

ILLUMINATION OF THE SPIRIT

by

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In the terminology of the Sufis the term *tajliia-i-Rub*, or, the Illumination of the Spirit, means the filling of the human spirit with the effulgence of the Vision of God, and the fervour of His love. Before we proceed to elucidate this subject, let us first consider the problem of the quiddity, or, nature of the Spirit.

For the gnosis of the human spirit, first, we must see what the Qur'ān has to say about it. According to the Qur'ān, the human spirit is an *Amr* or "Command of the Lord" (XVII: 85). Traditions report that the Prophet of Islam was asked whether the spirit was created by God, or, it is an eternal being. He replied that the spirit is a created and originated being. As the word *amr* also signifies 'action', it may mean that the spirit is an "act of the Lord," that is to say, is created and thus contingent (hādith), originated and non-eternal.

This is how the above verse is interpreted by Sayyid Murtūdhaa in his famous book entitled *Dūrar-i-ghūrar*. Among the ancient philosophers, Plato believes that "the soul resembles what is divine, simple and indissoluble and possesses consequently the same qualities" (*Phaedo*). "She is drawn of herself to what is pure, eternal and immortal and, being of the same nature cleaves there unto" (*Ibid.*). Thus, Plato taught not only the immortality of the soul, but its eternity also. But, none among the Muslims believes in the eternity of the soul, for, according to them, the only eternal being is God and none else besides Him.

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The verse under consideration is also interpreted to mean that the spirit is an abstract (*majarrad*) entity. "My Lord's Command" is taken to mean that it belongs to the, "World of command" ('Ālam-i-amr) and Everlastingness (baqā) and not to the World of creation and extinction ('*Ālam-i-Khalq wa fanā*). The World of Command is also named as (*Ālam-i-ghayb*, or the Invisible world, "*Ālam'l-ākhirat*," or, the world of the hereafter. It is said in the Qurān (VII. 54): "His verily is all creation (*kehalq*) and command (*amr*)." This means that the corporeal and spiritual worlds are both created by God. In the terminology of the Sufis, the world of command' is created by God, but not from matter and is not in time. It was brought into existence by God directly, by His word of command "Be"; while the 'world of creation' is fashioned from something already existing and is in time and space. Therefore, the meaning of "Say, the spirit is my Lord's Command", seems to be that the spirit belongs to the World of command which has come into existence by the command of God and is incorporeal and non-temporal. It follows that, the spirit is an abstract substance. In the terminology of the philosophers, an "abstract substance" is defined as an entity that is neither the locus of any substance, nor does it inhere in any substance nor is it composed of any such substances.

A great majority of the learned Sunnite 'Ulamā is against this view. They deny the existence of abstract entities in this originated world. According to their belief, God alone is abstract and none else besides Him. Most of the Shiā ulamā also hold the same view. For example, Sayyid Ne'matullah Jazairī, the author of *Anwār-i-Nu'māniya* and Mukhidith Mujlisī belong to this school of thought. Fakhr-ud-Dīn al-Rāzī is also a staunch supporter of this view. In *Sharah-i-Ishārāt* he has refuted the philosophers' view (that the rational soul is abstract) with cogent arguments. And in his *Tafsīr-i-Kabīr* (the great commentary of the Qur'ān) he has attempted to prove that the spirit is a heavenly body composed of a subtle and light substance.

In our view, there is no valid argument against the existence of abstract entities. But the belief in the eternity (*qidam*) of any abstract entity is certainly false, both from reason and authority (*fides implicita*). The argument advanced to refute the abstractness of the spirit is that

abstractness (*tajjurrud*) is a special attribute of God, and therefore, none else can partake of it. But, the truth is that the special attributes of God are self-subsistence (*wujūb-bi-Dhāt*) and absolute eternity (*qidam-i-mīlay*). Now, if one believes in an abstract entity that is contingent, temporal and non-eternal there can be no objection to this belief.

Consequently, there are not a few Sunni 'ulamā like Ghazālī, Dawwānī, Rāghib of Isfahān and the Shiites, like 'Tao, Shaykh Ajal Mūfid, Shaykh Ibn Bābwaih, Kalini' and Sayyid Mūrtudha and even, as recently as the days of Mīr Damād and Sadr-ud-Dīn Shīrūzī, and, among the early M'utazalities, M'uummar-b-Ibād Salmī and many dialecticians (mūtakallamīn) all have held that human spirit is a substance that is free from all matter, but, it works in material environment and that is the reason why it is related to a body. But it is related to a body to the extent that it manages and controls it. By itself, it belongs to the invisible world, or, the world of command and not to the visible world, or the world of creation; it is neither rational nor sensuous, is neither in the body nor outside the body; it is neither joined to the body, nor, separated from it. It has the same relation to the body as God has with the Cosmos.

Most of the Sufis and the Illuminati (*Ishyāqin*) also hold that, spirit is an abstract entity. Shaykh-al-Ischrāq, in his book *Hīakal i-Nūr* expresses astonishment as to "how this holy entity (i.e., the spirit) has been regarded as a body!" He says, "When it goes in ecstasy, it seems that it will leave the world of material bodies and soar towards an infinite world...Were you merely a body, or, a part of it, your ego would have changed all the time and there would have been no continuity in the perceiving self." What the Shaykh means is that the body (and its parts) are in constant change from their very birth and this process goes on incessantly till death ; and, yet the ego, the subject, remains identical with itself. As Kant has, in recent times, argued, we are conscious of the identity that holds between our experiences. The consciousness of the identity of the present with the past, is in truth, the essence of recognition. Kant lays stress upon this "Synthesis of recognition", as he calls it. We have, as he points out, the "consciousness that what we think is the same as that which we thought a minute ago." Thus, consciousness of identity is really the consciousness of the one and identical self and indicates the spiritual nature of the soul.

The Ishrāqia believe that the soul is eternal or without beginning. The Sufis, on the other hand, believe that the soul is originated or created and contingent. According to the Peripatetic school (*Mushāiah*), when the *sperma hominis* attains the highest reach of its capability, it is endowed with the soul by the Supreme Being. This may have some affinity with what has been said in the Qur'an (XV. 29): "I breathed into him of My spirit." An attempt has been made to reconcile the points of view of the Illuminati, the Peripatetics and the Sufis. The Supreme Being may be regarded to have the same relation with the individual souls or spirits as, for example, the cloud has with the drops of rain. If we call the cloud eternal, we also have to call the drops eternal for, the cloud is the quintessence of the drops. And the drops may also be regarded as originated (*hādith*), for they assume their form when they are separated from the cloud and not before. There is no doubt that the Supreme Being is eternal and, hence the souls or selves are also eternal in one sense, but, they are also originated in another sense, as they have limited forms and are determined.

As we have stated above, the Sufis believe that the spirit is an abstract non-spatial substance and has been originated before the creation of the body. Sufis of the Naqshbandiyya Order regard the *Latā'if* above the *Arsh* (the throne). This does not mean that the spirit resides above the Divine Throne ; it merely indicates that the spirit is non-spatial. As the *Arsh* is the furthest end of all spatial bodies and the spirit is non-spatial, it was said to be above the *Arsh* !

What the philosophers call "rational self" and "animal soul" the Sufis call the 'spirit' (*rūh*) and 'self' (*nafs* .) Kāshi explains these terms thus: "The spirit in the terminology of the Sufis, is a human *latifa* and is an abstract entity; and in the terminology of the philosophers, it is a fine vapour which arises in the heart. It has the potentiality to receive life, sensibility, and heat; and this they have called *Nafs* (self). The one that occupies the middle stage between spirit and the self having consciousness of universals and particulars is called the *Qalb* or the heart. Philosophers have made no distinction between the heart and the human spirit and have called them both the rational self (*Nafs-i-nātiqa*)."

Sayyid Sharīf Jūrjānī has elaborated in his book *Tā'rifāt* thus: "The human spirit is a human *latīfa* which knows and perceives and is borne by the animal soul. It has descended from the world of command. The intellect is incapable of knowing its essential nature, and this spirit is sometimes abstract and apart and sometimes it enters into a body."¹²⁷ And this is how he defines the 'Great Spirit' (or *ar-Rūb-al-Āẓam*): "The Great Spirit is what is called the human spirit. It is a manifestation of the Essence of God, and an expression of His aspect of Care and Providence (*rūbūbiya*). That is why nobody can acquire its gnosis. It will remain an arcane secret. God alone knows it."¹²⁸ Qaisarī has said: "The rational self (the spirit) is immanent in the body in the same way as the Absolute Reality is immanent in all beings. In one sense, it is other than the body." Maulanā 'Abd'l 'Alī in his *Shara-i-Mthnawī* says:

"The human spirit is a divine *latīfa* or a particular mode of it, without matter, in the form of the animal soul, or, you may put it this way, that the animal soul serves as a mount or conveyance for the human spirit. The human spirit has the same relation to the animal soul as the determinations have to the Absolute Essence. Though the human spirit in the absolute world has knowledge of things and is totally free from pleasure and pain, yet when it assumes a determinate form, it becomes the animal soul, and in this form it is stripped of all knowledge and is attributed with pain and pleasure. It acquires knowledge through reason, as it has the innate capacity to gain knowledge. At the time of death this soul leaves the body and assumes a similitudinary body and with this body it is questioned in the grave . . ."

Ghazlī says that, the human body is like a lamp, the human heart, like the wick, the animal soul, like the fire, and the human spirit like the light. The only difference is that the light of a lamp depends on fire, but the human spirit does not depend on the animal soul. The human spirit is the real thing and the animal soul depends on it. It is like a lamp lit from the lights of the unseen Domain. From this example, it may be understood that God has attributed certain things with a quality that when a reflection of

¹²⁷ Ash-Sharif al-Jūrjānī, al *Tā'rifāt*

¹²⁸ Ibid.

opposite things falls on them, it assumes a definite shape in them. So also, the animal soul is gifted with the attribute that when the lights of the Unseen world cast their reflections on it, it become luminous and assumes a new form. Now this reflection, together with that part of the animal soul on which the reflection has fallen, is called the human spirit. When this new form is established, the animal soul (which is a name for the vapours issuing from the fine humours of the human body), becomes a mount for the human spirit. The body is mortal, but as the lights of the Unseen are eternal, their reflection will necessarily also be eternal and, hence, the human spirit is also without end (*abadi*). It has a permanent, constant relation with its Source. As the ray of the sun has a perpetual relation with the sun, and, as, after the demolition of a house, the reflection of the sun still persists, so also, after the annihilation of the body or of the animal soul, the human spirit is not annihilated, it still persists and endures. It has some connection with the external world as it contains an element of the animal soul within it. Therefore, after the extinction of the body, the human spirit survives in a similitudinary world (which is between the world of the spirit and the world of the bodies).

"The spirit comes in the external world with an aptitude to acquire knowledge. If it acquires discursive knowledge alone, i.e., knowledge proceeding from argument or reason only, and not intuitive, it remains imperfect. But, if, by austerity and self-discipline, it purifies itself so much that it acquires a direct perception of God ('ilm-i-shahūdi), it becomes perfect" ¹²⁹

Let us now turn to Ghazālī and learn what he has to say about the nature of the human spirit. In his epoch making work, *Ihya' ul ulūm-al dīn* (Revivification of the Religious Sciences), he says:

"The word 'Spirit' has two meanings. According to the first meaning, it is a subtle body having its source in the vacuum of the bodily heart and from here it permeates the entire body through the arteries. Its permeation in the body and giving life and the five senses to it is just like placing a

¹²⁹ Quoted from Shah Ali Qalandar, *Al-Qual al Mūwajjah fī tabaiq-i-man `arafa nūfsabo faqad `arafa rabbaho*, Lucknow, 1330 A. H., pp 181-182.

lamp in a house from which light spreads into the four corners of the house. So also, the spirit is like a lamp, and life is like the light. The moving of the spirit and its permeation through the body is just like moving the lamp in the house. This is what the physicians mean by the word spirit. I do not wish to go into these details. This is what the physicians say and they treat the body. But the physicians of the spirit, who wish to lead the spirit to the *sanctum Sanctorum*, do not accept this meaning. What they mean by the spirit (and this is the second meaning of the word spirit referred to above) is that it is a *latifa-i-mudrika*, or an organ of knowledge and this is what is meant in the Quranic verse: Say, the spirit is my Lord's Command. We have dealt with this meaning when we dilated on the second connotation of the word *Qalb* (or, heart). It is a wonderful divine entity whose quiddity, reason is unable to grasp."

The second connotation of the heart as given by Ghazālī is as follows:

"The heart is a receptacle of God's grace and is spiritual in substance. This spiritual substance is the essence of man. It alone has perception, knowledge and gnosis. It is the heart which is admonished, reprimanded and punished. It has the same relation with the pine-shaped piece of flesh as an accident has with the body, as an attribute is related to the substance attributed, a spatial object to the space which it occupies, or an instrument to the man who uses it. The reason why we do not propose to enquire into its essential nature is two-fold: first, this is a matter pertaining to inspirational knowledge *eilm-i-mukashafa* and is an arcane secret, and we are dealing in this book with the knowledge of practical affairs. Next, it will be divulging the secret of the spirit, about which the Prophet of Islam has observed silence. It is better not to open our lips and remain quiet".¹³⁰

Thus, it is clear that for Ghazālī the word "spirit" and the word "heart" connote the same sense and that it is not possible to comprehend them by any intellectual effort. The Sufis seem to agree that it is not possible to attain the gnosis of the essence of the spirit through discursive reason. Reason is unable to perceive abstract *lights(annwār-i-mujjarada)*. They

¹³⁰ Madhāq-ul Arifin, VOL.3, (Urud tran. Of Ihyā al-ulūm), Lucknow, p.304.

may be perceived by spiritual unveiling or, by the Grace of God. And, this is possible only when one closes the door, not only to the external senses but also to the injunctions of the internal senses and frees the heart from all bodily entanglements with a view to engage it in the apprehension of abstract spiritual matters. In this way alone, the essence of the spirit is revealed to the Sufis and in this way alone they attain its gnosis, which they express in some such words as "pure light and entire purity" and intuit the same sense from the verse(XVII.85): "Say, the spirit is my Lord's Command; Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you."

And by "a little knowledge" they understand knowledge acquired by discursive reason. By such partial reason, entangled in worldly relations and involved in thoughts of *meum* and *teum*, the essence of spirit is not disclosed. That is why an adept prayed:

Help me, O God ! that I may subjugate my carnal self,

And intoxicate my reason with the wine of Thy love !

That I may become void of self to gain Thy awareness,

That the self may "pass away" and by thus dying live in Thee !

Rūmī has made use of two illustrations to explain what he understands to be the essence of the spirit:

(1) The invisible lights which emanate from the Universal Spirit are like an ocean and the individual souls are like waves. If we look at the ocean we find that all waves are in the ocean and in reality they are all one. And if we look at the waves we find that they are many in number and separate from one another.

(2) The Universal Spirit, the real source of all the invisible lights, may be conceived as the sun and the individual souls inhabiting the bodies of the individuals as the rays of the sun which penetrate through the windows in every house. Now, if we look at the sun, it is one and if we look at the rays entering into several houses they are multiple and

separate. The gnostic knows this truth and fully understands what this unity or diversity implies. But he who is not a gnostic and has no knowledge of reality feels puzzled and fails to understand what really the human spirit is. Says Rūmī

Difference exist only in animal souls,

Human souls have a common source,

And are fundamentally one!,

Animal souls are like stray bits of inorganic clay.

This is what the Sufis of the order of the Unity of Being maintain. According to them, God alone has the Absolute Ego and the Absolute Spirit. In all individuals the same Ego or Spirit manifests itself according to the aptitudes of the individuals. They are like mirrors wherein God reflects Himself.

In this way, the spirit may be conceived as one, from one point of view, and many from another point of view. Since the gnosis of the essence of God is impossible, it has been said that nobody can know the essence of the spirit, or, in other words, it is unknown and unknowable.

In all individual human souls the same Universal spirit has manifested itself according to the dispositions of the individual essences. In the well

known book *Mūtummimā-i-Jāma' l-Usūl* there is a comprehensive statement on the human spirit:

"The human spirit is a knowing, perceiving *latīfa* of man. Its mount is the animal soul. It has come down from the world of Command. Reason is incapable of knowing its quiddity. It is sometimes abstract and self-subsisting and sometimes enters into a body. The animal soul is a fine, subtle substance and is produced in the vacuum of the heart and permeates through the entire body through the veins. The Great Spirit is the same human spirit, being a manifestation of the Essence of God and

an expression of the aspect of His Care and Providence. That is why nobody is able to acquire its gnosis. God alone has it. It is the First Intelligence (*al-' aql l-anwal*), and the Reality of Muhammad (*al-Haqīqatu 'l Muḥammadiyya*) and the Reality of the Names (*al-Haqīqat-l-Asmā'iyya*). It is the "First of all beings" whom God has Created in His own form. It is the "Great Vice-regent of God" (*Khalīfa-i-akbar*). It is a spiritual substance and, in view of its substantiality, it is called self (*nafs*) and in view of its being light it is called the first Intelligence. As it has many Names and manifestation in the macrocosm, such as the First Intelligence, the Pen (*al-Qalam*), The light, the Universal Self (*al-Nafs l-Kāliyya*), the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥu mahfūz*) ; similarly, it has many names and manifestations in the microcosm. In the terminology of the Sufis they are called *Sirr, Khafi, Akhfa, Qalb, Kalimah, ra'um, f'ūwād, Sadr, 'aql* and *safs*.¹³¹

Now, let us turn to the subject of the "illumination of the spirit" and try to understand its meaning and the manner in which it is done.

The Sufis maintain that, the perfection of the spirit consists in illuminating it with the attributes of God's Providence (*rūbūbiyya*) so that it may become fit to be the vice-regent of God on earth. There seems to be some difference of opinion among the sufis, as how best to illuminate the spirit. According to some of them, it is not possible to purify the self (*nafs*) without first illuminating the spirit. But there are others who hold that this can be done even otherwise. It may be achieved by first cleansing the heart. However, according to the Kūbrawiyya School of Sufism, if a person spends his entire life in purifying his self, he will not succeed and will not find time to illuminate his spirit. The best method appears to be, and on this most of the Sufis agree, that the evil-prompting self (*nafsu 'l-ammāra*) should first be subjugated and brought under the prohibitions of Shari'a ; and one should engage oneself in cleansing the heart and illuminating the spirit at the same time. Now, as the Tradition has informed us about what God has said: "He who moves a foot towards Me, I advance towards him an arm-length" (Būkhārī); grace in abundance begins to descend; and, again, in accordance with the promise, "He who walks towards Me, I come to him running (Būkhārī)"; the self is purified, in a short time, to such an

¹³¹ 5. *Al-Qual Al-Muwajjah*, p. 189,

extent that even life-long austerity and self-remonstrance cannot achieve the same result, for "A Divine pull takes one nearer to God more than the combined worship of the jinn and human-kind". He who is the patron, friend and helper of the self can only purify the self and that is why the Prophet has taught us to pray thus: "o God, purify my self and make it righteous. Thou art the best who canst purify it. Thou art its patron and its friend."

Shaykh Najm-ud-Dīn Kubra (d. 618 A.H.) has shown at great length in his well-known book, *Mirsād'l Ibad*, how to illuminate the spirit by means of the love of God:

"For the illumination of the spirit, it is necessary that every relation that the spirit after entering the body has established with this world through sense, perception and knowledge should gradually be severed, for it is these relations and attachments with the world that form a veil and keep the spirit remote from God. Every thing to which it gets attached and in whose love it is imprisoned makes it its bondsman. The spirit exclaims: 'I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.' Thus, it loses the zest of witnessing God. But, when these worldly relations are gradually severed, and the chains that bind the spirit with the ephemeral objects of the world are cut asunder, the spirit 'pure from self as flame from smoke' sets forth upon its journey to God, renouncing all but Him, and shows attachment to Him alone. Now, it occupies itself wholly with the thought of God, in the spirit of intense humility and restless yearning.

In this state it wails:

A breeze scented with the fragrance of my friend

Blows and adds freshness to my rusting love;

O breeze, thou hast the sweet scent of my friend,

I beseech thee not to blow towards any stranger."

Here, two mothers nurse the baby spirit. On the one hand, it is fed by the breast of Mystic Path (*Tariqa*) with the milk of the renunciation of heart's desires and lust and passion. On the other hand, Reality (*Haqiqat*) feeds it with the milk of divine light so much so, that filled with the spiritual illuminations of the divine splendour, the spirit is freed from the shackles of relations of body and attributes of flesh and returns to its primary pure and uncorrupted nature, now having competence to listen to what God had said, "Am I not your Lord?" and to affirm in reply "Yea, verily"! When the spirit thus sheds human frailties and emerges from their robes, it gains freedom from the supremacy of whim and fancy also, it observes what happens in the 'world of dominion' (*'alamu'l-malakūt*) and perceives in the mirrors of the external and internal worlds the signs of God.

"At this stage love becomes pure and clean. Affinity grows between love and spirit, love pervades the spirit and the spirit finds in itself nothing but love. As a lover has expressed this condition in his own way:

I pined a lot in the love of a beautiful face,

Now, I find myself wholly enveloped in
love.

"So far the life of the body depended on the spirit, but from now on the life of the spirit depends on love alone. Another lover has said:

O Disciple of love, if thou seest me alive,

Do not believe that life is still left in me.

Love is keeping me alive and not the
spirit,

I have risked my life to keep my love
alive.

"At this stage, love takes the place of the spirit in the body and performs its functions, while the spirit moth-like hovers round the shining Face of its Beloved and exclaims in ecstasy:

Thy Beautiful Face is like a flame and the moth is me,

My heart has befriended Thee and is in Thy pursuit, the person left alone is me.

Put the chain of thy tresses which is round thy neck

Round my neck, for the mad man in thy love is me

!

"At this stage, abundant Divine favours welcome the spirit and fill its being with ecstasy and loving converse with the Beloved begins. The spirit is also reprimanded thus:

If thou desirest to advance in My direction,

Think not what the world thinks of thee.

Thou canst win My love, if thou art ready

To burn thy self into its flame.

"When the intoxicating wine of: 'We shall charge thee with a word of weight (Qur'ān, LXXIII. 5); fills the heart to the brink, the very being of the spirit is naughted ! This mystic state of effacement is expressed by an ecstatic in symbolic language thus:

It was reported yesterday that an old man entered a bar,

And with tears in his eyes started hobnobbing with his wine glass,

The wine turned into honey and the bar into a place of worship,

Oh God ! what miraculous powers the visitor had !

"The spirit is kept for a few days in a place which lies between the heaven of Divine Attributes and the hell of worldly existence and by administering the wine of direct observation of the Beloved, the remaining existential attributes are naughted. This is how the sufis interpret the following verse of the Qur'ān (VII. 43): 'And we remove whatever rancour may be in their hearts.'

"And, then, as indicated in the verse (XXXI. 20): (God) has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen, the spirit is loaded with divine favours both without and within, and it exclaims involuntarily:

Oh God, I sacrifice myself in gratitude for Thy boon!

What a boon ! My sacrifice is hardly a recompense.

"But, if the spirit, having attached itself with these bounties and favours, forgets the Bestower thereof and 'turns on its heels' it is simply lost. But if it sticks to the path of servitude, swerve not, nor does go wrong, greater revelations of its Lord await for it.

"This is of course a very perilous stage. Many sincere lovers slipped here. They fell down and were lost forever. Thus many true travellers on the Path to God began to feel proud of their occult and mysterious powers, they turned away from the path of love for God and fixed their gaze on the flattery of ephemeral creatures of this fleeting world. In this way, they lost the very disposition to have direct observation of God and consequently fell in the deepest depth of degradation. How nicely a true lover admonishes these folks in an indirect way:

O thou, the *qibla* of all those who enter Thy
lane,

All good souls hanker after Thee!

He who turns his eyes away from Thee
today,

How will he be able to see Thee tomorrow?

"But, those who are eternally 'blessed' and about whom it has been said in the Qur'an (XXXI. 101): 'Lo! those unto whom kindness hath gone forth before them from us, they will be far removed from thence', they keep their eyes fixed on the Bestower Himself not on the blessings bestowed; and know that thanksgiving means remembering Him, the Bestower of the blessings. And they, in accordance with the proclamation of the Lord (XIV. 7): If ye give thanks; I will give you more, become entitled to receive many more blessings and favours." An ecstatic has depicted their mental condition thus:

Never shall my heart abandon Thy thought,

Or, think of befriending some another one.

If it gives up Thine love whom shall it love?

And if it leaves Thy lane where will it go?

"At this stage, it is the bounden duty of the spirit to seek one, say one, know one, and desire one." It should divorce and eschew the two worlds. It should not look at lofty positions of this world, nor should it go after the comforts of the Heaven. It should lay its head on the threshold of its Beloved and say (in the words of Shaykh Najm-ud-Din Kubrā):

As long as we enjoy Royal patronage,

The entire universe is at our beck and call.

Heaven itself is just a land-mark on the road to our destination,

As our goal is further away from the universe.

"If a thousand arcane secrets, revealed to the prophets, are disclosed to the spirit, it should pay no attention to them; if it is asked a thousand times to show what it likes to have it should only say: 'an *'abd* (bondsman) has no desire', as the presence of desire indicates that it still exists, while it has negated itself.' This path is not traversed easily. If the Beloved pays no attention for a long time, do not lose patience, do not turn your thought from Him. Here, even the prophets and saints feel bewildered. Human steps alone unaided by the divine grace cannot tread the path. As an ecstatic has said:

Thy vision is a treasure and every human being is searching for it.

Let us see who will be the lucky recipient?

"This is the stage of the Beloved's caprice (*nāz*) and the lover's constancy (*niyāz*). To attain it, the spirit is stripped off all relations, becomes humble and humiliated and fights even with its life to attain it. The adepts have already warned:

Fight for the prize with thine life, because it is not going to *Dustan* in any case.

Milk from the cup of Shari'a is not given to those who are not composmentis.

Where, persons dead to themselves have a drinking bout,

Self worshippers cannot expect even a peg!

"When the spirit smells the scent of divine favours, like Jacob it raises the cry: 'I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph: Nay, think me not a dotard (XII. 94)', or, as a lover has exclaimed in his yearning for the beloved:

When the beloved with Joseph-like beauty strolls in the parterre,

A scent from *Zulikha* comes to me.

Like Jacob my heart wails:

'I can smell the apparel of Joseph.'

"Now, the spirit feels the yearning for the Beloved and the pang of His love so much that it gets tired of this existence, tries to kill itself and like Hūsayn Munsūr wails:

Kill me, oh ! my good friends, surely in my death is my life,

My life is in my death and my death is in my life.

"During this period, when the spirit is not allowed to enter the Sanctum and is left pining for its Beloved undergoing the pang of separation, it is filled with pain and anguish; patience and reason leave it and it wails:

All devices to attain my goal I have tried,

Now the stage of lunacy is reached.

"In this state of distraction, supplication, and humiliation, it dawns upon the spirit that 'the quest is a failure, the road is blocked, and restlessness is necessary.' It bewails of its misfortune and exclaims:

Due to separation from thee my heart was bleeding, last night,

(The star) *Pervin* alone sympathised with me, last night,

Till early morning my only cry was:

Hearken, my God, Thou who listens to all !

"When the spirit shows its humility, distraction and helplessness before its Beloved and complains of the distraction caused and anguish suffered, crying:

Everyone in this world has someone to look after him,

I have none, but thee, thee and thee alone;

then, as it is wellknown (Qur'ān, XXVII. 62): 'Who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him and who relieves its suffering?' Veils are lifted, the spirit of the distressed lover is loaded with divine favours and bounties flow to it in exceeding measures. It hears a voice calling it to rise:

The house is well decorated to receive thee,

All curtains have been raised in anticipation of thine advent.

"When the Illumination of the Divine Essence is revealed, moth-like the spirit dashes into it and vanishes. It loses the consciousness of its individuality and a Divine substance with Divine Attributes is put instead. Under this mystic state an ecstatic has exclaimed:

In Thy love, the sense of pain and pleasure all are lost,

On meeting Thee my pangs of separation are over.

A ray of the light of Thy revelation has obliterated,

All distinctions between more or less or good and evil.

"At this stage, by abiding in the Divine illumination, the spirit feels peace and ataraxia. The Qur'ān informs us (LVIII. 22): As for such He hath written faith upon their hearts and hath strengthened them with a spirit from Him.

"If a life is lost in attainment of goal, a new life is given instead which will never be lost. As a gnostic of this rank has said:

When the spark of love was ignited, my life was surrendered
to the Beloved,

It was the Beloved who restored life to me from His own life.

"This is the threshold of annihilation and the beginning of a life everlasting ! Thereafter, the spirit is trained by the Illumination of Divine Attributes. Every moment of this life equals the combined worship of the jinn and humankind!"

Now, we proceed to give a detailed exposition of the various stages which the spirit has to pass in its love journey to God, which has been briefly discussed by Najm-ud-Dīn Kubrā above. For a more comprehensive statement we are drawing upon the epoch-making work of Rūmī's Mathnawī. The cry of love that Rūmī has raised in this work is without parallel in the world of Sufism.

First we have to consider the problem of the quiddity or nature of

of love (or ardane love)¹³².

¹³² "But those of faith are overflowing in their love of God" (Qur'ān, II. 165.)

God has attributed Himself with love. So says the tradition: "I was a hidden treasure, and I desired to become known. So I created the world in order to be known. I dealt with them lovingly, so they came to know me." The Qur'ān also speaks about those righteous elects who have cut asunder the chains of limitations and cast aside the veils of relations and have made their hearts a mirror for the illuminations of the Unseen: "Soon will God produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him" (Qur'ān V. 54).

There is no doubt that the love that God has for the expression of His own perfections is personal and it proceeds from the love of His own Essence. This love is the basis of His attributive love and is the root cause of the manifestations of all beings. The Love of His own Essence is due to the perception of His own Essence and perfections. But it should be noted that this love is not an addition to the state of Abstract Unity (or *Abdiyyat*). This unity is the state of dropping of all modes, adjuncts, relations and aspects. It is the state of Pure Essence, in which there is no name, no quality, no relation, no adjunct or anything else and hence we cannot speak of love, or regard it as something different from the Pure Essence or external to it. The love that God has for His own Essence will, therefore, remain unknown and unknowable. The quest to acquire its gnosis is of no avail. Reference is made to this in the Qur'ān (III. 29): "Allah biddeth you beware of Him." And the Prophet has warned the thinkers: "Don't indulge in speculating on the Nature of God, speculate on the signs of God (manifested in nature)."

With regard to this Love it has been said:

Love surpasses human ambitions,

It can neither be duly commended nor
grasped.

When a thing is beyond the realm of
thought,

It can neither be conceived nor
comprehended.

Rūmi has also understood love in the sense of the Love of God
for His own Essence. Says he:

Whatsoever I say in exposition and explanation of love,

When I come to Love (itself) I am ashamed of that (explanation).

Although the commentary of tongue makes (all) clear,

Yet tongueless love is clearer.

Whilst the pen was making haste in writing,

It split up in itself as soon as it came to love.

In expounding it (Love), the intellect lay down (helplessly) like an
ass in the mire ;

It was love (alone) that uttered the explanation of love and
loverhood.

If thou require the proof, do not avert thy face from him.¹³³

Now we consider the quiddity of love in the state of *Wābdiyyat*, or the
Second Epiphany, or, Reality of Humanity, the Holy Breath. When the
gnostic contemplates the Essence of God in the sense that It possesses
knowledge in all its details covering Its Names, Attributes and Ideas, together
with all their aspects, their interrelations and mutual distinctions, this plane is
termed *Wābdiyyat*. This is the plane of the Names and Attributes. Here, love
is differentiated from the Essence and Its Names and Attributes, as every
attribute is differentiated from the reality attributed to and from other
attributes also, and the reality of love is expressed in the plane of God's

¹³³ *Mathnawi* (Nicholson's translation), I, p. 10.

knowledge and its manifestations realised in the external world. But the quiddity of love in the plane of *Wabdiyyat* and also in the external world is revealed to those only who have quaffed the wine of love and are intoxicated with it, though it may be the love for the Absolute Beauty or the love for any corporeal or spiritual manifestation of It. Now as it is not possible to describe the pleasure derived from music or the pleasure enjoyed by coition before one who has not experienced them, so also it is impossible to explain or expound love to one who is not struck by love.. The same idea is expressed by an Arab gnostic in these couplets:

He who is not struck by love cannot realise it,

While he who has experienced it, cannot explain it.

To describe the sun before a blind man is a folly,

So is an attempt to describe beauty before one who lacks the taste to appreciate it.

The same idea is expressed by another lover in this way:

He who does not love the Beloved as I do,

Cannot understand what love connotes.

Mere description of shapes and forms,

Does not impress a blind person.

What is perceived by intuition cannot be described by mere conceptions. Love is a matter of intuition or taste. It can neither be expounded, nor the mere idea of love can apprise us of the reality of love. Is it possible to feel hot by the mere thought of fire? Is our thirst quenched by thinking of water? This idea is beautifully expressed in the following couplets:

Thinking of fire does not make thee hot,

Thinking of water does not quench thy
thirst;

Fragrance of scented stuff,

Does not reach one by merely thinking of
them.

He who has not tasted wine,

Cannot feel intoxicated by talking about it.

The lover alone knows what love is, it is an arcane secret which cannot be disclosed. "Love is a treasure to be concealed ; where the treasure lies cannot be revealed." We have to learn from the lover himself what is love and what is a beloved:

What is called love is nothing but grief and ignition.

The Beloved is another word for pain and
frustration.

Let him who does not value his life,

Face the call to the slaughter house.

Rūmī has thus eulogised love:

Hail, O Love that is our best bargain,

Thou that art the physician of all our ills,

The remedy of our pride and vainglory,

Our Plato and our Galen!

Through love the earthly body soared to the skies,

The mountain began to dance and became nimble.

Love inspired Mount Sinai, O Lover,

(So that) Sinai (was made) drunken and Moses fell in a swoons¹³⁴

According to Rūmī, "sickness of love" is preferable to health and healing. "It is the very soul of health. Its pains are the envy of every pleasure."¹³⁵

The melting (wasting) away of lovers is (the cause of their spiritual) growth:

Like the moon, he (the lover) hath a fresh (shining) face whilst he is melting away.

All the sick hope to be cured.

But this sick one sobs, crying, "Increase my sickness".

I have found no drink sweeter than this poison!

No state of health can be sweeter than this disease,

No act of piety can be better than this sin!

Years in comparison with this moment are (but) an hour.¹³⁶

Reason cannot understand this state of affairs. It denies love, but the lovers regard reason as an ignoramus. As Rūmī says:

¹³⁴ Ibid., I, 11. 23-26.

¹³⁵ Ibid., VI, 1. 4594.

¹³⁶ Ibid, VI, 11. 4597-4601.

He that is blessed and familiar (with spiritual mysteries),
Knows that intelligence is of Iblis, while love is of Adam.

Intelligence is (like) swimming in the seas!

He, (the swimmer), is not saved; he is drowned at the end of the
business.

Leave off swimming, let pride and enmity go;

This is not a *Jayhūn* (Oxus), or, a lesser river, it is an ocean,

And moreover, (it is) the deep ocean without refuge:

It sweeps away the seven seas like straw.

Love is as a ship for the elect;

Seldom is calamity (the result); for the most part it is deliverance.

Sell intelligence and buy bewilderment:

Intelligence is opinion: while bewilderment is (immediate)vision.

Sacrifice your understanding in the presence of Mustafa
(Muhammad).¹³⁷

Say: *hasbiya llab*—for God sufficeth me.

Reason busies itself in argumentation and love burns itself in the
resplendent light of the beloved's beauty. Reason ties itself with the six
dimensions of this phenomenal world, enchained in earth and water, and
love in the proximity of the beloved annihilates itself in the flame which

¹³⁷ Ibid., IV, 11. 1402-8. except his beloved.

flares upon the face of the beloved. Love has nothing to do with crown and scepter, it craves for gallows and gibbets.

It is said that each one has a goal toward which he turns. This goal may be a material one or a spiritual one. The Qur'ān also indicates: "To each is goal to which he turns (II. 148)." But, it is love alone that negates and abolishes all goals; it turns the face of the lover from every thing save the beloved; it destroys his pride and egotism. It closes his eye from every body save his beloved and clears his heart from everybody

Having severed his connections with all, the lover desires none save his beloved. If the treasure of both the worlds are placed at his feet, he does not cast even a glance at them.

This characteristic of love is illustrated by Rumi in another way:

God spoke to Moses by inspiration of heart, saying, "O Chosen one, I Love thee."

He (Moses) said: "O Beautiful One, (tell me) what disposition Is the cause of that, in order that I may augment it."

He (God) said, Thou art like a child in the presence of its mother ;

When she chastises it, it still lays hold of her.

It does not even know that there is any one in the world except her;

It is both afflicted with headache (sorrow) by her and intoxicated (with joy) by her;

If its mother gives it a slap,

Still, it comes to its mother and clings to her;

It does not seek help from any one but her; She is all its
evil and its good.

Thy heart, like wise, in good or evil (plight) Never turns
from Me to other quarters.

In thy sight all besides Me are as stones and clods, Whether
(they be) boys or youths or old men.¹³⁸

In fact, the isolation of the lover from all else save the Beloved, the annihilation of his desires and wants and the effacement of all knowledge and reasoning is the result of the extinction of his being and the naughting of his very existence. As Rūmī says:

There is no way (admittance) for any one,

Till he becomes naughted, into the audience chamber of (Divine) Majesty.

What is the means of ascension to Heaven? This not-being.

Not-being is the creed and religion of the lovers(of God).¹³⁹

To make this point clear, Rūmī has related the story of Majnūn and his she-camel. Majnūn riding on her started in the search of Layla. But her foal was left behind. Whenever she saw her toggle slack, she would at once perceive that Majūn had become heedless and dazed, and would turn her face back to go in search of the foal without delay. When Majnūn came to himself again, he would see that she had gone back many miles. In these conditions Majnūn remained going to and fro two to three days. At last Majnūn threw himself down from her back and said to her: "O camel, since we both are lovers, therefore we two contraries are unsuitable fellow-travellers. It behoves me to choose parting from thy companionship."

¹³⁸ Ibid., IV, 1i.2921-28.

¹³⁹ Ibid., VI, 11. 232-33.

Rūmī remarks: "These two fellow-travellers—the reason and the flesh—are brigands waylaying each other ; lost is the spirit that does not dismount from the body." When Majnūn flung himself violently to the ground from the camel's back his leg broke. He tied up his leg and said: "I will become a ball, I will go rolling along in the curve of Layla's bat."¹⁴⁰ After relating this story Rūmī remarks:

How should love for the Lord be inferior to love for Layla?

To become a ball for His sake is more worthy.

Become a ball, turn on the side which is sincerity,

And go on rolling and rolling in the curve of the bat of love.¹⁴¹

Rūmī explains why this body is a hindrance in the way of Union with God:

"Tis a house filled with pictures of imagination and fancy,

And these forms (ideas) are as a Veil over the treasure of Union(with God).

"Tis the radiance of the Treasure and the splendour (of the spiritual gold)

That cause the forms (ideas) to surge up in this breast.

"Tis from the purity and (ceaseless) agitation of the precious spirit,

"Tis from the purity and translucence of the noble water,

That the particles of foam have veiled the face of the spirit. That the bodily figure has veiled the face of the spirit.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., IV 11. 1545-47.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., IV, 11. 1557-58.

Hearken, then, to the adage that issued from the mouths(of men).

"This which befalls us, O brother, is due to our doings,"

Because of this veil, these thirsty ones who are (so) fond of the foam,

Have got out of reach of the pure Water.

O (Divine) sun, notwithstanding (that we have) a *qibla* (object of adoration) and Imam like Thee,

We worship the night and behave in the manner of bats.

Make these bats fly towards Thee,

And redeem them from this bat-like disposition, O Thou whose protection is implored.¹⁴²

This means that in love the real task for the lover is to efface and annihilate his separate being, and this annihilation and extinction is the key to real existence.

The effacement of the being of the lover in the being of the Beloved, or, in the terminology of the Sufis "ittihād" (*Einswerden*) of the lover with the Beloved and their being coloured in one and the same (Qurān, II. 138): "Colour of Allah and who is better than Allah at colouring?" and such other technical terms should not incline us to hold that the Sufis use them in their literal or primary meanings. In Sharīah, oneness with God (*ittihād*), if understood in the literal sense, is sheer unbelief and blasphemy, for the lover and the Beloved are opposed to each other in form. One is contingent, limited and determined; and the other is Infinite, Necessary and Absolute. And in *Haqīqat* (or Truth), oneness or identity with God is worse than unbelief or blasphemy. For, to those who look behind the veil, nothing other than God exists. God is the only Being and none exists besides Him. And "Ittihād" (*Einswerden*) implies the existence of two

¹⁴² Ibid., VI, 11. 3425-31.

separate beings and then the identification of these two beings. But for 'one of Truth' (ahl-i-Haqiqat).

What is there in the two worlds except the Single Essence

Nothing exists in the entire universe except He.

As Jāmi has boldly declared:

Raze the words 'this' and 'that', duality

Denotes estrangement and repugnancy ;

In all this fair and faultless universe,

Naught but one Substance and one Essence
see.

In the terminology of the Sufis what is meant by *Ittibād* is the state of the lover in which he is absorbed completely in the thought of his beloved and in that state he does not behold anybody except his beloved (hālat-i-istighrāq). This is the highest reach of love's journey. Hallāj expressed this idea in his own way:

I am He whom I love and He whom I love is "I".

Rūmī has also given the same meaning to *Ittibād* and it is clear that all the eminent sufis agree that the connotation of this term is not what the heretics and those who have deviated through unbelief have taken to mean. The true sense is that in the mirror nothing but the beauty of the Beloved is observed. Rūmī has expressed this sense in his own way thus:

The reflexions that are seeking the Light

Are naughted when His light appears.

Before His Face existent and non-existent perish:

Existence in non-existence is in soothe a marvellous thing:

In this place of presence all minds are lost beyond control;

When the pen reaches this point, it breaks.¹⁴³

To explain this mystic state, Rūmī relates the story of Majnūn. This sets forth "the real oneness of the lover and the beloved, although they are contrary to each other from the point of view that what is the opposite of no want. So a mirror is formless and pure, and, formlessness is the opposite of form, yet in reality they have a oneness with each other which is tedious to explain ; a hint is enough for the wise."¹⁴⁴

It is clear that a lover who is purified from vicious and animal attributes is dead to carnal pleasures, and thus through abandonment of self and naughting of all that is not God, becomes resplendent with the Divine Light and obtains eternal existence after extinction, can never be compared to a person, who is engulfed in the darkness of his self-hood and thus lives in depths of darkness. The Qur'an (VI. 123) has thus indicated the difference between these two: "Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a light whereby he can walk amongst men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness from which he can never come out?"

¹⁴³ Ibid., III, II.4160-63.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., I, II. 1999-2019.