

A MOSLEM
SAINT OF THE
TWENTIETH
CENTURY

SHAIKH AHMAD AL-'ALAWĪ



MARTIN LINGS

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Martin Lings, A MOSLEM SAINT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1961, pp. 224, Price 28 s.

This is the 23rd volume in the series '*Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West*'. The author Martin Lings is a *Ṣūfī* in charge of Arabic books in the British Museum. He is an English convert to Islam and bears the Muslim name of al-Ḥājj Dr. Abū Bakr Serāj ad-Dīn. He is also the author of '*The Book of Certainty*'—a short introduction to *Ṣūfism* published by Rider and Co., London 1952. The book deals with the life, personality, teachings and the spiritual heritage and legacy of the celebrated Algerian *Ṣūfī* Shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī of Mustaghanem (1869-1934), who was reported to have had more than two lakhs of disciples spread over the various *Zāwiyahs* all over North Africa, Damascus, Aden, Addis Ababa, Marseilles, Paris, La Hague and Cardiff.

Hitherto research on Islamic mysticism has been confined to the lives and works of early and medieval *Ṣūfis*, but as the twentieth century, despite its materialistic advance, is not devoid of spiritualism, it is refreshing to read a book on the life and works of a modern mystic of Islam.

In the Preface, the author mentions that the present volume formed the main part of a doctoral dissertation approved by the University of London for the degree of Ph.D. The book is divided into two parts—part one is entitled '*The Path and the Order*' and consists of four chapters, while part two is captioned '*The Doctrine*' and has eight chapters. The work has also two appendices, the first being a list of the Shaykh's sixteen works, both published and unpublished and the second giving his "spiritual chain". The book has two indices, one of persons, titles, places etc. and the other of Arabic terms occurring in the book. It also has five plates, two of them showing the Shaykh al-'Alawī in about 1930 and 1905. The third illustration exhibits the supreme Name "*Allāh*", the fourth a page from the Holy Qur'ān, and the last one is a pencil-drawing of the Shaykh done from memory some years after his death by the author of '*Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*.'

The book is based on first-hand sources until recently inaccessible to the general reader. The author has utilized both the Shaykh's own writings and the works of other persons who had come into contact with him, as also collected information from those who had met the Saint in person.

The book opens with an English translation of the wonderfully vivid account of the Shaykh by a French physician, Dr. Marcel Carret, who had set up his clinic at Mustaghanem where the former resided thus having frequently come into closer and more intimate contact with the Shaykh as he had known him, avoiding any personal appreciation of his doctrine or discussing his ideas, and

an assessment of his spiritual calibre and achievements. The author says : "From his writings, as also from the testimony of those who knew him, one has the impression of a vast and penetratingly active intelligence of which the higher or central part was utterly and eternally satisfied—he speaks of 'remaining inwardly for ever steeped in drunkenness'—and of which the ^{circumference} ~~circumference~~ ^{that} ~~circumference~~ is, the earthly or mental part, insofar as it had any respite from the demands made on him by his thousands of disciples, found ample sustenance in meditating on the Qur'an and the Traditions and in exploring some of the Sūfic treatises, in particular those of Ibn 'Arabī and Jilī. Moreover he was a great lover of poetry, especially of the odes of 'Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ, long passages which he seems to have known by heart." In this chapter, his practice of *Khalwah*, i.e., spiritual retreat in the solitude of an isolated cell or small hermitage, as part of his method of spiritual instruction has also been described.

Chapter V is captioned "Oneness of Being" (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*). The reviewer had pointed out to the late Prof. Massignon that Martin Lings had attacked him, *inter alia*, in this chapter. He replied that the author stood for *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as against *Waḥdat al-Shuhūd*. Indeed the author's treatment of the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* shows that he defends Ibn 'Arabī, who is followed by Shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī in this respect, against criticism of this doctrine. He says : "Oneness of Being is the doctrine that behind the illusory veil of created plurality there lies the one Divine Truth—not that God is made up of parts, but that underlying each apparently separate feature of the created universe there is the One Infinite Plenitude of God in His Indivisible Totality." Since this doctrine has remained the subject of endless controversy through the ages (cf. Ibn Taymiyah's criticism of this doctrine on moral ground and Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī's criticism on the basis of his mystical experience), it seems rather beyond the scope of this review to dwell on its merits and demerits *vis-à-vis* the other view-points. In this connection, the author has recommended the study of Titus Burckhard's "An Introduction to Sūfī Doctrine,"—a book which he regards as almost indispensable to any one who wishes to make a serious study of Sūfism but does not read Islamic texts at first hand.

Chapter VI is headed "The Three Worlds." In this chapter the author has discussed the Shaykh's mystical theology especially with reference to the Divine Essence, Qualities and Actions. A small extract from the Shaykh's views will explain the title of the chapter. 'These Qualities are of three different kinds, and each group hath its own specific world. Hearing, Sight and Speech are of the World of Human Sense (*'ālam al-nāsūt*) ; Power, Will and Knowledge are of the Dominion (*'ālam al-malakūt*), whereas Life is of the World of the Domination (*'ālam al-jabarūt*), and none of them are (sic) separate from the Essence in virtue of its All-embracingness and its Transcendence over all localization."

Chapter VII discusses some of the salient points of the Shaykh's treatise "The Book of the Unique Archetype (*Al-Numūdhaj al-Farid*)" which singnalleth the way unto the full realization of Oneness in considering what is meant by the envelopment of the Heavenly Scriptures in the Point of the Basmalah." This title is self-explanatory.

Chapter VIII is headlined "The Great Peace". This chapter deals with the ultimate aim of Sūfism, namely, "to raise the Spirit above oneself"; in other

words, "inward Peace" which is called the Supreme Station and the means of attaining this end e.g., inward concentration and extinction (*fanā*). Other allied Ṣūfī terms like "drunkenness," "sobriety," "separation," and "union" have also been touched. Further, it ~~x~~ also discusses the nature of sainthood and the respective status of the Prophets, Saints and the Believers. In footnote 2 at page 166, one again finds the author's strange Christian predilection to the following effect: "An outstanding example of this rare occurrence, (viz. 'cutting off') though somewhat beyond the scope of the Islamic perspective, would seem to be the cleavage between the two natures of Christ as expressed in the last words on the Cross. If the human nature had not been momentarily 'forsaken' by the Divine Nature, the Sacrifice would not have been complete—*wa 'llāhu a'lam*." This belief is contrary to the explicit Qur'ānic text which says: "And they (Jews) did not kill him (Christ) nor did they crucify him (وما قتلوه وما صلبوه)."

Chapter IX captioned "Gnosis" is another important chapter of the book as it discusses the moot point about the possibility of the outward eye gazing at the Truth in direct vision, while still 'in this world'.

The last Chapter captioned "Selections from his poetry," gives in English verse, a remarkable translation of some poems selected from the *Shaykh's* *Diwān*.

The foregoing analysis of the book shows that it is extremely interesting as well as thought-provoking. The author seems to have poured out his heart and soul into this composition with the result that he cannot fail to move the reader. Despite French being his mother-tongue, the author's command of English is remarkable and his translation from the Arabic prose and poetry is excellent—so that it gives an impression of being an original composition. The book is well-documented and copiously annotated throughout, thereby evidencing the author's wide reading and scholarship. The style is lucid and fascinating. A remarkable feature of the book is that the author has taken great pains to explain, in the text and footnotes, all the Arabic terms and expressions, particularly the technical terminology of Ṣūfism, used throughout the book. If the author had added a sketch-map of North Africa and the Middle East, showing the important places concerned with the spiritual activities and journeys of the *Shaykh*, it would have given the reader a good picture of the scenes of his operations. Similarly, some photographs of the various *Zāwiyahs* spread over different places of the *Shaykh's* spiritual influence particularly that of the mother *Zāwiyah* of Mustaghanem, his native place, would have been welcome.

KARACHI

Ch. ABDUL AZIZ.

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A MOSLEM SAINT
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CENTURY

Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawī

HIS SPIRITUAL HERITAGE AND LEGACY

BY

MARTIN LINGS

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had one. But this entertainment was none the less not without its interest. That is why I turned my eyes towards nature rather than towards abstract ideas. When I had to leave the entertainment I would do so regretfully, because I found it interesting. But in time it would no doubt end by boring me. Besides, in any case, I had no choice. And what did it matter? When one crushes an ant the world goes on just the same.

"What you say is true of the body no doubt", he said. "But what of the Spirit?"

"True, there is also the spirit. The consciousness we have of ourselves. But we did not have it at birth. It was developed slowly together with our bodily sensations. We only acquired it progressively, little by little, as our knowledge increased. It developed alongside of the body, grew up with it, came to full strength with it, like a sum total of acquired ideas, and I fail to convince myself that it could survive this body to which it really owes its existence."

"There was a long silence. Then, coming out of his meditation, the Shaikh said:

"Do you want to know what is lacking in you?"

"Yes, what?"

"To be one of us and to see the Truth, you lack the desire to raise your Spirit above yourself.¹ And that is irremediable."

"One day he asked me point-blank:

"Do you believe in God?"

"I replied:

"Yes, if you mean by that an indefinable principle on which all depends and which no doubt gives a meaning to the Universe."

"He seemed satisfied by my reply. I added:

"But I consider this principle as being beyond our reach and our understanding. What surprises me, however, is to see that so many people who claim to be religious and even believe that they are so, and who are convinced of their immortality in God, should be able to go on attaching importance to their earthly existence. They are neither logical, nor honest with themselves. . . . It seems to me that if I were certain of life after

¹ In one of his poems the Shaikh wrote:

'Thou seest us amongst men, but we are not as thou seest,
For our Spirits shine clear above the highest heights'

(*Diwān*, p. 5. All references to the *Diwān* are to the second edition.)

9140 89, 90.
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from this theme do not soon lead up to it, they are abruptly snatched up to it again, as if the Qoran was bent on demonstrating its own continuously repeated words: *Do not all things return to Allāh?* The Name *Allāh* occurs so often that it may be considered as the warp on which the Qoranic text is woven.

The verse: *Verily ye have a fair pattern in the Messenger of God*¹ is full of meaning at every level of Islam, but its highest significance must be understood in the light of an earlier Revelation, another of the very first injunctions received by the Prophet at Mecca: *Prostrate thyself and draw nigh* (to God)². The ritual act of prostration, which is an extremity of self-effacement, is implicit in one of Muḥammad's secondary names, '*Abd Allāh*, the Slave of God. Without the complete self-effacement of slavehood it is impossible to *draw nigh* or, in other words, without first being empty of other than God it is impossible to be filled with the ever-present Reality of His Nearness, of which the Qoran says: *We (God) are nearer to him (man) than his jugular vein*³. The realization of this Nearness is implicit in another of the Prophet's names, *Habīb Allāh*, the Beloved of God, for the following Tradition,⁴ though it is of universal import, refers to him first and foremost:

'My slave ceaseth not to draw nigh unto Me with devotions of his free will⁵ until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth, and the Sight wherewith he seeth, and the Hand wherewith he smiteth, and the Foot wherewith he walketh.'⁶

The full range of Sufism, as it has shown itself to be throughout the centuries, lies summed up in this Tradition.

In speaking to his closest followers Christ said: 'It is given

¹ XXXIII, 21

² XCVI, 19

³ L, 16.

⁴ I have used this word throughout with a capital to denote a saying of the Prophet. Such sayings are of two kinds, 'Holy Traditions' where, as in the present instance, God speaks in the first person on the tongue of the Prophet, and 'Noble Traditions' which were uttered by the Prophet in his own capacity, as for example: 'The slave is nearest his Lord when he is prostrateth himself' (Ibn Hanbal, II, 421).

⁵ Devotions in addition to the obligatory legal minimum.

⁶ Bukhārī, *Riqāq*, 37

In connection with one of the Prophet's mystical visions, the Qoran says that it was his *Heart* which *saw*,¹ and Baidāwī² comments that 'other-worldly realities are perceived first by the Heart'.³ What is meant by Heart here, and what the ancients of both East and West mean by saying that the Heart is the throne of the Intellect may be understood with the help of Kāshānī's already quoted commentary, which bases some of its interpretations on the correspondence between outward phenomena and inward faculties. The night corresponds to the soul, the moon to the Heart (which is to the soul what the corporeal heart is to the body) and the sun to the Spirit. Just as the moon is the last outpost of daylight in the darkness of night, so the Heart is the last outpost of Divine Light, that is, direct Knowledge (Gnosis)⁴ in the darkness of the soul's knowledge, which even in its highest form, that is, as theoretic understanding of the doctrine, is only mental and therefore indirect. The 'Eye of the Heart', which corresponds to the ray of light that connects the moon with the sun, is the Intellect in its true sense—the sense in which *Intellectus* was used throughout the Middle Ages—the organ of transcendent vision.

The aspiration 'to let one's Spirit (that is, as here meant, one's centre of consciousness) rise above oneself' presupposes at the very least some remote awareness of the existence of the Heart, which is the point where the human self ends and the Transcendent Self begins. If the clouds in the night of the soul are so thick as to prevent the moon of the Heart from showing the slightest sign of its presence, there can be no such aspiration.

Most of the Qoranic verses quoted so far are among the earliest to be revealed, which is enough to show that a strong mystical element was present from the outset. But coming when it did,

¹ LIII, II.

² d. 1286 The author of the most widely read of all Qoranic commentaries.

³ The Prophet said of Abu Bakr, who later became the first Caliph of Islam: 'He is not your superior by reason of much fasting and prayer, but because of something which hath been fixed in his heart.' (Kālābādī *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, in Arberry's translation, p. 66.)

⁴ This word is used throughout as a translation of the Arabic *ma'rifah* in the sense of Intellectual Knowledge. Similarly 'Gnostic' ('*arif*') is used here exclusively to indicate one who attains to this knowledge. It bears no reference to any sect.

as the last religion of this cycle of time, Islam could not be an effective vehicle of the Divine Mercy if it did not take into account the conditions of a world which was long since past its best (the Prophet said: 'Naught is left of this world but trial and affliction'² and 'No time cometh upon you but is followed by a worse'³), a world in which *the Foremost* would be in an increasingly small minority. These conditions are implicit in the following passage which was revealed towards the end of the Prophet's life,⁴ many years after he and his followers had been forced to emigrate from Mecca to Medina, and after they had returned in triumph to Mecca and had become masters of all Arabia, with an inevitable sacrifice of quality to quantity as regards converts to Islam:

*The Arabs of the desert say: 'We believe'. Say thou (Muḥammad): 'Ye believe not, but say rather: 'We submit',⁵ for faith hath not yet entered your hearts. Yet if ye obey God and His messenger, He will not withhold from you any reward that your deeds deserve. Verily God is Forgiving, Merciful.'*⁶ We see here as it were the net of Divine Mercy stretched out to find a place in the new religion for some of those who would not have been worthy of the first small Meccan community of Moslems. Yet the growth of Islam throughout the time of the Prophet's mission is not only in this one direction but in all. The Qoran undertakes to answer any questions which might arise during the period of its revelation, and in responding to the needs of the increasingly complex community of Islam as a whole it does not neglect those who follow the path of approach to God; for while it is more and more concerned, in the Medina period, with outward questions—legal, administrative and political—its verses are at the same time more markedly charged with peace and serenity. The much loved and often repeated verse which the Qoran recommends especially for recitation in times of adversity: *Verily we are for God, and verily unto Him are we returning*⁷ has a distinctly

¹ XXXVIII, 29.

² Ibn Mājah, *Fitan* 23.

³ Bukhārī, *Fitan*, 6.

⁴ He died in 632.

⁵ This might also be translated: *We have become Moslems*. The word *islām* means 'submission' (to God).

⁶ XLIX, 14.

⁷ II, 156.

versed in the Qoran and the Traditions and who are therefore qualified to establish, by inference and on analogy, precedents about points not definitely and explicitly laid down by the two higher authorities. The deductive process by which they reach their conclusions is called *ijtihād*, (literally 'striving'). Below *Ijmā'* there is a certain relative authority in the *ijtihād* of a group of qualified persons or even of a single qualified individual. The differences between the four great schools of Islamic law, for example, are due to the differing *ijtihād* of four eminent canonists. But each school admits the right of the other schools to hold their own opinions, and it is often said: 'In the canonists' differences there lieth a mercy.'

The law is not the only plane of the religion, however, as is made clear in the following Tradition which was reported by 'Umar, the second Caliph:

'One day when we were with the Messenger of God there came unto us a man whose clothes were of exceeding whiteness and whose hair was of exceeding blackness, nor were there any signs of travel upon him, although none of us had seen him before. He sat down knee unto knee opposite the Prophet, upon whose thighs he placed the palms of his hands, saying: 'O Muḥammad, tell me what is the surrender unto God (*al-islām*)'. The Prophet answered: "The surrender is that thou shouldst testify that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is God's Apostle, that thou shouldst perform the prayer, bestow the alms, fast Ramadan and make, if thou canst, the pilgrimage to the Holy House". He said: "Thou hast spoken truly" and we were amazed that having questioned him he should corroborate him. Then he said: "Tell me what is faith (*īmān*)", and the Prophet answered: "It is that thou shouldst believe in God and His Angels and His Books and His Apostles and the Last Day, and that thou shouldst believe that no good or evil cometh but by His Providence."¹ "Thou hast spoken truly", he said, and then: "Tell me what is excellence (*iḥsān*)" The Prophet answered: "It is that thou shouldst worship God as if thou sawest Him, for if thou seest Him not, verily He seeth thee." . . . Then the stranger went away, and I stayed there

¹ It is the objective content of faith which is here defined, not its subjective quality.

long after he had gone, until the Prophet said to me: "O Umar, knowest thou the questioner, who he was?" I said: "God and His Prophet know best, but I know not at all." "It was Gabriel" said the Prophet. "He came to teach you your religion".¹

Thus Islam in its fullest sense consists of three planes—surrender or submission (*islām* in the narrower sense of the word), faith (*īmān*) and excellence (*ihsān*), and the Shaikh Al-'Alawī points out that there is scope on all three for the exercise of *ijtihād*: just as the plane of *islām* crystallized into the different schools of law and the plane of *īmān* into scholastic theology, so also, beneath the *ijtihād* of Junaid² and other Sufis, the plane of *ihsān* became a definitely organized branch of the religion.

In the Prophet's definition of *ihsān* the word for 'worship' ('*abada*') means literally 'to serve as a slave', and indicates not merely a series of acts but a perpetual state. Thus to worship God 'as if thou sawest Him' implies perpetual remembrance of God, and to achieve this some form of spiritual guidance and method is, practically speaking, indispensable. Here in fact lies the origin of the Sufic brotherhoods, without which the plane of *ihsān*, which in the first generations of Islam was relatively spontaneous and unorganized, could never have been prolonged throughout the centuries.

The Qoran insists without respite on remembrance of God, *dhikr Allāh*, and this insistence holds the place in Islam that is held in Christianity by the first of Christ's two commandments. It is the Qoranic use of the cognitive term 'remembrance' rather than 'love' which has, perhaps more than anything else, imposed on Islamic mysticism its special characteristics.

The predominances, in Christian mysticism of 'Love' and in Sufism of 'Knowledge', that is, Gnosis, are so strong that many of the terms currently used in these two mystical forms are apt to be quite misleading outside their own particular sphere. For example, in the light of Hinduism, where both perspectives

¹ Muslim, *īmān*, 1.

² A great Sufi of Baghdad, d. 910.

are to be found side by side,¹ it can be seen at once that the 'contemplative' orders of monasticism in the Roman Catholic Church are closer to the path of Love than to that of Gnosis. On the other hand what has been termed 'the Sufi path of Love' is far more akin to *jnāna* than to *bhakti*,² for it is Love within the general framework of Knowledge.

Very typical of Sufism is Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's³ saying: 'He that knoweth God loveth Him, and he that knoweth the world abstaineth from it', and the saying of another early Sufi: 'Intimacy (*uns*) with God is finer and sweeter than longing.'⁴

Whereas one aspect of this path of Knowledge reflects the symbolism of light in which the Qoran abounds and also the joyous and often dazzling imagery through which it allows its reader to 'taste' the Mysteries of the next world,⁵ another aspect reflects not only the stark simplicity of some of the Qoranic formulations but also certain sayings of the Prophet which have an unmistakable 'dry' flavour about them, a sober objectivity which puts everything in its proper place, as for example: 'Be in this world as a stranger or as a passer-by'⁶, and 'What have I to do with this world? Verily I and this world are as a rider and a tree beneath which he taketh shelter. Then he goeth on his way and leaveth it behind him.'⁷

These two aspects of Moslem spirituality make themselves

¹ The comprehensiveness of Hinduism makes it something of a norm by which to measure other mysticisms, for after thousands of years it has crystallized into two main currents, which evidently correspond to two main mystic possibilities, the path of Gnosis (*jnāna-marga*) and the path of Love (*bhakti-marga*).

² The Egyptian Sufi 'Umar ibn al-Fārid, (1181-1235) who is often called 'the Sultan of the Lovers', would rank in Hinduism as a pure Gnostic (*jnāni*).

³ d. 728.

⁴ Quoted by Abū Sā'id al-Kharrāz (d. c. 900) in his *Kitāb as-Sīdq* ('The Book of Truthfulness'), Arabic Text, p. 56, Arberry's translation, p. 46. The author of the remark is not specified.

⁵ Men tend to judge others by themselves, and it has become almost a habit in the West to comment on the 'unexalted materialism' of the Qoranic descriptions of Paradise. The following remark puts the whole question in a truer light: 'To speak of the Gardens and Fountains of Paradise, as also of Its Rivers, Fruits and Consorts, is to speak the truth, whereas to speak of such blessings in this world is only a manner of speaking, for the Realities are in Firdaus (the Supreme Paradise), and what we see in this world are only the remote shadows of Reality.' (Abū Bakr Sirāj Ad-Dīn, *The Book of Certainty*, p. 18, note 2—Rider & Co., 1952).

⁶ Bukhārī, *Riḳāq*, 3.

⁷ Ibn Mājah, *Zuhd*, 3.

*he hath proved an ignorant tyrant.*¹ Reaching the end of the spiritual path, which is none other than the state in which man was originally created, means, amongst other things, reassuming the tremendous responsibilities from which mankind in general has fallen away.

This ultimate station, that is, the state of Supreme Sainthood, which he referred to in speaking to Dr Carret as the 'Great Peace', is defined elsewhere in his writings as being one of inward intoxication and outward soberness, in virtue of which the mind fulfils its analytical function with perfect clarity, although, as he has just indicated, there is nothing in the nature of an absolute barrier between it and the Heart's rapture. But in the case of the mystic who, though far advanced upon the path, has not yet reached the end, other-worldly drunkenness is liable to invade the mind and make it supernaturally and unbearably active, or produce some other abnormality in it, thus throwing the soul off its balance. It is even possible, as is shown by the reference to al-Ĥallāj and as we shall see more clearly in a later chapter, for a mystic to reach in a sense the end of the path and to attain to a plentitude of drunkenness which is as yet unstabilized by the complementary perfection of sobriety. For although the Divine Nature of the Saint is Eternal and does not develop, his human nature is subject to time and may not be able to adapt itself in one day to the Supreme Presence, especially in cases where the spiritual journey has been completed with phenomenal speed as it almost certainly was in the case of the Shaikh Al-'Alawī.

More than once in his writings he quotes Abu 'l-Ĥasan ash-Shādhilī² as having said: 'Vision of the Truth came upon me and would not leave me, and it was stronger than I could bear, so I asked God to set a screen between me and It. Then a voice called out to me, saying: "If thou besoughtest Him as only His Prophets and Saints and Muḥammad His beloved know how to beseech Him, yet would He not screen thee from It. But ask Him to strengthen thee for It."'

¹ XXXIII, 72.

² d. 1258. As the founder of the great Shādhilī Ṭarīqah he was doubly the Shaikh Al-'Alawī's spiritual ancestor, since both the Darqāwīs (to whom the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī belonged) and also the 'Isāwīs are branches of the Shādhilīs.

"Who told you?", I said. "I have always been hearing about you", he said, "and just now while I was looking at you, as I have been for some time, I suddenly realized that you must be that very man"; so I said that I was. Then I went with him to another part of the boat and having asked his name, was told that he was Al-Ĥājj Ma'tūq; when we began to talk together I realized that he was a Gnostic. I asked him if he found any spiritual support among his fellow countrymen, and he said: "I am the only man of this art in all Jerba." From my meeting with him the time passed as happily as I could have wished until he and those who were travelling with him landed at Jerba, and I was once more in the grip of loneliness and the inevitable hardships of travelling in winter until I myself landed at Tripoli.

'My cousins were waiting for me at the harbour. We were longing to catch sight of each other, all the more impatiently on account of our enforced separation. No sooner had we reached their house and sat down than we discussed the question of emigration and all that was connected with it, and they told me that materially speaking they were well off, thanks to God's safe care. As to the country, it seemed to me as far as I could tell a good place to emigrate to, since its people were as like as possible to those of our country both in speech and in ways.

'Towards sunset I asked my cousins if they knew any *dhākir* there, or any Shaikhs who were Gnostics, and they said that they only knew a Turkish Shaikh, who was the head of some government department, a man of the most evident piety. I asked if it would be possible for us to meet him the next day, and just as we were considering this there was a knock at the door and one of them went out and came back saying: "Here is the Shaikh himself at the door, asking if he can come in." He had never visited them at their home. I told them to bring him in, and in he came, a tall man with a long beard dressed from head to foot in Turkish fashion.

'We greeted each other, and when he had sat down he said: "A man from the West—he meant Shustarī¹—says of the Divine Manifestation: 'My Beloved embraceth all existence, and appeareth in both black and white.' I said: 'Leave Western talk to Western folk and let us hear something from the East.'"

¹ An Andalusian mystic and poet. d. 1269. The poem is given by Massignon in *Recueil de textes inédits relatifs à la mystique musulmane*, p. 136.

He said: 'The poet said "embraceth all existence", and did not specify either West or East', whereupon I knew that he was well versed in the lore of the mystics. He sat with us for an hour or two that night, all eagerness, listening with all his faculties rapt in attention, as I noticed. Then he took leave of us, but not before he had made us promise to visit him at his office the next day. We went the next morning to where he worked—the department of maritime revenues, of which he was the director. He received us most joyfully and gave orders for work to be stopped and gave his staff a holiday, although there was much work to be done. Then we went off with him alone, and it would take too long to tell of all that we spoke of in the way of mystic doctrine, but I may mention that he said to me: "If you wish to stay in our country, this zāwiyah here is yours, and all the outbuildings that go with it, and I will be your servant." I knew that all he said was spoken in perfect sincerity, and I told him that I would leave my home and settle there. I went for a short walk round the district and found myself very attracted by that neighbourhood as if it corresponded to something in my nature . . .¹

'On my third day in Tripoli I heard a town crier calling out: "Whoever wants to go to Istanbul can have a ticket for very little", and he added that the boat was due to leave at once. Immediately I had an urge to visit the capital of the Caliphate, and I thought that very likely I might find there the learning I felt the need for. So I asked one of my cousins to go with me, and he said he would, but the sight of the fury of the sea and the crash of the waves stopped him. It was certainly no weather for a crossing. Suffice it that we reached the other side!

'Don't ask me for any details about our embarkation! Once I had found a place on the deck I began to wonder where I should turn for help and refuge upon the journey, and I found no comfort in anything but reliance upon God.

'By the time we reached Istanbul I had almost died of seasickness, and what made my plight worse was that at that time I had not a single friend in Istanbul to take me by the hand, and I was so ignorant of Turkish that I was hard put to it to say the simplest thing.

'One day after my arrival I was walking at the outskirts of the

¹ There is no further mention of the Turkish Shaikh.

forever steeped in drunkenness'¹—and of which the circumference, that is, the earthly or mental part, in so far as it had any respite from the demands made on him by his thousands of disciples, found ample sustenance in meditating on the Qoran and the Traditions and in exploring some of the Sufic treatises,² in particular those of Ibn 'Arabī and Jīlī. Moreover he was a great lover of poetry, especially of the odes of 'Umar ibn al-Fārid, long passages of which he seems to have known by heart. But although it does not appear directly in his writings, and although it is relatively most unimportant, it is evident from what Berque says of the Shaikh's thirst for information about other religions that at the extreme edge of this circumference there was a certain 'nostalgia' for something which he would never have found unless he could have come into some kind of contact with representatives of other religions who were on a spiritual level with himself, such as, for example, his slightly younger Hindu contemporary, Sri Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, whose teaching was essentially the same as his own. But he seems to have had no knowledge of Hinduism, and none of Taoism or Buddhism, nor had he any intellectual exchanges with the Qabbalists of Judaism, and as regards Christianity, with which he always maintained a certain contact, it is extremely doubtful whether he ever met any representative of it who was even remotely comparable to himself.

Here, however, he would in any case have needed an exception, for generally speaking Christianity scarcely admits of mutual understanding with other religions. Even the Christian mystic, though he may not reject other religions as false³, is indifferent to them, legitimately so, for the method of 'the

¹ Al-Mināḥ al-Quddūsiyyah, p. 22.

² He says: 'I do not think I am exaggerating if I say that there are amongst the Sufis men whose intelligences, each taken separately, would almost outweigh the combined intelligences of all the writers of this present age.' (*Risālat an-Nāṣir Ma'rūf*, p. 20).

³ Unless one is content to imply that God is a monstrosity of injustice, caprice and ineffectuality, the words 'None cometh to the Father but by Me' must be considered to have been spoken by Christ as the Logos, the Divine Word, of which not only Jesus but also, for example, the Hindu Avatars, including the Buddha, are manifestations; and just as these are 'the Word made flesh', so the Vedas, the Torah and the Qoran are 'the Word made book'. But since so many people, especially Europeans and Semites, are incapable of following seriously a religion unless they believe it to be the only one or to be

before thee. About some of them have We told thee, and about some have We not told thee, and Verily the Faithful¹ and the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians—whoso believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth deeds of piety—no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve.² But the Sufi, who methodically seeks to permeate his whole being with the Qoran, cannot fail to be interested, potentially, in all other Heaven-sent religions as manifestations of Divine Mercy, as God's *Signs on the Horizons*.³ I say 'potentially' because he may never come into direct contact with other religions, and in any case he will be more or less bound to retain outwardly the prejudices of the great majority of his co-religionaries so as to avoid creating a scandal. But in so far as these prejudices are his own, they will be like fetters of gossamer upon his outlook, ready to be brushed away at a mere touch.

According to Berque, 'the Shaikh was always hungry for knowledge about other religions. He seemed to be quite well informed as regards the Scriptures and even as regards the patristic tradition. The Gospel of St. John and the Epistles of St. Paul appealed to him in particular. As an extremely subtle and penetrating metaphysician, he was able to reconcile plurality with unity in the Trinitarian conception of three persons in a consubstantial identity. . . . He rejected it none the less, but his understanding of it made some people think that he adhered to it.'⁴

At the time when the Shaikh left the 'Īsāwī Ṭarīqah, and when he and his friend Al-Ĥājj Bin-'Awdah were searching for a spiritual path, there were several different branches of the Darqāwī Ṭarīqah⁵ firmly established in the province of Oran to which Mostaganem belongs, not to mention many branches

¹ Moslems

² X, 47.

³ *We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in themselves until it be clear to them: He is the Truth.* (XLI, 53).

⁴ Berque, p. 739.

He was in fact accused by some of his enemies of believing in the Trinity (ibid., p. 735).

⁵ According to Depont and Coppolani, *Les Confréries religieuses musulmanes*, pp. 510-1, there were over 9500 members of this brotherhood in Algeria at that time. In Mostaganem itself there were three Darqāwī zāwiyahs, and it was no doubt from one or more of these that the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī met with opposition

of other orders. Yet he says: 'Although we considered it an absolute necessity to take as a guide someone who was generally recognized as a Master by those who could judge, we had little hope of finding such a one'.¹ Fifteen years later, at the death of the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī, there was still the same quantity rather than quality among those who offered guidance.

In one of his poems he declares:

'I hid the truth² on a time and screened it well
And whoso keepeth God's Secret shall have his reward.
Then when the Giver vouchsafed that I might proclaim it,
He fitted me—and how I know not—to purify souls,
And girded upon me the sword of steadfastness,
And truth and piety, and a wine He gave me,
Which all who drink must needs be always drinking,
Even as a drunk man seeketh to be more drunk.
Thus came I to pour it, nay, it is I that press it.
Doth any other pour it in this age?'³

The sight of the relatively wasted efforts of so many fervent souls unconsciously following 'blind guides' made the Shaikh more and more outspoken as regards his own function and indirectly—sometimes even directly—as regards the false pretensions of others.⁴

There is little doubt that he felt himself to be the renewer (*mujaddid*) which the Prophet had promised for every century.⁵ The last one had been unquestionably the great Shaikh Ad-Darqāwī himself. The Shaikh Al-'Alawī says: 'I am the pourer, the renewer',⁶ and: 'Proclaim, O chronicler, the name of 'Alawī after Darqāwī, for God hath made him his successor'⁷ His poems were not published until just after the first world war,

on his return from Morocco. Berque wrongly says that he was a member of the Habrī branch of the Darqāwīs, whereas in actual fact he was not a descendant of Shaikh Muḥammad al-Habrī but as it were his younger brother, both being disciples of Muḥammad ibn Qaddūr of Morocco.

¹ *Raudah*, p. 12.

² The truth of his own supreme spiritual realization.

³ *Dīwān*, p. 35. The whole poem is translated on p. 207.

⁴ For lines which he addressed to a spiritual imposter, see p. 198 f.

⁵ 'God will send to this community at the head of every hundred years one who will renew for it its religion' (Abū Dā'ūd, *Malāḥim*, 1).

⁶ *Dīwān*, p. 30, 1.6.

⁷ *Dīwān*, p. 45, 1.6.

though they had a wide circulation in manuscript. But the jealousy of the various heads of *zāwiyahs* was probably roused not so much by anything he said or wrote as by the fact that they found themselves being deserted by their own disciples.

The Shaikh was at this time in his early forties. Berque who met him about ten years later says: 'A remarkable radiance emanated from him, an irresistible personal magnetism. His glance was quick, clear and extraordinarily attractive. . . . He was very affable and courteous, unassertive, full of tact and delicacy, anxious to avoid any friction . . . and at the same time one was conscious of a great tenacity of purpose in him, a subtle flame which consumed its object in a few moments'.¹ One of his disciples wrote: 'When he was talking he seemed almost negligent, as though he was relying upon help from outside, and at the same time he mastered men's hearts and brought them by force to the point of what he was saying'.² Another wrote: 'He spoke to everyone according to his intellectual capacity and particular disposition, and when he was speaking it seemed as if the one he was speaking to was the only one he cared for in all the world.'³ His presence was such that when he went out he was liable to draw men irresistibly after him down the street.⁴

As might have been expected, the greatest opposition to him came at first from the heads of the *Darqāwī Zāwiyahs* in the neighbourhood. This was brought to a climax when after about five years he decided to make himself independent of the mother *zāwiyah* in Morocco and thus distinct from the other Algerian branches of the order, and to name his branch *At-Tariqat al-'Alawīyat ad-Darqāwīyat ash-Shādhiliyah*.

One of his motives for taking this step was that he felt the need to introduce, as part of his method, the practice of *khalwah*, that is, spiritual retreat in the solitude of an isolated cell or small hermitage. There was nothing very drastic in this, for if remembrance of God be the positive or heavenly aspect of all mysticism, its negative or earthly aspect is retreat or drawing away from other than God. The Tradition 'Be in this world as a

¹ pp. 692-3.

² *Shahā'id*, p. 137.

³ *Shahā'id*, p. 141.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵ *Raudah*, p. 29.

stranger, or as a passer-by' has already been quoted, and one of the most powerful aids to achieving this permanent inward spiritual retreat is bodily withdrawal which, in some form or another, perpetual or temporary, is a feature of almost all contemplative orders. In some Sufic brotherhoods—the Khalwatī Tāriqah, for example—it was the tradition to make retreat in a special hermitage. But in the Shādhilī Tāriqah and its branches, the spiritual retreat had usually taken the form of withdrawal to the solitudes of nature, after the pattern of the Prophet's retreats in the cave on Mount Hira, and though inevitably the *khalwah* must have been used on occasion, to introduce it as a regular methodic practice was something of an innovation for the descendants of Abu 'l-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī. However the Shaikh no doubt found this form of retreat more practicable than any other in view of the conditions in which most of his disciples lived. We have already seen that he himself had suffered for want of a definite place where he could be alone, and that it was part of his method to supervise at times very closely the invocation of his disciples, which presupposed that the disciple in question would be within easy reach of him.

'Abd al-Karīm Jossot¹ quotes the Shaikh as having said to him:

'The *khalwah* is a cell in which I put the novice after he has sworn to me not to leave it for forty days if need be. In this oratory he must do nothing but repeat ceaselessly, day and night, the Divine Name (Allāh), drawing out at each invocation the syllable *āh* until he has no more breath left.

'Previously he must have recited the Shahādah (*lā ilāha illa 'llāh*, there is no god but God) seventy-five thousand times.

'During the *khalwah* he fasts strictly by day, only breaking his fast between sunset and dawn. . . . Some fuqarā obtain the sudden illumination after a few minutes, some only after several days, and some only after several weeks. I know one faqīr who waited eight months. Each morning he would say to me: "My heart is still too hard", and would continue his *khalwah*. In the end his efforts were rewarded.'²

¹ See p. 30, note 1.

² Berque, pp. 753-4, quoting an article by Jossot, *Le Sentier d'Allah*, which I have been unable to trace.

His action in making himself independent seems to have created, for the moment, a disproportionately violent ill-feeling. Every obstacle was put in his way, and no effort was spared to detach from him the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī's former disciples, now his by oath of allegiance. Moreover he had no time to earn his living and was extremely poor, sometimes to the point of having to sell his household goods, for he could not bring himself to ask his disciples for anything and they did not always perceive that he was in difficulties. But although some of the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī's disciples did in fact fall away from him, new disciples began to flock to him from elsewhere, including even one or two heads of *zāwiyahs* together with their followers. His opponents among the *Darqāwīs* must have been somewhat disconcerted when the great-grandson of Mawlāy Al-'Arabī ad-Darqāwī himself came from the mother *zāwiyah* in Morocco and took the Shaikh as his Master. Here follows an extract of a letter from him:¹

'What I saw in the Shaikh and his disciples compelled me to cleave to his presence, and in longing for a possible means of opening my inward eye I asked his permission to invoke the Supreme Name. Until then I had simply been an initiate of the order and nothing more, but I had heard that my ancestors used to rely on the *Tarīqah* as a means of direct attainment, not merely of attachment to a spiritual chain. After I had practised the invocation of the Name according to his instructions, I had certain experiences which compelled me to persevere in it, and before long I had direct knowledge of God . . . If I served the Shaikh as a slave for ever and ever, I should not have given him back a tenth part of a tenth of what I owe him. In a word, it was what compelled my great-grandfather to follow Sidi Mawlāy 'Alī Al-Jamal which compelled me to follow Shaikh Sidi Aḥmad Bin-'Alīwah. . . . I paid no attention to those of my family who blamed me for following him, for they did not know the truth of the matter. . . . But when I explained things to my uncle, Sidi Mawlāy 'Abd ar-Raḥmān², he showed no opposition to my following the Shaikh. On the contrary, he

¹ Muḥammad ibn Aṭ-Tayyib ad-Darqāwī.

² The head of the mother *zāwiyah*.

attacks. The nearest he came to doing so was to write to the editor of one of the hostile papers, *An-Najāh* (after greetings):

'You have unsheathed your blade and thrust at my honour and reputation with the vigour of a man whom nothing will daunt, and I took it all as springing from jealousy for the religion and the desire to defend it, until the writer was led on to abuse and insults. And all these too I accept and place upon my head, if they were truly meant in defence of the honour of the Prophet. *If God knoweth good in your hearts, He will requite you with good.*¹ but if not, then *I submit my case unto God. Verily God is the Seer of His slaves.*^{2,3}

It was in the same year, 1920, that he wrote the first of his vindications of Sufism.⁴ This was in answer to a pamphlet entitled *A Mirror to show up Errors* by a teacher in the Religious College at Tunis, whose criticisms were so petty and childish that one might be surprised that the Shaikh should have bothered to answer them at all. But he no doubt realized that they had a significance which went far beyond their immediate author and that they were nothing less than particular crystallizations of a general hostility which could not be ignored. Since most people are apt to be irritated by what they do not understand, any critic of mysticism, however crude and unintelligent his arguments may be, can be almost certain today that his words will awaken a chorus of agreement from quite a large portion of the community, not only from those who are anti-religious but also—and perhaps above all—from a certain class of believers.

It is one of the excellencies of Islam that there is no laity and that every Moslem is in a sense a priest, spiritual authority being shared by the community as a whole. On the other hand it is one of the excellencies of Christianity that it has a definitely constituted spiritual authority consisting of a small minority

¹ Qoran, VIII, 40.

² Qoran, XL, 44.

³ *Shahā'id*, p. 214, note 1. This was published in *An-Najāh* itself, which later published a long article in praise of the Shaikh and his disciples (*Shahā'id*, pp. 55-61).

⁴ *Al-Qaul al-Ma'rūf*. The quotations from it which follow are from pp. 38-76, with omissions.

of men whose lives are dedicated to religion, the other-worldliness of their office being stressed in various ways and in general by the fact that its function does not extend to the domain of the temporal power, inasmuch as Christ said: 'My Kingdom is not of this world'. But although these excellencies have been responsible, or partly responsible, for centuries of spiritual well-being in both religions, they come in the end to cast their shadows, which are in Christianity the stifling and choking of the spiritual authority by the laity, who push it further and further into a remote corner of the community from which it can barely function and from which it sometimes seeks to emerge by pandering to mundane triviality, and in Islam the existence of a large number of very limited individuals who imagine that the whole religion is within their grasp and that what lies outside the scope of their own meagre understanding is necessarily outside the pale of Islam itself. The author of 'the Mirror' is a striking example of the extreme exoterism that any Moslem mystic is liable to be confronted with. One of his tirades ends with the words: 'Islam is nothing other than the Book of God and the Wont of His Messenger.' To this the Shaikh replied:

'Who told you that the Sufis say that Islam is based on any principles other than these? They say, however, that in the Book of God there is doctrine which is beyond most men's attainment. The Sultan of the Lovers¹ said:

'There lieth a lore beneath the words of the text too subtle to be grasped by the farthest reach of sound intelligences.'²

'It may well be that one who cleaves to externals can see nothing in the Book of God but what his own intelligence, such as it is, can apprehend and that he may belie what goes beyond this without realizing that in knowing the outside of the Book only he is as one who knows a fruit by nothing but its peel—and beyond that lies "what no eye hath seen and what no ear hath heard and what the heart of man cannot conceive." Let him examine himself: if what his heart hides is more precious than what his tongue tells of, then he is *one whom his Lord hath made certain*;³ but if not, then he has missed far more than he has gained. . . . The Prophet said: "Knowledge of the inward is one

¹ See p. 46, note 2.

² At-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā, 1. 675.

³ Qoran, XI, 17.

of the Secrets of God. It is wisdom from the treasury of His Wisdom which He casteth into the heart of whomsoever He will of His slaves"¹ and "Knowledge is of two kinds, knowledge in the Heart which is the knowledge that availeth, and knowledge upon the tongue which is God's evidence against His slave".² This shows that secret knowledge is different from the knowledge that is bandied about.

'Abū Hurairah said: "I have treasured in my memory two stores of knowledge which I had from God's Apostle. One I have divulged; but if I divulged the other ye would cut my throat".³

'In saying: "Islam is nothing other than the Book of God and the Wont of the Apostle", it is as if you said: "Islam is what I understand of the Book and the Wont, and no more" . . . which means that you set your own innermost perceptions on a level with the innermost perceptions of the Companions—nay, of the Prophets! . . .

'The Prophet said: "The earth shall never be found lacking in forty men whose Hearts are as the Heart of the Friend⁴ of the All-Merciful".⁵ One has only to study the traditions to find that they tell us explicitly that there is within the community an elect to whom God has revealed the secrets of the Book and the Wont, and where else is this body of men to be found save amongst the Rememberers, who are marked out for having devoted their lives to God? It was of such as them that Dhu 'n-Nūn al-Miṣrī⁶ said: "In my travels I met a slave girl and asked her whence she came. She said: 'From men *whose sides shrink away from beds*.'⁷ Then I asked her whither she was going, and she said: 'To men whom neither bartering nor selling diverteth from the remembrance of God' "⁸

Like many others before him, the author of the 'Mirror' did not fail to criticize the Sufic practice of dancing, not only

¹ Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi' as-Saghir*.

² *Ibid.*

³ Bukhārī, *Ilm*, 42

⁴ Abraham.

⁵ This Tradition is given by Suyūṭī (*Al Jāmi' as-Saghir*) in a slightly different form.

⁶ An Egyptian Sufi, d. 860.

⁷ Qoran, XXXII, 16.

⁸ Qoran, XXIV, 36.

dances which by heredity flowed as it were in the blood of his disciples and had therefore a more immediate appeal for them.

None the less, the subjection of the body to a rhythmic motion is never, for the Sufis, any more than an auxiliary; its purpose is simply to facilitate *dhikr* in the fullest sense of remembrance, that is, the concentration of all the faculties of the soul upon the Divine Truth represented by the Supreme Name or some other formula which is uttered aloud or silently by the dancers. It was explained to me by one of the Shaikh's disciples that just as a sacred number such as three, seven or nine, for example, acts as a bridge between multiplicity and Unity, so rhythm is a bridge between agitation and Repose, motion and Motionless, fluctuation and Immutability. Fluctuation, like multiplicity, cannot be transcended in this world of perpetual motion but only in the Peace of Divine Unity; and to partake of this Peace in some degree is in fact that very concentration which the *dhikr* aims at. Knowledge of this virtue of rhythm¹ is part of man's primordial heritage, and all men possess it instinctively whether they are aware of it or not.

The sacred dance of the Sufis enters into a more general category of practices which are summed up in the Arabic word *tawājjud*. In defence of them the Shaikh quotes from one of the more eminent exoteric authorities of Islam, Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah:²

'*Tawājjud* is seeking to induce a state of ecstasy (*wajd*) through

¹ Rhythm, like other cosmic and potentially sacred forces, such as those used in magic for example, is capable of being perverted into the wrong direction. It is therefore of vital importance to distinguish between 'white rhythm' and 'black rhythm' and there is no doubt as to which of the two is more familiar to the modern Western World. Needless to say the words 'white' and 'black' are used here without any ethnological significance. To judge from what little one has the opportunity of hearing, the rhythm of most Africans in their native state is eminently 'white'.

² d. AD 1350. In his youth he had been a violent critic of the Sufis, but towards the end of his life he came to venerate them. The change appears to have taken place during a period which he spent in prison, where 'he busied himself with reciting the Qoran and pondering and meditating, whereby much good was opened up to him and he had many spiritual intuitions and veritable ecstasies. It was in virtue of this that he ventured to expound the doctrine of the Gnostics' (quoted from Ālūsī's life of Ibn Qayyim by Rashīd Ridā in his preface to *Madārij as-Sālikīn*, II, p. 6).

deliberate effort, and opinions differ as to whether it is legitimate or not. The truth is that if one's effort is for the sake of enhancing one's reputation it is wrong, but if it is for the sake of obtaining a *hāl* (the partial and transitory realization of a spiritual degree) or *maqām* (the integral and permanent realization of a spiritual degree), it is justified.¹

Ibn Qayyim quotes in defence of legitimate *tawājud* the saying of the Prophet: 'Weep, and if ye weep not, then try to weep'² which makes one think of the Jews wailing at the 'Western Wall' and the Red Indians going out into the wilds of nature to lament,³ and similar modes of *tawājud* in other religions. It would be true to say, however, that in the aspen-like soul of the mystic there is nearly always some spiritual motion, however slight, so that the effort in question, instead of being a new departure, is in most cases merely the exaggeration of an initial degree of ecstasy which the mystic fears to lose and wishes to increase. *Tawajud* thus means, 'rushing out to meet ecstasy half way', and that is why the Shaikh makes no distinction between the effort and the achievement in his reply to the criticisms of the 'Mirror'.

He says: 'God commended the people of the Book⁴ for their rapture, mentioning one of its aspects with the highest praise: *When they hear what hath been revealed unto the Prophet, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears from their recognition of the Truth.*⁵ Does not this point to a sudden impact of movement within the believer through his remembering God and listening to His words? Has He not said moreover: *If We caused this Qoran to descend upon a mountain, thou wouldst see the mountain lying prostrate with humility, rent asunder through fear of God.*...⁶

¹ This is a paraphrase of Ibn Qayyim. The full text in question is on p. 43 of pt. 3 in the *Manār* edition of the *Madārij*.

² Ibn Mājah, *Iqāmah*, 176.

³ A mystic contemporary of the Shaikh, a man only 6 years older than him but very far removed in space, said in an unforgettable description of the Red Indian ritual lamentation: 'Until now I had only been trying to weep, but now I really wept. . . .' (*Black Elk Speaks*, by J. G. Neihardt, p. 187).

⁴ The Jews and Christians.

⁵ Qoran, V, 83.

⁶ Qoran, LIX, 21

Why then can you not excuse hearts for being rent and bodies for swaying from side to side at what causes the rending of mountains? It is simply because you do not find within yourself what others find, for there are hearts, as indeed He has mentioned, *as hard as stones or even harder*¹; or else it is because you have mentioned the Name of God and recited His Book merely by rote. . . . The Imam Ash-Shāfi'i heard someone reciting: *This is a day on which they speak not, nor are they permitted to proffer excuses*,² whereupon he fainted and was carried to his house. But such occurrences do not call for much explanation, seeing that awe and rapture have caused even the death of many of our pious ancestors³. . . . Have you never read or heard His Words: *Only those are believers whose hearts thrill with awe at the remembrance of God*⁴, and did you not know that the Prophet mentioned as being amongst his people "folk who enter Paradise and whose hearts are as the hearts of birds"⁵. Where are we to find those referred to in these utterances if not among the Rememberers? No doubt you tell yourself that you are one of them. So answer me this, with God as your witness: Are you one of *those who remember God much*⁶, or of *those whom neither bartering nor selling diverteth from the remembrance of God*, or of *those whom neither their possessions nor children divert from the remembrance of God*⁷, or of *those who remember God standing and sitting and reclining upon their sides*,⁸ or of *those whose hearts thrill with awe at the remembrance of God*, or of *those whose eyes overflow with tears when they hear what hath been revealed unto the Prophet*, or of those about whom the Prophet said: "The solitary ones take precedence, they who are utterly addicted to the remembrance of God"⁹, or of those who are called mad through acting on the Prophet's injunction:

¹ Qoran, II, 84.

² Qoran, LXVII, 35-6.

³ See Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, ch. XXV; in Nicholson's translation, pp. 396-7.

⁴ Qoran, VIII, 2.

⁵ Muslim, *Jannah*, 27; Ibn Ḥanbal, II, 331.

⁶ Qoran, XXXIII, 35.

⁷ Qoran, LXIII, 9.

⁸ Qoran, III, 191.

⁹ This Tradition is to be found, with very slight variations, in nearly all the canonical books, e.g. Muslim, *Dhikr*, 1.

"Multiply remembrance of God until they say: 'Madman!'"¹ or of those who are called pretenders because they act on his injunction: "Multiply remembrance of God until the hypocrites say: 'Verily ye are pretenders'"²? Tell me, I beg you, which group you belong to. Are you one of the sayers or the said? . . .

'If the grace of ecstasy is beyond you, it is not beyond you to believe that others may enjoy it. . . . None the less I do not say that dancing and manifestations of ecstasy are among the essentials of Sufism. But they are outward signs which come from submersion in remembrance. Let him who doubts try for himself, for hearsay is not the same as direct experience.'

The Prophet is said to have considered that of all his family the one who resembled him most was his cousin Ja'far to whom on one occasion he said: 'Thou art like me both in looks and in character,'³ whereupon no words could express Ja'far's pleasure, and he danced in the Prophet's presence.

One of the last precepts given to the Shaikh Ad-Darqāwī by his Master, Shaikh 'Alī al-Jamal, was that he and his followers should continue to follow the example of Ja'far ibn Abī Tālib in dancing to the Glory of God.⁴

Against the 'Mirror's' affirmation that 'anyone who considers dancing to be legal is an infidel', the Shaikh Al-'Alawī mentions the dancing of Ja'far, and also the dancing of a delegation of Abyssinians before the Prophet on one occasion in the mosque at Medina. But he adds:

'Do you imagine that the Sufis hold dancing to be absolutely lawful, just as you hold it to be absolutely unlawful? . . . It behoves the learned man not to pass any judgement about it until he knows what is the motive behind it, lest he forbid what God has allowed'.

Then, since going to meet ecstasy halfway is in reality answering a Divine Summons, he dismisses the question with

¹ Ibn Ḥanbal, III, pp. 68 and 73.

² Suyūṭī, *Al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣaḡhīr*.

³ Ibn Ḥanbal, I, 108.

⁴ For a list of these last precepts, see Rinn, *Marabouts et Khouan*, p. 233.

In wooing rapture there is no blame,
And none in swaying to and fro.
Thou risest if one call thy name
And on thy feet doest hurrying go.
He whom his Lord hath summonèd
May then go hurrying on his head.

He continues: 'Every lover is shaken at the mention (*dhikr*) of his beloved . . . and if love crept through the marrow of your bones, you would long to hear the mention of God, even from an infidel, and you would say, as the Sultan of the Lovers said:

"Mention of her is sweeter to me than all words else,
Even when alloyed by my censurers with their
blame of me."¹

'Then you would know what it is to thrill with awe, and you would see whether you could retain the mastery over yourself or not. Have you not read in the Book of God about the women who cut their hands when Joseph came before them. *They said: Peerless is God's Glory! This is not of humankind.*² Now if such as this could happen through contemplating created beauty, why should not something of the kind happen at the contemplation of the Beauty of its Creator, when He appears in all the Splendour of His Greatness?

'Remembrance is the mightiest rule of the religion. . . . The law was not enjoined upon us, neither were the rites of worship ordained but for the sake of establishing the remembrance of God. The Prophet said: "The circumambulation round the Holy House, the passage to and fro between Šafā and Marwah³,

¹ Ibn al-Fārid's *Mtmiyyah* which begins *Adir dhikra man ahwā*, 1.3.

² Qoran, XII, 31.

The Qoran tells here how Potiphar's wife invited some of the women of Egypt to her house so that, having seen Joseph for themselves, they would understand why she loved him and would excuse her. When he appeared before them they were so amazed at his beauty that they cut their hands in mistake for their food.

³ Two rocks in Mecca (the wall of the Great Mosque comes near to Šafā, after which one of its gates is named) between which Hagar passed in search of water for herself and Ishmael. To pass between them seven times is one of the subsidiary rites of the Pilgrimage.

and the throwing of the pebbles were only ordained as a means of remembering God"¹; and God Himself has said: *Remember God at the Holy Monument*.² Thus we know that the rite of stopping there was ordained for remembrance and not especially on account of the monument itself, just as the stay at Muna was also ordained for remembrance, not on account of the valley, for He has said: *Remember God during the appointed days*.³ Moreover concerning the ritual prayer He has said: *Perform the prayer in remembrance of Me*;⁴ and you will find other examples if you look through the Book. In a word, our performance of the rites of worship is considered strong or weak according to the degree of our remembrance of God while performing them. Thus when the Prophet was asked what spiritual strivers would receive the greatest reward, he replied: "Those who remembered God most". Then when questioned as to what fasters would be most rewarded he said: "Those who remembered God most", and when the prayer and the almsgiving and the pilgrimage and charitable donations were mentioned, he said of each: "The richest in remembrance of God is the richest in reward".

Among the already referred to last precepts given by the Shaikh 'Alī al-Jamal to the Shaikh Ad-Darqāwī was the recommendation that he and his disciples should follow the example of the Prophet's Companion Abū Hurairah and wear their rosaries round their necks. The Shaikh Al-'Alawī made an exception for his more Oriental disciples and allowed them, if they wished, to carry their rosaries in their hands in conformity with the general practice of their countries. But he himself and his Algerian and Moroccan disciples, like the other Darqāwīs, continued to follow the injunction of the Shaikh 'Alī al-Jamal. Their large flat wheel-shaped wooden beads make strikingly virile necklaces, very different from the smaller more delicate round-beaded Middle-Eastern rosaries

¹ Tirmidhī, *Hajj*, 64.

² Qoran, II, 198. This is a mound at a place called Muzdalifah where the Pilgrims spend the night after the day on Mount Arafat, and where each gathers 49 pebbles with which to stone Satan, represented by 3 stone pillars in the valley of Muna (between Arafat and Mecca) where they spend the next three days.

³ Qoran, II, 203.

⁴ Qoran, XX, 14.

is your judgement; and the Final Judgement is God's.'

Many of the features of the Shaikh's few months' travel after his Master's death are very typical of his life as a whole, and this is especially true of his visit to Tunis, with the somewhat furtive entry into the town to avoid meeting profane acquaintances, the dream about members of Sufi brotherhoods coming to him, his staying four days in the house until they actually came, and his finally going out with them and meeting and teaching many others. Particularly characteristic is his lack of plans as regards details and his continual reliance upon inspiration, in one form or another, to tell him what to do. Thus although he was by nature exclusive and aloof, and disinclined to mix with those who were not fuqarā, he never allowed a general rule to interfere with the particular law of each moment which came to him through the dictates of the Spirit, and it was certainly these dictates rather than his own inclination that imposed upon him a function which went far beyond the confines of his zāwiyah.

Ibn 'Abd al-Bāri' writes: 'Once when the Shaikh was in Algiers he was followed on his way to the Great Mosque by a crowd of over a hundred, men who, far from being initiates were mostly no more than Moslems in name. When they reached the door of the mosque he told them to go in with him, which they did. Then he told them to sit down, and sitting down himself in their midst he preached to them. When he had finished they turned to God in repentance and gave the Shaikh their oaths and made covenants with him that they would never revert to their former state.'¹

He also mentions² that when the Shaikh stayed for a few days in the country, it sometimes happened that almost the whole countryside would come to him for initiation. If they did not aspire to follow the path, they came for the 'initiation of blessing'. Another disciple writes: 'You would find sitting in front of him hundreds, nay, thousands, with heads bowed as if birds were hovering round them and hearts full of awe and eyes wet with tears, in silent understanding of what they heard him say.'³

¹ *Shahā'id*, p. 95, note 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 140, note 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 140

Another writes: 'I went to a Shaikh in Bijāyah and took initiation from him after he had prescribed for me, as a condition of this, a considerable number of daily litanies. I persevered in reciting them regularly, and after a while he ordered me to fast every day and to eat (after sunset) only barley bread soaked in water. I kept to this also, and then he transmitted to me the seven Divine Names¹ especially used for invocation in the Khalwatī Tāriqah. Then after a few days he ordered me to go and give guidance to others and as soon as I heard this from him I shuddered with dismay and disappointment, for I knew that this was not what I had been looking for. I had only received from him certain vague indications which I did not understand the meaning of, and when I told him of this he sharply forbade me ever to make such confessions again either in front of him, or in front of my fellow disciples for fear that it should cause them misgivings. . . . I left this Shaikh and set about looking for one more worth cleaving to the company of, until by the Grace of God I came into contact with this supreme Master Shaikh Sidi Aḥmad Al-'Alawī through the intermediary of one of his disciples,² who prepared me by giving me *Al-Minah al-Quddūsiyyah* to read. Then when the Master himself came to our part of the country³ I renewed my initiatory oath of allegiance to him, whereupon he transmitted to me the invocation of the Name as practised by his followers, and told me I could invoke it wherever possible, in secret solitude or openly, in company. He stayed in our country for thirteen days, and in that time about two thousand men, women and boys entered the Tāriqah. Then after he returned to Mostaganem I went to him there and he sent me into *khalwah*. I stayed there for six days, and gained from this all that I had previously hoped for'. The Shaikh's visit to those parts was in 1919. The last quoted disciple, writing five years later, during which time he had become a Muqaddam, says that in the Shaikh's name he had received more than six thousand into the order and supervised their spiritual retreats, not counting those who stop short at the 'initiation of blessing.' He adds that many among these

¹ These are: (i) *Lā ilāha illa 'LLāh* (there is no god but God), (ii) *Allāh*, (iii) *Huwa* (He), (iv) *Al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth), (v) *Al-Ḥayy* (the Living), (vi) *Al-Qayyūm* (Self-Sufficient), (vii) *Al-Qaḥḥār* (the Irresistible). See Rinn, pp. 300-1.

² That is, he received initiation from one of his Muqaddams.

³ 'Arsh al-Ja'farah in the province of Constantina.

thousands had been given permission to guide others, remarking that 'it was not the Shaikh's practice to authorize anyone to give guidance except after his soul had been purified and his inward eye had been opened to the Divine Light.'¹

Most of the Shaikh's Muqaddams represented him in their own towns or villages, but some of them travelled from place to place. One of these tells how the Shaikh sent him and others to travel among the tribes in desert places, forbidding them to accept any invitations to meals except in so far as was absolutely necessary. He told them to ask for nothing except water for the ablution. When questioned about their reluctance to accept hospitality they used to say: 'We have only come to you so that you may take guidance from us upon the path or at least that you may give us your oaths always to perform the prayers at the right time with as much piety as you can muster.'²

In short, the Shaikh's life might well lead Massignon to revise his judgement that the school of Ibn 'Arabī (to which the Shaikh Al-'Alawī unquestionably belongs) 'put an end to the outward radiation of Islamic mysticism throughout society as a whole.'³

The book from which most of these last quotations are taken contains many letters from the Shaikh's disciples, describing their relationship with him, and most of these letters end with a mention of the spiritual realization which they achieved at his hands, 'the opening of the Heart to the Divine Light.' Not infrequently the realization is spoken of in absolute terms; and in most cases he appears to have relinquished his guidance as though the path were ended. In general the letters seemed to me strangely incompatible with what he said to Dr Carret about the extreme rarity of full spiritual realization. I mentioned this to one of his disciples, and I forget the exact words of his reply but the gist of it was as follows:

'No doubt the fuqarā tended to speak of their realization in too absolute a way; but it is true that very many of them had at least some realization, and the whole zāwiyah was vibrant

¹ *Shahā'id*, pp. 123-4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 158

³ *Essai*, p. 80.

with spiritual drunkenness. The Shaikh demanded that the disciple should be as wax in his hands, and he was quite ruthless in his method. He would put them in *khalwah* for weeks at a time if need be, and sometimes for months. For many of the fuqarā, even for most, this was difficult to endure; but what might have been intolerable in other circumstances was made relatively easy because the Shaikh knew how to provoke 'a state of spiritual concentration.'¹ None the less, some of the fuqarā would come out of *khalwah* almost in a state of collapse, dazed in both body and soul, but the Shaikh was indifferent to this provided that some degree of direct knowledge had been achieved. Moreover the faqīr would usually recover his balance very soon, while at the same time a complete break had been made between him and his former life. Some of them for example had been to all appearances just ordinary manual labourers for whom, apart from their work, life had meant no more than begetting children and sitting in cafes. But now their interests were all centred upon God, and their great joy was to perform the *dhikr*.'

'But why', I asked, 'did not the Shaikh always continue his guidance rigorously until the end of the path?'

'Because in a sense a faqīr can be his own guide after a certain point has been reached. Besides in the case of most of his disciples the Shaikh knew that he had already, by a special Grace, achieved as it were the impossible. That the soul should be open to the Divine Light, even with so small an opening as to allow only a glimmer to pass through, was enough to satisfy the utmost aspirations and capabilities of the vast majority for the rest of their life on earth. It remained for them to treasure what they had gained and to consolidate it, which was not difficult thanks to the protective surroundings of the traditional civilization in which they lived. It was these surroundings which neutralized the dangers inherent in such a method.'

According to Berque the Shaikh was accused of hypnotizing his disciples, and Berque himself adds that in his opinion the accusation was not unjustified. But whatever word one uses for what the Shaikh himself often refers to as his 'wine', there

¹ These last four words translate the single word *hāl* which is used by the Sufis in a very wide sense, extending sometimes beyond a state of concentration to one of illumination.

can be no doubt that it was quite different from hypnotism in the ordinary sense, and that in some respects it was the very opposite. For although he demanded that his disciples should be 'as passive as a corpse in the hands of the washer of the dead', this passivity was not in the least mediumistic. On the contrary, it presupposed on the part of the disciple an undercurrent of extreme spiritual activity which was destined in the end to rise to the surface and to replace the activity of the Master. As he himself says in describing his own Master's method, which he inherited: 'In all this the Shaikh would watch over him and strengthen him in the *dhikr* degree by degree until he finally reached a point of being conscious of what he perceived through his own power, and the Shaikh would not be satisfied until this point was reached.'

Reliance on the inspiration of the moment is one of the mystic's essential features, and in its full maturity this reliance is no less than an aspect of the supreme spiritual state which is the goal of all mysticism. Although the term *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* ('Perfect Man' or 'Universal Man'), which is used by the Sufis to denote this state, infinitely transcends human nature ('man' being used here above all symbolically to indicate the Perfection in whose image he was created), it none the less includes, on the earthly plane, an integral human perfection, which implies not only a static flawlessness but also, dynamically, a perfect reaction to every circumstance of life, that is, a reaction which is in complete conformity with the Will of Heaven; and when there is no other means, legal or traditional, of knowing where the 'wind' lies, such a reaction can only be achieved by following the inspiration of the moment. The Shaikh was fond of quoting the verse:

Submit unto Salmā¹, go whither she goeth,
And follow the winds of Fate, turn whither they turn².

¹ A woman's name symbolizing a Divine Attribute, perhaps Wisdom as in Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, IV.

² *Mināḥ*, p. 42. This verse has its place in the Shaikh's heritage, for when Aḥmad Zarrūq, one of his spiritual ancestors, took a last farewell of his Master, Aḥmad al-Ḥadramī and asked him for a final precept, he simply replied: 'Submit unto Salmā . . .', and having finished the line, would say no more. See 'Abd Allāh Gannūn, *Mashāḥir Rijāl al-Maghrib*, Aḥmad Zarrūq, p. 11.

Similarly he remarks that the inward essence of *islām* (submission to the Divine Will), an essence to which only the elect can penetrate, is *istislām* (going to meet the Divine Will in utter compliance)¹.

It is in virtue of his *istislām*, which denotes a perpetual state of expectant but serene readiness to act at a moment's notice, that the fully realized mystic is the most practical² of men. This truth was impressed upon Berque by his visits to Mostaganem. He quotes Delacroix as having remarked that 'most great mystics have had the gift of creative action'³ and of the Shaikh Al-'Alawī he himself says: 'His faith was full to overflowing and communicated itself to others in a cascade of lyrical eloquence. But at the same time he retained a keen sense of facts and how to make the best of them. He belonged to that class of men, often to be met with in North Africa, who can pass without transition from deep thought to action, from the mysteries of the next world to the life of this, from the vast sweep of ideas to the smallest details of native politics'⁴.

It was his practicality, in view of the ignorance and limited understanding of great numbers of those who were attached to him, which prompted him to write, in addition to his more profound and abstruse works, one or two very simple expositions of the elements of Islam⁵, which differ none the less from the ordinary exoteric catechisms in that they always have an opening, explicitly or implicitly, on to the domain of esoterism. It was a principle of the 'Alawī Ṭarīqah that the first thing to be done with a novice was to teach him his ordinary religious obligations according to his capacity.

Another result of the Shaikh's acceptance of facts, however much they might go against his own natural inclinations, was that in 1922 he started a religious weekly newspaper, *Lisān*

¹ *Minali*, p. 151.

² The wide-spread opinion to the contrary springs partly from failure to understand what mysticism is and, in consequence, from counting as mystics those who are not or those who have only a touch of the mystic about them, and partly from the fact that true mystics never consider this world as a self-sufficient whole but only as a fragment of the Universe. What seems to be practical from a worldly point of view may be grossly impractical from a more universal point of view, and *vice versa*.

³ *Études d'histoire et de psychologie du mysticisme*.

⁴ p. 693.

⁵ See Appendix A (6, 11, 13)

ad-Dīn, which in 1926 he replaced by another with a wider scope, *Al-Balāgh al-Jazā'iri*. Both were published in Algiers. *Al-Balāgh* in particular, which was continued for a few years even after the Shaikh's death, served a double purpose. We have already seen that it had been part of the Shaikh Al-Būzidi's method to insist on his disciples 'recognizing the truth and acknowledging it whatever it might be', and that 'he had gone on giving them the means of doing this until it had become second nature to them.' The Shaikh Al-'Alawī was as well aware as his Master had been that no purification is complete if it does not include the purification from false ideas as well as from other psychic impurities, and one of the purposes of *Al-Balāgh* was to bestow as far as possible on his disciples a just and objective outlook in every respect. For example, although he continually and strenuously opposed the activities of Christian missionaries in Algeria and other Islamic countries, he none the less defended them against many of the usual attacks and pointed out that for the most part far from being the conscious political instruments of their respective countries they were continually exhorting their governments to make sacrifices as regards material interests. 'But why', he adds, 'do not these missionaries care more for the spiritual welfare of their own people?'¹

Apart from his disciples, Al-Balāgh was for the community at large. It was his means of preaching a renovation of Islam in all its aspects, not puritanically, as one who seeks to strip his religion of everything that goes beyond his understanding, but on the contrary seeking to safeguard its dimension of breadth and above all to restore what it had lost of its dimension of depth.

'If Islam could speak,' he writes, 'it would complain to God, enumerating all the evils which assail it.'² But he asserts continually that of all the dangers which beset Islam, by far the greatest come from certain Moslems, and he makes it no secret that he is referring to those exoteric authorities of the group known as As-Salafiyyah who claimed to be 'reformers', a word which often aroused his anger and sarcasm, prompting him to quote from the Qoran: *And when it is said to them: 'Cause not*

¹ Jan. 9, 1931.

² April 17, 1931.

lamp in his hand to light him upon his path. God says: *Whoso striveth after Us, verily We shall lead them upon Our paths*¹, and indeed the true believer looks unceasingly for one who will take him to God, or at the very least he looks for the spiritual gifts which lie hidden within him, that is, for the primordial nature which he has lost sight of and in virtue of which he is human. It is characteristic of man that his soul should tend upwards beyond those inclinations to cleave to the earth which are what connects him with the lower animal species.'

One of the last quotations in the anthology is from Muḥammad 'Abduh,² who was both Grand Mufti of Egypt and Rector of the Azhar University:

The Sufis are concerned with the cure of Hearts and purification from all that obstructs the inward eye. They seek to take their stand in Spirit before the Face of the All-Highest Truth until they are drawn away from all else by Him, their essences being extinguished in His Essence and their qualities in His Qualities. The Gnostics amongst them, those who have come to the end of their journey, are in the highest rank of human perfection after the Prophets³.

After quoting from one or two authorities of his own generation, the Shaikh draws his treatise to a close:

'I do not deny, my brother, the existence of many intruders among the Sufis—only too many—who deserve censure, and if you had concentrated on these, no one could have blamed you. Moreover you would have had a good deed to your own credit, while doing us, in particular, a service at the same time. What offended us was your vilification of the way of the Folk altogether, and your speaking ill of its men without making any exceptions, and this is what prompted me to put before you these quotations from some of the highest religious authorities. At the very least they should impel you to consider

¹ Qoran, XXIX, 69.

² d. 1905.

³ His gloss on the word *Šūfī* in his edition of Badi' az-Zamān al-Hamad-hānī's *Maqāmāt*, p. 29.

your brothers the Sufis as members of the community of true believers, every individual of whom both we and you are bound to respect. The Prophet said: "Whoso prayeth our prayer and useth our orientation and eateth of our sacrifices, the same is a Moslem, and he is under a pact of protection from God and His Messenger. So cause not the pact of God to be violated."^{1,2}

Apart from criticisms in print, the Shaikh also had visits from those who felt that some of the 'Alawī practices were un-Islamic.³ One such visitor objected to the practice of repeating over and over again the Divine Name *Allāh* without any 'grammatical context'. For him the Qoranic insistence on *dhikr Allāh* meant prayer to God or praise of God, and nothing more. Generally speaking, it may be said that the need for a more concentrated mode of worship in addition to and beyond prayer and praise in the ordinary sense is felt or not, and understood or not, according to the depth or shallowness of the centre from which one's deepest worship springs. If as in most cases this centre is nearer to the mind, which is the faculty of analysis, a more analytical form of worship will meet the needs of the worshippers. But the deeper the centre, the nearer it will be to the Heart, which is the faculty of synthesis. Litany comes as it were from midway between the Heart and the head. The speed and rhythm with which its formulae are repeated confers on them a synthetic quality, although in themselves they nearly always express analytical thought. Beyond litany is invocation in the sense of the word *dhikr*. This is a cry from the Heart, or from near to the Heart⁴, and

¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣalāt*, 28

² *Risālat an-Nāṣir Ma'rūf*, pp. 127-8.

³ Occasionally such visits took an unexpected turn: Sidi 'Alī aṣ-Ṣadaqāwī, one of the Shaikh's most devoted disciples tells us that he first visited the Shaikh to criticize him (*Shahā'id*, p. 104); and the compiler of the *Shahā'id* adds that he now sees many among the disciples who had first come to the zāwiyah with hostile intentions.

⁴ Particular circumstances may suddenly lay bare, in the soul, a centre far deeper and far nearer the Heart than anything it had been conscious of before. A case in point is that of three men who were marooned in Greenland during the war for 11 days, and eventually saved, although at one time they had their hopes suddenly raised from near desperation only to be dashed again.

The mood of the three marooned men changed from ecstasy to doubt and misgiving, and then to desperation. It seemed that the ship on which their last

no 'raiment' is more perfectly suited to such a cry than a single Divine Name.

In answer to his critic the Shaikh published as a serial in *Al-Balāgh al-Jazā'iri* a short treatise¹ on the repetition of the Name *Allāh*. Here are a few extracts:

'You know, my brother, that every name has an influence which attaches itself to the soul of him who mentions it even if it is not one of the Divine Names. For example, if a man repeat several times the word "death", he will feel an imprint upon his soul owing to the mention of that name, especially if he persists in it, and there is no doubt that this imprint will be different from that which is experienced from mentioning "wealth" or "glory" or "power".

'Any reasonably sensitive man will be conscious of the influence upon his soul of the name that he mentions, and if we admit this, we are bound to believe that the Name of God also produces an influence upon the soul as other names do, each one leaving the particular imprint that corresponds to it. I think you are aware that a name is ennobled with the nobility of him who is named inasmuch as it carries his imprint in the hidden fold of its secret essence and its meaning.'²

He quotes from Ghazālī's commentary on the Divine Names with regard to the Name *Allāh*: 'That which the slave getteth from this name is deification (*ta'alluh*), by which I mean that his heart and his purpose are drowned in God, so that he seeth naught but Him.'³

hope rested had been abandoned. There was no sign of life on board.

'For the next three hours they knelt in the sunshine, praying continually. There was only one prayer they all knew, and they chanted it together unceasingly, as children recite a memorized lesson, uncomprehendingly.

"Our Father, which art in heaven . . ." they chanted right through to the end, and then straightway back to the beginning again, hundreds of times, as though rescue depended absolutely on their maintaining an unbroken stream of prayer.'

(*Sunday Express*, January 25th, 1959.)

A child's recitation of lessons often falls *short* of the mind. But if these men prayed 'uncomprehendingly', that is, if they did not analyse what they were saying, it was because although the form of their prayer was analytical, the centre it sprang from lay far *beyond* the mind—beyond prayer in the ordinary sense, and perhaps even beyond litany.

¹ *Al-Qaul al-Mu'tamad*.

² *Al-Qaul al-Mu'tamad*, pp. 5-6.

³ *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, p. 38 (Cairo, A.H. 1322)

The following argument is typical of the Shaikh, both as regards its somewhat disconcerting unexpectedness and also as an example of his readiness to meet his critics on their own ground.

'The question of invocation is of wider scope than you imagine. A sick man lay groaning in the presence of the Prophet and one of the Companions told him to stop and to be patient, whereupon the Prophet said: "Let him groan, for groaning is one of the Names of God in which the sick man may find relief".'¹

'Now suppose that the sick man had been repeating the Name of Majesty *Allāh! Allāh!* instead of *Ah! Ah!*, would that Companion's objection have been justified. . . ?

'This is surely enough to make a man think well of the rememberers, whatever their method of remembrance. But supposing that all I have said so far does not convince you as a logical proof, then it is only fair to say that the question is one about which we must agree to differ. In other words, it is a matter for *ijtihād*², and on what pretext, my brother, would you compel us to accept your way of thinking and subscribe to your *ijtihād* when we have done nothing to compel you to subscribe to ours?'³

He goes on to quote what various authorities have said about the invocation of the Name, as for example: 'Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī said: 'First of all I sought to make my way upon the path of the mystics with many litanies and much fasting and prayer. Then when God had proved the sincerity of my purpose, He decreed that I should meet one of His Saints, who said to me: "My son, rid thy heart of all attachment save unto God, and go apart by thyself and say with all thy powers of concentration *Allāh Allāh Allāh*".'⁴ He also said, I mean Ghazālī: "When thy thoughts are muddled with other than God, thou hast need of the negation *lā ilāha*⁵. But once thou hast

¹ Suyūṭī, *Al-Jāmi' as-Saghir*.

² See p. 44.

³ *Al-Qawl al-Mu'tamad*, pp. 13-4.

⁴ Quoted from Ibn 'Ajībah's commentary on Ibn al-Bannā' at-Tujībī's *Al-Mabāhiṭh al-Asliyyah*. See also Ghazālī's *Mizān al-'Amal*, pp. 44-5.

⁵ 'There is no god . . .', the negative and therefore illusion-destroying half of the affirmation of Divine Unity, *lā ilāha illa' Llāh*, 'there is no god but God'.

withdrawn from all things in contemplation of Him who is the Lord of all, thou takest thy rest in *Say Allāh, and leave them to their idle prating*¹. Then he said: 'When thou has finished recalling that which never was and art busied with the remembrance of Him who ever is, thou sayest *Allāh* and takest thy rest from all else.' He also said: 'Open the door of thy Heart with the key of thy saying *lā ilāha illa 'Llāh* and the door of thy Spirit by saying *Allāh*, and lure down the bird of thy Secret by saying *Huwa Huwa*^{2,3}.

Apart from the Shaikh's vindications of Sufism, *Al-Balāgh* contains some of his attacks on the so-called 'Reformers' for their continual yielding to the modern age at the expense of the religion. At the same time he exhorts the heads of *zāwiyahs* to practise what they preach. As regards the world in general he takes his stand against all anti-religious movements and in particular against communism. For Moslems he stresses the importance of raising the general level of knowledge of classical Arabic. He denounces the practice of becoming naturalized French citizens⁴. Again and again he points out the dangers of westernization, that is, of adopting European habits of thought and life, and in particular he condemns those Moslems who wear modern European dress⁵.

As a spiritual guide, and therefore a supreme psychologist, he knew that clothes, which are the immediate ambient of the human soul, have incalculable powers of purification and corruption. It is not for nothing that the contemplative and other orders of Christianity, like those of Buddhism for example, have kept throughout the centuries to a dress that was designed and instituted by a spiritual authority bent on choosing a garb compatible with the wearer's dedicated life. Moreover, generally speaking, apart from such examples, one may say that in all theocratic civilizations, that is, in all

¹ Qoran, VI, 91.

² 'He is He', or else it may be understood as a repeated invocation of the Divine Name 'He'.

³ *Al-Qaul al-Mu'tamad*, p. 15.

⁴ By becoming a French citizen an Algerian Moslem becomes altogether subject to French law, whereas non-French Algerian Moslems are entitled to remain, at any rate in certain respects, subject to Qoranic law.

⁵ For the various references to *Al-Balāgh*, see Berque, pp. 718-28.

civilizations but the modern one, dress has been more or less dictated by the consciousness that man is the representative of God on earth, and nowhere is this truer than in the Islamic civilization. In particular the Arab dress of North-West Africa, the turban, burnus and jallabah, which has remained unchanged for hundreds of years, is an unsurpassed combination of simplicity, sobriety and dignity, retaining these qualities even when in rags.

Al-Balāgh was strenuously attacked by the modernists and also, as was to be expected, by the Salafiyyah reformist group, and *Ash-Shihāb*, kept up an almost undiminished hostility until 1931, when the editor, Bin-Bādis, happened to come to Mostaganem, and both he and the Shaikh were invited to a wedding feast. Although the Shaikh was in bad health at the time—it was barely three years before his death—he accepted the invitation since it is against the wont of the Prophet to refuse to go to a wedding, and having come face to face there with the editor in question, he invited him to the *zāwiyah*. In the next number of *Ash-Shihāb* there appeared the following item of news:

‘A supper was given by Shaikh Sidi Ahmad Bin-‘Aliwah and it was attended by some of the leading men of Mostaganem, together with about one hundred of the Shaikh’s pupils. The Shaikh himself was exceedingly cordial and gracious to the point of serving some of the guests with his own hands. . . . After supper verses from the Qoran were recited, and then Shaikh’s pupils began to chant some of the odes of ‘Umar ibn al-Fārid which they did so beautifully that their audience was greatly moved.¹ The pleasure of the evening was further enhanced in between the singing by literary discussions about the meaning of some of the verses; and among the many examples of courtesy shown us by our host the Shaikh, I was particularly struck by the fact that he never once touched on any point of disagreement between us by so much as a single allusion that might have compelled me to express my opinion or to defend it. Our conversation all turned on those many questions about

¹ Berque (p. 753) quotes the Shaikh as having said to him: ‘Music is not crippled with the dry bones of words. Liquid and flowing like a stream, it carries us into the Presence of God.’

If there were anything which, in the Reality of the Eternal Present, could show itself to be other than God, then God would not be Infinite, for Infinity would consist of God *and* that particular thing¹.

This doctrine is only concerned with Absolute Reality. It has nothing to do with 'reality' in the current sense, that is, with lesser, relative truths which the Sufis call 'metaphorical'. Ghazālī says: 'The Gnostics rise from the lowlands of metaphor to the peak of Verity; and at the fulfilment of their ascent they see directly face to face that there is naught in existence save only God and that *everything perisheth but His Face*, not simply that it perisheth at any given time but that it hath never not perished. . . . Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own, and a face of its Lord; in respect of its own face it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face of God it is Being. Thus there is nothing in existence save only God and His Face, for *everything perisheth but His Face*, always and forever . . . so that the Gnostics need not wait for the Resurrection in order to hear the summons of the Creator proclaim: *Unto whom this day is the Kingdom? Unto God, the One, the Irresistible*², for this proclamation is eternally in their ears; nor do they understand from His Utterance *God is Most Great (Allāhu Akbar)* that he is greater than others. God forbid! For there is nothing other than

there pulsates the life of the triple world, and this is intuited by *prajna*, not by way of reasoning, but 'immediately'. (D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in Zen*, p. 94.)

¹ This is implicit in the following formulation of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* by Al-Hallāj, who literally takes the ground from beneath the feet of those who accuse the Sufis of localizing God (*liulūl*).

'It is Thou that hast filled all "where" and beyond "where" too. Where art Thou then?' (*Diwān*, p. 46, 1.4.)

The Shaikh Al-'Alawī quotes at some length (*An-Nāṣir Ma'rūf*, pp. 112-5) Muhammad 'Abduh's formulations of the doctrine in question from pt. 2 of his *Wāridāt*, ending with the words:

'Do not think that this is a doctrine of localization, for there can be no localization without two beings, one of which occupieth a place in the other, whereas our doctrine is: "There is no being but His Being."'

Over 2000 years previously the Taoist Chuang Tzu had said: 'A boat may be hidden in a creek; a net may be hidden in a lake; these may be said to be safe enough. But at midnight a strong man may come and carry them away on his back. The ignorant do not see that no matter how well you conceal things, smaller ones in larger ones, there will always be a chance for them to escape. But if you conceal Universe in Universe, there will be no room left for it to escape. This is the great truth of things.' (ch. 6, Yu-Lan Fung's translation.)

² Qoran, XL, 16.

Himself in all existence, and therefore there is no term of comparison for His Greatness¹.

This doctrine is necessarily present whenever there is explicit reference to the Supreme Truth—the Absolute, the Infinite, the Eternal. In Christianity the goal of mysticism is most often conceived of as union with the Second Person of the Trinity. Here the Supreme Truth is not explicit but implicit: who has Christ has indeed All; but for those who follow the path of love this Totality is not usually the direct object of fervour. Yet when it is conceived more directly, then in Christianity also² we find inevitably the doctrine of the Oneness of Being.

On the other hand, when the Supreme Truth recedes into the background, then in all religions this doctrine also necessarily recedes, since apart from the Infinite and Eternal Present it is meaningless. No one can hope to understand the formulations of the mystics without bearing in mind that there is liable to be a continual shifting of the centre of consciousness from one plane to another.

One of the first things that a novice has to do in the 'Alawī Ṭarīqah—and the same must be true of other paths of mysticism—is to unlearn much of the agility of 'profane intelligence' which an 'Alawī faqīr once likened, for my benefit, to 'the antics of a monkey that is chained to a post', and to acquire an agility of a different order, comparable to that of a bird which continually changes the level of its flight. The Qoran and secondarily the Traditions of the Prophet are the great prototypes in Islam of this versatility.

Three distinct levels of intelligence are imposed methodically twice a day in the three formulae of the 'Alawī rosary which are (each being repeated a hundred times) firstly asking forgiveness of God, secondly the invocation of blessings on the Prophet, and thirdly the affirmation of Divine Oneness.³ The first

¹ *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, pp. 113-4 in *Al-Jawāhir al-Ghawālī* (Cairo, 1343 A.H.); in Gairdner's translation, which however I have not followed, pp. 103-5.

² 'However vile the dust, however small its motes, the wise man seeth therein God in all His Greatness and Glory.' (Angelus Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*).

³ According to Ḥasan b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, one of the Shaikh's disciples, this triple rosary is used in all branches of the Shādhilī Ṭarīqah (*Irshād al-Rāghibīn*, p. 31). The same formulae are also used, with some variations, by many branches of the Qādirī Ṭarīqah and others. See Rinn, *Marabouts et Khouan*, pp. 183-4, 252-3, 441, 503.

standpoint, which is at what might be called the normal level of psychic perception, is concerned with the ego as such. This is the phase of purification. From the second standpoint this fragmentary ego has ceased to exist, for it has been absorbed into the person of the Prophet who represents a hierarchy of different plenitudes of which the lowest is integral human perfection and the highest is Universal Man (*Al-Insān al-Kāmil*)¹, who personifies the whole created universe and who thus anticipates, as it were, the Infinite², of which he is the highest symbol. The disciple aims at concentrating on perfection at one of these levels. From the third point of view the Prophet himself has ceased to exist, for this formula is concerned with nothing but the Divine Oneness.

All mysticism necessarily comprises these different levels of thought, because it is, by definition, the passage from the finite to the Infinite. It has a starting point and an End, and cannot ignore what lies between. It follows that the formulations of any one mystic are unlikely to be all from the same standpoint³, and this is especially true of the more spontaneous

¹ See Titus Burckhardt's introduction to his *De l'Homme Universel* (translated extracts from Jili's *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*), P. Derain, Lyons, 1953.

² The first formula of the rosary may also open on to the Infinite, but in a negative sense, for the end of purification is extinction (*fanā*). The Shaikh Al-'Alawī often quotes the saying attributed to Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah, one of the greatest women Saints of Islam (d. 801): 'Thine existence is a sin with which no other sin can be compared' (*Minaḥ*, p. 41). It is this point of view which Al-Ḥallāj expresses in the words: 'Between me and Thee is an "I am" which tormenteth me. O take, by Thine Own I am, mine from between us.' (*Akhhār Al-Ḥallāj*, Massignon's edition, no. 50).

³ The refusal to see that mysticism is never a 'system' and that mystics are consciously and methodically 'inconsistent', taking now one standpoint, now another, has led to much confusion, especially as regards *Wahdat al-Wujūd*. In his preface to his translation of *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (p. 61), Gairdner says: 'The root question in regard to al-Ghazzālī, and every other advanced mystic and adept in Islam, is the question of Pantheism (i.e. *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, now usually translated, with some advantage, "monism"): did he succeed in balancing himself upon the edge of the pantheistic abyss? . . . Or did he fail in this?' Massignon, for his part, has devoted much of his output to exculpating Al-Ḥallāj from the 'unorthodoxy' in question, that is, to pinning him down to the dualism expressed in certain of his verses, and turning a blind eye to his affirmations of the Oneness of Being, or in other words denying that he ever made the transcension from what Ghazālī calls the metaphor of union (*ittiḥād*) to the truth of the realization of the Oneness (*tawḥīd*) (*Mishkāt*, p. 115). Nicholson pleads for Ibn al-Fārīd (*Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 193-4). Gairdner, feeling that Ghazālī is in great 'danger', pleads for him and by charitable extension for all other Moslem mystics on the grounds that they do not mean

immortality of the soul. Yet in affirming the Transcendence and immortality in question he implicitly affirms the Oneness of Being. The difference between him and the Sufis is that he does not follow up his belief to its imperative conclusions, but stops half way. For if it be asked: 'Why is the soul immortal?', the answer lies in Meister Eckhardt's 'There is something in the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable. . . . This is the Intellect.' The soul is not merely immortal but Eternal, not in its psychism but in virtue of the Divine Spark that is in it. The Shaikh Al-'Alawī says in one of his poems:

Thou seest not who thou art, for thou art, yet art not "thou".

and he quotes more than once Shustarī's lines:

After extinction I came out, and I
Eternal now am, though not as I.
Yet who am I, O I, but I?¹

As to the Divine Transcendence, I will leave him to show that far from denying It, the doctrine of the Oneness of Being comes nearer than any other doctrine to doing justice to It.

Massignon writes² that this doctrine was first formulated by Ibn 'Arabī. It may be that the term *Wahdat al-Wujūd* was not generally used before his day, but the doctrine itself was certainly uppermost in the minds of his predecessors, and the more the question is studied the further it recedes along a purely Islamic line of descent. The already quoted passage in Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* is closely followed up by: 'There is no he but He, for "he" expresseth that unto which reference is made, and there can be no reference at all save only unto Him, for whenever thou makest a reference, that reference is unto Him even though thou knewest it not through thine ignorance of the Truth of Truths. . . . Thus "there is no god but God" is the generality's proclamation of Unity, and "there is no he but He" is that of the elect, for the former is more general, whereas the latter is more elect, more all-embracing, truer, more exact, and

¹ *Wa-man anā yā anā illā anā?*

² Encyclopaedia of Islam, *Taṣawwuf*.

more operative in bringing him who useth it into the Presence of Unalloyed Singleness and Pure Oneness.¹

The Shaikh Al-ʿAlawī quotes² from the end the *Manāzil as-Sāʾirīn* of ʿAbd Allāh al-Harawī (d. AD 1088) with regard to the third and highest degree of *Tawhīd*:

ʿNone affirmeth truly the Oneness of God, for whoso affirmeth It thereby setteth himself in contradiction with It. . . . He, He is the affirmation of His Oneness, and whoso presumeth to describe Him blasphemeth (by creating a duality through the intrusion of his own person)ʿ.

This recalls the almost identical saying of Al-Ḥallāj (d. AD 922):

ʿWhoso claimeth to affirm God’s Oneness thereby setteth up another beside him’³.

Al-Kharrāz, in his *Book of Truthfulness*, quotes the Companion Abū ʿUbaidah (d. AD 639) as having said:

ʿI have never looked at a single thing without God being nearer to me than it’⁴.

Only one who stops short at the outer shell of words could maintain that there is a real difference between this and the following more analytical formulation from the thirteenth century *Treatise on Oneness*:

ʿIf a questioner ask: “Supposing we see refuse or carrion, for example, wilt thou say that it is God?”, the answer is: “God in his Exaltation forbid that He should be any such thing! Our discourse is with him who doth not see the carrion to be carrion or the refuse to be refuse; our discourse is with him who hath insight (*baṣīrah*) and is not altogether blind.”⁵

¹ pp. 117-8. Although written at the end of Ghazālī’s life (he died in AD 1111), this treatise is about 100 years earlier than Ibn ʿArabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*.

² *An-Nāṣir Maʿrūf*, p. 99.

³ Akhbār, no. 49.

⁴ Arabic text, p. 59; Arberry’s translation, p. 48.

⁵ We may compare the following third century BC formulation: ‘Tung Kuo Tzu asked Chuang Tzu: “Where is the so-called *Tao*?” Chuang Tzu said: “Everywhere.” The former said: “Specify an instance of it.” “It is in the ant.” “How can *Tao* be anything so low?” “It is in the panic grass.” “How can it be still lower.” . . . “It is in excrement.” To this Tung Kuo Tzu made no reply. Chuang Tzu said: “Your question does not touch the fundamentals of *Tao*. You should not specify any particular thing. There is not a single thing without *Tao*.”’ (Chuang Tzu, ch. XXII, Yu-Lan Fung’s translation).

Al-Kharrāz's quotation, made about AD 850, spans the first two centuries of Islam with the Qoranic doctrine of Nearness—Identity—Oneness. We have seen that in the early Meccan Surahs the highest saints are referred to as the *Near*, and that what the Qoran means by 'nearness' is defined by the words *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein*. In the following already quoted Holy Tradition this nearness is expressed as identity: 'My slave seeketh unremittingly to draw nigh unto Me with devotions of his free will until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth and the Sight wherewith he seeth and the Hand wherewith he smiteth and the Foot whereon he walketh.' It cannot be concluded from this Tradition that this identity was not already there, for the Divinity is not subject to change. The 'change' in question is simply that what was not perceived has now been perceived.¹ These two levels of perception are both referred to in the verse: *We are nearer to him than ye are, although ye see not*². The lower of these two is perception of the merely relative reality of God's absence which is pure illusion in the face of the Absolute Reality of His Presence. For there is no question of relative nearness here. *We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* and *God cometh in between a man and his own heart*³ mean that He is nearer to him than he is to his inmost self. The Oneness here expressed exceeds the oneness of union.

It may be convenient for certain theories to suppose that these flashes of Qoranic lightning passed unperceived over the heads of the Companions, and that they were only noticed by later generations; but is it good psychology? No men have been more 'men of one book' than the Companions were, and there is every reason to believe that no generation of Islam has ever surpassed them in weighing the phrases of that book and in giving each one its due of consideration. They would have been the last people on earth to suppose that the Qoran ever meant *less* than it said. This does not mean that they would necessarily have interpreted as formulations of Oneness of Being all those Qoranic verses which the Sufis so interpret, for some of these

¹ It has been perceived only because the agent of perception is God, not the mystic. 'I am . . . his Sight', or to use the Qoranic phrase: *The sight o'ertaketh Him not, but He o'ertaketh the sight* (VI, 103).

² LVI, 85.

³ VIII, 24.

CHAPTER VI

THE THREE WORLDS

Before considering some of the Shaikh Al-'Alawī's own formulations of the doctrine of Oneness of Being, let us consider what he quotes from 'the Shaikh of our Shaikhs, Mawlāy Al-'Arabī ad-Darqāwī':

'I was in a state of remembrance and my eyes were lowered and I heard a voice say: *He is the First and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden*. I remained silent, and the voice repeated it a second time, and then a third, whereupon I said: "As to *the First*, I understand, and as to *the Last*, I understand, and as to *the Inwardly Hidden*, I understand, but as to *the Outwardly Manifest*, I see nothing but created things." Then the voice said: "If there were any outwardly manifest other than Himself I should have told thee." In that moment I realized the whole hierarchy of Absolute Being.'¹

Ibn 'Āshir's *Guide to the Essentials of Religious Knowledge*², on which the Shaikh's *Al-Minaḥ al-Quddūsiyyah* is a commentary, formulates what must necessarily be attributed to God as follows: 'Being, Beginninglessness, Endlessness, Absolute Independence, Incomparability, Oneness of Essence, of Quality and of Action, Power, Will, Knowledge, Life, Hearing, Speech, Sight.'

The Shaikh comments: 'Here he explaineth what belongeth unto God. See therefore, O slave, what belongeth unto thee, for if thou shouldst qualify thyself with any one of these qualities, thou wilt be contending with thy Lord.

'God's is the prerogative of Being, and Being is the very Self of Him who is. This is Absolute Being which is not to be limited and measured and set on one side. It is not possible

¹ *Minaḥ*, p. 174.

² *Al-Murshid al-Mu'in*.

that there should exist any other being with this Being in virtue of Its Unlimitedness and the Force of Its Manifestation and the Immensity of Its Light. Thou shouldst know that this Being brooketh no denial in the inward eye of the Gnostics, just as sensible objects brook no denial in the sight of those who are veiled. Nay, the appearance of spiritual truth to the Intellect is stronger and more direct than the appearance of the sensible object to the sense. Thus the Manifestation of Absolute Being falleth upon the perception of the Sufi so that he is utterly overwhelmed in his realization of the Infinite. If he trek the vast Beginninglessness he findeth no starting point, and if he then turn into Endlessness, he findeth no limit and no finality. He plungeth into the depths of Innermost Mystery and findeth no outlet, and he mounteth up throughout the hierarchy of Outward Manifestation and findeth no escape from it, so that in his bewilderment he crieth out for refuge. Then the Truths of the Names and Qualities call unto him saying: "Seekest thou to limit the Essence? Wouldst thou qualify It with dimensions? Thou art in a station which is attended with knowledge of the Secrets of the Names and Qualities. What hast thou to do with created things?" And thereupon he surrendereth himself unto Being, and realizeth that beside It there is neither nothingness nor being.¹

As regards the Divine Incomparability he comments: 'Another necessity is God's difference from what is contingent, but this qualification is not one of the supports of the Gnostics, since comparison entereth not into their thoughts. . . . For them the seer is folded up in That which is seen. There is naught that hath being besides God that it might be compared with Him. But this qualification of Incomparability is helpful to those who are veiled—nay, it is the very ark of their salvation.

'The Truth transcendeth all the qualities of contingent things; and if the outer covering be removed for the Gnostics from his Quality of Transcendence amazement falleth upon them, for they find that the Truth transcendeth Transcendence. Then they wish to tell of the marvellous mysteries that are there, but the encumbrances of the letters of the alphabet upon their tongues impede them, and it may be that an utterance cometh forth which resembleth comparison and which

¹ *Minah*, p. 35.

may cause offence in the hearing of those who are veiled, although the utterance is in reality an extreme affirmation of Transcendence.

'None is safe from the snare of qualifying the Truth and making comparisons with regard to It save him who companioneth the Gnostics and treadeth the path of those who realize the Oneness. . . .

'How should one be safe from limiting the Truth who conceiveth It to be far away? And how should one escape beyond the frontiers of ignorance when the created universe still existeth in his sight? . . .

'It is of no avail to affirm His Transcendence with the tongue and to affirm His likeness to other things in the heart. If thou art veiled, in seeming to affirm His Transcendence thou affirmest in fact His likeness to other than Him through thine inability to conceive the Truth of His Transcendence, and if thou knowest Him, in seeming to liken Him to others thou affirmest in fact His Transcendence through the utter obliteration of thy being in His Being. In a word, the Folk's affirmation of His likeness transcendeth the generality's affirmation of His Transcendence.

'Another truth that must be believed of God is His Oneness in Essence, Qualities and Actions, for He is not composed of parts, not multiple.

'The Oneness of the Truth is not to be added unto, for verily It admitteth not of increase even as It admitteth not of diminishment. "God was, and there was naught with Him."¹ "He is now even as He was,"² for the Qualities stand not by themselves so as to be independent in their Being or so as to be separated from That which they describe, which is the Essence.

'As to Oneness in Action, this means that it is impossible that there should be any act but the Act of God.

'The Folk may be divided into three groups. The first is the group of those who see that there is no agent but God, thus realizing Oneness in Actions by way of direct intellectual perception, not merely by way of belief, for they see through

¹ Bukhārī, *Khalq*, I.

² It is doubtful if even the most exoteric of dogmatic theologians would venture to deny the truth of this Sufic comment on the above Tradition.

for the slave, and by "slave" the Folk mean the world from its zenith beneath the Throne to its nadir at the nethermost fringe of creation, that is, all that started into existence at the word "Bel", all that is "other". So realize, my brother, thine own attributes and look with the eye of the Heart at the beginning of thine existence when it came forth from nothingness; for when thou hast truly realized thine attributes, He will increase thee with His.

'One of thine attributes is pure nothingness, which belongeth unto thee and unto the world in its entirety. If thou acknowledge thy nothingness, He will increase thee with His Being. . . .

'Extinction also is one of thine attributes. Thou art already extinct, my brother, before thou art extinguished and naught before thou art annihilated. Thou art an illusion in an illusion and a nothingness in a nothingness. When hadst thou Existence that thou mightest be extinguished? Thou art *as a mirage in the desert that the thirsty man taketh to be water until he cometh unto it and findeth it to be nothing, and where he thought it to be, there findeth he God.*¹ Even so, if thou wert to examine thyself, thou wouldst find it to be naught, and there wouldst thou find God, that is, thou wouldst find God instead of finding thyself, and there would be naught left of thee but a name without a form. Being in itself is God's, not thine; if thou shouldst come to realize the truth of the matter, and to understand what is God's through stripping thyself of all that is not thine, then wouldst thou find thyself to be as the core of an onion. If thou wouldst peel it, thou peekest off the first skin, and then the second, and then the third, and so on, until there is nothing left of the onion. Even so is the slave with regard to the Being of the Truth.

'It is said that Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah met one of the Gnostics and asked him of his state, and he replied: "I have trod the path of obedience and have not sinned since God created me," whereupon she said: "Alas, my son, thine existence is a sin wherewith no other sin may be compared."

'Tread then, my brother, the path of those who realize the Oneness and affirm not Being for any but God, for if one of the Folk affirm Being for himself, he is guilty of idolatry. But the generality cannot escape from affirming the existence of other than God, though in doing so they affirm all evils.

¹ Qoran, XXIV, 39.

'Life is not one of thine attributes, for thou art dead in the form of the living, even as a possessed madman who claimeth to be someone that he is not. But if thou wast brought before thy Lord, and threw down thy body even as the body of thy father Adam, He would breathe into thee of His Spirit and create thee in His Form and then mightest thou say without wrong: "I am Alive," having realized thy deadness, whereas previously, in attributing Life unto thyself and giving thyself an independent existence thou wast contending with thy Lord.

'Another attribute of the slave is deafness. Thou art now deaf, O slave, and Hearing is not in thy nature. God is the Hearer, and it is by attributing this faculty unto thyself that thou art deaf. Though thou hast ears, thou hearest not. If thou couldst hear, then wouldst thou hear the Discourse of God at every time and in every state, for He hath not ceased speaking. But where is thy hearing of this Discourse, and where is thine understanding of this Speech? Nay, thou art deaf and art still in the fold of nothingness; but if thou camest out into Being, then wouldst thou hear the Discourse of the All-Worshipped, and if thou couldst hear, then wouldst thou answer. Yet how shouldst thou answer, seeing that dumbness is one of thy qualities? How comest thou to claim Speech which is one of the Attributes of thy Lord? If thou couldst indeed speak, then wouldst thou avail as a teacher, but no one sitteth at the feet of the dumb. If thou wouldst realize thy dumbness, He would increase thee with His Speech, and thou wouldst come to speak with the Speech of God and wouldst hold converse with God, so that thy hearing would be the Hearing of God and what thou wouldst hear would be all from God.

'Blindness, O slave, is another of thine attributes. If thou couldst see, thou wouldst behold His Name *the Outwardly Manifest*, but now thou seest only appearances. Where is thy vision of the Manifestation of the Truth, when things other than Him are clearer in thy sight? Far be it from Him that there should be any veil over His Manifestation!¹ It is simply that blindness, thine attribute, hath overcome thee, and thou hast become blind although thou hast eyes, all through attributing Sight unto thyself. But if thou wouldst realize thy blindness and then seek to draw nigh unto Him through such actions as

¹ For the Tradition here referred to, see above p. 130, note 2.

His Good Pleasure accepteth from thee, then He will be thy Hearing and thy Sight, and when He is thy Hearing and thy Sight, then wilt thou hear only Him and see only Him, for thou wilt be seeing Him with his Sight and hearing Him with His Hearing.

'Consider well thine attribute of blindness, and meditate on the wisdom that lieth in attributing it to thyself, and then there will appear upon thee the rays of Sight. Then wilt thou hear what thou heardst not and see what thou sawest not, but this cannot be but by knowing thyself and meditating upon the nothingness that is thine by rights.

'It is God who hath manifested things through His Own Manifestation in them, even as one of the Gnostics hath said:

'Thou didst manifest Thyself in things when Thou didst create them.

And lo! In them the veils are lifted from off Thy Face.

Thou didst cut man off as a piece from Thy Very Self, and he is neither joined to Thee, nor is he separate from Thee.'^{1, 2}

Ibn 'Ashir formulates 'proofs' of God's Eternity as follows:

'If Eternity were not of necessity His Attribute, then must He needs be ephemeral, subject to change and vicissitude. If extinction were possible, then Eternity would be banished.'

The Shaikh comments: 'In each demonstration he saith: "If so and so were not the case, then so and so would be the case," after the manner of the logicians, and this is suitable for boys who are beginning to learn the doctrine of Islam, but as for the gnostics, who are firm-fixed in the station of face-to-face vision, they dally not with any such teaching as this, being ashamed before God to speak in these terms, let alone to imagine the existence of phase and vicissitude in the Divinity—nay, this is impossible for the brains of the gnostics, and it can find no place in their intelligences where it might be received. Such is the certainty unto which they have attained that they use not logical proof and demonstration even by

¹ 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī's quotation from his own 'Ainiyyah in his *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ch. XXIII (opening).

² *Minaḥi*, pp. 39-45.

way of instruction, inasmuch as they are robed with the raiment of nearness in the presence of direct contemplation.

'They understand proof in another sense,¹ however, as for example: if extinction which is pure nothingness, were possible, Pure Being, Eternity's intimate attribute,² would be banished. Thus would Eternity be bereft of That which is Eternal, inasmuch as we had spoken of nothingness in Its Presence, whereas not only relative being but also nothingness vanisheth in that Noble Presence. God was, and there was no nothingness and no being with His Being.

'As to pure nothingness, if thou shouldst examine it after thou hadst conceived it, thou wouldst find therein a Truth of His Truths, since no truth is empty of the Truth of the Essence. Even so is the Essence named the Truth of Truths. Thus every impossibility hath, underlying it, a Divine Truth such as is not currently conceived of by men, and that Truth is to be understood from His Saying *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God*.³ Things lie hidden in their opposites, and but for the existence of opposites, the Opposer would have no manifestation.

'None understandeth what I have just said save him who hath realized the Truth of the Oneness in the Essence and all that this Truth implieth. He that is veiled may take the

¹ Ibn 'Ashir's logic is addressed merely to the reason. But the Shaikh is now referring to supra-rational argument which is addressed to the Intellect and which is intended to provoke a sudden intuitive glimpse of the truth. This intention lies behind most mystic formulations, especially of the kind which are quoted in this and the following chapters. If the path be represented as the opening of a series of doors, the 'proofs' which the Shaikh is speaking of are keys which the spiritual Master gives—key after key—to the disciple; and in the 'Alawī Tāriqah, as no doubt in other orders, the saying: 'When the door has been opened, throw away the key' is well known. This saying is never meant to be followed too rigidly, for some keys will open more than one door and must be treasured; but at least it serves to show that the attitude of the mystics towards their own formulations is very different from that of the dogmatic theologians towards theirs, not to speak of the philosophers.

² Being is in a sense the 'content' of Eternity and Infinity, and the word 'pure' is a reminder that although in expressing relative truth a distinction may be made between Being and nothingness, in the Ultimate Truth Being is the absolute Positive which precludes all negativity whatsoever, just as Eternity is the Absolute Present which precludes all beginning and end, past and future, and Infinity is the Absolute Totality which precludes all notion not only of 'more' but also of 'less.'

³ Even by turning one's attention towards 'nothingness' one is inevitably turning one's attention towards God.

Oneness to mean that God is One in that His Essence is not composed, or in that there is no essence like unto It. He perceiveth not that the Oneness refuseth to have the least thing co-existent with it.

'Count not this world as a thing nor believe that it hath otherness or that it is alien to the Divine Presence, for it is no less than one of Its Manifestations, one of Its Secrets, one of Its Lights. *God is the Light of the Heavens and of the earth.*¹

By way of commentary on this last verse, he follows it with another passage from the Qoran: *Thus did We show unto Abraham the dominion of the Heavens and of the earth, that he might be of those possessing certainty. When the night grew dark upon him, he beheld a planet, and said: 'This is my Lord'. Then, when it set, he said: 'I love not things which set.'*

*And when he saw the moon uprising, he said: 'This is my Lord.' Then when it set, he said: 'Unless my Lord lead me, I must needs become one of the folk who have gone astray.' And when he saw the sun uprising, he said: 'This is my Lord. This is greatest.' Then when it set, he said: 'O my people, verily I am innocent of all that ye place beside God. Verily I have turned my face towards Him who created the Heavens and the earth.'*²

'He did not say *This is my Lord* by way of making comparisons but he spake thus in utter affirmation of God's Transcendence, when there was revealed unto him the Truth of all Truths that is indicated in the noble verse: *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God.* He informed his people of this Truth that they might show piety unto God in respect of each thing. All this was on account of what was revealed unto him of the *dominion of the Heavens and the earth*, so that he found the Truth of the Creator existent in every created thing.³ Then he wished to impart unto others the knowledge to which he had attained, but he saw that their hearts were turned away from

¹ Qoran XXIV, 35

² Qoran VI, 75-9.

³ Elsewhere (*Unmūdḥaj*, p. 11) he quotes the verses:

'Thou didst show Thyself in other than Thee unto mine eyes
Which saw not the other, but rejoiced in Thee Alone.
Even so before me did the Friend invert his glance
When he beheld the light of the planet, moon and sun.'

('Umar ibn al-Fārid, *Kāfiyyah* 11. 45-6.)

the pure doctrine of Oneness for which God had singled him out, so he said: *O my people, verily I am innocent of all that ye place beside God.*¹

The words *I love not things that set* he explains as follows in another passage:

'Albeit the Truth appear unto His slaves in some forms, yet is He Jealous on behalf of His other forms of manifestation wherein they are unmindful of Him, for the limited form unto which they attach themselves is very often of the most fleeting transitoriness. . . . Abraham was not willing to abide with God in some fleeting forms without recognizing Him in all, and therefore he said: *I love not things which set*, that is, *I like not to know God in one thing apart from another lest with the disappearance of that thing I should forget Him*. Nay, *I have turned my face*, and wheresoe'er I turn my face, there is the Beauty of God.

'Now Abraham incurred a certain preference for one of his sons, and God tried him for it with an order to sacrifice him, and Abraham showed his obedience, thus proving his sincerity.'²

'Elsewhere he says: "*It is His Will that thou shouldst know Him in what He will, not in what thou wilt, so go as He goeth, nor seek to lead the way. If thou knewest Him in the Essence, thou wouldst not deny Him in the manifestations thereof. It is His Will that thou shouldst truly know Him, not merely by hearsay.*"

'The Outwardly Manifest is veiled by naught but the strength of the manifestations, *so be present with Him, nor be veiled from Him by that which hath no being apart from Him*. Stop not short at the illusion of forms, nor have regard unto the outward appearance of receptacles.

'*Do not know Him only in His Beauty, denying what cometh unto thee from His Majesty,*³ but be deeply grounded

¹ *Minaḥ*, pp. 46-8.

² *Minaḥ*, p. 71.

³ Just as the Divine Beauty, being the Archetype of expansion, presides over all outward manifestation, the Divine Majesty presides over the inverse process of contraction, that is, of the reabsorption of all created things in the Essence. In his chapter on Majesty in *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* (ch. 24), Jīlī gives a list of the Names Majestic (*Al-Asmā' al-Jalāliyyah*), amongst which are *Al-*

in all the states, and consider Him well in opposites. Do not know Him in expansion only, denying Him in contraction, neither know Him only when He vouchsafeth, denying Him when He withholdeth, for such knowledge is but a veneer. It is not knowledge born of realization.¹

He illustrates these remarks later with regard to the symbolism of the Pilgrimage. Having mentioned that the circumambulation round the Ka'bah signifies being overwhelmed in the Presence of the Oneness, he says that Šafā and Marwah, the two rocks² outside the Holy Mosque, signify respectively the Beauty and the Majesty.

'The passage of the Gnostics to and fro between these two stations is even as the rocking of the babe in the cradle. It is the Hand of Divine Care which moveth them this way and that, and protecteth them in both states, so that they suffer no trial therefrom, inasmuch as they have already, in virtue of their circumambulation, been overwhelmed in the Presence of the Oneness and have become even as a piece of It. Thus neither Majesty nor Beauty affecteth them inwardly, being already within them, whereas to other than them each is a trial. We try you both with evil and with good.³ For the gnostic the Divine Majesty is none other than the Divine Beauty, and thus doth he delight in them both together. Our Shaikh Sidi Muḥammad al-Būzīdī would often say in moments of suffering "My Majesty is One with My Beauty" and thou wouldst see him even more radiantly happy and more overflowing in wisdom

Qābid (He who contracteth), *Al-Mumīt* (the Slayer), *Al-Mu'id* (the Bringer-back, the Re-integrator, or the Transformer), *Al-Wārith* (the Inheritor).

The Divine Beauty displays the world as a symbol of God, whereas the Divine Majesty reveals the limitations of the world inasmuch as it is merely a symbol, and by inheriting 'the reeds out of the mat' (see p. 135, note 5) It finally reduces it to nothing. It is in this sense that all imperfections, all decay, all sufferings, all evils, which are simply phases of a gradual demonstration that 'there is no he but He', may be said to come from the Majesty. They come more directly from the protective shell of time in which this world is wrapped and which serves as a 'filtre' to the action of Majesty. Without this shield there could be no evil, for all appearance of other than God would be reduced to nothing in an instant.

¹ *Mināk*, pp. 29-30.

² See above, p. 96, note 3.

³ Qoran, XXI, 35.

than when he was in a phase of Beauty. At one time he was smitten with such agony that one of his legs and one of his arms were paralysed, and when we came unto him, full of sorrow, the first words he spake unto us were: "Since I entered upon the Path I have not found an expression of Truth more eloquent than this: I slept for part of this blessed night, and on waking I touched my arm which is paralysed with the hand of the arm which I can move, and I supposed that it was something other than myself, for being lifeless it did not feel my touch. So I took it to be a foreign body, and I called out to the people of the house to light me a lamp, saying: "There is a snake here with me. I have hold of it." Then when they lit the lamp I found the hand of one of my arms clutching the other, and no snake with me at all nor indeed anything other than myself, so I said: "Glory be to God! This is an example of the illusion that befalleth the seeker ere he hath attained unto Gnosis." "See then, my brother, the condition of the Folk, how they delight in God's Majesty inasmuch as they are with Him at all times, not with the manifestations of either Majesty or Beauty, but looking upon expansion and contraction even as they look upon night and day (*We have made the night as a covering and the day for livelihood*¹), two phases which are necessary for the bodily form, contraction being the attribute of the flesh and expansion that of the Spirit. *God it is who contracteth and expandeth.*² Now since the Gnostic is with Him who contracteth, not with the contraction itself, and with Him who expandeth, not with the expansion itself, he is active rather than passive and hath thus become as if naught had befallen him. Be then, O seeker, with God, and all shall be with thee, following thy command. Even so will that which for others is as the fire of Hell become a Paradise for thee, inasmuch as the Hand of Mercy and Grace and Solicitude rocketh thee to and fro, taking care that thou shouldst know no pain, and that thou shouldst want for nothing. Let the Station seek thee: seek it not thou,³ since it was created for thee, not thou for it. Be

¹ Qoran, LXXVIII, 11.

² Qoran, II, 245.

³ He is referring to purity of intention. It is on God exclusively that all spiritual aspirations must be concentrated. In the same sense Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah said: *Al-Jār thumma 'd-Dār*, 'the Neighbour first, then His House.'

turned unto God, welcoming all that cometh unto thee from him. Busy thyself with naught but let everything busy itself with thee, and do thou busy thyself with proclaiming the Infinite and saying *there is no god but God*, utterly independent therein of all things, until thou comest to be the same in either state, and art at Šafā even as thou art at Marwah. Let Perfection (*Kamāl*) be thine attribute, which is Beatitude in both Majesty and Beauty.¹

In another passage, after quoting the following verses by Al-Ĥarrāq:²

The sum of quests is in Thy Loveliness.
All else we count not worth a glance.³
Nay, when we look we see that naught is there
Beside Thy Wondrous Countenance.

he comments: 'The Gnostic hath not Gnosis if he know not God from every standpoint and in whatever direction he turneth. The Gnostic hath only one direction, and that is towards the Truth Itself. *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God*, that is, *wheresoe'er ye turn* your senses towards sensible things or your intelligences towards intelligible things or your imaginations towards imaginable things, *there is the Face of God*. Thus in every *ain* (where) there is '*ain*,⁴ and all is *lā ilāha illā 'Llāh* (there is no god but God).

'In *lā ilāha illā 'Llāh* all being is comprised, that is, Universal Being and particular being, or Being and that which is metaphorically said to exist, or the Being of the Truth and the being of creation. The being of creation cometh under *lā ilāha* which meaneth that all save God is naught (*bāḥil*),⁵ that is, denied, not to be affirmed, and the being of the Truth cometh

¹ *Minaḥ*, pp. 283-5.

² Muḥammad al-Ĥarrāq (d. 1845), a disciple of the Shaikh Ad-Darqāwī.

³ A variant of 'We have only to gaze, naught else' which is a translation of this half line as it stands in Wardiff's edition of the poem at p. 195 of *Bughyat al-Mushtāq* (Bulaq 1881).

⁴ This highly synthetic word means 'eye', 'fountain', 'self', 'origin', and, as here, in a synthesis of all, 'the Divine Essence'.

⁵ An echo of the Tradition which he quotes elsewhere (*Al-Qaul al-Ma'rūf*, p. 51): 'The truest word that poet spake is: "Are not all things naught save God?"' (Bukhārī, *Manāqib al-Ansār*, 26). The poet in question is Labīd.

under *illā 'Llāh*. Thus all evils come under the first half, and all that can be praised cometh under the second half.

'All being is comprised in the affirmation of Oneness (*lā ilāha illa 'Llāh*), and thou must comprise it also in naming the noblest of the slaves (in saying *Muhammadun Rasūlu 'Llāh*, Muhammad is the Apostle of God).

'This second testification compriseth the three worlds: *Muhammad* denoteth the World of the Kingdom, that is, the sensible world, and the reference to his Apostleship is a reference to the World of the Dominion, the inner world of the secrets of abstract conceptions, and this is mediate between the ephemeral and the Eternal; and the Name of Divinity pointeth unto the World of the Domination, the Sea from which both sense and conception are brought forth.

'*Rasūl* (apostle, messenger) is indeed the mediator between the ephemeral and the Eternal, since without him existence would be brought to nothing; for if the ephemeral meeteth the Eternal, the ephemeral vanisheth and the Eternal remaineth.

'When the Apostle was placed in his exact relation unto both, then was the world ordered, for outwardly he is a lump of clay, and inwardly he is the Caliph of the Lord of the Worlds.

'In short, the meaning of the affirmation of Oneness is not complete, nor is its benefit all-embracing, without the affirmation of Oneness in Essence, Qualities and Actions. This affirmation is to be understood from the saying *Muhammadun Rasūlu 'Llāh*.

'When one of the Gnostics saith *lā ilāha illa 'Llāh*, he findeth in reality, not merely metaphorically, nothing but *Allāh*. So do not be content, my brother, with the mere utterance of this noble sentence, for then thy tongue alone, naught else, will benefit, and this is not the end in view. The essential is to know God as He is. "God was and there was naught with Him. He is now even as He was." Know this, and thou wilt rest from the burdens of negation, and naught will remain for thee but the affirmation, so that when thou speakest thou wilt say: *Allāh, Allāh*. But now thy Heart is burdened and its vision is weak. Ever since thou wert created thou hast been saying *lā ilāha . . .* but when will that negation take effect? Nay, it will not take effect, for it is merely a negation with the tongue. If thou

wouldst make denial with thine Intellect, that is, with thy Heart and thine innermost Secret, then the whole world would be banished from thy sight, and though wouldst find God instead of finding thyself, let alone thy fellow creatures. The Folk have denied the existence of other than God and they have found rest and have entered His Fortress, never to leave It, whereas thy negations know no ending. . . .

'Other than God will not vanish at a mere "no" upon the tongue, nor yet through the eye of faith and certainty but only when thou comest unto the station of direct perception and face-to-face vision; and verily thy Lord is the Uttermost End¹, unto which all cometh. Then wilt thou need no negation just as thou wilt need no affirmation, for He whose Being is Necessary is already affirmed before thou affirmest Him, and that of which the being is impossible is already naught before thou negatest it. Wilt thou not frequent a physician who will teach thee the art of obliteration, that thou mayest once and for all obliterate everything apart from God, and who will then bring thee into the presence of sobriety where thou wilt find naught but God? Then wilt thou live with God and die with God and be raised with God and dwell *in the abode of truthfulness at the court of an Almighty King*;² and all this will be in virtue of thy remembrance and thy Gnosis that *there is no god but God*. Now thou knowest only the mere phrase, and the furthest extent of thy knowledge is that thou sayst: "None is rightly worshipped but God." This is the knowledge of the generality, but what hath it to do with the knowledge of the Folk? Would that thou hadst known the knowledge of the elect before knowing what thou now knowest, for it is this thy present knowledge which putteth thee off from the other. Wilt thou not deny all upon the hand of a Shaikh eminently practised in the Truth, until there is naught left for thee but God, not merely by way of faith and certainty, but by direct perception? Hearsay is not the same as seeing face to face.'³

¹ Qoran, LIII, 42.

² Qoran, LV, 55.

³ *Minah*, pp. 59-62.

Angel.¹ I said: "Indeed, it is above my station. It is the throw of a stone without a thrower." Then the tongue of my state answered, and said: *Thou threwest not when thou threwest, but it was God that threw.*²

'Whenever, in this treatise, I mention one of the names of "other than God", that is on account of the needs of expression. So let not thine imagination conceive "the other" as being truly other, for then wouldst thou miss the good I am seeking to show thee. For verily we bring thee *great tidings*.³ Incline then unto that through which thou mayest be o'erwhelmed in the Reality, and go thou forth from the relative unto the Absolute. Perchance thou wilt understand what is in the Point, though *none understandeth it save the wise*,⁴ and *none meeteth it face to face save him whose destined portion is immeasurably blessed*. . . .⁵

'Whenever I speak of the Point I mean the Secret of the Essence which is named the Oneness of Perception (*Wahdat ash-Shuhūd*), and whenever I speak of the *Alif* I mean the One Who Alone is (*Wāḥid al-Wujūd*)⁶, the Essence Dominical, and whenever I speak of the *Bā'* I mean the ultimate⁷ Manifestation which is termed the Supreme Spirit, after which come the rest of the letters, then single words, then speech in general, all in hierarchy. But the pivot of this book turneth upon the first letters of the alphabet on account of their precedence over the others. *The Foremost are the Foremost, it is they who*

¹ Said by the women of Egypt (Qoran, XII, 31) with reference to Joseph (see p. 96, note 2).

² In the Qoran (VIII, 17) these words are addressed to Muḥammad with reference to his throwing a handful of gravel at the enemy during the Battle of Badr, an act which changed the tide of the battle in favour of the Moslems, who completely defeated a Meccan army three times as large as theirs. This was the first battle of Islam, AD 624.

³ XXXVIII, 67.

⁴ XXIX, 43.

⁵ XLI, 35.

⁶ It is here that he diverges from Jilī, in whose treatise the Point stands for the Divinity in All Its Aspects, whereas the *Alif* is the Spirit of Muḥammad (Jilī quotes the Tradition: 'God created the Spirit of the Prophet from His Essence, and from that Spirit He created the entire Universe') that is, the Supreme Spirit, which for the Shaikh is symbolized by the *Bā'*. But beneath this divergence the doctrine remains the same.

⁷ Ultimate, because this Spirit, which is none other than 'Universal Man', contains the whole Universe.

are brought nigh.¹ These are *Alif* and *Bā'*, and they hold in the Alphabet the place that is held by the *Basmalah* in the Qoran, for together they make up *Ab*² which is one of the Divine Names. By it would Jesus speak unto His Lord, and he used it when he said: "Verily I go unto my Father and your Father", that is, unto my Lord and your Lord. And now, if thou understandest that these two letters have a meaning that thou knewest not, be not amazed at what we shall say of the Point, and the rest of the letters.

'The Point was in its hidden-treasurehood³ before its manifestation of itself as *Alif*, and the letters were obliterate in its secret essence until it manifested the inward outwardly, revealing what had been veiled from sight by donning the various forms of the visible letters; but if thou graspest the truth, thou wilt find naught there but the ink itself, which is what is meant by the Point,⁴ even as one of us hath said:

The letters are the signs of the ink; there is not one,
 Save what the ink hath anointed; their own colour is pure illusion.
 The *ink's* colour it is that hath come into manifest being.
 Yet it cannot be said that the ink hath departed from what it was.
 The inwardness of the letters lay in the ink's mystery,
 And their outward show is through its self-determination.
 They are its determinations, its activities,
 And naught is there but it. Understand thou the parable!
 They are not it; say not, say not that they are it!
 To say so were wrong, and to say "it is they" were raving madness.
 For it was before the letters, when no letter was;
 And it remaineth, when no letter at all shall be.
 Look well at each letter: thou seest it hath already perished
 But for the face of the ink, that is, for the Face of His Essence,
 Unto Whom All Glory and Majesty and Exaltation!

¹ Qoran, LVI, 10-1.

² Father. It may be noted here incidentally how close the *Basmalah* is in reality to the *In Nomine*. The relationship between the two Names of Mercy in Islam, of which the second only is both Divine and human, is comparable to the relationship between the first two Persons of the Christian Trinity, while the Mercy Itself which is implied in the *Basmalah*, being from both *Ar-Rakmān* and *Ar-Rakīm*, that is, 'proceeding from the Father and the Son', is none other than the Holy Ghost.

³ Referring to the Holy Tradition: 'I was a Hidden Treasure and I wished to be known; and so I created the world.'

⁴ The point and the ink are interchangeable as symbols in that writing is made up of a series of points of ink.

Even thus the letters, for all their outward show, are hidden,
Being overwhelmed by the ink, since their show is none other
than its.

The letter addeth naught to the ink, and taketh naught from it,
But revealeth its integrality in various modes,
Without changing the ink. Do ink and letter together make two?
Realize then the truth of my words: no being is there
Save that of the ink, for him whose understanding is sound;
And wheresoe'er be the letter, there with it is always its ink.
Open thine intellect unto these parables and heed them!¹

'If thou hast understood how all the letters are engulfed in the Point, then wilt thou understand how all the books are engulfed in the sentence, the sentence in the word, the word in the letter, for we can say with truth: no letter, no word, and no word, no book. The word hath indeed no existence save through the existence of the letter. Analytical differentiation proceedeth from synthetic integration, and all is integrated in the Oneness of Perception which is symbolized by the Point. This is *the Mother* of every book. *God effaceth and confirmeth what He will, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.*²

'The Point is essentially different from the letters. *There is naught like unto Him and He is the Hearer, the Seer.*³ Even so the Point, unlike the other signs, is not subject to the limitation of being defined. It transcendeth all that is to be found in the letters by way of length and shortness and protuberance, so that the sense cannot grasp it either visually or aurally as it graspeth the letters. Its difference from them is understood, but its presence in them is unknown save unto him whose sight is like iron⁴ or who giveth ear with full intelligence⁵, for although the letters are its qualities, the Quality encompasseth not the Essence, not having the universality which is the Essence's own. The Essence hath incomparability as Its prerogative whereas the Qualities create comparisons.

'And yet to make a comparison is in reality the same as affirming incomparability by reason of the oneness of the ink,

¹ 'Abd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī, *Dīwān al-Haqā'iq*, p. 435. (Cairo, 1889.)

² Qoran, XIII, 39.

³ XLII, 11.

⁴ L, 22.

⁵ L, 37.

for though the letters are comparable each to other, this comparability doth not belie the incomparability of the ink in itself, neither doth it belie the oneness of the ink which is to be found in each letter. Here lieth the ultimate identity between striking comparisons and denying the possibility of comparison, for wherever there be any question of comparison, it is always in reality the ink itself which is compared with itself. *He it is who is God in Heaven and God on earth.*¹ Howsoever and wheresoever He be, He is God, so let not that which thou seest of Him in the earth of comparability prevent thee from conceiving of Him as He is in the Heaven of incomparability, for all things are made of both incomparability and comparability. *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God.* This is in virtue of the general Attribute which overfloweth from the Infinite Riches of the Point on to the utter poverty of the letters. But as to that which belongeth unto the Point's Own Mysterious Essence, it is not possible that it should undergo the least manifestation in the letters, nor can any letter, either in its form or its meaning, carry the burden of the Point's innermost characteristics.

'Seest thou not that if thou tracest some of the letters of the alphabet, as for example: **ث ت ب** thou wilt find for each letter another letter that resembleth it: **ت** is like **ب**, for example, and **ث** is like **ت**. Then if thou wishest to pronounce one of these letters, thou wilt find a sound that fitteth it exactly, whereas the Point hath no exteriorization that so fitteth it. If thou seekest to utter its truth, thou sayest *nuqlat^m*, and this utterance will force thee to submit unto letters which have nothing to do with the essence of the point—*nūn, qāf, lā'* and *tā'*. It is clear, then, that the Point eludeth the grasp of words. Even so is there no word that can express the Secret Essence of the Creator. Therefore whenever the Gnostic seeketh to denote the Divine incomparability in words, that is, when he seeketh to convey what is meant by the Plenitude of the Essence with all Its Attributes, there cometh forth from his mouth an utterance which goeth far wide of its mark by reason of the limitations of language.

'The Point was in its principal state of utterly impenetrable

¹ Qoran, XLIII, 84.

secrecy¹ where there is neither separation nor union, neither after nor before, neither breadth nor length, and all the letters were obliterate in its hidden Essence, just as all the books, despite the divergence of their contents, were obliterate in the letters. As to this reduction of books to letters, it can be perceived by all who have the least intuition. Examine a book, and thou wilt find that naught appeareth on its pages to convey their sense but the twenty-eight letters,² which in their manifestation of each word and meaning will be forever reassembling in new formations as the words and meanings vary, until God *inherit the earth and all who are on it*³ and *all things come unto God*.⁴ Then will the letters return unto their principal centre where nothing is save the Essence of the Point.

'The Point was in its impenetrable secrecy with the letters all obliterate in its Essence, while the tongue of each letter petitioned the length, shortness, depth or other qualities that its truth required. Thus the promptings unto utterance were set in motion according to the demands of the Point's attributes which lay hidden in its Essence. Then was determined the first manifestation.

'The Point's first manifestation, its first definable appearance, was in the *Alif*, which came into being in the form of incomparability rather than of comparability, so that it might exist qualitatively in every letter while remaining essentially aloof from them. Moreover, thou shouldst know that the appearance of the *Alif* from the Point was not caused, but the Point overflowed with it. Thus was the primal *Alif* not traced by the pen,⁵ nor was it dependent upon it, but sprung from the outward urge of the Point in its principal centre. Whenever

¹ 'Amā, literally 'blindness', with reference to the blindness of 'other' than It, inasmuch as It is pure, unshared Perception (*Walīdat ash-Shuhūd*).

² It must be remembered that the purpose of a mystical treatise is always eminently 'practical', and the practical purpose of this one is in fact indicated in its title (see p. 148). The Shaikh is here inviting his disciples to transpose this operation to the book of Nature in such a way as to see there the 'letters' rather than the 'words'.

³ Qoran, XIX, 40.

⁴ XLII, 53.

⁵ The pen symbolizes the Supreme Pen after which Sūrah LXVIII of the Qoran is named. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (*Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ch. 47), says: 'The Prophet said: "The first thing which God created was the Intellect" and he also said: "The first thing which God created was the Pen" Thus the Pen is the first Intellect, and they are two aspects of the Spirit of Muḥammad.'

there streamed from it an overflow, there was *Alif*, naught else. It dependeth not upon the pen for its existence, nor needeth it any help therefrom in virtue of its straightness and its transcending all that is to be found in the other letters by way of crookedness or protuberance or other particularity. *He is not questioned as to what He doth, but they are questioned.*¹ As to the other letters, they need the movement of the pen upon them, nor could any of them have appearance except by means of it, on account of their concavity, roundness, and whatever else characterizeth them.

'It is true that the *Alif* also may be made to appear by means of the pen, while yet remaining independent of it and without any disparagement to the transcendence of its station, inasmuch as the pen hath its length and straightness from the *Alif*, nay, it is the *Alif*, whose penned appearance is thus through itself for itself.

'The *Alif* is a symbol of the One who Alone is, of Him whose Being no being precedeth. Thus the appearance of the Point as *Alif* is what is called "Firstness". Before its manifestation it was not so qualified, even as it was not qualified by "Lastness". *He is the First and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden.*

If the unique Firstness of the *Alif* be confirmed,² then of necessity must Lastness also be reserved for it alone.³ Thus doth it declare unto the other letters *Unto Me is your return*,⁴ one and all. Yea, *unto God come all things*.

"As to the Outward Manifestation of *Alif* in the letters, it is easily perceived. Consider the question well, and thou wilt find that there is no letter whose extension in space is not derived from the *Alif*: the *Hā'* for example is nothing other than a hunchbacked *Alif*, whereas the *Mīm* is a circular *Alif*, and such is the manifestation of the *Alif* according to the dictates of its wisdom, in all the letters, but *the sight attaineth not unto Him*, and this is the meaning of the Inward Hiddenness, for it is clear that no one can perceive the existence of

¹ Qoran, XXI, 23.

² 'The *Alif*, unlike all other letters, is only one degree distant from the Point, for two points together make an *alif*' (Jili, *Al-Kahf wa 'r-Raqim*, p. 7).

³ In the inverse process of reintegration.

⁴ Qoran, XXXI, 15.

the *Alif* in the circle of the *Mīm* except after much practise, and naught hindereth us from perceiving it but its roundness, that is, its manifestation in a quality that we do not recognize. It itself is the veil over itself. . . .

'The Outward Manifestation of the Truth may be stronger in some visible forms than in others, and this is not difficult to see for him who looketh. Canst thou not detect the *Alif* in some letters as not in others? Not far from its form is the form of the *Lām*, for example; and there is in the *Bā'* of the *Basmalah* that which revealeth the manifestation of the *Alif* therein. But few are they who can easily detect it in the other letters. As to the generality, they are ignorant of the rank of the *Alif*; some know it in its Firstness and are ignorant of it in its Lastness, and there are some who know it in both; but whoso knoweth it not in every letter, small and large, long and short, early in the alphabet and late, verily he seeth not aright, and his perception faileth. If thou hast understood that the *Alif* is manifest in every letter, tell me whether this causeth it to fall short of the dignity of its incomparability wherein it retaineth ever that which belongeth unto it alone. Nay, the essential truth of the *Alif* remaineth as it is, and I see no short-coming on account of its manifestation, which I see rather as one of its perfections. The short-coming—though God knoweth best—is in him who would confine it to one quality, not allowing it to reach out unto another, but constraining it, limiting it, refusing to know it, and reducing it to comparability by making of it a thing like other things. The truth of the knowledge which befitteth its station is that thou shouldst see the *Alif* manifest in every word of every book. All is *Alif*. . . .

'The letter *Bā'* is the first form wherein the *Alif* appeared, and thus it manifested itself therein as never elsewhere. "God created Adam in His Image";¹ and by Adam it is the First Man² who is meant, and he is the Spirit of Being. It was in virtue of his having been created in His Image that He made him His

¹ Bukhārī, *Isti'dhān*, 1; and most other canonical books of Traditions.

² If God created the human being in His Image, He created *a priori* in His Image man's spiritual prototype, Universal Man, here called 'the First Man', who was the first created thing. This prototype is what the *Bā'* represents; it is only remotely, and by extension, that *Bā'* can be said to represent Adam in the sense of earthly man, who was the final outcome of creation.

representative on earth, and ordered the Angels to prostrate themselves to him.

'Had not His Beauty shone in Adam's countenance,
The Angels never had bowed down prostrate before him.'¹

Was their prostration to other than Him? Nay, God pardoneth not him who is guilty of idolatry.

'The *Bā'* of the *Basmalah* differeth from the ordinary *Bā'* both in form as in function. *Verily thou art of a tremendous nature*;² and its greatness is none other than the greatness of the *Alif*. *Whoso obeyeth the Apostle obeyeth God*.³ Seest thou not that elsewhere the *Bā'* is not lengthened, whereas in the *Basmalah* it is lengthened, and its length is none other than the elided *Alif*. *Bism* (بسم) was originally *bi-ism* (باسم), and then the *Alif* in *ism*⁴ left its place vacant and appeared in the *Bā'*, which thus took on the form of the *Alif*, just as it fulfilled the function of the *Alif*. Even so did the Prophet say: "I have a time wherein only my Lord sufficeth to contain me", and thou seest that the *Bā'* hath a time, namely in the *Basmalah*, wherein only the *Alif* sufficeth to contain it, both in its form and in its Point⁵, albeit the Point of the *Alif* is above it, whereas the Point of the *Bā'* is beneath it. Indeed the *Alif* is none other than the Point itself which is an eye that wept or a drop that gushed forth and which in its downpour was named *Alif*, without any detriment unto itself in virtue of the Integrity of the *Alif* and its flawless Transcendence wherein the Point remaineth in its Eternal Incomparability. *Verily we stand over them Irresistible*.⁶ Full descent only took place at the manifestation of *Alif* as *Bā'*, followed by the other letters. If its form had been identical with that of the *Alif*, the *Bā'* would have lost its distinctive characteristics. But the *Bā'* is *Bā'* and the *Alif* is *Alif*: the *Alif* was manifested spontaneously, of its own free will, whereas manifestation was forced upon the *Bā'*.

¹ Jili, 'Ainiyyah.

² Qoran, LXVIII, 4 (addressed to Muhammad).

³ Qoran, IV, 80.

⁴ An initial vowel is always written with *alif*.

⁵ In many manuscripts of the Qoran the *hamzah* on an initial *alif* is indicated by a large dot as may be seen in plate IV. In plate III this dot is replaced by a star.

⁶ Qoran, VII, 127.

Hence the necessity of the difference between its form and that of the *Alif*, lest we should deny the latency of *Alif* in the other letters,¹ or lest we should think that freedom is altogether incompatible with obligation.²

'Moreover the Point, which is above the *Alif*, is beneath the *Bā'*, so let this be for us an illustration of the truth that the things of the lower worlds are manifestations of the Point even as are the things of the higher worlds, nor let the manifestation of the Point in the Essence prevent our recognition of it in the Qualities. The Prophet said: "If ye lowered a man by a rope unto the nethermost earth, ye would light upon God."³ Even so doth the Point beneath the *Bā'* signify the effacement that underlieth all things. *Everything perisheth but his Face. He it is who is God in Heaven and God on earth.* The Point's being above the *Alif* instructeth us that the *Alif* is its state of manifestation; but the *Bā'* is its veil, and therefore doth it lie beneath the *Bā'*, like the hidden treasure beneath the wall that Al-Khidr feared would collapse.⁴

'When *Bā'* understood its true relation unto *Alif*, it fulfilled what was incumbent upon it both by definition and obligation.⁵ It submitteth unto its definition by cleaving unto the other letters,⁶ inasmuch as they are of its kind, unlike the *Alif* which standeth aloof from the letters when it precedeth them, though they attain unto it as a Finality; and verily *thy Lord is the Uttermost End.*'

¹ But for the mediation of the *Bā'* of the *Basmalah*, which on the one hand clearly suggests the *Alif* while on the other hand it is distinguished from it precisely by the lower curve which joins it to the other letters, it would not have been possible for us to see the *Alif* in the other letters. Otherwise expressed, but for the mediation of the Word made flesh, the latent Divinity in men could never be brought out.

² Lest we should think that the coexistence of free will and predestination in man is impossible. The *Bā'* is in fact an image of this coexistence, for its resemblance to the *Alif* symbolizes man's relative free will, whereas its difference from the *Alif* symbolizes man's predestination.

³ A comment, by the Prophet, on the verse: *He is the First and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden* (Tirmidhi, *Tafsir Sūrat al-Hadid*; Ibn Hanbal, VI, 370).

⁴ A reference to Qoran, XVIII, 77-82.

⁵ Referring to the Prophet's fulfilment of the normal functions of the human being, which were his by definition, and of his apostolic obligations.

⁶ *Bā'* is joined to the letters on either side of it, *Alif* only to a letter that precedes it.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREAT PEACE

It has already been explained¹ that rhythm may serve ritually as a bridge from the perpetual fluctuation of this world or, more particularly, of the soul, to the Immutability of the Infinite World of the Divine Peace. In other words rhythm, like the letter *Bā'* through whose mediation the common letters of the alphabet are reabsorbed into the *Alif*, is a symbol of the Prophet as Universal Man, for he personifies the whole created universe, the macrocosm, which is in fact the bridge between the microcosm, the little world of the individual, and the Metacosm, the Infinite Beyond.

This passage from agitation through rhythm to Peace, from microcosm through macrocosm to Metacosm, from individual through Universal Man to God, is traced out not only in the sacred dance of the 'Alawī-Darqāwī Tarīqah but also in the rosary. In the dance it is the breathing above all which is subjected to the rhythm. The ordinary rhythm of breathing represents the individual, the microcosm, and the sacrifice of the individual rhythms of the dancers to the macrocosmic rhythm of the dance is a mode of 'repentance' or 'asking forgiveness' which is the first formula of the rosary. The rhythm of the dance itself, the rhythm of the universe, corresponds to the second formula of the rosary, the invocation of Blessings upon the Prophet, through whom the soul is de-individualized and universalized. Beyond its aspect of plenitude, this second formula has also an aspect of extinction or emptiness in the Face of the Absolute on to which it opens, and its final words, which are a prayer for Peace, are in one sense analogous to the end of the dance, when the rhythmic breathing 'expires' and the dancers sink to the ground in repose.

The inward concentration, which is the ultimate aim of the dance, corresponds to the third formula of the rosary, the affirmation of the Divine Oneness in Its Infinite Plenitude.

It was explained to a friend of mine by an eminent Moroccan

¹ p. 92.

Darqāwi, Al-Ĥājj Muhammad Būsha'rah of Salé, that the rhythmic breathing of a faqīr during the dance is in fact very comparable to the breathing of a man at the point of death, who has already been half reabsorbed into the greater world from which he came and who breathes in and out to a cosmic rhythm which is far beyond his control. But whereas the dying man is passive and more or less unconscious, the faqīr actively and consciously anticipates his death in a ritual death-agony which symbolises the extinction of all that is not God.

The rhythm to which the breathing is subjected is the rhythm of creation and dissolution, of Beauty and Majesty.¹ Breathing in represents creation, that is, the Outward Manifestation of the Divine Qualities, the flowing of the ink from the *Alif* into the *Bā'* and the other letters of the alphabet; breathing out represents the 'return' of the Qualities to the Essence; the next intake of breath is a new creation,² and so on. The final expiring symbolises the realisation of the Immutability which underlies the illusory vicissitudes of creation and dissolution, the realization of the truth that 'God was and there was naught else beside Him. He is now even as He was.'

Since bodily repose after the sacred dance is only a symbol and not the Reality of the inward Peace which is aimed at, and since this Peace altogether transcends motion and rest, presiding alike over the most violent rhythmic movements and over the ultimate repose from them, Its Presence may be realized as well during the dance itself as after it has ceased. The fullest attainment of inward Peace means the shifting of the consciousness from a secondary or illusory centre to the One True Centre, where the subject is no longer the *Bā'* but the *Alif*, no longer the created being but the Creator. This is in fact what is meant by 'concentration'; it follows therefore that for one who is truly concentrated, the symbolism of breathing is necessarily inverted: breathing in becomes the absorption of all in the Oneness of the Essence, and breathing out is the Manifestation of the Divine Names and Qualities. Here lies the highest significance of the dance rhythm, as also of the second

¹ See p. 142, note 5.

² According to the Qoran, the span of life is a continuous alternation of presence in creation and absence from it, for in sleep the soul is withdrawn from creation, to be re-manifested on waking (VI, 60).

formula of the rosary. To say that beyond his created plenitude Universal Man has an aspect of total extinction means that beyond this extinction he has an aspect of Absolute Plenitude, for his extinction is simply the measure of his capacity to receive. Nothingness is as it were an emptiness of infinite dimensions, and one of the names of Reality is the All-Bountiful.

In the words of the second formula, which is in full: 'O God, overwhelm in Glory our Lord Muhammad, Thy slave and Thy messenger, the unlettered prophet, and his family and companions, and give them Peace', it is the Glory which, from the highest point of view, corresponds to the intake of breath, the overwhelming of all in the Oneness of the Essence, whereas Peace is the relaxation of breathing out, the remanifestation of the Self, not as man but as God, in the sense of the already quoted lines:

After extinction I came out, and I
Eternal now am, though not as I.
Yet who am I, O I, but I?

The Shaikh Ad-Darqāwī quotes Abū Sa'id ibn al-A'rābi¹ as having said when asked of the meaning of extinction (*fanā'*):

'It is that the Infinite Majesty of God should appear unto the slave and make him forget this world and the next with all their states and degrees and stations and all memories of them, extinguishing him both from all outward things and also from his own intelligence and soul, and from his extinction therefrom, and from his extinction from extinction therefrom, inasmuch as he hath been utterly o'erwhelmed in the waters of Infinite Realization.'²

The Shaikh Al-'Alawī says:

'The Gnostics have a death before the general death. The Prophet said: "Die before ye die", and this is the real death, for the other death is but a change of abode. The true meaning of death in the doctrine of the Sufis is the extinction of the slave, that is, his utter effacement and annihilation. The

¹ d. 952. In his youth he was a disciple of Junaid.

² *Ar-Rasā'il ad-Darqāwiyyah*, quire 3, p. 1.

Gnostic may be dead unto himself and unto the whole world, and resurrected in his Lord, so that if thou shouldst ask him of his existence he would not answer thee inasmuch as he hath lost sight of his own individuality. Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī¹ was asked about himself and he said: "Abū Yazīd is dead—May God not have mercy on him!" This is the real death; but if on the Day of Resurrection thou shouldst ask one who hath died only the general death "Who art thou?" he would answer: "I am so-and-so", for his life hath never ceased and he hath never sensed the perfume of death, but hath simply passed on from world to world, and none graspeth the meaning of the real death save him who hath died it. Thus have the Sufis a reckoning before the Day of Reckoning, even as the Prophet said: "Call yourselves to account before ye be called to account."² They laboured in calling themselves to account until they were free to contemplate their Lord, and theirs is a resurrection before the Resurrection.³

The Shaikh continually affirms the spiritual precedence of Prophets over Saints; others have affirmed the superiority of sainthood over prophethood. But the apparent contradiction was resolved once and for all by Ibn 'Arabi:

'If a Prophet maketh an utterance which transcendeth the scope of his function as Law-giver, then he doth so inasmuch as he is a Saint and a Gnostic, for his station as one possessing Gnosis is more universal and perfect than is his station as a Messenger or Lawgiver. Thus if thou hearest any man of God say—or if he is reported as saying—that sainthood is higher than prophethood, his meaning is as we have just explained. Or if he say that the Saint is above the Prophet and the Messenger, he is referring to one person, and meaneth that the Messenger is more universal in virtue of his sainthood than he is in virtue of his apostle-prophethood.⁴ He doth not mean

¹ d. 874.

² Tirmidhī, *Qiyāmah*, 25.

³ *Mināh*, p. 74.

⁴ Elsewhere (*Kalimat Shaihiyyah*) he explains this by remarking that 'apostlehood and prophethood come to an end (with the fulfilment of the mission in question) whereas sainthood knoweth no end.' 'Abd al Ghani an-Nābulusi, in his commentary, distinguishes between the sanctity of the Prophet and the non-Prophet by speaking of the 'sainthood of prophecy' and 'the sainthood of faith'.

take Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī's "We plunged into a sea while the Prophets remained standing on its shores," and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī's "O Companies of Prophets, ye have been given a title, and we have been given that which ye have not been given", and 'Umar ibn al-Fārīd's

'Haste ye to share my Eternal Union by whose Light
The tribe's elders are still but the babes I knew in childhood',
and his

'All those under thy protection desire thee',
Yet I by myself am worth all the rest,'³

and the saying of one of the Gnostics:

"The steps of the Prophets end where those of the Saints begin."⁴ The explanation of these utterances is that the Gnostic hath a time even as the Prophet said: "I have a time wherein only my Lord sufficeth to contain me." Extinction and submersion and annihilation come suddenly upon the Gnostic, so that he goeth out from the sphere of sense and loseth all consciousness of himself, leaving behind all his perceptions, nay, his very existence. Now this annihilation is in the Essence of the Truth, for there floweth down over him from the Holiness of the Divinity a flood which compelleth him to see himself as the Truth's Very Self in virtue of his effacement and annihilation therein. In this state he giveth utterance to such sayings as: "Glory Be to Me!"⁵ and "There is no god but I Alone",⁵ speaking with the Tongue of the Truth, not with his own tongue, and telling of the Essence of the Truth, not of himself. Such are the demands of the extinction which appertaineth unto this station. We are not to understand that these Saints have transcended the degree of the Prophets. Therefore, my brother, whenever thou hearest of any such utterance on the part of the Shaikhs, interpret it as having

¹ *At-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*, l. 760.

² All mystics.

³ *Kāfiyyah*, l. 36.

⁴ Al-Hakīm at-Tirmidhī (see Massignon, *Essai*, p. 292).

⁵ Said by Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī.

been uttered by them in a state of extinction from themselves and of submersion in the Infinity of their Lord.'¹

This last quotation is relatively easy to understand, at any rate in theory. More difficult to conceive is the state of the supreme Saint as compared with that of other men at times when his life has not been interrupted by the re-absorption of all his faculties into the Essence.

With regard to one of the Shaikh Al-Būzīdī's disciples, the Shaikh says: 'One of our brethren was troubled and perplexed by the case of Jacob and the grief which he suffered on account of Joseph, according to the words of the Qoran: *His eyes grew white with blindness for the grief that he was suppressing.*'² He asked me how he could have felt such exceeding sorrow, and how the beauty of Joseph could have diverted his attention from the Beauty of the Truth, and he quoted as an argument the words of Ibn al-Fāriḍ:

'If the Beauty of His Face in Jacob's ears they had sounded,
The beauty of Joseph from Jacob's memory had been banished'³

I humoured him until he had subsided, and then I said to him: 'Jacob's exceeding sorrow was not for the person of Joseph, but because Joseph was for him a place of the Manifestation of the Truth, so that when Joseph was by, Jacob's own presence with God was increased in intensity. The Truth would appear unto Jacob in Joseph even as He appeared unto Moses in Mount Sinai so that Moses could scarce attain unto the Great Intimacy save when he was on the mountain, although God is Present in every place. *He is with you wheresoe'er ye be.*'⁴ Even thus would the Beauty of the Truth manifest Itself unto Jacob in the form of Joseph, so that he could not endure to part with him, for he had become as the orientated sanctuary of his vision of God. Likewise did the Prophet say: 'I saw God in the form of a beardless youth.' Hence also the prostration of the Angels before Adam, for God created him in His Image, and hence also the prostration of some of the Christians unto

¹ *Mināh*, pp. 51-2.

² XII, 84.

³ *Fā'iyyah*, l. 38.

⁴ Qoran, LVII, 4.

Jesus even in his lifetime and their attributing unto him the Attributes of Divinity. All these prostrations were unto God, and unto none other than God, for the Manifestation of His Beauty can be so intense in some forms that the human imperfections are obliterated.

Men of perfect intelligence, the Prophets and the elect of the Saints, know Him who manifesteth Himself in the form, not the form itself, so that their knowledge, far from implying limitation and comparability, is an affirmation of His Transcendence and Incomparability, and when they contemplate Him in any form their vision is attributed unto His Name the Outwardly Manifest.

'Jacob's intimacy with God had been wont to grow exceedingly intense when he beheld his son, and when he lost him direct vision came not so readily unto him. Thus was it that he grieved.

'Thou shouldst know also that although the Truth appeareth unto His slaves in some forms, yet is He Jealous on behalf of those His other forms wherein they are unmindful of Him, for the limited form whereunto they attach themselves is very often of the most fleeting transience. Therefore the Truth trieth those whom He loveth by the sudden disappearance of the form, so that their vision may be deflected from the part unto the whole, as He did with Jacob.'¹

It is clear from this passage that there is no comparison between the intimacy of the Saint even at its lowest degree, and the remoteness of the mere believer. The words: 'When Joseph was by, Jacob's own presence with God was increased in intensity' show that Jacob was always present with God even when Joseph was not there. Similarly, in another passage, with reference to the state of supreme sanctity, the Shaikh speaks of the Divinity 'taking one of His slaves unto Himself and bringing him into His Presence, where sometimes He revealeth Himself unto Him, and sometimes withdraweth from him.'²

That the 'withdrawal' in question is merely as it were a separation within the framework of a union is confirmed a few pages later where, having considered what must and must

¹ *Minali*, pp. 70-1.

² *Minali*, p. 20.

Abu 'l-'Abbās al-Mursī¹ used to pray: 'O Lord, open our inward eyes and illumine our secret parts, and extinguish us from ourselves, and give us subsistence in Thee, not in ourselves.'² This extinction from oneself and subsistence in God are precisely what the Shaikh has termed in a previously quoted passage 'death to creation' and 'resurrection in God.' In summing up all that he tells us about the Supreme Station (*Al-Maqām al-A'lā*), that is, the state of 'the Prophets and the elect of the Saints', one may say that the subsistence in God is Absolute Eternal Infinite Oneness, within the framework of which there is room—if one may seek to express the inexpressible—for relative 'separation' and 'reunion'. Subsistence in God during life on earth will normally be extended as it were in hierarchy throughout the three worlds. As we saw in a previous chapter, this hierarchic subsistence in God is affirmed, in ascending order, by the words *Muhammadun Rasūlu 'Llāh*, and here the possibility of the relative 'separation' within the Absolute Oneness is at its greatest. But when the hierarchy of the three worlds 'melts' into the One World of the Essence, the possibility of even relative 'separation' no longer exists. Moreover this subsistence of 'union' is in a sense always retained even in 'separation', for 'Wheresoe'er be the letter, there with it is always its ink'.

The state of 'extended' subsistence in God, expressed by the words *Muhammadun Rasūlu 'Llāh*, is further defined by the Shaikh as follows:

'When the Gnostic knoweth God in His Essence and Qualities and is drowned in direct vision thereof, this Gnosis should not take him beyond the prescribed bounds, but he maintaineth a deep-rooted integration of his law-abiding outside with his visionary inside. His separation (*farq*) veileth him not from his union (*jam*'),³ nor his union from his separation. He beholdeth directly the Truth within him, while the Law is binding upon him from without.'⁴

Elsewhere he says that spiritual perfection demands 'that

¹ The successor of Abu 'l-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī.

² Quoted by the Shaikh ad-Darqāwī, *Rasā'il*, q. 3, p. 2.

³ He has already 'apologized' for his terminology by quoting Jīlī's: 'He (man) is not joined to Thee, nor is he separate from Thee.'

⁴ *Minaḥi*, p. 31.

one should combine outward stability with inward o'erwhelmedness, so that one is outwardly spiritual effort and inwardly contemplation, outwardly obedient to God's command and inwardly submissive (*mustaslim*) to His Utter Compulsion^{1, 2}, and that the Supreme State belongs to those 'who combine sobriety (*ṣāhū*) with uprootedness (*iṣṭilām*)'.³

This same double qualification of full spiritual maturity—or virility (*rujūliyyah*) as the Shaikh usually calls it—is expressed in the Glory (*ṣalāh*)⁴ and Peace (*salām*) of the second formula of the rosary. He says: 'By *ṣalāh* the Sufis mean the Manifestation of Divine Glory as when God poureth forth His Radiance upon one of His slaves, taking him unto Himself and bringing him into His presence. As for *salām*, Peace, when it is conferred by God on His slaves, it denoteth safety and stability beneath the Glory that hath come over them. One must therefore not ask God for his Glory alone, but for His Glory together with his Peace, nor must one mention the Peace first, for it referreth back unto the Glory, denoting stability and strength beneath it. Now God may manifest His Glory unto some of His slaves and delay the vouchsafing of His Peace, so that the Glory shaketh them with all manner of agitation and turmoil, and causeth them to cry out, and divulge some teaching unto those who are not qualified to receive it. Thus are they wrongfully accused and unjustly condemned, all by reason of the isolation of God's Glory upon them. Therefore if God wisheth to preserve them and to preserve others through them, He immediately followeth up His Glory with His Peace, whereupon their agitation is stilled and the course of their lives is made straight, so that outwardly they are among creatures and inwardly with the Truth, integrating two opposite states and combining the wisdom of each. They are the heirs of the Prophets, and they refer unto this noble station as drunkenness and sobriety, or extinction and

¹ That is, inwardly predestined and outwardly having free will (we see here, as always, that the mystics carry in themselves the solutions to the so-called 'problems' of religion) which needs, as complement, another of his formulations about this state, namely that its possessor is 'inwardly free (because he is none other than Destiny) and outwardly enslaved' (*Mināh*, p. 117).

² *Mināh*, p. 199.

³ *Mināh*, p. 208.

⁴ This word can only be so translated when God is the agent.

subsistence, and the like. Thus by drunkenness they mean God's manifesting His Glory unto them, whereas sobriety is Peace after being utterly overwhelmed in the direct vision of their Lord. Now it is the special prerogative of the Prophets that God's Peace should come upon them together with His Glory, or immediately after It; but as for His Saints, some of them are characterized by the manifestation of His Glory without his Peace, and some die in this state, whilst others (the heirs of the Prophets) return unto their senses while remaining inwardly firm-fixed in drunkenness.¹

This return is as if the Divine Centre should flood the whole circle of creation, filling it with 'uncreatedness'—as indeed It has never ceased to fill it—as far as its outermost circumference, where lie the sharpest illusions of 'other than God'. It is to this 'meeting of the finite with the Infinite' (it can scarcely be spoken of without some such contradiction in terms) that Ghazālī alludes in his already quoted words:

'Each thing hath two faces, a face of its own and a face of its Lord; in respect of its own face it is nothingness, and in respect of the Face of God it is Being.'

The Shaikh also refers to the same mystery, in so far as it concerns the 'circumference' of the Saint, when he says in one of his poems:

All glorification of me cometh short
Of the measure, as doth all contempt.²

What cannot be 'contemned' enough is his apparently independent individual self, which is a pure illusion:

Think it not me thou seest here
Clad in human qualities.³

But since for most men this 'face of nothingness' is his only reality, he is bound to speak on occasion with the 'voice of

¹ *Minaḥ*, pp. 20-2. This is also the main tenor of his little treatise *Dawā'iat al-Asvār*.

² *Diwān*, p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

CHAPTER IX

GNOSIS

In considering what is possible and what is not, the Shaikh mentions as an example of 'self-evident impossibility' the impossibility of relegating the Essence, that is, of setting It on one side. It follows, without being immediately obvious, that the eye of the body, whose normal objects of vision are earthly things, cannot see the Essence as distinct from the world of the senses, for this would mean relegating the Essence to other than this world. He mentions this as an example of 'non-self-evident impossibility', an impossibility which had not been evident to Moses, for instance, when he asked to see God.¹

'When Moses asked to see God distinctly, apart from the world, He answered him: *Thou shalt not see Me*, for I am not outside the world nor am I in it; I am neither separate from it, nor joined unto it. *Gaze upon the mountain: if it stand firm in its place, then shalt thou see Me*. And when his Lord manifested Himself unto the mountain, and the shadow gave place to the substance, and separation attained unto union, and the mountain and all other places were levelled out of sight, Moses fell down senseless, for 'between' had been obliterated and 'where' had vanished, and the eye had been refreshed with the Eye.'^{2,3}

The difference between the Manifestation of the Truth to the mountain for the sake of Moses and to *the Lote Tree of the Uttermost End*⁴ for the sake of Muhammad would seem to be that whereas Moses was unprepared—hence the extreme violence attendant upon the vision—Muhammad was fully

¹ Qoran, VII, 143. It is from this verse (in italics) that the Shaikh quotes in the following paragraph.

² Or Essence; that is, the human eye of Moses had been replaced by the Divine Eye.

³ *Minaḥi*, p. 28.

⁴ This celestial tree, which Muhammad saw on his Night Journey (see p. 35, note 3) marks the summit of the created universe.

prepared inasmuch as on the Night Journey he was altogether in the next world, which meant that his outward eye was spontaneously and perfectly co-ordinated with his inward eye. But the Shaikh affirms that it is none the less possible for the outward eye, while still 'in this world', to see the Truth, provided that it can first achieve a perfect co-ordination with the inward eye.¹

'The outward eye is the ray of the inward eye and the faqir should not open his outward eye (in the hope of seeing Reality) until the connection hath been established between it and his inward eye. When, in virtue of this connection, his outward eye hath become pure inward vision, then will he see the Lord of the verse *Naught is like unto Him* with all his faculties,² just as he will also hear Him with all his faculties, even as one of us hath said:

I am all eyes when He appeareth before me
Even as when He converseth with me, I am all ears.'^{3, 4}

The Qoran mentions two visions which the Prophet had of the Truth during the Night Journey, one with the inward eye, the Heart, and one with the outward eye. The vision of the Lote Tree was the second of these, and it is described as follows:

Verily he saw Him at another revelation by the Lote Tree of the Uttermost End. Even here is the Garden of Ultimate Refuge.

¹ During this life the Saint's 'resurrection in God' is a resurrection of the soul, not yet of the body. But through the co-ordination just referred to, he may also have foretaste of the resurrection of the body.

² He has already been quoted as teaching that the Intellect is as an outpost of Divine Sight, and he has just extended the continuity still further by saying that the ray of the Intellect virtually reaches as far as the outward eye. In speaking now of all the outward faculties he means that they are all as differentiated 'rays' or branches of the Intellect which, being a synthesis, may be called 'inward eye', 'inward ear', etc., according to the context. The co-ordination of the outward eye with the inward eye implies that the other outward faculties will also be co-ordinated with their intellectual archetype; and in virtue of this co-ordination each outward faculty will take on something of the versatility of synthesis which normally belongs to the Intellect alone, so that, for example, the touch, smell and taste will become as it were endowed with both vision and hearing.

³ 'Ali, the grandson of 'Umar ibn al-Fārid, *'Ainiyyah* i. 32.

⁴ *Minali*, p. 174.

*When there enshrouded the Lote Tree That which enshroudeth, the eye wavered not nor did it transgress. Verily he beheld, of all the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest.*¹

In his commentary² on these verses, the Shaikh says: 'This vision was with the eye of the senses, whereas the previous one had been with the eye of the intelligence. Now the genitive after Lote Tree is possessive, and what is meant is the Lote Tree of Him at whom all things reach their end. *Verily thy Lord is the Uttermost End.* The Lote Tree here signifieth the whole of manifestation which groweth out from its root in Him. Thus is it also named the Tree of the Universe.

'This vision was more excellent than that which preceded it in virtue of its union of separate elements and its integration of widely scattered fragments. Thus He said: *Even here is the Garden of Ultimate Refuge*, meaning that the Lote Tree marketh a finality of Gnosis, and that he who attaineth unto this point is enshrouded by the Lights of the Divine Presence—nay, the whole world is enshrouded, so that he seeth naught without seeing therein God. This is explained in the words *When there enshrouded the Lote Tree That which enshroudeth*, that is, when it was enfolded and covered by the all-enshrouding Lights of the Divinity, so that the whole hierarchy of created beings disappeared, the majestic and the lowly, in the manifestation of the Lights of the Names and Qualities. *God is the Light of the Heavens and of the earth.* It was through the appearance of These, which is referred to in the words *at another revelation*, that Muhammad attained unto more through the vision of the outward eye than through the vision of the Heart alone. His outward eye was at its vision one with his inward eye, and therefore did God praise him with the words: *His eye wavered not, nor did it transgress*, that is, the outward eye wavered not from what the inward eye beheld, nor did it transgress by going beyond the bounds and turning its attention away from that wherein the Truth manifested Himself unto him, but it kept its gaze upon Him in each several thing. . . .

'Now the Truth is not to be seen by any outward eyes whatsoever except their sight be inverted and have taken on

¹ LIII, 13-8.

² *Lubāb al-'Ilm fī Sūrat Wa'n-Najm*, a commentary on the whole Chapter of the Star, in which these verses occur.

the function of the inward eye, even as the sight of Muhammad's outward eye had been inverted and become one with his inward eye. The *Rūh al-Bayān*, citing *At-Ta'wīlāt an-Najmiyyah*,¹ saith that his other-worldly sight was united with his earthly sight so that with the former he beheld the Inward Aspect of the Truth in respect of His Name *the Inwardly Hidden*, and with the latter he beheld the Outward Aspect of the Truth in respect of His Name *the Outwardly Manifest*.

'Now what if thou askest: 'What impedeth others also from seeing Him with the outward eye in this world, inasmuch as nothing can come between the sight and His Outward Manifestation? And in what consisteth the special privilege of the Prophet's vision?', my answer is that the cause of the impediment is not that the Truth refuseth to allow the sight to fall upon His Essence. The sight's lack of vision is the natural result of its lack of preparation. As one of the greatest of us hath said, what preventeth vision of the Truth in this world is that the creatures recognize Him not. They have eyes, yet they see not, that is, they know not that what lieth before their gaze is the Truth, being veiled from Him by naught else but their own obtuseness. The special privilege of the Prophet cometh from his being more perfect than others in intellectual penetration. He knew with all certainty that the sight cannot attach itself unto nothing, and that therefore no object of sight can be void of the Outward Manifestation of the Truth, for things in themselves are naught. Thus there came over him the vision of the outward eye, nor is anyone who hath inherited the least share of the Prophet's penetration cut off from the Truth's Outward Manifestation in things.

'The Heart's vision was hierarchically nearer to the Truth than was the vision of the outward eye, which could never have achieved the union of separate elements and the integration of widely scattered fragments if the universe had not been enshrouded by the all-enshrouding Lights of Unification which are lit from the tree of Wheresoe'er ye turn there is the Face of God.'² Whoso attaineth unto This hath reached an End

¹ By the Sufi Ahmad as-Samnānī (d. 1336).

² He is here commenting indirectly on the Verse of Light (Qoran, XXIV, 35): *God is the Light of the Heavens and of the earth. His Light (on earth) is like a niche, wherein is a lamp; the lamp is of glass; the glass is like a shining planet.*

beyond which there is no passing, and Muhammad's attainment thereunto is indicated in the words *Verily he beheld, of all the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest*. We know from this last word that the Sign in question was not of the category of created beings nor yet of the Manifestations of the Names and Qualities,¹ but it can have been no less than the direct vision of the Lights of the Holy Essence. Thus was this state greater than all his other states, and of it he said: "I have a time when only my Lord sufficeth to contain me," and in this connection also did he say: "Increase me, O Lord, in marvelling at Thee."

'What I have said about the possibility of the outward eye gazing at the Truth in direct vision is so exceedingly improbable in the opinion of most of those who make a claim to learning, let alone those who make no such claim, that some may even consider it as being against reason and also against the Law. Such was the opinion of the Mu'tazilites,² and they were satisfied that this conclusion was necessary on the grounds that what is seen must be localized in order that the sight may fall upon it. They were not fully alert unto the inevitable corollary of this, that the Sight of the Truth would be prevented from fixing Itself upon created beings, on the ground that Its doing so would presuppose Its localization upon the object seen. Thus in following them we should be attributing a lack of perception unto God—High Exalted is He above all such incapacity! The remedy is not to speculate about the spiritual state in question, but to leave it unto its masters, for indeed the mysteries thereof are beyond the scope of most intelligences.'³

It is lit from a sacred olive tree that is neither of the East nor of the West, the oil whereof well nigh blazeth though the fire have not touched it—Light upon Light! God leadeth to His Light whom he will, and God citeth symbols for men, and God is the Knower of all things.

Inasmuch as it is *neither of the East nor of the West*, the sacred olive is the tree of *wheresoe'er ye turn . . .*, that is, the tree of Gnosis.

¹ He has already said that at the manifestation of *That which enshroudeth 'the whole hierarchy of created things disappeared . . . in the manifestation of the Lights of the Names and Qualities.'* These were evidently a transitional preparation for the Supreme Lights of the Greatest Sign. To use another of his metaphors, it may be said that for the words to be re-absorbed into the Point they must first be re-absorbed into the letters.

² A rationalistic heretical sect of early Islam.

Lubāb, pp. 8-10.

only on condition that it hath melted after its crystallization, in which case it must be considered as Absolute, for the Archetype is Absolute, and to return unto the Archetype is to be once more the Archetype, as the poet of the '*Ainiyyah*' hath said:¹

The world is nothing other than a berg of ice.
And thou art of the water that from its sides is flowing.
Nor is the ice, if we grasp the truth, other than its water.
Though it be deemed ice in the doom of the Law
Yet at the ice's melting is that doom revoked,
And it is deemed water, even as in truth it is.²

The purpose of the ablution in Islam is the removal of inward impurity, symbolized by various modes of outward impurity or, in cases of doubt, supposed outward impurity, which necessitate the ablution before one can proceed to the ritual prayer. The Law only defines the outward or symbolic impurity; the conception of what it symbolizes will vary as spiritual aspirations vary. At the highest level its conception is expressed in the already quoted saying of Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah: 'Thine existence is a sin with which no other sin can be compared.'

'The meaning of defilement (*ḥadath*)', continues the Shaikh, 'is ephemeral existence (*ḥudūth*), that is, the existence of other than God. This is not ousted from the heart of the Gnostic, and its film is not removed from his inward eye to be replaced in his sight by Eternity, save through his finding the Water and his Purification therewith. Except he be purified by It, he is far from the Presence of his Lord, unfit to enter It, let alone to sit therein. Likewise the slave will not cease to suppose the existence of defilement in all creatures until he have poured

nature (the untainted 'orthodoxy' of the sensible world) has powers of purification for one who can 'absolve' it by reducing it to the Essence, that is, by transforming it, through intellectual penetration, to the flood of Limpidity which it really is.

¹ Jili, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ch. 7, says: 'God hath said: *We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them with naught but Truth* (Qoran, XLVI, 3). Even so is the world like ice and the Truth—Glorious and Exalted—is the Water which is the Origin of this ice. Thus is the name 'ice' but lent unto that crystallization, whose true name is Water.' Then he quotes from his own '*Ainiyyah*', the lines which follow above.

² *Minaḥ*, pp. 83-6.

this Absolute Water over their outward appearance. Without It he will not cease to condemn them, and how should his verdict be revoked when he seeth their defilement with his eyes, and when his Heart believeth in the independent existence of creation? Far be it from him to take the outward appearance of things for other than he seeth it to be, and to deem them pure, as if the cause of his condemning them had vanished from his sight. How should he deem them pure, when he seeth their transgression, disobedience, disbelief, hypocrisy, idolatry, contentiousness and the like—how, until he hath changed this standpoint for one which is altogether beyond his experience? On seeing the letter *Shīn*,¹ should he say that it is *Zain*?² Nay, he telleth of what he seeth, naught else. Jars only ooze out what is inside them. Thus passeth he judgement upon most creatures that they are guilty of defilement, nor is this verdict rescinded from his Heart, nor is the stain of guilt removed from existing things but through purification with this Absolute Water. Once purity hath been achieved, that is, once he hath washed the outward appearance of things in this Water—nay, once he hath washed his own sight therein, since as for the things they are already pure before they be purified—then will his eyes tell him that his verdict was false, and he will come to see what he had never seen before.³

In distinguishing between the two ablutions, the greater and the lesser, he says that the purity obtained through the lesser, which only involves washing certain parts of the body, signifies extinction in the seven Qualities of the Truth—Power, Will, Knowledge, Life, Hearing, Sight and Speech. This purity, he says, 'is current among both the generality of the Sufis and the elect, unlike the Great Purity which is only for the Prophets and the greatest of the Saints.'⁴ To each one of these, when he has obtained the purity of complete extinction signified by the washing of the whole body in the greater ablution, 'the Truth appeareth on a sudden, immediately he hath finished his ablution, and this Vision cometh unto him in Its Totality, with neither limitation nor interruption nor revealing of one part

¹ This suggests also the word *shāin* which means 'deformity'.

² In many dialects the letter *Zāy* is *Zain*, which also means 'ornament'.

³ *Minaḥ*, p. 86.

⁴ *Minaḥ*, p. 87.

thereafter but the exchanging of confidences. The Folk name this the Station of Intimate Discourse, and in it the ears of the Gnostics are delighted by what is spoken unto them by the Lord of the worlds.¹

Then he draws us back to the significance of this in relation to the rest of the prayer rather than as a whole in itself by letting his expression of the Absolute end with a hint that there is more to come and that what has been gained is only a fore-taste, not yet an Eternal Possession:

'The best that they hear from their Divine Protector is: "Leaveth this nearness aught to be desired?", whereat he who is immersed in the Lights of contemplation answereth: "Nay indeed, and therefore *Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds*,"² inasmuch as he hath been favoured beyond others and hath gained what his imagination had been powerless to conceive, even as one of them hath said:

I gained my Desire beyond my highest hopes.
O that It were mine, utterly and forever!^{3,4}

In considering the prayer as a whole he gives a summary account of it as follows:

'When he hath made good his entry into the rite of the prayer (by raising his hands and saying *Allāhu Akbar*) and when the Lights of Divine Manifestation have shone visibly upon him, he beginneth to draw himself in little by little and his first shrinkage is the letting down of his hands to his sides or putting them on to his breast, after they had been on a level with the top of his head. All this is through his approach unto the Truth, and the nearer he approacheth the more he draweth himself in. First it is demanded of the worshipper that he raise himself unto his full height and lift his hands before the

¹ *Minaḥ*, p. 112.

² The first words of the 'intimate discourse' which is spoken at this part of the prayer.

³ Ibn al-Fārid, *Lāmiyyah* (Ushāhidu ma'nā ḥusnikum . . .) l. 5.

⁴ *Minaḥ*, pp. 112-3.

Manifestation of the Truth upon him. But when some degree of union hath been achieved and he hath begun to approach nearer and nearer unto the Truth, his stature is changed and his existence is brought low and beginneth to be folded up *like the folding of a written scroll*,¹ all on account of his nearness unto the Truth, until he attaineth unto the extremity of nearness, which is in the state of prostration. The Prophet said: "The slave is nearest his Lord when in prostration." At his prostration he descendeth from the stature of existence unto the fold of nothingness, and the more his body is folded up, the more is his existence folded up, even as one hath said:

My existence hath come to naught in my vision, and I have parted
From the 'I' of my vision, effacing it, not affirming it²

'Before his prostration the Gnostic had the upright stature of existence, but after his prostration he hath become extinct, a thing lost, effaced in himself and Eternal in his Lord.'³

It has already been mentioned that among the movements of the prayer there is one obeisance followed by two prostrations. Having specified that the obeisance signifies 'effacement of the actions and also of the qualities (in the Divine Actions and Qualities)', he says of prostration:

'When the worshipper hath obtained the degree of prostration and hath been extinguished from existence, he prostrateth himself a second time that he may be extinguished from that extinction. Thus is his (second) prostration identical with his rising up from (the first) prostration, which rising signifieth subsistence.'⁴

The Shaikh means that symbolically this rising and falling must be considered as simultaneous; each is an extinction of

¹ Qoran, XXI, 104.

² Ibn al-Fārid, *At-Tā'iyyat al-Kubrā*, l. 212. The poem continues:

'I embraced what I perceived, and effaced mine own perceiving' that is, I embraced the Object of my vision and effaced its subject.

³ *Minaḥ*, pp. 156-7.

⁴ *Minaḥ*, p. 114.

the extinction in that each represents a purely positive 'result' of the extinction: the rising means subsistence, whereas the second prostration crowns that subsistence with the crown of Divinity. If we take his already quoted verse:

Thou seest not who thou art, for thou art, yet art not 'thou'.

then it may be said that the rising means *thou art* whereas the second prostration means *yet art not 'thou'*. Referring to the simultaneity of these two positions, he continues:

'He is prostrate with regard unto the Truth, upright with regard unto creation, extinct (even as a Divine Quality is extinct) in the Transcendent Oneness,¹ subsistent in the Immanent Oneness. Thus is the prostration of the Gnostics uninterrupted, and their union knoweth no separation. The Truth hath slain them with a death that knoweth no resurrection. Then He hath given them Life, Endless Life, that knoweth no death.'²

With regard to the perpetuity of the prostration, the Shaikh draws our attention to the fact that it is recommended (*mandūb*) that on rising from prostration to the sitting position the worshipper should not *lift* his hands from the ground and place them on his knees but that he should *draw* them up to his knees. He interprets this recommendation as being 'lest one wrongly imagine that after the worshipper prostrateth himself, that is, after he hath been put out of existence and hath taken hold of the Rope of the Essence which is the sum of his desires, on rising he relinquisheth, by lifting his hands, all that he hath gained . . . whereas from this recommendation it is to be concluded that he who hath reached his Goal keepeth ever hold upon the Rope of God.'³

¹ The Transcendent Oneness (*Aḥadiyyah*) is Pure Non-Duality, which excludes all concepts such as those of Essence and Quality, Creator and creation, etc. The Immanent Oneness (*Wāḥidiyyah*) is that more outward Aspect of Non-Duality which embraces, penetrates and unifies all apparent differentiation. Jīlī (*Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ch. 6) says that *Aḥadiyyah* corresponds to 'God was and there was nothing with him' and that *Wāḥidiyyah* corresponds to 'He is now even as He was.'

² *Minaḥ*, pp. 114-5.

³ *Minaḥ*, p. 162.

After the final prostration before the end of the prayer, the worshipper resumes the sitting position from which, after expressions of devotion to God and invocations of Peace on the Prophet, himself and all the faithful, he seals the prayer by turning his head to the right with the words *As-Salāmu 'alaikum*—Peace be on you!

Of this final sitting position the Shaikh says: 'He must take a middle course when he returneth unto creation, that is, he must be seated, which is midway between prostration and standing, that he may make good his intercourse with creation. For if he went out unto creatures in a state of being prostrate, that is, in a state of extinction and obliteration, he could take no notice of them. Nor must he go out unto creation standing, that is, far from the Truth as he used to be before his extinction, for thus would he go out unto creation as one created and there would be no good in him and none would profit from his return. Even so must he take a middle course, and "midmost is best in all things". It is said: "Long live the man who knoweth his own worth and taketh his seat beneath it!" Now a man gaineth knowledge of his worth only at his obliteration. Thus is a sitting position¹ required of him after his obliteration.'²

As to what is displeasing to God (*makrūh*) during the prayer, Ibn 'Āshir mentions, amongst other things: 'pondering on what is inconsistent with awe-struck reverence.'

The Shaikh says: 'All pondering is in fact inconsistent with awe-struck reverence which (in its fullest sense) is nothing short of amazement and wonderment at the Essence of God. Meditation may be on things that are made, but not on the Essence, even as the Prophet said: "Meditate upon all things, but meditate not on the Essence lest ye perish." Thought is only used with regard unto what is made, but when the Gnostic hath attained unto the Maker, then is his thought changed to wonderment. Thus is wonderment the fruit of thought, and once it hath been achieved the Gnostic must not swerve from

¹ Sitting is 'beneath' prostration which signifies, beyond obliteration, deification.

² *Minaḥ*, p. 116.

it nor change it for that which is its inferior. Nor can he ever have enough of wonderment at God, and indeed the Prophet would say: "O Lord, increase me in marvelling at Thee". Meditation is demanded of the faqir whilst he be on his journey. One meditateth on the absent; but when He that was sought is Present in Person, then is meditation changed into wonderment.¹

He quotes:

Give me excess of love, and thus increase me in marvelling at Thee;
And Mercy have upon a Heart with flame of passion seared for thee;
And when I ask to see Thee as Thou art, make not reply *thou shalt not*² but let me see.³

Also *makrūh* are 'trifling' and 'looking away'. The Shaikh says: 'Trifling, for the Gnostic, is being busied with that which concerneth him not, once he hath realized the degree of Perfection; and everything except being busied with God is such frivolity and trifling as justifieth neither a turn of the head thereunto nor the waste of a moment of time thereon. The occupations in question may be allowed for the generality, but for the Gnostic they are counted ill. 'The good deeds of the Righteous⁴ are the ill deeds of the Near'; and if even good deeds can be faults for them, what of other deeds which directly impair their nobility? It is permissible for them to hang out their lamp of this world, but it must be on their outside, and not within them,⁵ for the Gnostics are inwardly ever with God, and if their inward parts were to be busied with aught else, they would be trifling in His Presence.

'As to "looking away", it is as if the Gnostic after realizing the Oneness of God by way of direct vision should turn unto another station or seek for something more than he hath already, as if, for example, he should turn unto working wonders and

¹ *Minaḥ*, p. 168.

² God's reply to Moses (see p. 171).

³ Ibn al-Fārid, *Rā'iyyah* (*Zidnī bi-farṭi 'l-ḥubb*).

⁴ See p. 38.

⁵ One of the Shaikh's disciples once said to me that it is impossible for a Saint to be preoccupied inwardly even with being a spiritual Guide, and that he will only accept that function if it be imposed upon him, in which case he is given the means of guidance, without any effort on his part.

should crave that normalities be violated on his account,¹ that he may have power, side by side with the Truth, to destroy him whose destruction he willeth and to make safe him whose security he willeth. If God in His Loving-Kindness go not after him and bring him back unto where he was, then will he perish with those that perish, inasmuch as he sought to exchange the better for the worse, the higher for the lower, and was *not content with one food*.² Thus it may be feared for him lest he have to *go down unto Egypt*, the Egypt of souls, inasmuch as he was not content with the Presence of the All-Holy.³

He makes it clear however that such an example would only apply to 'those who make false claim to attainment of sanctity.' As regards the true Saint he says: 'The deeds and words and states of the Gnostics range between what is bounden and what is recommended, not going beyond these. But this they achieve with God's Help, so that if any one of them should purpose to turn away from that which is pleasing unto God and His Apostle, it would be scarcely possible for him, nay, he would be incapable of it, and incapability in this sense is God-sent achievement. Hence it is said that the protectedness (*hifz*) of the Saints is as the infallibility (*'ismah*) of the Prophets.'⁴

Passing on to the funeral rites, he says with regard to the washing of the corpse:

'He in whom there is a residue of life is not washed. Even if he were already on the washing table and it was seen that there was life in one of his limbs, the washer would leave him then and there. Even so the Shaikh proceedeth not to the purification of the disciple so long as there be any residue of lower soul in him, that is, unless he hath realized his death, having reduced unto ashes the fire of his nature. Otherwise he will let him be, so long as he hath any claim to be alive. Therefore doth he require of the disciple who is eager to enter the Presence

¹ Elsewhere (p. 171) he says: 'The working of wonders is not a criterion of sanctity such as the slave may seek from God, but rather doth it impose itself upon the slave (at the right moment)'.

² Referring to the Jews whom Moses threatened with return to Egypt when they asked for a change from the manna and quails (Qoran, II, 61).

³ *Minaḥ*, pp. 169-70.

⁴ *Minaḥ*, p. 169.

of God that he should first make every effort to reduce his soul unto nothing and to deal the death-blow to his existence, that he may be passive in the hands of the washer, and lest he be left with all his impurities upon him by reason of his stubbornness and wilfulness and want of passivity. Even so did one of them say:

If Destiny be propitious and if Fate drive thee
To a veritable Shaikh, one versed in the Truth,
Then take pains to please him, and follow his wishes,
And leave all that ere this thou wast bent on achieving.
Be thou with him as a corpse in the ablutioner's hands.
He turneth it at will, while it passive remaineth.¹

'Thus should the disciple be between the hands of his Master, if he would be purified of all that hath contaminated him and if he would escape from his natural limitations. Then when his purification hath been made good and he is cleansed, so that the light of his Heart hath shone forth from the niche² of his existence, he must hide it, for guarding secrets is one of the marks of the perfect Gnostic, just as divulging secrets is a characteristic of the ignorant. Here lieth the meaning of the shroud: he must enshroud the glass of Freedom with the niche of servitude until nothing of the secret of his elect-hood appeareth save what is necessary. When the death of the soul hath been realized, when it hath been purified from seeing with the eye of the senses and cloaked in a seemly garment, then hath it deserved concealment from prying eyes, and this is what is meant by burial, that is, it hath deserved burial in the earth of obscurity, that its growth thereafter may be beautiful and acceptable unto God, even as the author of *al-Hikam*³ hath said:

'"Bury thine existence in the earth of obscurity, for if a seed be not buried it bringeth not forth in fullness."

'Indeed, there is nothing better for the disciple than obscurity after attainment, and no harm is greater for him than fame at that moment, that is, at the moment of his entry unto God,

¹ Jili, 'Ainiyyah.

² Using the symbolism of the Verse of Light. (see p. 174, note 2).

³ A treatise in the form of aphorisms, by Ibn 'Atā' Allāh al-Iskandarī, the successor of Abu 'l-'Abbās al-Mursī.

not afterwards, for after his burial in the earth of obscurity there is no harm in the spreading of his fame inasmuch as the growth hath come after the roots were firm, not before, so that there is no doubt that he will bring forth in fullness.

'Moreover he did not seek manifestation for himself, but it was God who manifested him after his burial. He slew him and entombed him; then, if He will, He raiseth him up; but if He will not, then the Gnostic hath it not in him to raise up his own fame of his own accord, for in this station he is void of preference, desiring neither manifestation nor obscuration and being but as a tool in the hands of the Craftsman, as one of them hath said:

'“Thou seest me as an instrument of which He is the Mover. I am a pen in the Fingers of Fate”'.^{1, 2}

Analogously, by a symbolism parallel to this last, the realization of Supreme Sainthood is mirrored in the funeral prayer. Just as the body yields up the soul at death, so the soul, at spiritual death, yields up the Spirit. The Shaikh says:

'Bodily death taketh not place without the Angel of Death, and even so spiritual death taketh not place save through the intermediary of a Master who knoweth how to grasp the Spirits of his disciples.

'Whoso understandeth the outcome of spiritual death which is the delight of contemplating the Divinity, how should he not deliver up his soul unto destruction, counting all that he leaveth behind him as a trifle, for trifling indeed, in the eye of him who knoweth what he seeketh, is that which he leaveth behind? Nay, though the soul be precious, yonder lieth That which is more precious than it:

'The soul is precious, yet for Thee will I exchange it,
And being slain is bitter, yet in Thy Good Pleasure is it sweet.'

'When the disciple surrendereth himself unto a Shaikh that he may unite him with his Lord, then is the Shaikh bound to

¹ Jili, *'Ainiyyah*.

² *Minah*, pp. 179-81.

bring him into the Presence of God with a rite whose obligations are four.¹

'Among the obligations through which this death is fulfilled, and through which the existence of the disciple is folded up, are four affirmations of the Greatness of God. The meaning of this is that the Master should cast upon the hearing of his disciple the four Aspects of Being, the Firstness and Lastness and Outward Manifestation and Inward Hiddenness all at once, cutting short all his arguments and stopping up all loop-holes. Then doth the truth of God's Words *He is the First and the Last and the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden* become so evident that when these Aspects have closed their ranks and the disciple findeth no outlet for want of any gap between them, his Spirit departeth and his body goeth to nothing, inasmuch as the directions of space exist no longer for him through his finding not even so much as the breadth of a finger-tip left vacant by these four Aspects, whithersoever he turneth. Even if he turn unto himself, he findeth that he himself is one of these Aspects, and so it is wherever else he turn, according to His Words *Wheresoe'er ye turn, there is the Face of God*. Thus when the rapt one turneth his face unto himself and seeth in the mirror of his existence the Face of God, he saith as Al-Ĥallāj said: "In my cloak is none but God"; and it is not the cloak alone which is meant, but all bodies, the higher and the lower, the sensible and the spiritual.

'Then do the Spirits of the disciples vanish, for in the Presence of the Truth's Being they find neither "where" nor "between" in which they might exist.

'He that prayeth over the dead must know how to bring him into the Presence of God inasmuch as he is interceding for him. Thus must he make him beloved of God, that he may be duly received; and then will he himself be one of the dearest of men unto God, even as the Prophet said, speaking with the Tongue of the Truth: "The dearest of men unto Me is he who maketh Me dear unto men, and maketh men dear unto Me."

'So let him be as importunate in prayer as he can, until the

¹ The four necessary elements in the funeral prayer are, in the words of Ibn 'Āshir, 'Four magnifications, prayer, purpose, peace', that is, saying *Allāhu Akbar* (God is Greatest) four times, invoking Mercy on the dead with a resolute purpose, and saying *As-Salāmu 'alaikum* (Peace be on you) as at the end of the ordinary ritual prayer.

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