrows on the plain of the resurrection waiting for the Josephs of the community. How is this a place for gazing on houris?' (412/525)

O chevalier, there was no name or mark of Adam, no trace of dust, and the lordly gaze was debating with your antagonists: '*Surely I know what you do not know*' [2:30]. When He placed the cap of chosenness on Adam's head, it concealed all of his defects. Why do you look at the fact that the child came forth ugly from its mother? Look at the mother's tenderness!

Wait a few days until this carefree handful of dust, with naked feet and head, comes out from the special chamber of dust and mounts on the steed of good fortune. What is that steed? The wings of the angels of the Dominion. Then you will see the angels' embarrassment at what they said. The answer to the blamers is given only by the beloved's beauty. (391/499)

First Gabriel was sent to take a handful of dust from the earth... What is the wisdom in this handful? Yes, the subtleties and secrets of the Unseen must be deposited in a container. The dust was taken by severity, and the spirit was deposited within it by severity, for they were opposites. Had there been only spirit, the days would have been free of stain and the acts would have had no adulteration. But pure acts are not appropriate for this world, and from the beginning Adam was created to be the housemaster in *this* world . . .

The secrets were combined with dust so that they would not shine there and be found by the evil eye. The dust was put there to throw off the folk of outwardness. The army of the uncaused Will set up an ambush with Adam's dust so that Iblis would look at the dust, protest, and become accursed . . .

He wanted to put a hundred thousand secrets in Adam's makeup. He gazed and saw no one in the world more trustworthy than dust, so He put the secrets in dust. He did not give them to fire, for fire burns and reduces to nothing. Deposits are not given to the treacherous; they are given to the trustworthy. The secrets were the locus of exaltation, for they were the veiled virgins of the Unseen Presence, and curtained women are kept concealed. Nothing was like dust in concealing, so dust was made the curtain of the secrets. Then the privy would look at the secrets, and the non-privy would look at the dust. (333-4/420)

In the midst of this Iblis criticized Adam by saying that he was made of clay. 'O accursed one, you see the outwardness adorned with clay, but you do not see the inwardness trimmed with the heart. *And He adorned it in their hearts* [49:7].' (294/371)

O dervish, when a watcher is set over someone, he is set over someone who is beautiful. He did not say, 'I am the watcher over heaven and earth; I am the watcher over the Throne and the Footstool.' He said, 'I am the watcher over you: *Surely God is watcher over you* [4:1].' This is because a watcher is stipulated for someone beautiful, and no existent thing has the beauty that you have: *Surely We created man in the most beautiful stature* [95:4]: 'You are *the most beautiful of created things*, and I am *the most beautiful of creators*. "So blessed is God, *the most beautiful of creators!*" [23:14].' (298/375-6)

O dervish, if you gather a large amount of copper and iron and toss on it a speck of the elixir, it will all turn into pure gold. Copper and iron are such that they have no trace of the mystery of the elixir, but once the elixir has acted upon them, they become pure gold.

You and I were a handful of dust, and Adam was a handful of clay. Adam had not seen the mold of power and had not yet come out from behind the curtain of the subtle artisanry. The secret of knowledge had not yet shone its light upon him, and coming down had not yet become his specific attribute. The oyster of the decree had not yet become the container for the pearl of his secret core, and the sun of majesty had not yet risen over his days from the constellation of beauty. The subtle secret of union and the reality of the meaning of love had not yet shown their faces to him. But once these meanings became manifest and the pearls of these realities were deposited in the coffer of his heart, if you say that Adam is dust, you will have wronged him. If you say that he is *molded mud* [15:26], you will have scorned him.

The elixir is an artifact of creatures. If it is suitable for turning iron into gold, how can it be that love, which is the attribute of the Real, cannot purify dust of its opacity and make it the crown on top of the celestial spheres? If the clay that you knead yields roses, why are you surprised that the clay He kneads yields a heart? Yes, it was dust, but then the Real's gentleness came and made the dust the object of His seeking. Had it been nothing but dust, all of it would have been *Adam disobeyed* [20:121]. Had it been nothing

but gentleness, all of it would have been *surely God chose Adam* [3:33].

O chevalier, when a Muslim judge makes a ruling, he does so on the basis of just witnesses and truthful testimony. Dust testifies with the tongue of *Adam disobeyed*. Then the gentleness of the Real comes and testifies with the tongue of *his Lord chose him* [20:122]. What do you say? Which one gives a more just testimony? Dust, which was not and then came to be, or gentleness, which is an attribute of the Real? (182/234)

O dervish, the two worlds are a box, and the pearl inside the box is the existence of Adam. A box can be carved in an hour, but it takes many years before the precious jewel, which is called the unique pearl, will be put inside. Adam's outwardness was made of clay, and clay needs no respite. That is what the heart needs—not the respite of power, but the respite of greatness . . .

He created an individual, threw the noose of subjection around the neck of everything in heaven and earth, and put it in his hand. The sun was his torch-holder, the moon his dyer and cook, the mountains his treasurers, heaven his roof, earth his carpet. He subjected to him the exalted angels, with their high degrees and ranks and their brilliant stations and honors. One of them drives the clouds, another brings the rain, a third provides daily bread, a fourth writes down works, a fifth asks forgiveness . . .

He created everything for him, but He did not turn him over to anything. He gave him a name, but He did not turn him over to the name. He sat him on a throne and had the angels prostrate themselves before him, but He did not turn him over to that. He brought him into this world and made the whole of this world his kingdom, but He did not turn him over to this world. At first he had the cape of nonexistence, but He did not turn him over to nonexistence. Then he put on the cape of existence, but He did not turn him over to that. He gave him attributes, but he did not let him loose with those attributes. He created him, gave him beauty, and displayed the beauty to the world's inhabitants. A hundred thousand seekers began to seek, but the Exalted Jealousy came out and did not turn him over to anyone. 'If you did not want to sell, why did you give him to the broker?' All being took a share of his beauty, but he himself kept the trailing skirts of his state pure of those shares. (183-5/235-8)

We chose them, out of knowledge, above the worlds [44:32] is a secret. We are wounded by our own existence, but we receive bestowals from His subsistence. When we look at our own existence, we see only annihilation, but when we look at His uncaused munificence, we see only subsistence.

O dervish, do not look at the form of the dust [*turbat*]-look at the secret of the nurturing [*tarbiyat*]. When you give a grain to dust, it will give it back many times over, but when you give something to fire, it will burn it away. They gave that grain of wheat—which carries the mystery of nourishment’s wherewithal—to the nursemaid dust, so that she would nurture it at her side and breast. Then in a short time she gave back produce many times over, *in every ear a hundred grains* [2:261].

He sprinkled the grain of love and the unique seed of affection on the clay of dust’s breast, for *He loves them and they love Him* [5:54]. Then He fermented the clay with the hand of gentleness, for ‘*He fermented Adam’s clay in His hand for forty mornings.*’ He nurtured it with the right hand of auspiciousness and the left hand of bestowal and assisted it with the limpid water of bounty from the clouds of prosperity, for *He confirmed them with a spirit from Him* [58:22]. In the spring of the secrets the ear of acceptance grew fat and joined with the produce of connection and arrival. *A goodly word is like a goodly tree, its roots fixed and its branches in heaven; it gives its fruit every season by the leave of its Lord* [14:24–5]. (131/173)

THE TRUST

Adam’s unique role in creation is typically associated with the Trust (*amāna*). According to the Qur’ān, God offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they were afraid of it and refused to carry it. Then man accepted it. The verse concludes, ‘He was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant’ (33:72). Sam‘ānī often contrasts Adam’s acceptance of the Trust with its rejection by the ‘heavens’, that is, the angels who dwell in the Dominion (*malakūt*) or heavenly realm.

O chevalier, don’t fancy that when He offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth, He desired that the heavens and the earth would accept it. If we suppose that He desired their acceptance, then they would have accepted it—what He desired would not fall flat.

Rather, first He offered it to the unworthy so that the worthy would get up from their places and seize the skirt of the sought. (86/119)

'At the beginning of the work, Our knowledge requested that We bring into existence heaven and earth and the Throne and the Footstool. We gave existence to daytime as a white-faced servitor and to night as a black-cheeked maid, and We sent them to serve the house of your interactions. It was the sun of your good fortune that rose over heaven and earth so that We could dress them in the shirt of their existence. We gave forth this overflowing cup: *We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains* [33:72].

It was the ray of your state's majesty that shone on the Throne so that We could adorn it with the attribute of tremendousness and make it the kiblah for supplication. It was the lightning of your greatness and nobility that struck the Footstool such that We gave it eminence with this declaration: *His Footstool embraces the heavens and the earth* [2:255] . . .

It was for the sake of your disobedience that We made apparent the attribute of severity. It was by virtue of your frailty and incapacity that We put bounty to use. It was because of the heat of your desire that We called out, "*He loves them and they love Him*" [5:54]. It was because of Our eternity's bounty toward this handful of dust that We said, "*My mercy takes precedence over My wrath.*" It was because of Our beginningless kind favor that We said for the sake of this handful of dust, "*Your Lord wrote mercy against Himself*" [6:54].'
(181-2/233-4)

O dervish, when He wants to give, He gives without deliberation. And when He puts deliberation in the midst, you must detach your heart. Do you not see that He said, '*Surely We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth*' [33:72]? The deliberation was because He did not want to give. But when He brought forth Adam, the center of the work, He did not allow for deliberation and made him no offer. The man himself had fallen into the work. When Adam saw that He was offering it to others, he was moved by jealousy. He fearlessly threw himself forth because of jealousy. He stepped into the field of danger without the offer. Then He said, '*Surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant.*' This alludes to his lack of fear. He stepped into the world of purity because he was fearless. (142/187)

Jealousy is a major theme in the literature on love. Islamic knowledge of God is formulated in terms of *tawhīd*, the assertion of divine unity epitomized in the formula, 'No god but God,' which means that there is nothing truly real but the eternally real. Although *tawhīd* can be achieved by understanding, love can only be actualized by transformation. It calls for realizing divine unity by erasing everything 'other' than God from heart, mind and soul. The word for 'other' is *ghayr*, and the word for 'jealousy', *ghayra*, is derived from it. As Sam'ānī says, 'When His love comes, it strikes jealousy's fire into the haystack of gazing on others' (153/201).

For Sufis and philosophers, 'He loves them and they love Him' is an ontological fact. God and man love each other because of the nature of things. But in the last analysis, other than God has no existence, for only the Necessary Existence is real. If people love others, they are loving illusions, even if the illusions are signs of God's reality. Like most Sufi teachers Sam'ānī has a good deal to say about this common failure to perceive the others' illusory nature. In the first passage below he quotes two of the great shaykhs of the previous century, students of whom he would have known personally:

They recited this verse before Shaykh Abū Sa'īd [ibn Abī'l-Khayr]: *'He loves them and they love Him'* [5:54]. *He said, 'By the rightful due of "He loves them," surely He loves only Himself.'*

O dervish, since there are no others in existence, how can you say that He loves anyone else?

The master Abu'l-Qāsim Qushayrī said, *'The others are lost in His existence, and when His rightful due is witnessed, traces and vestiges are effaced.'* (123/164-5)

The Exalted Lord offered the Trust to heaven and earth. The goal was not that heaven and earth should accept it, but rather that the offer should shake the chain of Adam's love and make him stand up in the station of jealousy.

The exaltedness of Adam's acceptance became manifest because of their refusal and unwillingness, and his courage appeared in their cowardice. If no one in the world were timid and faint-hearted, how would the courage of the courageous appear? In the days of security, everyone wears a weapon. The manly man is he who appears on the day of war. How is it that just the other day the angels were saying, *'We glorify Thy praise'* [2:30], and today they put on the belt of apprehension? . . .

First He offered the Trust to heaven and earth so that they would refuse and Adam's love would appear. Things are offered first to the unworthy so that the worthy will get moving. Adam started to move because of his love.

The address was coming, '*Surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant*' [33:72]. What is this? Adam's incense against the evil eye.

At the first waystation the caravan was attacked and his wherewithal taken as plunder. He was sent indigent into this world and shown that if he wanted to reach someplace, he could not do so with his own wherewithal. Once a servant's wherewithal is thrown to the wind, if his lord wants to send him for another transaction, he has to give him new wherewithal . . .

On the day Adam carried the Trust, he firmed up the foundation of love. Even if he now brings into existence a hundred thousand betrayals, sins, and acts of disobedience, the foundation will not be destroyed. (218-19/276-7)

Iblis performed many acts of obedience and worship, but all of them were accidental. His innate attribute was disobedience, for he was created of fire, and fire possesses the attribute of pride. Pride is the wherewithal of the disobedient.

Adam slipped, and we disobeyed. But the attribute of disobedience is accidental, and the attribute of obedience original. After all, we were created from dust, and the attribute of dust is humility and submissiveness. Humility and submissiveness are the wherewithal of the obedient. God looks at the foundation of the work and the point around which the compass turns; He does not look at uncommon things and accidents.

O dervish, on the day Adam slipped, they beat the drum of good fortune for all the Adamites. God set down a foundation for Adam at the beginning of the work. He gave him wherewithal from His own bounty. The first example of the bounty that He showed Adam was that He placed him in paradise without any merit and without his asking. And the first example of his own wherewithal that Adam displayed was his slip. (174/225-6)

Surely We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth [33:72]. Adam was drunk with love. A heavy burden was put on his head. Though he was weak, his love was hot. (492/629)

The angels were saying, 'Such a heavy burden and such a frail body! This body is not fit for the burden, nor is the burden fit for this body. Do they put the morsels of elephants into the craws of sparrows?' Adam said, 'You see the burden, I see the lap.'

When Adam lifted the burden of the Trust, it was after eating the wheat. He said, 'If it is I who am to set this work right, well, the first fruit of the garden of my existence has already reached the Presence. If it is He who is to set it right, well, "Once the water is over the head, let it be a hundred feet deep." . . .

Adam was the marvel of creation. When he saw that heaven and earth did not lift the burden of the Trust, he stretched out the hand of need. Yes, the angels looked at the burden's tremendousness and refused it. Adam looked at the generosity of Him who was offering the Trust. He said, 'The burden of the trust of the generous is carried with aspiration, not with strength.' When he lifted the burden, he was addressed with the words, '*We carried them on land and sea* [17:70]. *Is the recompense of beautiful doing anything but beautiful doing?*' [55:60]. (156/204)

When Adam lifted the burden of the Trust, the address came, '*He was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant*' [33:72]. But when the angels said, '*What, wilt Thou set therein one who will work corruption there, and shed blood?*' [2:30], He sent a fire that burned several thousand of them. True, friends say things about friends, but they are not content to let outsiders look at them with sharp eyes. '*I'll backbite my brother, but I won't let anyone else backbite him.*' (157/205)

ANGEL AND DEVIL

Both angels and Satan play important roles in the Qur'ānic creation story. Sam'ānī points out that their differing reactions to this new creature shared much in common. Both spoke on the basis of self-centeredness, so they offer lessons in how not to respond to God's wisdom and power. According to the Qur'ān, angels never disobey God's commandments. In contrast, Iblis disobeyed the primordial commandment—prostration before Adam—and thereby became the model for all sinners. The angels' purity and sinlessness led them to wonder at God's choice of Adam as His vicegerent, but by questioning God's wisdom, they displayed their self-regard, what Sam'ānī calls their

'we-ness.' Iblis's reaction was to claim that he was better than Adam, for God created him of fire, and fire is better than clay. As for the handful of clay that was Adam, it saw that it had nothing but neediness toward its Lord, so it gave itself over to love, which demands forgetting self and remembering the Beloved.

When God brought Adam into existence, He said, '*Surely I am creating a mortal of clay*' [38:71]. The angels were saying, '*What, wilt Thou set therein one who will work corruption there?*' Iblis was saying, '*I am better than he. Thou createdst me of fire, and Thou createdst him of clay*' [7:12]. The Exalted Lord answered them all: '*Surely I know what you do not know*' [2:30]. (157/205)

Look at the road of Iblis and see nothing but claims. Look at the road of Adam and see nothing but need. O Iblis, what do you say? '*I am better than he*' [7:12]. O Adam, what do you say? '*Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves*' [7:23]. (65/90)

The Exalted Lord gathered all the angels and reported that He would be creating Adam. They thought that this Adam must be an exalted somebody for him to be disclosed this way. The warmth of the ray of this declaration was still in their heads when they were addressed, '*Prostrate yourselves before Adam!*' [2:34]. One refused. What was that? The decree of the Beginningless arrived and snatched the top hat of good fortune from his head.

'What happened to me?'

'O accursed one, that paragon needed an evil eye. If everyone in Adam's service was fortunate, that would not be good. There must be both fortunate and unfortunate if the good fortune of the fortunate is to shine.' (385/489)

Iblis had piled up a thousand thousand bales of obedience and pots of worship, but in the end he came out accursed. Adam, without any rushing and running, became the prayer-niche and kiblah of a thousand thousand proximate angels: '*O accursed one, you argue that Thou hast created me of fire and Thou hast created him of clay*' [38:76]. Arguments do not go forward in the road by which I came. When I was brought, I was brought from the center-point of uncaused gentleness.' (395/505)

What did Adam the Chosen do that he was brought into the row of chosenness, with the collar of election and the shawl of limpidness thrown over the neck of his good fortune? What did the miserable Iblis do that the angelic garb was pulled from his head and he was made into the ill-fated of the spheres?

If the cause of Adam's chosenness and rank were the limpidness of his road because of the rushing and running of his feet, then His prohibition—majestic is His majesty!—struck fire into the haystack of this cause, for He brought him into the Garden of Eden by the decree of eternal gentleness at the first step. And if you judge the root of Iblis's rejection to have been disobedience, He destroyed the basis for this judgment when He said to Iblis, 'Prostrate yourself,' and he did not; and He said to Adam, 'Do not eat the wheat,' but he did. So what caused the crown of Adam's chosenness to be added to the hat of his election? And what caused that miserable one to be rejected such that he will never have a road to acceptance and never have a standing place at the Court? (121/167)

O my spirit and world, the angels came, wearing the majestic silk of hallowing and the perfect shirt of glorifying: *We are those in rows, we are the glorifiers* [37:165–6]. Adam the dust-dweller came, wearing the patched cloak of deep ignorance and the tattered coat of great wrongdoing. The angels recited the sermon of their own days: '*We are those in rows,*' but God praised this handful of dust by Himself: '*We honored the children of Adam*' [17:70]. (131/172–3)

O dervish, by the decree of the eternal severity, the curtain of generosity was lifted from the obedience of Iblis, and it all became disobedience. His knowledge was made deaf and dumb, and God's beginningless knowledge began to speak. By the decree of sheer gentleness, the curtain of pardon was let down before Adam's slip, and the decree of intercession loosed its tongue: "*But he forgot, and We found in him no resoluteness*" [20:115]. (63/88)

Exalted friend, Adam had not yet eaten the wheat when the hat of chosenness was sewn. Iblis had not yet refused when the arrow of the curse was dipped in the poison of severity.

Iblis says, 'Though You commanded me to prostrate myself to Adam and I did not, You commanded Adam not to eat the wheat and he did. One for one!'

'O expelled from the Threshold! Don't you know that the slips of friends are not counted against them?'

*When the beloved comes with one sin,
his beautiful traits bring a thousand interceders. (122/163)*

When the desire to give existence to Adam the Chosen came forth from the ambushade of knowledge to the open plain of manifestation, a call was given out that an army would be brought into the world to kill adversaries. The waves of the words of the Possessors of the Stations [the angels] began to clash. Those who were the wellspring of cleanliness and the essence of purity began to speak: 'We, we.'

The Sultan of beginningless knowledge was walking in the field of beginningless majesty without attending to anyone's tumult or looking at anyone's words. The beginningless knowledge gave out this call: '*Hey there, "Surely I know what you do not know!"* [2:30].'

[The angels said,] 'Is there a work more splendid than this, an occupation with a better arrangement? A whole world in glorification, hallowing, sinlessness, and purity!'

'*Surely I know what you do not know!* Ah, I have a work on the way of which knowledge is the emissary. Yes, there are glorification and hallowing, but what is needed is a lover who is unitary in essence, someone who will suddenly leap without fear from the abode of subsistence to the abode of trial. Yes, you will go straight and they will go every which way. But behind the curtain of friendship things happen that would be faults outside the curtain, things that are tolerated inside the shelter of friendship.' . . .

'When I wanted to bring them into existence while knowing that they would have faults and slips, I spread the carpet of love so that, no matter what they did, the decree of love would eliminate it from them.' (127/168-9)

O dervish, when the angels said, '*What, wilt Thou set therein one who will work corruption there and shed blood?;*' the Exalted Lord did not reply that He would not do that. He said, '*Surely I know what you do not know*' [2:30], namely My forgiveness of them. *You recognize their disobedience, but I know My forgiveness of them.* In your glorification you make manifest your own activity, but in My forgiveness I make manifest My bounty and generosity. '*Surely I know what you do not know;*' namely My love for them and the limpidness of their belief in loving Me. Though their outward practice is barefoot, their inward

love for Me is limpid. *'Surely I know what you do not know,' namely My love for them.* However they may be, I love them.

*Love's affair is truly strange,
thrown to you without a cause.*

'Although I made you felicitous by making you sinless, I grasped them in My mercy. Although your felicity lies in your sinlessness, I desire to show mercy to them. You wear the vest of sinlessness, but they are curtained by mercy. Your conjoining with sinlessness is in the state of existence, but the attachment of My mercy to them was in the beginningless beginning. You show your beauty and act coyly with your own acts of obedient conformity, but they stay broken and shattered by witnessing themselves.'

On the day that He created Adam from dust, His generosity made mercy incumbent on Himself. He said, *'Your Lord wrote mercy against Himself'* [6:54]. He wrote Adam's slip with the intermediary of others, but He wrote mercy against Himself without intermediary. After all, dust is the wherewithal of incapacity and weakness. What can be shown to the weak but mercy? (173/224-5)

A thousand thousand brilliant pearls were inside the shells of the various sorts of glorification and calling holy. A thousand thousand celestial figures were swimming in the sea of glorification and traveling in the world of hallowing on top of this tall world, this bright garden, this high arch, this brocade canopy, this blue disk. Their morning draft was *we glorify Thy praise* and their evening draft was *we call Thee holy* [2:30]. But the falcon of love's mystery aimed for a sparrow of small dignity. This state was expressed in the tongue of good news with these words: *'I am yours, whether you wish it or refuse, and you are Mine, whether you wish it or refuse.'* You are mine, whether or not you want it so, and I am yours, whether or not you want it so.

Yes, the glorifiers, *tawhīd*-reciters, and hallowers of the palisades of holiness and the meadows of intimacy were tipsy with the wine of we-ness. A subtlety was needed to break that tipsiness and clarify for them the tenor of the word *we*. He brought into existence a person from *molded mud* [15:26], dressed in a garment of remorse and indigence, on his head the turban of not-finding, around his waist the belt of disappointment, and evident to the world his names *great wrongdoer* and *deeply ignorant* [33:72]. Then all at once He sent those 700,000-year old elders, tipsy with the wine of calling holy, to

welcome the prosperity of this man walking by himself. He issued the command, ‘When he arrives at the city of being, scatter your prostrations—which are the gist of deeds and the mystery of states—over his good fortune. Then you will know that the majesty of My existence does not need the beauty of your prostration.’ (13/18–19)

THE FELICITOUS SIN

Generally speaking, Islamic theology considers the prophets to be ‘sinless’ (*ma‘ṣūm*), a word that means literally ‘protected’. God protected them from disobedience (*ma‘ṣiyya*), which is the basic Qur’ānic word for sin. Adam was not yet a prophet when he tasted the fruit in the Garden and the call went out, ‘Adam disobeyed’ (20:21). But given that God appointed him as a prophet after sending him down to the earth, the tradition usually refers to his act of disobedience with the milder word ‘slip’ (*zalla*). Scholars often pointed out that he was not sent down because of his slip, but rather because God had created him for vicegerency in the earth, not in heaven.

When Adam was brought from paradise into this world, it was not because of the slip. Even if we suppose that he had not slipped, he still would have been brought into this world, for the hand of vicegerency and the carpet of the sultanate were waiting for his stepping forth. *Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘God had taken him out of the Garden before putting him into it.’* (249/313)

Some Muslim jurists and preachers no doubt questioned Adam’s lofty status. After all, he disobeyed the only prohibition he was given in paradise. Sam‘ānī seems to be referring to their view in this passage:

Someone may say, ‘What about the call, “*Adam disobeyed*” [20:121]?’

The answer: ‘Why are you looking at the whip of *Adam disobeyed*? Look rather at the magnificent crown of *his Lord chose him* [20:122].’ . . .

O chevalier, they made him a cup of poison from *Adam disobeyed* and at once they sent the antidote of gentleness in its tracks: *If guidance comes to you from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance, no fear shall be upon them* [2:38] . . .

They placed so many bejeweled crowns of leadership on the felicitous head of Adam the dust-dweller that, had they not clothed him in the patched cloak of the severity of *he was a great wrongdoer*,

deeply ignorant [33:72] and had they not buttoned it up with *Adam disobeyed*, there would have been fear of many things.

What a marvelous business! He made apparent the secrets of His Lordhood in places where the imaginative wings of intellect's phoenix cannot fly. He took a handful of dust in the grasp of perfect power and kept it for forty years in the sunlight of His gaze until being's dampness left it. Then He commanded the angels of the Dominion, 'Go to the gate of this wondrous form, marvelous shape, and subtle guise and kiss the threshold of its majesty, which is beyond these seven heavens. *Fall before him in prostration!* [15:29].'

O dervish, He said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam.' This level, distinction, rank, and status did not belong to water and clay, but rather to the ruling power of the heart. In the core of Adam's heart was deposited one of the divine subtleties, royal secrets, and unseen meanings, a secret concealed by the curtain of *the spirit is of the command of my Lord* [17:85]. God gave back a mark of this hidden secret on the purified tongue of Muṣṭafā with the words, '*He created Adam in His form*' . . .

Adam's essence was the depository of the secrets of the Unseen. Otherwise, how could a handful of dust have such worth that the residents of the precincts of holiness and the preachers on the pulpits of intimacy prostrate themselves before him? Is a handful of fruitless clay and water given such respect that it should be said to trustworthy Gabriel, unshakeable Michael, and stable Seraphiel, '*Prostrate yourselves before him*'? No, no—that handful of clay had a jewel-box in the secret core of its heart. (122-3/163-4)

If we suppose that He had not given Adam the draft mixed with poison at the beginning of the work, the Adamites would have fallen into error concerning themselves. He knew how to lay down the foundation.

They say that in India there are people who drink goblets of poison without fear. How can that be? In childhood they mix the poison with milk and pour it down the throat of nature. The prostration of the angels was milk and sugar, and the cup of great wrongdoing was poison. They were mixed together so that both the capacity for gentleness and the capacity for severity would come forth. (443/564)

God said to the angels, '*Surely I know*' [2:30], and He said to Iblis, '*What prevented thee?*' [38:75]. 'O angels, do not look at the disloyalty of their deeds, look at the limpiness of My knowledge! O Iblis, do not look at the *molded mud* [15:33], look at the robe of My attributes! Though My friends slip and adulterate the coin of their practice with disobedience, I hold before them the crucible of repentance—*the repenters, the worshipers* [9:112]. The wisdom of the slip is that when they look at themselves in that slip, they will bring forth poverty, but if they were to look at Us in obedience, they would bring forth boasting.' (488/623-4)

The only thing farther back than the Adamite is the Adamite. Heaven and earth, Throne and Footstool, angels and celestial spheres, from the highest of the high to *beneath the ground* [20:6]—whatever can be called a 'thing'—all are seeking and searching, rushing and running. It is the Adamite that has the attribute of great wrongdoing and deep ignorance. He is weak, unjust, dust-low, thrown down, least in all the scales, counterfeit among all the hard cash. He sits with the disloyal, gets along with His enemies, and harasses His friends . . .

They give charity to the worthy, and we are the worthy. '*From us good is a slip, and evil is our attribute.*' Our father Adam had the cap of election and the crown of chosenness, but 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 first of the jug is dregs, what do you think its last will be?*' (204/261-2)

O chevalier, our interceder is our ignorance, our leader our negligence. Adam's greatest good fortune was that it was said about him, '*Surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant*' [33:72]. (441/562)

Adam fell on his head in the abode of sinlessness. The Exalted Lord predestined a slip at first because this house would be a house of sinners. Then if a frail person falls on his head, he will not lose hope. He will say, 'In the house of subsistence, the abode of bestowal, the station of security, and the place of honor, Adam fell on his head, and the Exalted Lord accepted his excuse. In the house of annihilation, the abode of trial, and the world of grief and trouble, it will not be surprising if a frail person falls on his head and the Exalted Lord does not take him to task, but instead accepts his excuse.'

O paragon of paragons, give back a report of this state. He said, '*If you did not sin, God would bring a people who did sin, and then He would forgive them.*' '*Surely there is no sin too great for God to forgive.*' (244/309)

No sin is greater than the first sin, especially when the person was nourished on beautiful-doing and nurtured by beneficence. The angels had to prostrate themselves before him—the chair of his good fortune was placed on the shoulders of the proximate. He was taken into paradise without any merit and given a home in the neighborhood of His gentleness. Since He pardoned the first slip, this is proof that He will forgive all sins.

After all, we have a thousand times more excuses than Adam had. If we need the darkness of clay, we have it. If we need the frailty of dust, we have it. If we need the impurity of *molded mud* [15:26], we have it. If we need some confused morsels, we have them. If the times should have become dark with injustice and corruption, we have that. If the accursed Iblis has to sit in wait for us, we have him. If caprice and appetite have to dominate over us, we have them. At the first slip, Adam was forgiven without any of these meanings. Since we have all these opacities, why would He not forgive us? In truth, He will forgive us. (175/226)

O dervish, a hundred thousand sins of the constrained will be overlooked, but not one sin of the carefree will be overlooked.

Yahyā ibn Mu'ādh Rāzī said, '*If anything is in my hands tomorrow, I will not chastise lovers, for their sins are sins of constraint, not free choice.*'

Adam sinned because of constraint, so he was given the goblet of limpidness. Iblis sinned because he was carefree in his self-seeing, so he was expelled and cursed such that he will never have access to acceptance . . .

Adam knew that he was reared for another secret. When he reached for the grain of wheat, he made his road short. He said, '*I love a single rebuke from the Presence more than all the blessings of paradise.*' It was because of wishing and yearning for the rebuke of the Presence that he reached for the wheat—so that he could come out of paradise, for paradise was not He. Since he made that slip by constraint, it was overlooked. (248–9/313)

O dervish, if He had not taken Adam to task for that grain of wheat, His majesty would not have been diminished. If He had shown Moses His vision, His beauty would not have suffered any loss. But the perfection of beauty demands that a thousand thousand lovers wail and moan, captive to the chains of His severity. (104/140)

What a marvelous business! He said to Adam, 'Do not go after the wheat,' but wherever they put Adam's chair, the wheat was there disclosing itself like a bride. There is a secret in this. Yes, the people consider his greatness to be that he had a chair, hat, crown, and belt, but this is wrong.

'O Adam, beware, beware! Do not go after this tree!' But the decree had gone out, and the decree had the upper hand. As soon as Adam put that morsel into his mouth, the greatness of those ornaments fell away from him. Adam was left naked with only the crown of the chosenness of *surely God chose Adam* [3:33] and the robe of *his Lord chose him* [20:122]. Thus people will know that the root greatness has no need for those trappings. (186/239)

That paragon was adorned with all sorts of good fortune and bounteousness and with the lights of perfection and beauty. Then he was sent into paradise. He wandered around, but he found nothing to cling to. He reached the tree known as *the tree of trial* [*balā'*], though in fact it was *the tree of friendship* [*walā'*]. He saw it, so to speak, as a road-worthy steed. He did not hesitate a moment. When he reached it, he bridled it up. That bad bridling was expressed as *Adam disobeyed* [20:121]. He had sharp eyes and saw within it the secret of a traveling companion. And the tree also—it lifted the veil from its face and showed him: 'You cannot travel this road without me.' (183/236)

You should know that in verified truth the grain of wheat that Adam put in his mouth was the fortress of his days, for mortal nature demands glancing, and whoever looks at himself will not be delivered. This is why the exalted ones have written letters to their brothers saying, '*May God give you no taste of your own self, for if you taste it, you will never be saved.*'

That grain of wheat was made Adam's fortress, for every time Adam looked at himself, he looked with embarrassment. He came forward asking forgiveness, not showing pride.

The stipulation of the traveler is that whenever he looks at God's success-giving, he should say, '*The praise belongs to God*' [1:2], and whenever he looks at his own deeds, he should say, '*I ask forgiveness from God.*' (157/205–6)

That paragon was at rest in the world of comfort and ease. Like a king he was leaning back on the chair of exaltation and nobility and like a prince he wandered wherever he wished and desired in the orchards of the Highest Paradise. All at once the exactor of passion's debt, love's deputy, was unexpectedly pounding the knocker on the door of his heart: 'Get up! Go like a lover into the field of severity, the realm of not reaching your desires! Then the beauty of what you seek will be unveiled to your heart. O Adam, you who are standing still in good fortune, move into the world of passion and love!' . . .

Adam's manliness took him by the skirt and sought its rightful due from him. Severity's army plundered his crown and pulled off his robe. Riḍwān⁶ came and said, 'Adam, step out of paradise, for this is the house of ease, and there is no ease in the street and quarter of lovers—only trial upon trial. Settle down in the house of tribulation inside the circle of love. Then the sultan of love will take everything that is justly due from you.' (218/276)

O dervish, He brings about the decree of His Lordhood according to the requisite of His will. He does not look at anyone's talk and chatter. When He took Adam into paradise on the shoulders of the proximate angels with a hundred thousand endearments and exaltings, that was a blessing. When He brought him out naked and hungry, that was jealousy. By giving him paradise, He made Lordhood apparent, and by bringing him out, He made love manifest. (249/314)

LOVE'S SECRET

In Sam'ānī's reading, the Qur'ānic account of Adam provides instructions on how to be a true lover of God. References to Adam need to be understood in terms of God's loving kindness and Adam's loving response.

6. Riḍwān (literally 'approval') is the proper name of the angel who rules over paradise.

When Adam was on the throne of exaltedness and the couch of good fortune, he had the ring of the Real's gentleness in his ear and the shawl of the sultanate over his shoulder; he was the friend, but the secret of love was covered by blessings. When his foot slipped, it became apparent that he was both friend and servant. (113/152)

Before the existence of Adam, who was the embroidery on the cape of love's secret, the angels kept the rows of worship straight and adorned the ranks of obedience. They did not know that there was a man in the Unseen who, when he put on the garment of dried clay, would upset the rows of their obedient acts when he became drunk with the goblet of union.

As soon as Adam stepped from the concealment of nonexistence into the world of existence and fixed his eyes on the center-point of witnessing, the nightingale of his passion became distraught and the rose of his love blossomed. Then the angels began to shout: 'That man of dust has come to set fire to the merchandise of our obedience with his brazenness!'

The address came: 'O angels of the Dominion, turn your faces away from the Throne. The chair of Adam's good fortune is now your throne and his essence is your kiblah. All of you, turn toward the presence of his majesty and the courtyard of his good fortune, for he is the knower and you are doers. He is the friend and you are servants.' (177/229)

O dervish, the stipulation for all the world's passionate lovers is to learn truthfulness in love from the breath of Adam. He threw away the eight paradises and made a patched cloak from leaves. *And Adam disobeyed* [20:121] is the stone on the seal ring of love. *He forgot, and We found in him no resoluteness* [20:115] is the embroidery on the cape of gambling away all.

One precondition for the imamate is bravery. The imam must be bold. When Adam was created, he was created for the sultanate, and a sultan cannot be faint-hearted. He said, 'I accept the brand of great wrongdoing and I will suffer the severity of deep ignorance, but I will not throw Your command to the ground.'

O dervish, there is your life and there is the goal. It wants a man to say, 'Either I will give up my life, or I will reach the goal.'

This is talk of the night-brightening pearl. The pearl's exaltedness is the fact that its doorman is the ocean's waves. It has a hundred

thousand seekers who sacrifice their lives for it, going upside down to the ocean's depths . . .

The exaltedness of the Adamites is that there are many among them seeking the Presence of the Lord of Lords. He brought the whole world from the concealment of nonexistence to the open space of existence, but He did not send a messenger or a message to anyone. As soon as the turn of this handful of fearless dust arrived, He sent courier after courier and message after message. The dust was a devotee in the monastery of secret whispering, full of need for the Unneeded. It wore the tattered cloak of disengagement and drank down the draft of solitariness. Because of the heart's yearning it wrote '*The decree belongs to God*' [40:12] on the heart's necklace . . .

He—*majestic is His majesty!*—had no secret with any created thing in the universe, for all of them were servants. But He did have secrets with the Adamites, for they are friends, and secrets are told to friends. Then He displayed all the secrets of the divinity from places around which none of the minds of creatures had wandered. (215–17/273–4)

O dervish, know that in reality love has taken away the shine of both worlds. In the world of servanthood, both paradise and hell have worth. In the world of love, neither has any worth at all. They gave the eight paradises to Adam the Chosen, but he sold them for a grain of wheat. He put the bags of aspiration on the camel of his lot and came down to the house of sorrows. (128/170)

Before Adam it was the time of the rich and the possessors of wherewithal. As soon as Adam's turn arrived, the sun of poverty and need stuck up its head and indigence appeared. There was a group of creatures sitting on the treasure of glorification and hallowing, auctioning off their own merchandise: '*We glorify Thy praise*' [2:30]. But Adam was a poor man who came from the hut of need and the corner of secret whispering. He had made his garb from indigence and lack of wherewithal and he used his penury as a means of approach. In remorse he cried out at the Exalted Threshold: '*Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves*' [7:23].

O dervish, they take counterfeit coin from beggars in place of the genuine. They close their eyes to the transaction. But when it comes to the rich, they examine thoroughly and with caution. Yes, the angels of the Dominion had the wherewithal, but they also had a

ready self-importance. They had written the label of we-ness on the merchandise of their own obedient acts. Adam had no wherewithal, but his breast was a mine for the jewel of need and an oyster for the pearl of poverty.

Whenever coin is impure, it must be placed in the furnace so that its impurity will go away and it will become pure. Adam was a man who had the burn of seeking. His breast was the fireplace of love, and nothing in the realm of being had the capacity for one spark of that blaze. *A single breath of the yearners incinerates the deeds of men and jinn and extinguishes the fires of the two worlds.* When he put paradise into his work, it was because of the heat of his seeking. The wheat was ready at hand, and the whispering of Iblis was a pretext. Seeking the secrets was his mark.

'O angels of the Dominion, O inhabitants of the precincts of holiness and the gardens of intimacy! All of you have wealth and riches, but Adam is a poor man and sees himself as lowly. Your coin is impure because of attending to and gazing on yourselves. Now take the coin of your deeds to the furnace of Adam's need, for he is the assayer of the Presence: *Prostrate yourselves before Adam!* [2:34]. . . .

O chevalier, aloes has a secret. If you smell it for a thousand years, it will never give off a scent. It needs fire to display its secret. Its face is black and its color dark. Its taste is bitter and its genus wood. It wants a hot fire to display the mystery in its heart.

There was a fire of seeking in Adam's breast, and its sparks looked at all the acts of worship and obedience and all the wherewithal of the angels of the Dominion as nothing. *He was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant.* He was an incense that had to be thrown on the fire. From that incense a breeze appeared. What was it? *He loves them and they love Him.* . . .

Before Adam was brought into existence, there was a world full of existent things, creatures, formed things, determined things—all a tasteless stew. The salt of pain was missing. When that paragon walked out from the concealment of nonexistence into the open space 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 secret core. . . .

Who is this? A beginner in the road of creation, an ender in the road of limpiness. Who is this? The utmost in loveliness and beauty. Who is this? The sign of the gentleness of the Possessor of Majesty. Who is this? The one kneaded by the mysteries of Our

knowledge and wisdom, the one lifted up by Our choice and will.
(232-3/294-5)

Even though Adam was created to be God's vicegerent, he had to sin in order to realize his own inadequacy and need. For the Persian Sufi tradition, *niyāz* or 'need' is equivalent to poverty—Arabic *faqr* and Persian *darwishī*. Poverty in turn is understood as the selflessness that travelers on the path to God are striving to achieve. It is often taken as a synonym for the word Sufism. Need then is an awareness of one's own lack of true reality, which turns the soul toward its beloved, the Unneedy. As Sam'ānī remarks, 'How can it be correct for you to be existent and Him to be existent, for you to have being and Him to have being? *God is the Unneedy, and you are the poor* [47:38]' (124/165). Similarly, Sam'ānī puts these words into God's mouth: 'There is no one in the world who does not have business with My threshold. It is I who have no business with anyone. The banner of unneediness is raised only at the threshold of My majesty' (390/498). In reality need is a name for the love that was woven into human existence at the outset. Its presence shows that 'they love Him' cannot be eradicated from our makeup.

O dervish, the treasury of bestowers gains luster from the askers' asking and need. No asker had greater need than dust. It was given heaven and earth, the Throne and the Footstool, but its need did not decrease by one iota. The eight paradises were given over entirely to its work, but need seized its reins, for poverty was the host at the table of its existence: *Surely man was created grasping* [70:19].

A grasping person is someone who never becomes full. He brought Adam into paradise and permitted him its bliss, but He said, 'Don't go after that tree.' Nonetheless, despite all the blissful things, Adam was seized by the tree. *The forbidden is enticing*. Yes, He forbade it to him, but He did not purify his inwardness of wanting it. Indeed, every serving boy in the world serves his own want.

They say that in the Guarded Tablet it is written, 'O Adam, do not eat the wheat.' And in the same place it is written that he ate it. *Surely man was created grasping*.

The avarice of the Adamites goes back to the days of Adam himself. Whoever is not avaricious is not an Adamite. As much as a person eats, he needs more. If someone eats something and says, 'I'm full,' he's lying. There is still room for more. The Adamite is never full. (117/155-6)

O chevalier, if tomorrow you go to paradise and look at paradise from the corner of your heart's eye, in truth, in truth, you will have fallen short in the aspiration of Adamic nature. Something your father sold for one grain of wheat—why would you settle down there?

Adam said, 'O Lord, what You have said—"I am setting in the earth a vicegerent" [2:30]—is correct. This great eminence derives from Your bounty. But our rightful due is this: *Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves* [7:23]. The royal seat of vicegerency is Your gift, but the just due of our makeup is *Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves.*'

'O Adam, of all the blessings, why did you choose the grain of wheat?'

He replied, 'Because I found the scent of need in it.'

Adam was molded with need, and the wheat had the scent of need. He who was molded of need was brought together with the scent of need. This is why the stalk of wheat grew up in front of Adam's throne wherever it was placed—it had an affinity with his disposition.

Wherever Adam went, need went along with him. Everlastingness, blessings, kingship, and good fortune came from paradise, but the station of chosenness, election, pain, and remorse came from the grain of wheat. The lovers' enjoyment of remorse is sweeter than kings' enjoyment of good fortune. (65-6/90-91)

The first attribute to shine in Adam's heart was the secret of faith. It said, 'O Adam, come into exile, for "*Islam began as an exile, and it will return as it began, an exile.*"'

He said, 'Why should I come?'

It said, 'To do the work.'

He said, 'Is there a work to be done better than this work? The eight paradises are under my command, Riḍwān is my servant and slave boy, and the angels of the Dominion are prostrating themselves before the presence of my majesty.'

It said, 'No, you must exchange the Abode of Peace for the Abode of Blame. You must remove the crown from your head and pour the dust of destitution on your head. You must replace the good name of *surely God chose Adam* [3:33] with the blame of *Adam disobeyed* [20:121], for the good fortune of love will subsist forever.' (143/188)

When this center-point of poverty appeared, it appeared during the era of water and clay. Adam, who was the foundation of the work

and the quarry of lights and secrets, was busy enjoying himself in the Garden of Eden and the highest Firdaws. When the work of the sultanate and vicegerency clapped its hands, all at once poverty charged forth from the world of jealousy and took away his crown, robe, throne, and hat. 'O Adam, how can you enjoy yourself? That is a road that a son does not want for his father, nor a father for his son.' . . .

O dervish, anyone who cannot detach his head with his own hands has never smelt a whiff of poverty's rose. Pulling back your feet and sitting in safety is the work of old women and incapable men. The man is he who, when talk of severity comes forth and a sword appears from the Unseen, takes his spirit forward in welcome. . . .

O dervish, know with certitude and verification that anyone who looks at himself is held back from gazing on the Real's majesty. *Whoever says 'I has contended with the Lordhood.* Saying 'I' is the secret of every unbelief. The headman of all I-sayers is Iblis. (283-4/358-9)

'O Adam, why are you leaving paradise?'

He said, 'My heart is tight from being alone.'

They said, 'All these houris, wide-eyed maidens, slave boys, and servants—and you are alone?'

He said, 'Yes.'

O dervish, if impure dust had not nimbly and passionately wandered in the playing field of love's mystery, all the secrets of the Majestic Self-Sufficiency would have stayed behind the veils of the Unseen. (440/561)

'O Adam, you came into paradise and sat down at the tablecloth of approval. That is indeed beautiful, but what does a traveling man have to do with the tablecloth of approval? You must invite the specks of your children's offspring to the covenant. Then We will spread the tablecloth of the address, '*Am I not your Lord?*' [7:172]. We will make the goblets of the wine of *He loves them* [5:54] come one after another. We will put forth the cups of the gentleness of *their Lord will give them to drink* [76:21] again and again.'

The Higher Plenum remained in wonder: 'Love-making is no surprise from Adam. What is surprising are the specks of his offspring, who are jumping on the ship of trial [*balā*] and sitting in the boat of '*Yes indeed*' [*balā*; 7:172].'

From the pulpit of bounty the tongue of gentleness said, 'Don't be surprised—they're ducklings. It's not necessary to teach ducklings how to swim.'

O dervish, no one in the whole realm of creation dared to drink the wine in the cup from which they drank. The cup of the angels, both the elect and the common, was no more than *they are honored servants* [21:26]. In the eighteen thousand worlds no one other than the Adamites drank down the goblet of love's covenant: *He loves them.*

Pour me a big one—I'm big.

Only the small drink from the small. (118/156–7)

The work of the angels is straight because there was no talk of love with them. The ups and downs of the Adamites is because this talk was for them.

Your love made me haunt taverns like this –
otherwise I was safe and orderly.

'O angels of the Dominion, keep the treasuries of glorifying and hallowing filled! Keep on saying "*Glory be to God!*" and "*Praise belongs to God!*" It is the Adamites who will be caressed by Our gentleness and melted by Our severity. Sometimes We will wound them with the sword of uncaused desire, sometimes We will anoint them with a gentle gaze.' (170/221)

At the beginning of the work inside the tavern of effacing attributes, Adam—that wonder of the eternal gentleness with his limpid gait—was given so much of the wine of love and the potion of proximity—that spirit-mixed, turmoil-inducing liquor—that he sent the turban of the chieftainship of *surely God chose Adam* [3:33] to the bazaar of the lost-hearted and pawned it for the appetizer of *Adam disobeyed* [20:121], the mask of *our Lord, we have wronged ourselves* [7:23], and the belt of *surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant* [33:72]. . . .

Surely God chose Adam [3:33] is the good news of a robe of honor, and *surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant* [33:72] alludes to the robe's secret.

Surely God chose Adam was his beautiful face, and *surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant* was the mole on his cheek.

O friend, they gave Adam the Chosen the majestic cape and beautiful shirt of *surely God chose Adam* along with the patched cloak of *surely he was a great wrongdoer, deeply ignorant* so that,

if the angels should wonder at the highness of his station, the loftiness of his steps, the elevation of his days, and the greatness of his name, He would show them the exalted robe and beautiful cape. But if Adam's makeup should lead him into self-admiration, he would be shown the patched cloak of poverty and would hold himself back.

As for the mouthful that stuck in that paragon's throat, that was because of this same secret: the eight paradises were made his fief, and he was allowed to listen to the canticles of intimacy in the compartments of holiness. The crown of teaching, the diadem of priority, the robe of honoring, and the lights of the eternal gentleness's artisanry were scattered over his secret core. Morning and evening the subtle spirits had been drinking down the potations and drafts of worshipful acts, but they were sent to be his students. He said, '*O Adam, tell them their names*' [2:33]. . . .

Then that grain of wheat, its breast wounded by the sword of need, was sent forth on the steed of severity from the concealment of the Unseen. With goblets of poison it attacked the caravan of Adam's majesty and the camels of his beauty. It snatched away the shawl of chosenness and put the cane of *Adam disobeyed* in his hand. It clothed him in the patched cloak of *he forgot, and We found in him no resoluteness* [20:115]. It gave him the deprived and poor man's pot of *our Lord, we have wronged ourselves* [7:23] and put him into the man-eating desert of love. . . .

O dervish, the curling locks of the beloveds are the traps of the lovers' hearts, and the obscurity of the attribute of Will is the ambushcade of the wayfarers' hearts. When He wants to shed the blood of the one hundred and twenty-some thousand center-points of sinlessness [the prophets], He mixes up a marvelous dye and a strange color in the vat of Will. . . .

When He wants to plunder the hearts and spirits of a thousand thousand truthful friends, He alludes to the ruling power of His unneediness. When He wants to roast the hearts of a thousand thousand lovers and fill their eyes with water, He curls the earlocks of exaltedness on the cheek of the Will.

Who is not drunk with the wine of His Will? Who is not laid flat by the burden of His majesty? Who is not tipsy with the wine of His exaltedness? Which heart is not wounded by the sword of His severity? (97-9/132-5)

Adam was scorched by the fire of love and burnt by the fire of affection. The other existent things were unaware of love's secret. When the flint of the Sultan's command was struck against the iron of the divine decree, the fire of unneediness sprang up and caught only in him who was burnt by the Covenant. . . .

O dervish, Adam had aspiration in his head. He dealt in his own aspiration. Whenever the Adamites reach something, they reach it with aspiration. Otherwise they would never reach anything with what they have in their own makeup.

When Adam was first brought into existence, he was dressed in the robe of munificence and exaltedness and the cape of anointing, and the angels prostrated themselves before him. The name of kingship and vicegerency was recorded in the edict of his covenant and the eight paradises were given over to his exclusive use: '*O Adam, dwell thou and thy spouse in the Garden* [2:35]. O Adam the chosen, act freely in the House of Subsistence and the Abode of Everlastingness according to your own desire and want, and be ready in the life of ease for the day of the promise!

Adam's headstrong aspiration placed him like a sultan on the steed of love. He took an arrow of solitariness from the quiver of disengagement, placed it in a warrior's bow, and pulled it all the way back. He shot the adorned peacock of paradise strutting in the Garden of the Refuge, for this is the road of the disengaged. It is the work of those with high aspiration, the threshold of the proximate. Time, space, entity, traces, vestiges, shapes, existent things, known things—all must be totally lifted away from you. If any of these cling to your skirt, the name of freedom will not sit upon you. As long as the name free does not sit upon you, your servanthood will never be rectified. (86–7/120)

This is a marvelous story. It was said to Adam, '*Go down!* It was said to Muṣṭafā, '*Ascend!*'

'O Adam, go to the earth so that world of dust may settle down in the awesome majesty of your sultanate. O Muḥammad, come up to heaven so that the summit of the spheres may be adorned with the beauty of your contemplation. The secret here is that I said "*Go down!*" to your father so that I could say "*Ascend!*" to you. Sit on the steed of aspiration and take the top of the spheres as the dust on the carpet beneath your blessed feet. Travel away from both

the corporeal and the spiritual. Gaze upon Me without yourself.'
(158/206)

SAM'ĀNĪ'S SIGNIFICANCE

These passages provide a small sample of one of the most seminal books in Sufism, though it was written by an author mentioned by his contemporaries only as a jurist, not as a Sufi. Although his name was largely forgotten, his book left obvious marks. It was extensively quoted, for example, by his contemporary Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī, author of the influential Persian Qur'ān commentary, *Kashf al-asrār*, though Maybudī did not bother mentioning his source. Its content and approach were perhaps best reproduced by Rūmī, who was born about eighty years after Sam'ānī's death. Like other scholars in the field, R. A. Nicholson, whose ground-breaking edition and translation of Rūmī's *Mathnawī* set off the 'Rūmī boom', saw no real predecessor for Rūmī other than Ibn 'Arabī. Yet Sam'ānī's explication of the role of love in cosmic and human affairs is full of the mythic accounts and imagistic language that were to become the stock themes of Rūmī and other poets. In contrast to them, however, he never let his readers forget that he is presenting the intellectual and spiritual riches of the Qur'ān.

Rūmī's *Mathnawī* was sometimes called 'the Qur'ān in the Persian language', but translators have often ignored the centrality of the scripture to his vision. *Rest of the Spirits*, in contrast, reminds us constantly of the direct connection between the Qur'ān and the spiritual quest. Sufi prose and the poetry that dealt with the same themes were vital components of the religious tradition, infusing a living spirit into the juridical and theological schools of thought. What these authors made eminently clear is that, however necessary belief and practice may be, they serve a greater purpose, which is to prepare the soul for the meeting with God—preferably in this world rather than the next. As Sam'ānī remarks, quoting an anonymous Sufi, 'The body surrenders itself for credit, but the heart deals only in hard cash' (305/241).

Many modern translators of Rūmī and other Muslim poets have paid little or no regard to the worldview that animates their poetic vision. With the help of current theories of literature, some even seem to think that Rūmī and company are speaking directly to us and that we have no need to concern ourselves with how they themselves may have understood the human situation in its cosmic context. One can

sympathize with the view that poetry means what the reader finds therein, but scholars are being disingenuous when they imply that Rūmī or Ḥāfīz had nothing special in mind when they put their thoughts into words. The fact is that they saw the world with an integral vision that differs profoundly from the way most of us see it today.

Sam'ānī repeatedly voices the fundamental principles of Islamic thought, though he does so more with anecdotes and imagery than with theological dogma or abstract reasoning. These principles include the contingency of human existence vis-à-vis the absolutely Real and the understanding that everything that makes life meaningful—love, beauty, virtue, goodness, purpose—is rooted in ontology. The universe, far from being indifferent to us, is the externalized face of the infinite mercy and love of the Necessary Being. It is infused with intention and directionality, but the more we detach ourselves from it and treat it in objective and abstract terms, the more its reality escapes our grasp.

The message of Sufism largely coincides with the vision of things offered by the Muslim philosophers, a vision that was itself akin to Greek wisdom. Both philosophers and Sufis saw that every human individual has the potential to actualize the full, blazing light of Being. In contrast to a book like *Repose of the Spirits*, however, the philosophical exposition of human nature was so technical and abstruse that few could understand it. When Rūmī calls Avicenna 'an ass on ice', he is referring to the cold aloofness of most philosophical writing, which starves the soul for the love that animates the universe. That modern-day forms of learning provide even fewer tidbits for the hungry soul is surely one of the guiding themes of the Temenos Academy.

