

# ABŪ YAZĪD AL-BIṢṬĀMĪ'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUFĪSM

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Ṣufīsm, as we know it today, has passed through various stages of development. It started with ascetical practices, such as continuous fasting and withdrawal from public life, and finally developed into theosophico-philosophical systems, each with its own special terms, images and metaphors for explaining Ṣūfī ideas, on the one hand, and well-organized *tarīqāt* (sing. *tarīqah*, Ṣūfī order) with hierarchical structures and elaborate ceremonies, on the other. In this paper, we shall try to assess how Abu Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (also Bostāmī and Baṣṭāmī), an early mystic of Irān, helped the development of the Ṣūfī tradition.<sup>50</sup>

Grandson of a Magian who was later converted to Islām, Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. ʿĪsā b. Sharūshān al-Biṣṭāmī was born about the year 161 A.H. (777 A.D.)<sup>51</sup> in the town of Biṣṭām on

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<sup>50</sup> This paper is based on the concluding chapter of my unpublished doctoral dissertation *Abū Yazīd*. (Abbreviations of frequently used sources are given at the end of the paper). A revised version of this dissertation under the title *The Life, Thought and Historical Importance of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī* will come out shortly.

<sup>51</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, p. 47.

the highway to Naysābūr three miles and a half north-east of Shāhrūd. At about the age of ten,<sup>52</sup> he left Bistām and wandered from place to place for thirty years, disciplining himself with ascetical practices. We are told that during this period he served three hundred Sufī masters.<sup>53</sup> About the year 201/816, when he was forty, he came back to Bistām and, after that, spent most of the time there, devoting himself to mystical practices and to the teaching of disciples. He died in 234/848 at the age of seventy-three.<sup>54</sup>

In our attempt to assess Abū Yazīd's role in the development of Sufism, we are faced with several problems. It is difficult to trace the history of Sūfī ideas with reference to the terms which have been employed to express them; for, sometimes different terms have been used by different Ṣūfīs, and sometimes a particular Saḥfī has used more than one term to express a specific idea. Abū Yazīd, for example, sometimes used the terms 'Um (exoteric knowledge) to mean *ma'rifah* (esoteric knowledge).<sup>55</sup> Our problem becomes the more complicated in view of the fact that most Ṣūfī terms, e.g., *mi'rāj*

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We are using Lt. Col. Sir W. Haig's *Comparative Tables of Muḥammadan (sic) and Christian Dates* (Lahore: Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, n.d.) for the conversion of Islamic dates into the Christian.

<sup>52</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, p. 95, n. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Nūr*, p.47.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

For a discussion on the dates of AbuYazīd's birth and death, see *AbuYazīd*, pp. 47-49.

<sup>55</sup> *Nūr*, p. 87.

(spiritual ascension) and *tawhīd* (unification), may also be used as they are in general and common usage. Moreover, a specific Sūfī term does not always convey an identical meaning for every Sūfī. This is especially true of the early history of Ṣufism, when the use of technical terms had not yet been stabilized. The chapters on *maʿrifah* in Kalābādhī's *Ta'arruf*,<sup>56</sup> for example, show that early Ṣufīs used the term *maʿrifah* with various meanings in mind. We also recognize that similarity of the ideas of two Ṣufīs does not necessarily prove the historical influence of one on the other. Human minds may act in similar ways in similar circumstances. Hence, similarity of ideas may very well be the result of analogous causes affecting the minds. Last of all, our knowledge of Ṣūfīsm, especially in its early stages of development, is extremely limited. "Too many gaps remain in our knowledge; too many Ṣūfī writings are unexplored, and too many mystics of enormous influence are all but unknown."<sup>57</sup> In the present state of our knowledge, therefore, it is difficult to draw comparisons between the ideas of one Ṣūfī and those of another. In view of all this, we cannot arrive at definite conclusions about Abū Yazīd's contribution to the development of Ṣūfīsm. The conclusions which we present here, should, therefore, be regarded only as tentative.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ta'arruf*, pp. 63-67.

<sup>57</sup> C. J. Adams in his Foreword to my work *Al-Junayd*, p. ii. This work will be published by December, 1971.

The teachings of Abut Yazīd have two distinct features. The first of these is his mystical extremism; he had a tendency to go to extremes. For example, he had an unusually sharp sense of what is and what is not permissible. Once when, on inquiry, his mother informed him that during his childhood she had taken a little oil and kohl (*kuhl*) from neighbours without their permission and used these on his head and eyes respectively, he located the neighbours, sought forgiveness from them and thus freed himself and his mother from the burden.<sup>58</sup> He had an extreme sense of devotion to his mother. One cold night she asked him to bring her a drink of water. On his return with a mug of water he found the mother asleep and waited with the mug in his hand until she awoke, although due to the excessively low temperature, a piece skin from one of his fingers was frozen to the edge of the mug.<sup>59</sup> Abu Yazīd was extraordinarily humble before God and in his relations with His creatures. In spite of performing a great deal of worship, he said, "If one utterance by me of the formula 'There is no god but God' were pure, I would not have cared for anything after that."<sup>60</sup> According to Abu Yazīd, a true worshipper considers himself the worst of all creatures. As long as a man thinks that there is anyone in this world more evil than himself, he is boastful

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<sup>58</sup> *Nūr*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71; *Tadhkirah*, I, 138; *Kawakib*, p. 249.

<sup>60</sup> *Nūr*, p. 82; *Hilyah*, X, 40; *Kawākib*, p. 247; *Tadhkirah*, I, 171.

(*mutakabbir*).<sup>61</sup> The tendency in the direction of extremism also manifested itself in his mystical teachings. He carried, by what we may call the *Bisṭāmī* manner of exaggeration,<sup>62</sup> some of the *Ṣūfī* concepts to their logical conclusions. Along these lines *Abū Yazīd* was certainly influential in contributing to the development of the *Ṣūfī* tradition.

The second distinct feature of *Abu Yazīd*'s teachings is that he introduced into *Ṣūfism* some conceptual forms, images and metaphors, which proved meaningful in the expression of mystical experience. His contributions to the expression of mystical experience served and continue to serve those within the tradition of *Ṣūfism*.

We shall now discuss some of *Abū Yazīd*'s teachings in the light of the two features mentioned above.<sup>63</sup>

Asceticism (*zuhd*), the elements of which were present in the teachings of the *Qur'ān* and in the lives of *Muḥammad* and his immediate companions, was adopted as part and parcel of the *Sūfī* movement. *Ḥasan al-Baṣrī* (d. 110/728), *Ibrāhīm b. Adham* (d. 160/776) and *Rābi'ah al-'Adawīyyah* (d. 185/801) all practised and insisted on the renunciation of the world. Some of these *Ṣūfīs* even spoke of the necessity of renouncing

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<sup>61</sup> *Nūr*, p. 123; *Hilyah*, IX, 36. Variant *Kawākib*, p. 247.

<sup>62</sup> By this, we are referring to the extremism of *Abū Yazīd*'s thoughts and deeds.

<sup>63</sup> In doing this, we shall, in most cases, follow the order in which his teachings have been discussed in my dissertation *Abū Yazīd*.

the hereafter, i.e., the fear of Hell-fire and the hope for Paradise as motivating factors of the worship of God. According to Ibrāhīm b. Adham, the true saint of God covets nothing of this world, nor of the hereafter; he devotes himself completely to God.<sup>64</sup> Ibrāhīm once said that he had left the world and the hereafter and had chosen for himself the remembrance of God in this world and the vision of God in the hereafter.<sup>65</sup> Abū Yazīd expressed a similar idea when he said, "I looked and saw the people enjoying food, drink and marriage in this world. (I saw them doing) the same in the next world. Then I made God's remembrance (*dhikr*) my enjoyment of the next world."<sup>66</sup> Rābi'ah was once found running with water in one hand and fire in the other. When asked why she was doing so, she replied that she was going to extinguish the fire of Hell with the water and burn Paradise with the fire so that thereafter no one would be able to worship God either for fear of Hell-fire or for hope of Paradise.<sup>67</sup>

Abū Yazīd also practiced and preached the necessity of a rigorous asceticism concerning this world and the next. We can say that, upto this point, he was walking on the trodden path except that, perhaps, no Ṣūfī before him had used strong terms to describe his or her renunciation as he did in such utterances

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<sup>64</sup> *Kashf*, p. 274.

<sup>65</sup> M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963-1966), I, 336.

<sup>66</sup> *Mīr'at*, p. 166.

<sup>67</sup> *Manāqib*, I, 397.

as these: "I uttered the triple formula of divorce, never to return to it (the world),"<sup>68</sup> "I pronounced over them (the creatures) the formula of funeral prayer"<sup>69</sup> and "I was a blacksmith of my Self for twelve years."<sup>70</sup> What is new in Abū Yazīd's teachings is that he carried the idea of renunciation to its farthest limit. He renounced, in addition to the world and the hereafter, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), *maḥabbah* (love), *ma'rifah* and the gifts of God such as the Protected Tablet and the Throne.<sup>71</sup> While speaking of renunciation of all other than God, he also insisted on abstinence from abstinence itself.<sup>72</sup> It would seem that this last idea, i.e., the idea of abstinence from abstinence, was taken up by later Ṣufīs as the highest stage of asceticism<sup>73</sup> and the resultant psychological state, *fanā' an al-fanā'*, as the highest state of *fanā'* (annihilation).

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<sup>68</sup> *Nūr*, p. 95.

Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 67 and 99; *Mir'āt*, p. 165; *Hilyah*, X, 36; *Tadhkirah*, I, 170; *Kawākib*, p. 247.

<sup>69</sup> *Risālah* p. 52; *Nūr*, p. 74; *Mir'āt*, p. 166.

<sup>70</sup> Same as n. 2.

Cf. *Tadhkirah*, I, 139, and also *Nūr*, p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> *Hilyah*, X, 36 and 38 ; *Nūr*, pp. 80 and 133; *Tabaqāt* (Sulamī), p. 63; *Kashf*, p. 132 ; *Tadhkirah*, I, 159.

<sup>72</sup> *Nūr*, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Abū Bak r al-Shiblī (d. 334/945), for example, says that asceticism is

heedlessness (*Luma*, p. 47).

Although Sufīs before Abū Yazīd had emphasised the necessity of and also practised asceticism, no one, as far as we know, had expressed the psychological state resulting from asceticism in the conceptual form of *fanā'*, and its corresponding positive state in the conceptual form of *baqā'* (permanence). Probably, it was Abu Yazīd who introduced these two concepts into Sufism.

According to Jāmī (d. 898/1492), it was Abu Sa'īd al-Kharrāj who first spoke of the theory of *fanā'* and *baqā'*<sup>74</sup>. We cannot accept Jāmī's view as correct. Al-Kharrāj died in 277/890-91 and thus belonged to a generation which followed Aba Yazīd (d. 234/848). The view that Aba Yazīd introduced the concept of *fanā'* into Sufism has additional support if it is true that his master Abū 'Alī al-Sindī, who taught his disciple *fanā' fī al-tawhīd*,<sup>75</sup> was a non-Muslim.<sup>76</sup> One may argue, however, that probably Jāmī had the correlation of the concepts of *fanā'* and *baqā'* in mind when he said that al-Kharrāj was the first to speak of the two concepts. Our answer is that the idea of this correlation also existed in Abū Yazīd's teachings.

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<sup>74</sup> *Nafahāt* p. 73.

Cf. *Essai*, p. 301; R.A. Nicholson, "A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Sūfism", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1906), p. 325.

<sup>75</sup> *Nafahāt*, p. 47.

<sup>76</sup> On the question of Abū Yazīd's relationship with al-Sindī, see *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 334-345.



According to him, the Ṣufī, having been completely self-annihilated and creatureless, subsists (*bāqī*) on the carpet of God; the self-annihilated becomes self-subsistent, the dead alive, and the veiled unveiled.<sup>77</sup>

On the basis of the available information, then, we conclude that Abū Yazīd was the first Ṣufī to speak of the concepts of *fanā'* and *baqā'* and of their correlation. From this time on, *fanā'* and *baqā'* became two pivotal concepts in Ṣufī thought and literature. Soon afterwards, Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. ca. 298/910) wrote a treatise on *fanā'* (*Kitāb al-Fanā'*)<sup>78</sup> and developed the doctrine of *fang'* into a well coordinated Sūfī theosophy.<sup>79</sup> He understood Abū Yazīd's *subḥānī* (Glory be to me!)<sup>80</sup> to represent Abū Yazīd's experience of the state of *fanā'*. Referring to this famous *shath* (mystical paradox) of Abū Yazīd, al-Junayd said, "The one who is annihilated in the vision of (God's) Glory expresses himself according to what annihilates him. When he is withdrawn from the perception of himself so that he sees nothing other than God, he describes Him."<sup>81</sup> Al-Junayd's idea of *fanā'*, which has

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<sup>77</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 169.

Cf. *ibid.*, p. 154; Nūr, p. 109.

<sup>78</sup> Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, *Rasā'il*, ed. A. H. 'Abd al-Qādir in *al-Junayd*, pp. 31-39.

<sup>79</sup> For al-Junayd's doctrine of *fana'*, see *al-Junayds* ('Abd al-Rabb), pp. 49-69.

<sup>80</sup> *Infra*, p.

<sup>81</sup> Nūr, p. 68.

been well expressed in the following prayer for one of his friends, is particularly reminiscent of Abrū Yazīd's idea of *fanā'*:

Then may He (God) perpetuate for you the life which is extracted from the eternity of life as He is everlasting, and may He isolate you from what is yours on His behalf and from what is His on your behalf, so that you are alone through Him for all eternity. Then there shall remain neither you nor yours, nor your knowledge of Him, but God will be alone.<sup>82</sup>

Al-Shiblī, al-Junayd's disciple, expressed the state of *fang'* in the following words:

*I am lost to myself and unconscious,*

*And my attributes are annihilated.*

*Today I am lost to all things:*

*Naught remains but a forced expression.*<sup>83</sup>

One can add numerous examples to show how the concepts of *fang'* and *baqā'* were understood, developed, and made key

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Massign on seems to be prejudiced against Abū Yazīd when he says that this comment of al-Junayd applies more properly to Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Hallāj's (d. 309/922) utterances (*Essai*, p. 280).

<sup>82</sup>*Luma'*, p. 243.

<sup>83</sup>*Kashf*, p.244; slightly abridged trans. R. A. Nicholson (Leyden: E. J.

Brill, 1911), p. 195.

concepts of Sūfism by Ṣūfīs after Abū. Yazīd. Even a casual glance at the standard handbooks of Sūfism such as *Risālah*, *Ta'aaruf* and *Kashf* shows that considerable space is devoted to the doctrine of *fanā'* and *baqā'*. But, as we have said, probably the credit for introducing these concepts into Sūfism goes to Abū Yazīd.

Another pivotal concept of Sūfism is that of *tawhīd*. The earliest definitions of this term are associated with Abū Yazīd and with Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 245/860).

According to Abū Yazīd, *tawhīd* consists in the realization that all "movement and rest of creatures are the work of God, may He be exalted and glorified, and that there is no partner in His actions. When you have known your Lord (in this way) and He has settled in you, you have found Him."<sup>84</sup> Dhū al-Nūn has defined *tawhīd* in a similar way.<sup>85</sup> Abū Yazīd and Dhū al-Nūn were contemporaries and friends. Hence, if we assume that one of them learned the definition from the other, it is difficult to say who learned it from whom. However, most of the traditions which refer to their relationship indicate that Dhū al-Nan was indebted to Abū Yazīd. Dhū al-Nūn would send a disciple from Egypt to Abū Yazīd in Bisṭām to ask a question and not *vice versa*. On one occasion, having heard Abū Yazīd's answer to one of his questions, Dhū al-Nūn remarked about Abū Yazīd, "May he be blessed! This is a

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<sup>84</sup> *Nūr*, p. 129. Var. *Kawākib*, p. 249.

<sup>85</sup> *Risālah*, p.4.

speech which our states (*ahwāl*) have not reached.”<sup>86</sup> On the basis of this evidence, it is possible for us to speculate that the Wī conception of *tawhīd* originated in Bistām and not in Egypt.

Whether or not Abū Yazīd was the first to define the Ṣūfī conception of *tawhīd*, he clarified and elaborated it, and the Baghdād school of Sufism, which deserves the credit for the fullest development of this doctrine, may have received inspiration from him. His ideas that in the state of *tawhīd* man loses all volition and choice, that the experience of *tawhīd* is something to be tasted and not described, that this experience is the result of God’s grace and that there are different groups of worshippers,<sup>87</sup> are found in a much more developed form in al-Junayd,<sup>88</sup> the most prominent representative of the Baghdād school. We know it for certain that al-Junayd, as well as other important members of his school, knew Abū Yazīd’s teachings.<sup>89</sup> Hence we can perhaps say more or less definitely that the Baghdād school of Ṣufism was influenced by Abu Yazīd’s doctrine of *tawhīd*.

Still another pivotal concept of Ṣūfism is that of *ma’rifah*. Dhū al Nūn is generally credited with the introduction of the

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<sup>86</sup> *Risālah*, pp. 102-103. Var. *Nūr*, pp. 79-80; *Mir’āt*, p. 167; *Tadhkirah*, I, 137.

<sup>87</sup> *Kashf*, p. 502; *Nūr*, pp.109, 119 and 131; *Tadhkirah*, I, 177; *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 221-225.

<sup>88</sup> See *al-Junayd* (‘Abd al-Rabb), pp. 9-48.

<sup>89</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 3-10.

idea of *ma'rifah* into Ṣūfīsm. But this view does not seem to be correct. It is true that *ma'rifah* does not carry the same meaning for all early Ṣūfīs; hut there were Ṣūfīs before Dhū al-Nūn — Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830-831), for example — who spoke of *ma'rifah*.<sup>90</sup> Dhū al-Nūn's contribution seems to consist in his development of the idea of *ma'rifah* and his clear presentation of it. But in Abū Yazīd too we find a developed idea of *ma'rifah* very clearly presented. In fact, many of Abū Yazīd's teachings on *ma'rifah* resemble very closely those of Dhū Dhū al-Nūndistinguished three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the common man, of the elite and of the Ṣūfīs.<sup>91</sup> We find a similar distinction in Abū Yazīd's teachings.<sup>92</sup> Dhū al-Nūn's ideas that when *ma'rifah* comes God becomes the disposer of the ārif<sup>93</sup> and that one reaches *ma'rifah* through God<sup>94</sup> are also present in Abū Yazīd's teachings.<sup>95</sup> In fact, perhaps Abū Yazīd has further clarified the concept of *ma'rifah* through his distinction between exoteric knowledge (*'ilm al-zāhir*) and esoteric knowledge (*'ilm al-bātin*), his explication of the existence of knowledge in prophets and others, and his idea of the sources of these two kinds of knowledge.<sup>96</sup> Here again, if one of the two Ṣūfīs

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<sup>90</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 235.

<sup>91</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 127.

<sup>92</sup> Abū Yazīd, pp. 211-213.

<sup>93</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 127.

<sup>94</sup> *Risālah*, p. 156.

<sup>95</sup> Abū Yazīd, pp. 208-210.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 199-201.

influenced the other, it is difficult to say who influenced whom. But what we have said of their relationship in respect of the concept of *tawhīd* can also be applied in respect of the concept of *ma'rifah*.

Many ideas of Abū, Yazīd and Dhū al-Nūn with regard to *ma'rifah* were developed by the Baghdad school of Sufism.<sup>97</sup>

Abū Yazīd introduced into Ṣūfīsm the imagery of *mi'rāj*<sup>98</sup> as a means of expressing the mystical experience. The audacity in this lies not only in his re-enacting the process of the Prophet's journey to the court of God, step by step, in his own experience, but also in his claiming to have gone beyond all limits reached by anyone else before and to have become one with God.<sup>99</sup>

The *mi'rāj* experience of Abū Yazīd played an important role in the history of Ṣūfī thought and literature. Many Ṣūfīs and Sūfī authors, al-Junayd, al-Shiblī, al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), al-Hujwārī (d. ca. 469/1076), 'Aṭṭār (d. 606/1209) and Rūmī (d. 672/1273) to name only a few, have discussed and interpreted Abū Yazīd's *mi'rāj*. In fact, *mi'rāj* became a persistent theme in many later Ṣūfī works. Najm al-Dīn al-Kubra's *Fawā'ih*<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See *al-Junayd C Abd al-Rabb*), pp. 83-108.

<sup>98</sup> *Abu Yazīd*, pp. 191-193.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 269-274.

<sup>100</sup> Najm al-Din al-Kubra, *Fawā'ih al-Jamāl wa Fawātih al-Jalāl*, ed. E. Meier in *Die Fawā'i al-Jamāl wa fawātih al Jalāl des Najm al-Kubra*(Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1957).

and Lāhijī's commentary on Shabistarī's *Gulshan-i Rāz*,<sup>101</sup> for example, are full of expressions of the *mi'rāj* experience.

As for the influence of Abū Yazīd's use of the *mi'rāj* imagery on later Ṣūfī thought, many Ṣūfīs took Abū Yazīd as their ideal and tried to express their mystical experiences in the pattern of his *mi'rāj*. Al-Junayd's experience of *tawḥīd* as a return of the soul to the primordial State in which it was before it entered the human body<sup>102</sup> was a kind of *mi'rāj* experience. Al-Kharaqānī's 0.425/1033

description of his mystical experience is particularly reminiscent of Abū Yazīd's *mi'rāj*. He said,

I ascended at noon to the Throne, to circle it, and I encircled it a thousand times; I saw round about it people who were still and serene, and they marvelled at the speed of my circling. Their circling had little value in my eyes. I said: "Who are you, and what is this laggardliness in your circling?" They said: "We are angels created of light and this is our nature beyond which we cannot pass." Then they said: "Who are you and what is this

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<sup>101</sup> Muhammad Ja'far Lāhijī, *Mafatīh al-I'jāz fī Sharh-i Gulshan-i Rāz* ([Tehrān] Kitābfurūshī Maḥniddī, 1958).

<sup>102</sup> This is al-Junayd's famous doctrine of *mithāk* (covenant) (see *al-Junayd*, [ʿAbd al-Rabb], pp. 70-82; *al-Junayd* [ʿAbd al-Qādid], pp. 76-80).

speed in your circling?" I said: "I am a man compact of light and fire and this speed comes from the light of longing."<sup>103</sup>

A woman Sūfī<sup>104</sup> also expressed her experience of *mi'rāj* through different stages in a fascinating way. She said,

I was recalling Abū Yazīd's signs of grace, and I asked the Lord that He would show me him in the hidden world; and while I asked Him, in the same night I was taken up into heaven, in an ascent of perception, until I passed beyond the seventh sphere and came to the Throne. I was summoned, "Draw near ... draw near!" I came finally to the Throne, and penetrated the veils; there I was called: "Approach me!" Then I rent the veils; came to a place where my sight left me, and I saw God purely through His own deed, regarding His creation, and I said to him who was with me, "Where is Abū Yazīd?" He said, "Abū Yazīd is before you"; and he gave me wings with which I might fly. My state of annihilation, accompanying me, was replaced by the emergence of godhead, until He took me through

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<sup>103</sup> Translated and quoted by Qāsim al-Samarrā'i (*The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings*"Baghdād: The National Printing and Publishing Co., 1968], p. 193) from al-Kafawī's *A'lām al-Akhyār*.

For another account of al-Kharaqānī's *mirāj* experience, see *Abu Yazīd*, p. 333.

<sup>104</sup> Al-Sahlagī tells us that she was a pious woman of royal descent from

Khurāsān and that she belonged to Abū Yazīd's tradition of Sūfism (*Nūr*, p. 123).



Him, that is to say not Him through me, until He achieved a Union which is, without a hint of aught else, that Union which gives no sign of any created work when such oblivion is met with. Afterwards [I walked] on the carpet of the Essence of the Truth, hence I was asked: "At what are you aiming, while this is Abū Yazīd?" I was then taken to a green garden ... I said, "O! that is Abū Yazīd!" He said, "This place is Abū Yazīd's; but Abū Yazīd is searching for his self but will not find it."<sup>105</sup>

Since both al-Kharaqānī and the woman Sūfī belonged to Abū Yazīd's tradition of Ṣūfīsm, we are certain of his influence on them.

Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī (d. ca. 365/976) and Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) wrote books on their experience of *mi'rāj*.<sup>106</sup>

Aside from the *mi'rāj* imagery, Abū Yazīd introduced into Sūfīsm the symbolism of the 'mirror' of 'drink' and of the 'cup', the metaphor of the 'Magian girdle',<sup>107</sup> etc. These were used extensively by later Sūfīs and Ṣūfī authors, especially by the Ṣūfī poets.

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<sup>105</sup> *Nūr*, p. 123; trans. al-Sāmarrā'i, *Theme*, pp. 194-195.

<sup>106</sup> Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī, *Kitāb al-Mawāqif wa Kitāb al-Mukhātabāt*, ed. and trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Luzac & Co., 1953); Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb al-Isrā' ilá Makām al-Asrā'* (Haydarābad, 1948).

<sup>107</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 105, 151, 152, 159, n. 1, etc.

The most important aspect of Abū Yazīd's thought is that of *shataḥāt*<sup>3</sup> (sing. *shath*).<sup>108</sup> The phenomenon of *shath* existed before Abū Yazīd. Ibrāhīm b. Adham, for example, had said, "O God! You know that Paradise does not weigh with me so much as the wing of a gnat. If You bring me near Your recollection, sustain me with Your love and make it easy for me to obey You; then give Paradise to whomsoever You will."<sup>109</sup> Rābi'ah, Ibrāhīm's contemporary, once addressed God, saying, "O Lord! Do You not have any kind of punishment and discipline (*adab*) except Hell-fire?"<sup>110</sup> Another time, having heard someone reciting the Qur'ānic verse, "Verily the companions of Paradise on that Day shall enjoy everything that they do,"<sup>111</sup> she said, "Poor people of Paradise! They are busy with their wives."<sup>112</sup> Referring to the Ka'bah, she said, "This is an idol worshipped on earth; God does not enter it, nor is it independent of Him."<sup>113</sup>

We notice that these *shataḥāt* relate either to the interiorization of religious rites or to the hereafter. From our point of view, they fall into the lowest two categories of Abū

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<sup>108</sup> For a discussion on *shataḥāt*, see *ibid*, pp. 226-298.

<sup>109</sup> *Hilyah*, VIII, 35.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted by Badawī (*Shataḥāt*, p. 19) from al-Munāwī's *Tabaqāt al-Awliyā'*.

<sup>111</sup> *Qur'an*, 36:55.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted by Badawī (*Shataḥāt*, p. 19) from al-Munāwī's *Tabaqāt al-Awliyā'*.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*.

Yazīd's *shatahat*<sup>114</sup> But even in this respect, Abū Yazīd carried the *shatanāt* to their extreme limits in the Bistāmī manner of exaggeration. His claim that his banner was greater than Muḥammad's<sup>115</sup> and his excusing the Jews,<sup>116</sup>

for example, are much more paradoxical than the statements of Ibrāhīm and Rābi'ah.

One aspect of Abū Yazīd's *shatahāt* concerning the hereafter is his emphasis on intercession.<sup>117</sup> This is unique to Abū Yazīd. We do not know of any Ṣūfī before Abū Yazīd who claimed to have the power of interceding for men on the Day of Judgment. Later Sūfīs, al-Junayd, for example, spoke of a *shāfi'* as one who helps people to achieve the mystical aim in this world.<sup>118</sup> Abū Yazīd also believed in intercession in this sense. We know that he received guidance from several Sūfī masters, and he insisted that others do likewise. But Abū Yazīd was the first Ṣūfī to have applied the term *shāfi'* to a Ṣūfī in the sense of an intercessor on the Day of Judgment.

In his typical fashion, Abū Yazīd made extreme claims for himself. Whereas Muhammad's intercessory powers would be of assistance to Muhammad's community alone, Abū Yazīd

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<sup>114</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 253-266.

<sup>115</sup> *Nūr*, p. 111; *Shathīyat* p. 132; *Tadhkirah*, II, 186.

<sup>116</sup> *Luma'*, p. 391; *Shathīyat* p. 88; *Kawākib*, p. 245.

<sup>117</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 260-264.

<sup>118</sup> *Al-Junayd* ('Abd al-Rabb), p. 111.

claimed for himself the ability to intercede for all mankind.<sup>119</sup> There are, however, statements which suggest that the function was considered beneath him.<sup>120</sup> Intercession for all mankind would be easier than interceding for a piece of clay,<sup>121</sup> and he would not want to approach God for such a small favour. Besides, intercession is more in keeping with the appropriate functions of the prophets — men of *Shari'ah*<sup>122</sup> Abū Yazīd belonged to the men of *ḥaqīqah*.

The *shataḥāt* which have attracted the most attention are those statements which have been uttered in the moment of intense ecstasy, when the Sūfī experiences being one with God. In such moments the intoxicated Sūfī breaks forth in statements such as -Glory be to me!” The Sūfī no longer speaks as though God were other than he; he experiences that he is none other than God and that God is speaking through him. Abū Yazīd is particularly famous for *shataḥāt* of this extreme kind. Of special historical significance is the fact that Abū Yazīd was the first to express the experience of the overpowering presence of God in this manner. Subsequently *shath* has come to mean especially an utterance of this kind. It took a Khurāsānī rebel<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Nūr, p. 111; *Shathīyat*, p. 132; *Tadhkirah*, II, 186.

<sup>120</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 156.

<sup>121</sup> Nūr, pp. 79 and 80.

<sup>122</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 156,

<sup>123</sup> That is, Abū Yazīd. On the rebellious nature of the Khurāsānīs, see *Abu Yazīd*, p. 276, n. I.

to break all the limitations set by orthodox Islām and to cry out, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty",<sup>124</sup> "There is no god but I. So worship me!"<sup>125</sup>

The formulation of *shataḥāt* in which the Sūfī speaks as though he were God was a most radical innovation. It shocked "orthodox" minds and the response was tremendous. The immediate consequence was Abū Yazīd's exile from Bistām. What is more important is the fact that *shataḥāt* became a subject of heated discussion among both the orthodox Muslims<sup>126</sup> and Sūfīs. After Abū Yazīd's death, we find al-Junayd writing treatises on Abū Yazīd's *shataḥāt* and al-Shiblī and al-Hallāj criticizing Abū Yazīd for having uttered the *shataḥāt*. Ibn Sālim (d. 360/970) discussed them in a debate with al-Sarrāj, and al-Sarrāj devoted chapters of his *Limo* to explain and defend the *shataḥāt* of Abū Yazīd as well as of

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<sup>124</sup> *Kashf*, p. 327; *Tadhkirah*, I, 140. Var. Nūr, pp. 78 and 111; *Luma'*, p. 390; *Shathīyat*, p. 89.

<sup>125</sup> *Luma'*, p. 391; *Mir*, p. 122; *Tadhkirah*, I, 37; *Kawākib*, p. 251.

<sup>126</sup> Orthodoxy means a common voice. To speak with a common voice necessitates the existence of an authority, e.g., the Pope of Catholic Christianity. But since there is no such authority in Islām, strictly speaking we cannot speak of Islamic orthodoxy. Nevertheless, in the absence of a better terminology, we shall refer to Sunni Muslims as orthodox, although the Shi'ah are perhaps more orthodox than the Sunni in the sense we have defined orthodoxy.

others. In fact, there is hardly any Sūfī author after Abū Yazīd who has not discussed Abū Yazīd's *shataḥāt*.<sup>127</sup>

Not only did 'Šūfīs and sūfī authors discuss the *shataḥāt* of Abū Yazīd, but they were also influenced, either positively or negatively, by them. Let us take a few cases of positive influence first.

The most immediate and positive influence of Abū Yazīd's *shataḥāt* was on al-Hallāj and al-Shiblī. It is true that both of them criticized Abū Yazīd; but they made their own *shataḥāt*, which closely resemble some of the utterances of Abū Yazīd. One can see a very close similarity between Abū Yazīd's "There is no Truth (*ḥaw*) except that I am He"<sup>128</sup> and "I am the Truth" (*anā al-ḥaqq*) attributed to al-Hallāj. Some of al-Shiblī's *shataḥāt* are very similar to those of Abū Yazīd. Among al-Shiblī's *shataḥāt*, we would call attention to these: "If the thought of Gabriel and Michael has occurred to you, you have committed *shirk*"<sup>129</sup>; "By God! Muhammad will not be happy if there will be a single man from his community in Hell. If Muhammad intercedes for his community, I shall intercede after his intercession until none will remain in Hell."<sup>130</sup> In fact,

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<sup>127</sup> *AM Yazīd*, pp. 275-298.

<sup>128</sup> *Nūr*, p. 108.

<sup>129</sup> *Luma'*, p. 398.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted by L. Massignon (Recueil de textes inédits concernant l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'Islām [Paris: Paul Gauthier, 1929] p. 78) from al-Namūs of Ibn

it would be no exaggeration to say that there would have been no *shatahāt* of al-Hallāj and of al-Shiblī if there had been no *shatahāt* of Abū Yazīd. They were not to enjoy the freedom to express themselves that Abū Yazīd enjoyed. This fact can be explained, partially at least, by the kind of political and religious atmosphere which prevailed in their day.<sup>131</sup>

Later, the phenomenon of *shatahāt* became a very important aspect of Sūfism. Many important Sūfīs pronounced *shatahāt* in the form in which Abū Yazīd first introduced them. The famous Sūfī-poet of Egypt, ‘Umar Ibn(d. 632/1235), for example

said,

... but for me, no existence would have come  
into being, nor would there have been a  
contemplation (of God), nor would any secure  
covenants have been known.

None lives but his life is from mine, and every  
willing soul is obedient to my will;

And there is no speaker but tells his tale with my  
words, nor any seer but sees with the sight of mine eye;

And no silent (listener) but hears with my hearing,

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<sup>131</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 276-282,

nor any one that grasps [*batish*] but with my  
strength and might (*shiddah*);  
And in the whole creation there is none save me  
that speaks or sees or hears.<sup>132</sup>

Ibn al-Fārid's contemporary Ibn al-'Arabī, said,

He (God) praises me and I praise Him;

He worships me and I worship Him.<sup>133</sup>

Elsewhere, he said,

Whenever I say, "Oh Master!",

He (God) says, "You are My owner (*mālik*)

By God! The existence

of My servant has blocked all My ways.

Nothing prevents Us from

serving him in any way.

I do not share his essence,

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<sup>132</sup> Michael Farid Gharib, *Umar Ibn* (Zaḥlah: Zaḥlat at Fattāh, 1955), p. 69; trans. R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islāmic Mysticism* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1921), p. 255.

<sup>133</sup> Muḥi al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Ḥikain*, ed. Abu' al-'Alaa 'Afīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, 1946), p. 83.



nor his action with him.

....

And I am the Servant who  
looks after the kingdoms.»<sup>134</sup>

Baqlī devoted a whole monograph (*Shathīyāt*) to the elucidation and interpretation of *shataḥāt*. According to a statement of Rūmī, each of the verses composed by Ṣūfī masters in his day contained one thousand *anā al-ḥaqq*s and *subḥānīs*.<sup>135</sup>

There are two points here that should be mentioned. First, in the early period, *shataḥāt* were criticized and the Ṣūfīs who pronounced them were persecuted and were killed in some cases; but in the late medieval period Ṣūfism became a very important force in the Muslim societies, and few uttered a word against them. Rūmī expressed his satisfaction over the fact that no one had the audacity to say a word against the *shataḥāt* of the Sufīs of his time.<sup>136</sup> The second point we wish to make is that Abū Yazīd's *shataḥāt* were extreme to the degree that, as far as we know, no one after him could utter a more radical statement. Most of the *shataḥāt* of later Ṣūfīs are moderate in comparison with those of Abū Yazīd.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibn al-'Arabi, *Al-Fūtūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Cairo, 1876), IV, 459.

<sup>135</sup> *Manāqib*, I, 467.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

On the negative side, most of the so-called sober Ṣūfis and Ṣūfī authors learnt a lesson from Abū Yazīd's *shatahāt*. Al-Junayd was perhaps the first man to have fully realized the evil consequences of the unbridled expressions of the mystical

experience in the form of *shatahāt*. Therefore, he placed an emphasis on controlling the mystical expression and used obscure language to express the mystical experience.<sup>137</sup> He favoured sobriety and was joined by a number of apologetic writers who were directly or indirectly associated with the Junaydian school—al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī (d.465/1072), al-Hujwārī and al-Kalābādhī (d. 385/995). Some might contend that their attitudes were more significantly influenced by the experience of al-Ḥallāj's than by the reactions to Abū Yazīd's statements. We would say that the unfavourable consequences of *shataḥat* were already in evidence at the time of Abū Yazīd. He was the first to utter extreme statements which exceeded all limits. Al-Ḥallāj's *shataḥāt* were only more of the same kind although somewhat milder. For a number of reasons,<sup>138</sup> the treatment he received was more severe than that of Abū Yazīd. In short, then, we can say that the relatively more sober Sūfism

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<sup>137</sup> *Al-Junayd* ('Abd al-Rabb), pp. 6-8.

<sup>138</sup> See *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 276-282.

that came into being with the Junaydian school was in a sense the result of Abū Yazīd's provocative utterances.<sup>139</sup>

Abū Yazīd's teachings also contained, in an embryonic form, some concepts which, in the later history of Sūfism, were developed into important Sūfī doctrines. Al-Junayd, for example, developed the doctrine of sobriety (*saḥw*). According to this doctrine, the Sūfī, after having reached the experience of *tawhīd*, must come back to the world for the guidance of his fellow-men.<sup>140</sup> Later, many Sūfīs and Ṣūfī authors, e.g., al-

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<sup>139</sup> The importance of Abū Yazīd's *Shatahāt* in the history of Sūfism has been summed up very beautifully by Massignon. He says that Abū Yazīd

left a fulgurating memory ever alive in Islām. Having become a Semite spiritually, and praying in Arabic liturgy, he undertook a dialogue with God in the form of short invocations in Persian of a sharpness and violence which went beyond prayer, if I may say so. For, it is a vehement attack *vis-a-vis* Divine Omnipotence, which a pure Semite would perhaps not have dared to formulate, because he would have had to consider himself superior to a prophet in order to do it. Besides, there is in it something very Irānian: this psychological orchestration, this kind of frontal attack. Actually still, the whole vocabulary of Islāmic mysticism depends on this starting point, the attempt of the Irānians to seize the divine language throughout the *Qur'ān*. While the reverential fear of the Semite considers God as completely inaccessible, the Irānian temperament, which has a more supple language and a more daring "sylogistique", endeavours to penetrate to the nudity—if I may say so -- of the Divine Semitic word in Arabic, the liturgical language of Islām [L. Massignon, *Opera minora; textes recueillis, classes et presentes* ([Beirut]: Dar Ma'ārif, 1963), 1, 542].

<sup>140</sup> See *Al-Junayd* ('Abd al-Rabb), pp. 109-125; *al-Junayd* ('Abd al-Qādir), pp. 88-95.

Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwārī, ‘Attā’r and al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), adopted and elaborated on this doctrine. But the idea of a return to the world existed, in a latent form, in Abū Yazīd’s thought. He said,

When he (the Ṣūfī) is united (with God) through his separation (*fag*), he is given knowledge (*ilm*) of the unseen of His eternity. *When he is perfectly established, separation returns to separation without the removal of union and negation of separation.*<sup>141</sup>

Al-Junayd also developed the doctrine of covenant (*mīthāq*). On the basis of the Qur’ānic verse, "When your Lord took from the children of Adam — from their loins — their posterity and made them testify as to themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ they replied, ‘Yes’”<sup>142</sup>, al-Junayd concluded that the soul of man, before its entrance into the human body, existed in a state of unification with God, and that, in the experience of unification in this world, it (the soul) returns to the state in which it was originally.<sup>143</sup>

It seems that the idea of the pre-existence of the soul, on which al-Junayd’s doctrine of *mīll*\* is based, was also present in Abū Yazīd’s thought in a latent form. Some sayings of Abu

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<sup>141</sup> *Nūr*, p. 78. Var. *ibid.*, p. 82.

For more on this, see *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 246-247.

<sup>142</sup> *Qur’ān*, 7:172.

<sup>143</sup> For al-Junayd’s doctrine of *mīthāq*, see *al-Junayd* (‘*Abd al-Rabb*), pp. 70-82; *al-Junayd* (VOA al-Qādir), pp. 76-80.

Yazīd, especially, God's address to him, "I was yours when you were not",<sup>144</sup> are suggestive of the same idea.

One very important concept developed by later mystics, e.g., Abū Saīd Abī al-Khayr (d. 441/1049), 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) and Ibn al-'Arabī is that of "the Perfect Man" (*al-insān al-kāmil*). According to this conception, God chooses man, endows him with His own mysteries and makes him His vicegerent on earth. Hence "the Perfect Man" alone manifests God's Essence together with His "names" and "attributes". He is the pole (*qutb*) of the universe and the medium through which the universe is preserved; he is the final cause of everything and the connecting link between God and His creation.<sup>145</sup>

Many traditions indicate the existence of the idea of "the Perfect Man" in a rudimentary form in the teachings of Abū Yazīd. According to him, the real 3 nfi does not travel from the East to the West, but the East and the West come to him.<sup>146</sup> Abū Yazīd was omnipotent and omnipresent; he had neither beginning nor end;<sup>147</sup> angels came to ask him questions concerning ilm;<sup>148</sup> "present in the unseen (*ghayb*) and existent in the seen",<sup>149</sup> he informed other people of their presence with

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<sup>144</sup> Nūr, p. 140.

<sup>145</sup> On the idea of the Perfect Man. see *E. I.*, II-I, 510-511; Nicholson, *Studies*, etc.

<sup>146</sup> *Nūr*, p. 75.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75 and 99; *Tadhkirah*, I, 165 and 171.

<sup>148</sup> *Nūr*, 112.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

God;<sup>150</sup> if the people had seen his hidden attributes, they would die of wonder.<sup>151</sup> These are characteristics of "the Perfect Man". What is even more important is that Abū Yazīd used the expression *al-kamāl al-tāmm* (the perfect and complete man) to describe the perfect Sūfī.<sup>152</sup> Our evidence strongly suggests that the history of the developed concept of "the Perfect Man" goes back to a significant aspect of Abu Yazīd's teachings.

We turn now to the question of Abū Yazid's influence on the development of the social structure of Sūfism. One important aspect of medieval Muslim societies in general and of Sūfism in particular was the Sūfī *tarīqah*. In the fifth/eleventh century, the *tarīqāt* began to take the form of definite organized orders with hierarchical structures and elaborate functions and ceremonies. In the later medieval period, these orders played a dominant role in Muslim societies. Even today, the influence of Sūfī orders on Muslim minds is very strong in many parts of the Islāmic world. An example is the belief of most East Pakistani Muslims that salvation is dependent on the acceptance of the guidance of a *pīr*. (spiritual master).

Abū Yazīd may be credited with having made a significant contribution to the formation of the *tarīqah*. Earlier we referred

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>152</sup> See A. J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: The

Forward Lectures for 1956 delivered in the University of Liverpool, 1957), p. 107, and Nicholson, *Studies*, p. 77, D. 2.

to a female mystic who claimed to have the *mi'rāj* experience in the pattern of Abū Yazīd's *mi'rāj*<sup>153</sup>. Al-Sahlagī (d. ca. 486/1093) says that she belonged to Abū Yazīd's *tarīqah*<sup>154</sup>. We do not wish to leave the impression that Abū Yazīd had an order in the sense of the well-organized *tarīqāt* of later times. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many aspects of the later *tarīqāt* were in one form or another present in Abū Yazīd's teachings.

We know that, before and during Abū Yazīd's time, there was the tradition of receiving instructions from Sūfī masters. For example, Ibrāhīm b. Adham is said to have received instructions from a Christian monk;<sup>155</sup> Ibrāhīm also associated with Sufiyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) and Fudayl b. 'Iyad (d. 187/803); Shaqīq

al-Balkhī (d. 194/810) was taught by Ibrāhīm b. Adham. But no one before Abū Yazīd ever expressed the necessity of the guidance of a spiritual teacher so clearly and strongly. His statement, "If a man has no master (*ustād*), then Satan is his guide (*imām*)"<sup>156</sup> almost became a maxim of the Sūfī orders of medieval times.

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<sup>153</sup> *Supra*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>154</sup> *Nūr*, p. 123.

<sup>155</sup> Ḥsilyah, VIII, 29.

<sup>156</sup> *Risālah*, p. 199.

To our knowledge, Abū Yazīd was also the first Sūfī who declared that it is necessary for the disciple to be in absolute submission to his master. He said:

If the master orders the disciple to do something worldly and sends him for his (own) good (*fī iṣlāḥihi*), and on his way the *mu'adhdhin* of a mosque recites the call to prayer and he says (to himself): shall first go to the mosque to perform prayer and then go what the master has sent me for', then he has fallen into a well the bottom of which he will never discover...<sup>157</sup>

We know that a sizable group gathered around Abū Yazīd and that he used to live a community life, as is shown by the fact that one hundred or more people ate at his place everyday,<sup>158</sup> and that he used to sit in the *majlis* (assembly) to discuss with and advise disciples in mystical matters.<sup>159</sup> On the basis of this evidence, we can say that Abū Yazīd deserves the credit for introducing a more or less definite Ṣūfī *tarīqah*, which in later history developed into a powerful and cohesive force in Islāmic societies.

The above discussion shows that Abu Yazīd introduced into Ṣūfism some important concepts, images and metaphors, elaborated and made clear some of the existing Ṣūfī ideas,

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<sup>157</sup> *Nūr*, p. 144.

<sup>158</sup> *Nūr*, p. 61.

<sup>159</sup> *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 109-110.

On the problem of master-disciple relationship, see F. Meier, "Qushayrī's *Tarīb al-Sulūk*", *Oriens*, XVI (1963), 1-39.



began the practice of expressing the mystical experience in *shataḥāt* of the most extreme kind, anticipated some important doctrines developed by later Ṣūfīs and, as far as we know, was the first to have established

the rudimentary structure of a Ṣūfī order. All this greatly contributed to the development of the Ṣūfī tradition. The Baghdād school of Ṣūfīsm in particular was influenced by Abu Yazīd. But it would not be an exaggeration to say that nearly every Ṣūfī after Abu Yazīd was influenced either positively or negatively by his life and teachings. For lack of evidence, we cannot accept many of Zaehner's arguments in favour of his theory that Abū Yazīd was directly influenced by Indian thought,<sup>160</sup> but we agree with Zaehner's conclusion that Abu Yazīd constituted a turning point in the history of Ṣufism.<sup>161</sup> Al-Junayd remarked, "Abū Yazīd among us is like Gabriel among the angels",<sup>162</sup> and as a tribute to his greatness, he received the title *sultān al-'ārifīn*, "the king of 'knowers'".<sup>163</sup> We have not found these estimates inappropriate. Abū Yazīd was one of the most important Ṣūfīs of the early period; and, in view of his influence on future developments in the Ṣūfī tradition, he was probably the greatest Ṣūfī upto his time.

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<sup>160</sup> See *Abū Yazīd*, pp. 305-351.

<sup>161</sup> R. C. Zaehner "Abū Yazīd of Bistām: A Turning Point in Islāmic Mysticism", *Indo-Irāniam Journal*, 1 (1957).

<sup>162</sup> *Tadhkirah*, I, 135.

<sup>163</sup> *Nūr*, p. 147; *Tadhkirah*, I, 134 and 156; *Manāqib*, I, 256.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*Abū Yazīd*: Muhammad ‘Abd al-Rabb [Muhammad ‘Abdur Rabb].  
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