

THE LIFE, PERSONALITY  
AND WRITINGS OF  
AL-JUNAYD

A Study of a Third/Ninth Century Mystic  
with  
an Edition and Translation of his writings

*by*

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the principles of academic interpretation of holy writ. It was the esoteric nature of the subject which tended to be new in Islām rather than the method employed in reaching his conclusions.

*Ma'rūf al-Karkhī*

As-Sarī was a pupil of the great ṣūfī Abū Maḥfūz Ma'rūf ibn Fīrūz al-Karkhī (died 200 or 201 A.H.). As-Sarī used to say: "What I have learned is from the blessing of my association with Ma'rūf."<sup>1</sup> Ma'rūf was of Persian descent. It is said that he was a client (*Mawlā*) of the Imām 'Alī ibn Mūsa al-Riḍā and, having been a non-Moslem, accepted Islām at the hands of al-Riḍā. Ma'rūf lived in Baghdād in the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd in the Karkh quarter of the city, and thus was generally called Ma'rūf of Karkh. Abū 'l-Maḥāsin Taghribardī says that his parents were Sabeans coming from the region of Wāsiṭ; but al-Daqqāq said that they were Christians.<sup>2</sup> These Sabeans or Mandaeans or Elkhasāites (the Sabeans of the Qur'ān) had their centre in the marsh land between Baṣra and Wāsiṭ, where some of them still survive. They were called by the Moslems the *Mughtasilah* (Washers), on account of their frequent ceremonial ablutions. Their founder is said to have been Elkhasāi and, as their name Mandaeans (gnostics) implies, they are the remnants of a very ancient gnostic sect.<sup>3</sup>

According to Ibn-an-Nadīm in the *Fihrist*, Mani, the founder of the Manicheans, was in his youth one of the *Mughtasila*.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Professor Kessler formulated his theory that the doctrines of the *Mughtasila* were the principal source of Mani's system.<sup>5</sup> Al-Bīrūnī says that the Sabeans in Samarkand were the survivors of the Manicheans in the lands of Islām.<sup>6</sup>

R. Hartmann points out many Mandaean influences in ṣūfī doctrine and terminology.<sup>7</sup> To support this, we may refer to

<sup>1</sup> Abū Nu'aym, *Hilyā*, v. 10, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Nujūm, v. 2, p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholson, *JRAS*, 1906, p. 319. The Sabeans according to Nöldeke (*Mandäische Grammatik*, p. 1) were not Mandaeans but more likely Elkhasāites.

<sup>4</sup> *Fihrist*, p. 457.

<sup>5</sup> See Legge, *Forerunner and Rival of Christianity*, v. 2, p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> Bīrūnī, *Al'Āthār al-Bāqiyā*, p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> *Der Islam*, v. 6, p. 46.

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the ideas of *Ḥaqq* and *Ṣidq*, which appear again and again in Manichean literature. We find that they also occur very often in a particular sense in the works of al-Junayd, as in his "Book of *Ṣidq*" and his book of "*Ulūhiyya*." It may well be that al-Junayd took these notions and terms through Saqaṭī from Ma'rūf. At any rate, we can see in the sayings of Ma'rūf that he used the terms *Ḥaqq* and *Ṣidq*. It is well known Ma'rūf, as-Saqaṭī and al-Junayd were the first to speak in Baghdād of *Ḥaqqā'iq*.

There is also the question whether there has been a Neo-platonic influence through these Mandaeans or Sabaeans which reached the *ṣūfīs*. Hartmann maintains that the Neo-platonists were very scholarly, whereas *ṣūfism* rose from the people.<sup>1</sup> But, if it be true that these Mandaeans from the lower Euphrates marsh-lands were rather primitive sectarians, this is not the case with our *ṣūfīs*. There were, on the contrary, amongst them the most scholarly and widely cultured personalities of their time. It would be certainly worth while to raise the question whether there have been Neo-platonic influences on the early *ṣūfīs*. The Christian Syriac theological writers, who flourished widely in the centuries preceding the rise of Islām, were deeply steeped in the Neo-platonic current of thought. One may think of Dionysius the Arcopagite, and of Stephan bar Sudaili, a Syrian Christian mystic and pantheist (considered a heretic by contemporary churchmen), who taught and wrote before and about 500 A.D. in Edessa and Palestine. His work of mystical essays, called the "Book of the Holy Hierotheos," addressed to a disciple, stresses the secret character of these teachings. It interprets the Old and New Testament in a Neo-platonic sense, and is a witness for us of Christian Neo-platonism in Syria—rendered accessible by the translation of F. S. Marsh.<sup>2</sup> The Christian Neo-platonic influence on later *ṣūfī* thought has been further investigated by A. G. Wensinck in his edition, translation and commentary of "The Book of the Dove," written by Bar Hebraeus in 1278 A.D. One is tempted to hazard the conjecture that the long development of Neo-platonic thought in the Christian circles of Asia Minor was contempor-

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> The Book of the Holy Hierotheos, translated by F. S. Marsh, 1927.

*Both these terms occur in the Ḥaqq Qur'an*

had considerable means, which he used moderately and judiciously for his own living, and which he utilized in the main in entertaining his numerous friends. His house in Baghdād seems to have been a centre for the ṣūfīs of the town and for those from other countries passing through the capital, a meeting place where they gathered and remained as guests. His money was also used to help many poor ṣūfīs who followed the ascetic way of life.

He was regarded by his colleagues as an excellent friend, understanding and loyal, and many of his friendships continued throughout his life, as is confirmed by these many stories and by his exchange of letters. No information exists to show whether or not Junayd had a wife and children. No sons of his are mentioned anywhere and, if he had a family of his own, they cannot have played a central role in his life.

In an age when travelling of ṣūfīs was a common feature, al-Junayd cannot have travelled much, as the only journey which has been recorded is his pilgrimage to Mecca. It would seem that Junayd was not in favour of making numerous pilgrimages to Mecca; he rather felt that pilgrimages to Mecca should be on a spiritual plane, and his attitude is illustrated by the following story:

“A certain man came to Junayd. Junayd asked him whence he came. He replied: ‘I have been on the pilgrimage.’ Junayd said: ‘From the time when you first journeyed from your home have you also journeyed away from all sins?’ He said: ‘No.’ ‘Then,’ said Junayd, ‘you have made no journey. At every stage where you halted for the night did you traverse a station on the way to God?’ He said: ‘No.’ ‘Then,’ said Junayd, ‘you have not trodden the road stage by stage. When you put on the pilgrim’s garb at the proper place did you discard the attributes of humanity as you cast off your ordinary clothes?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then you have not put on the pilgrim’s garb. When you stood on ‘Arafāt did you stand one instant in contemplation of God?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then you have not stood on ‘Arafāt. When you went to Muzdalifa and achieved your desire did you renounce all sensual desires?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then you have not gone to Muzdalifa. When you circumambulated the Temple did you behold the beauty of God in the abode of purification?’

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anecdotes  
& children  
visit to  
Junayd's  
home  
(Hitzig II) 117  
@p 367  
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and that His creation goes on without instrument; that the cause of all things is His creation which has no cause and that everything of which you, yourself, may form a conception is a thing, so that God is different from it."<sup>1</sup> This signifies purely dogmatic confession of Unity with an anti-Mu'tazilite colouring.

Both these definitions are clear and truthful, but they lack the particular *ṣūfī* approach.

Only al-Junayd seems to have had a capacity for a more intimate approach to the conception of *Tawḥīd* in its specific significance for the *ṣūfī*.

He has expressed the "Unification" (*Tawḥīd*) in his famous phrase: "Unification is the separation of that which has, from that which was originated in Time." "*Ifrād al-Qadīm 'an al-muḥdath.*"

That means:

- (1) To separate the *Eternal Essence* from the originated essence, i.e. to fix or hold fast to this Essence of God and to disprove or reject all others.
- (2) To separate the *Attributes* contained therein from all other attributes, i.e. to fix or hold fast to the Attributes of God and to disprove or refute all others.
- (3) To separate *Actions*, i.e. to separate the actions of God and to disprove and refute all others.

All of these, His Attributes and His Actions, are so completely absorbed in His Essence that he who is in the state to comprehend this Unification sees that the Essence, Attributes and Actions are all completely absorbed in the Essence of God. He comes to this as he himself in this state is absorbed in God.

The early and the later *ṣūfī* writers were extremely impressed and attracted by this phrase of al-Junayd, and considered it the most brief and comprehensive of all the *ṣūfī* sayings on Unification; each *ṣūfī* has interpreted it in the light of his own particular approach.

For instance, Sarrāj, after having mentioned the definition of Unification according to the sense which the Moslems

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

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generally attach to it, and according to the sense which the ṣūfīs attach to it, commented on a saying of Shibli to the effect that: "The Unity of God is utterly inexpressible and indefinable," and quoted the brief sentence of al-Junayd as a justification of this statement.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Hujwiri commenced with this sentence of al-Junayd when he considered the indications which the Shaykhs had given on this subject, and has interpreted it in this manner: "You must not regard the eternal as a place of phenomena, or phenomena as a place of the eternal; and you must know that God is eternal and that you are phenomena, and that nothing of your genus is connected with Him, and that nothing of His Attributes is mingled in you, and that there is no homogeneity between the eternal and the phenomenal."<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qushayrī began Chapter I of his *Risāla* on the dogma of the ṣūfīs with this saying of al-Junayd, as being the foundation of their faith, and mentions it again in the chapter on Unification, saying: "Al-Junayd said: 'Unification is the separation of the Eternal from that which was originated in Time, and departure from familiar haunts and separation from brethren and forgetfulness of what is known and unknown, and God only in place of All.'"<sup>3</sup>

The later writers, too, have put stress on this sentence; for instance, Tahanawi, in his definition of Unification by the ṣūfīs, said: "The result of all the hints and signs is in brief that 'Unification is the separation of the Eternal, etc.'"<sup>4</sup>

Ibn Taymiya, who was an extreme Sunni, quotes this phrase of al-Junayd, stresses and praises it. He says: "What Junayd has said about the difference between the Eternal and the originated, is something to safeguard many of the mystics from the danger of following the wrong path." Some of them have scolded Junayd for this phrase, like Ibn 'Arabī in his book, "*Al-Isrā ila Maqām al-Asrā*," in which he says: "O Junayd, who could distinguish between two things, except if he is neither the one nor the other." And Ibn Taymiya argues against

<sup>1</sup> *Luma'*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> Qushayrī, *Risāla*, v. 3, p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> Tahanawī, *Kashshāf Is'īlāhāt al-funūn*, v. 2, p. 1468.

*This chapter dealing Egyptian patriotism, the author became Plotinus was also an Egyptian.*

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CHAPTER XI

AL-JUNAYD AND PLOTINUS

The influence of Neo-platonic philosophy on the mystical teaching of Islām has been proved definitely for the later Islāmī period. It has been clearly traced in Ibn ‘Arabī, Sahra-wardi, and others. But for the earlier period, from lack of material, this question has remained in doubt.

The letters of al-Junayd, which we have endeavoured to interpret in this study, have shed a new light on this problem and give a firm basis for considering it.

*No such contact has been established!*

In al-Junayd’s letters we meet, as we have indicated above,<sup>1</sup> numerous traces of Neo-platonic philosophy which cannot be put down to the chance of similar thinking and parallel experience only, but which must be based on some positive contact. Moreover, we find that these Neo-platonic elements in al-Junayd are in no way tinted by the Christian mystical thought, itself largely of Neo-platonic inspiration, which flourished before and at that time in the Near East. What we find appears to be a sum of pure and classical Neo-platonic ideas, not blended with any other elements so characteristic for the later evolution of Neo-platonism in Eastern Christian thought.

As the Neo-platonic literary tradition is very complex and scattered, we think it the best way to go back to the originator of this whole vast and profoundly influential school, to Plotinus himself (A.C. 205–270). The philosophy of Plotinus of Alexandria, which bases itself on the system of Plato and integrates much of the Aristotelic and Stoic thoughts, is preserved to us in full in the six books of the *Enneads* which contain the teachings of the great thinkers, in his inimitable personal style, written down by the hand of his nearest disciple, Porphyry. We thus propose to give a brief survey of Plotinus’ general philosophy and of his mystical approach. This will convey to

<sup>1</sup> Pg. 18.

us a wide view of the problem and will allow us to make a comparison.

Al-Junayd's writings seem to indicate that he has not had in his hand any Neo-platonic systematic work. We find no signs that he made a study of the whole general system of the Neo-platonics with its characteristic cosmology, astronomical theory, physics and aesthetics. The influence is only in the range of mysticism which is al-Junayd's personal concern. We thus assume that this current of ideas must have reached him through his teachers or other contemporaries unknown to us, by word of mouth. He seems not to have been conscious of "philosophising," but to have absorbed and integrated these thoughts, as they reached him, into his own seeking and thinking.

#### SUMMARY OF PLOTINUS' GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

We try to give a brief, sketchy survey of Plotinus' system and of his mystical thought.<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus starts from two facts, which he takes as accepted by those who are his students: the higher Reality or intelligible World other than the ordinary world around us, and the soul sharing in this higher world.<sup>2</sup>

In the centre of his system stands what we may call the Plotinian trinity.

(a) The primary for him is the One which he traces in his deductions as *the Origin, the First, the Good*. He is shy to give It or Him any name, and stresses that each of these terms is insufficient. One ought to call it neither that nor this. He states that the One is even beyond being. He is but one, not composite, quite Himself, supermundane; neither is He thought, nor thinkable, non-active, nor Himself thinking. "He needs nothing," being utterly self-sufficient. Thus he cannot, according to Plotinus, be imagined as the creator of the existing all which still originates from Him. Plotinus uses the comparison with the Light itself which is eternally, and with diffused light

<sup>1</sup> We base our survey particularly on the 9th Book of the VIth Ennead, *On the Good and the One*, which concludes the whole work. Our translations are from the original Greek. Plotinus Enneades, ed. Fr. Dübner, Didot, Paris 1896.—The author is grateful for Greek scholarship and translations to Ruth Gaevernitz, Ph.D.

<sup>2</sup> VIth Ennead, 9, 5, pg. 532, 533, Didot.

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This assumption is wrong in its very conception

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Shaykh and murīd, becomes of high importance, just as for Plato and Plotinus, so also to the Moslem ṣūfīs. To this relation between teacher and disciple we owe the whole mystical esoteric teaching and discipline among the Greeks and in Islām.

After having surveyed the numerous common elements and related notions in Plotinus and al-Junayd regarding the mystical path of the soul, we raise our minds to what is bound to be the first and last for the thinker and for the mystic, the idea of God. In al-Junayd's religious experience, as we have seen throughout his letters, God is all-present, all-seeing, all-active, all-creating. He is victorious, overwhelming. He is close by. He draws his worshipper near and engulfs him in His Presence. He personally elects His worshipper and endows him with super-human force to reach Him. He Himself acts in him to bring difference to nought and to bridge the gap.

For Plotinus, on the other hand, God was utterly remote, *beyond being*, beyond thinking, beyond acting, beyond creating—a conception of utter Oneness which caused Plotinus to accept the idea of a mediator, a creator who, thinking and active, "comprises the Universe in his creative thought," the Mind or Nous. Here the difference is fundamental indeed.

This is what we find: Al-Junayd's idea of God shows no influence whatever of the Greek philosophy. His faith in God is purely Islāmic: God all-present, creating, preserving, active, victorious, ever near to man, is the idea of God of the Qur'ān. God, electing his worshipper, drawing him nigh on the path of the seeker, finally engulfing and overwhelming him and merging him into His Presence—this shows the development of Islāmic religious experience from the Qur'ān to the early ṣūfī mystics. No external philosophical influence can be assumed as an explanation for this development.

We may well feel that no sublimated gnostic theology, no remote Deity such as Plotinus had taught, could influence the strong Muslim conviction alive in al-Junayd.

In realizing this fundamental difference, it becomes more evident that in the doctrine of the Soul and the mystical path the Plotinian influence on al-Junayd seems indeed deep and significant.

We may pause for a moment to consider the question: What

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attracted the early Muslim mystics to this Neo-platonic philosophy so that they opened their minds to it and became widely and deeply interested? It may have been, as we feel, this: That there came within their reach a comprehensive and enlightened system of thought, which based itself on the Oneness of God, and which, from this central point, comprised and deduced all spheres of knowledge about the Deity, the Universe and Man. The mystic in primitive Islām had been at first an isolated, groping individual. Then there may have been groups. Some among these early Muslim mystics will have been attracted particularly by the fact that in this sum of Greek knowledge they found a theory of the nature and potentialities of the soul and of the conditions and stages of the mystical path—in one word: A mystical system. Acquaintance with this was like a confirmation of their own quest at a time when they were often misunderstood by their contemporaries. It encouraged them to make conscious to themselves their own mystical experiences, to “speak and write about it,” and prudently to teach it to their nearest friends. They would penetrate deeply into those thoughts, pondering, selecting, and together discussing them. The contact of the early muslim mystics with Neo-platonic philosophy made possible the development of a mystical system in Islām, with its discipline and its terminology, thus giving the opportunity for the emergence of mystical schools around the personalities of the early and later šūfī thinkers.

It is known that Greek philosophy, through translations into Arabic, and it may be also through personal contacts, reached Baghdād under the auspices of Khālifs al-Ma'mūn and al-Mu'tazim. With regard to Neo-platonism, its influence on later Muslim thinkers and mystics has been established already.<sup>1</sup> The new fact which emerges from our study is that it influenced muslim mystics so essentially at such an early date as we have traced in the thought of al-Junayd.

This brings us back to our comparison between Plotinus and al-Junayd, both of whom were born teachers of men. Plotinus is, first of all, the philosopher who left a comprehensive system of thought on the Universe and man to posterity. He

<sup>1</sup> See p. 13, 14, 15.

This whole assumption is based on mere conjecture. The real source of inspiration is the Holy Quran & Sunnah of Muhammad's Emā.

No historical proof of contact or study has been advanced. AA  
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incorrect

was himself a mystic, and this enabled him to make the mystical experience the crowning feature of his general philosophy.

Al-Junayd, on the other hand, was first of all a mystic who, with his mature experience, became a guide to his close circle of friends—seekers like himself. His teaching is thus always aphoristic, not systematic. His contact with philosophy may have helped him to develop that deep and subtle knowledge of himself and his fellow men which is characteristic of him, as it is of Socrates. It may have enabled him to communicate in lucid words his own spiritual life to those who trusted him as a guide and friend. Plotinus' philosophy may have helped him in his endeavours to speak of the mystical experience in its essence and in its stages as clearly as is humanly possible. The clarity of the thinker and teacher, and the sublime, intimate experience of the *ṣūfī*, are happily integrated in al-Junayd's personality.

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*Another Letter by* ABU'L QĀSIM AL-JUNAYD *to* ONE OF HIS FELLOW MYSTICS<sup>1</sup>

*Generous*  
*Benefactor*

May the beauty of that which God, the Magnificent, the Resplendent, has granted you, shine before you undimmed. May He grant you the clear perception of that which He has specially chosen for you and vouchsafed to you. May God reveal to you the true nature of your creation. May God prefer you by that gift which is not granted to others but is kept specially for you. May He bring you near unto Him, close to Him before Him, may He bring you nigh unto Him. May He grant you the joys of familiarity in proximity to Him, and may He commune with you. *joys* May He choose for you His beauteous behests and be your intimate! May God grant you His aid in those significant stations, the state of proximity to Him, through His gifts of strength, assurance, quietness, acquiescence and composure. May God grant all this to you so that the ideas which occur to you and the revelations which reach you are not too much for you! When God first became your intimate it is so overpowering that amazement and astonishment overwhelm you in your ineffable discovery.

How can this be described, or the intellect perceive it, unless it be that God grants His control to the perception and His care to its secrets? Where are you when God has taken you entirely to Himself and has received before Him that of you which He desires? When He has granted you the indulgence of His communion and favoured you with the ability to answer Him? In this state you are spoken to and you speak; you are asked about yourself and you ask questions. The words communicated are as unique pearls, testimony upon testimony, a cloud of witnesses multiplying continually, harbingers of divine grace. They are as heavy rain from every side, generous donors to you of glory from God the glorious. Were it not for God's gift of grace and His vouchsafing His holy spirit then would man's mind be completely stupefied before Him and his perception, in the presence of God, utterly shattered. For God, may His praise be exalted and His holy name be sanctified, is the generous benefactor of him who puts his trust in Him and cossets him to whom He has granted the gift of companionship.

<sup>1</sup> For the preceding letter see p. 62.

has revealed to you. You are indeed one of my close companions, you share in my longings and are one of the leaders of my fellowship. You are of the friends of the heart for whom my devotion is sincere. Are you not one of those that remain of our brotherhood, one of us who has been singled out? Are you not the recipient of that Grace of God who benefits us all?

O! my Brother! Please continue your grace, your condescension, your good deeds, your writing to us and your communicating with us. We derive great joy from your good news and are delighted that you continue alive. We rejoice in the greatness of God's gift to you! Should you consider us worthy please continue to enlighten us as your duty, but if you cannot find us worthy, please continue to enlighten us out of the goodness of your heart, a gracious gift from you to us.

To you, then, be the peace of God and His mercy, and on all our brotherhood.

v. 2. 2. 6  
 (X) *A Copy of the Letter (Kitāb) by AL-JUNAYD to 'AMR IBN 'UTHMĀN AL-MAKKĪ—May God grant (this) mercy to both*

May you reach the highest peak of acquired knowledge and inborn wisdom, may you achieve the highest possible state of confident knowledge! May God bring you into His intimate companionship and may you be of those who are nearest to Him! May God grant you familiarity with the finest of His revelations so that you have complete comprehension of them! So that you have this knowledge with confidence and comprehension. May you achieve the highest pinnacle of its perfection and have that clear and dominant view which comes from the comprehensive knowledge which you have achieved, which God may grant you abundantly. Once you have achieved this confident knowledge you will no longer need to seek after God because by means of this knowledge you will see the Truth directly. Moreover, where opinions differ in the realm of scientific knowledge, you, for your part, possess perfect certainty.

Thus, then, does God make of you one who helps his brethren to achieve the object of knowledge by his explanation and comment. The true and satisfying conclusions are revealed

learned community which expounds and is of the opinion that its exposition is the truth exclusively, they have come to the wrong conclusion, because knowledge of the truth escapes them. The doubts and difficulties which they experience are that aspect of their error which shows up only after they have become involved in that error and confused in its evil implications. These people are they who have based their guidance on the exposition of men whose counsel though sincere is wanting, men whose fate it is not to light on the ultimate truth which they seek. They aver: "Mankind has the greatest need for our knowledge. The purpose of our knowledge is the establishment of righteousness for all mankind, by which is meant respect of the leaders, consultation with them and modelling our lives after theirs. So also should we respect the princes and the chiefs and the aristocracy." Therefore, they seek out and co-operate with the caliphs, the princes, the learned and the aristocracy.

This action they suppose to be for God's sake and they hope that it will have its reward. They reckon it to be one of the loftiest actions of the very highest degree and carrying the richest reward. It is, however, to the mighty that they bring their knowledge and by means of it they knock at their gates. They seek strenuously to pass on their knowledge to those who have neither asked them for it nor asked them to come to them nor respect them for it. To begin with, they must have the humility of the suppliant and ask of the chamberlains permission to <sup>enter</sup> ~~suter~~; they must suffer the humiliation of long waiting at the door, whereafter some are permitted entry and others rejected. Those that are rejected are humiliated, punished, mortified and return to their homes made low and mean. In this wise they continue the labour of going and returning, going and returning—this is the cause of their ruin and destruction—till finally they achieve that after which they sought. But they have forgotten God whom they worshipped originally and it is this forgetfulness and neglect which carry in their train the paths of death. They are overwhelmed by the afflictions and diseases of the soul. Their perception and their minds are seduced by the wealth which the mighty have acquired in this temporal world and they come to prefer the things of

this world to the next because of their tinsel-shine, their fresh charm, the magic of their perfume.

And know, O seeker after the preference and glory which knowledge inspires, O searcher for intimacy with God by means of good works exclusively for God, that the feet of the people have strayed from the right paths and that their hearts are not evenly balanced in their search after their real objective. They have turned aside and follow subconscious motives distracted by superficial beauty and misted by the ambition of fame, the desire of public respect and honour which is the due of that knowledge which they seek. We see them delighting in the concourse gathered before them to hear their wisdom, delighting in public recognition and reference to them as authorities, scholars whose views are decisive and whose dicta are final. Their ambition has become overweening and their appetite for praise unsated. If they do not receive this recognition they are dissatisfied, if they do not achieve what they delight in, they are angry. Do not dare to ask them about the excess of their anger or station, they blame all who would oppose their capricious desires. It would be possible to describe their extreme emotionalism in all they do at considerable length, but I have contented myself with what springs to my lips. I trust that the flow of my description and account is an ample sufficiency for you!

x  
And therefore put on now the garments of caution, don the clothes of fear and take unto yourself the shield of reverence. Stand before God in constant servitude, examine your heart constantly, weigh your actions deliberately, energetically pursue the performance of good actions and be completely sincere in seeking your aim. And all this while let your spiritual and inner aim go hand in hand with a constant awareness of God and complete concentration of Him. Be then one who devotes to God that complete energy and devotion which is due to Him, one whom God praises of the number of His sincere worshippers who will receive His glorious promise and His rich reward. We read in the Qur'an (29.69): "These who have striven towards us shall we surely lead on our paths for God is always with the righteous" and again (4.62): "Had they done that to which they had been exhorted, it would have gone better with them and their faith more firmly founded." Now these

two verses give the key to the attainment of goodness and the achievement of correct and straight guidance. So take unto yourself as much as you can of what these verses teach and persist in God's teaching which is revealed in them. And be particularly careful in the light of what has gone before in your handling of exegesis of holy texts. Beware of misunderstandings which may well invalidate the whole of your religious practice and lead to nothing but chagrin.

The scholar then said to him: "O, wise man, you have spoken of the very matter which was in my mind and attained to the uttermost doubts which exercised me. What is more, you have described things whose value I perceived but dimly. This I regard as both grace and mercy from God to me. Surely, God has made you the means of bringing to my notice essential matters the gift of which is God's grace to me through your agency. Were it not for this gift I should have been lacking in understanding and like those whom you have described. By means of your sincere teaching you have enabled me to avoid their errors and misunderstanding. That which God has endowed me with through you is a gracious gift. He has raised my appreciation of the teaching for which He has found you a fit and worthy channel. I refer to that part of your teaching which explains and expounds the three types of schoolwear and reveals what is wrong in their approach, where they deviate from the right path in religious practice, where they have strayed from the road. I was in sore need that you should describe to me the nature of those whose worship of God is based on true knowledge, those who fulfill their religious obligations as they should, those for whom to know the right is to do the right. Those who fulfill their obligation to pass on their knowledge and who are praised when they spread that knowledge abroad and make it known to their fellow men. Their purpose in giving this instruction is a religious one, altruistic, piously directed and of good name. These are men who are not influenced by greed nor deceived by a show of tinsel, who are not the prey of desire, nor slaves to their appetites, nor led astray by the world. They err not nor do they sin and are abundantly aware of what they are about."

Then spake the wise man and said: "Rejoice in that God has

opened for you the gate of questioning and enabled you to couch your questions clearly. This will surely—God willing—lead you to carry out good works, to give virtue the substance of action and, as is my pious hope, will lead you by smooth paths to full sincerity of worship. Seek then the Lord wholeheartedly and in the acquisition of wisdom and devotion to that branch of it which attracts you, beware lest your inmost self becomes a victim of those ills which will deny you true wisdom. Learn to control your innermost perceptions for verily wisdom for those who desire its comprehension and those who hotly seek its acquisition can be more loving, more affectionate, and more devoted than the most tender of mothers and gentle of fathers.”

And now I see learning like heavy clouds wide spread above you, rich with the promise of life-giving water, their deep shadows foretelling imminent rain and your hopes high for it. Seek, then, the rain which is in these clouds and wait patiently where it will fall. And make you plea to God who brings on the rain, who spreads wide the clouds, who removes famine, who gives freedom to the bound.

And know that God gives life to the dead desert places by a drop of her merciful rain which he causes to fall upon them. Seek out these places which require and receive the life-giving rain and you, too, will be well watered. For surely the first light showers from these clouds will cure your ills and the steady rain which follows will wash away from your innermost being the leaning towards the things of this world. When this rain pours on your body it will wash away from you all your spiritual afflictions and when you taste it its exquisite flavour will kill all passion within your soul.

And know that when the Almighty likes one of His worshippers He makes his path to God easy and clears this road of obstacles. He makes the time of his journey short and brings him to the glorious home and vouchsafes to him an exceeding reward.

I hope that God who has inspired you to ask such painful questions and endowed you with such clarity of purpose in this conversation we have had will grant you by His grace and mercy the status of those selected by Him from the number of



His saints and familiars who themselves have been chosen by God from among His worshippers.

And now—if God will—I shall describe to you the nature of those who know the truth (AHL-UL-ḤAQĀ'IQ) among the learned who practise their learning and whose devotion to it is complete, whose every effort is devoted to fulfilling the obligations implicit in their learning, who seek learning without any ulterior motive, and who, in their seeking, are not deceived into following earthly appetites nor so influenced thereby that they do not achieve the essence of that knowledge. Nor do the wily distractions of this world touch them. "These are the truly godly who shall flourish." Know, then, that the genuine scholar, prior to starting his searches for God, must in the first place have the right attitude and the correct objective. He must constantly observe what is taking place within his soul, and keep close watch on his desire to seek God as it emerges. Nor will these genuine scholars permit their feet to take a step forward or any of their limbs to make any movement at all before their decision has been, in their own view, adjudged to be a valid point of departure. They then undertake their search for God in the light of what learning has taught them basically and they continue in this wise and in accordance with the testimonies of learning. Now the nature of that which God gives them in the beginning makes their hearts sensitive, cautious and fearful, all three qualities being present together and restraining their physical movements, controlling their inward thoughts, and staying silent for long periods. None the less, they fear that they may have fallen short of that which God expects of them by way of effort in their seeking after knowledge and they redouble their efforts and, in seeking after knowledge, they achieve that state wherein the name of God is on their lips and their minds constantly upon God. This will protect them from familiarity with the company of those who seek after knowledge, that accompany them on the road. Thus it is that they themselves are in a state which is quite different from that of those who are with them. Whenever any folly issues from this company they turn aside, whenever there comes from them any sinful neglect or diversion they become fearful and attentive. Whenever a disturbance arises from company they concentrate

on maintaining their own attitude and redouble their hold on themselves. They pray to God for His guidance for those in their company and hope for their good and that they should stay on the right path. They bring no harm to their fellow men nor do they speak evil of them, they do not malign them nor blame them, but if they should see evil in them they have pity for them and pray for them when they become aware of their deficiencies. They recognize what is evil, reject it and avoid it, they recognize what is good, approve it and practise it. They do not despise those that have deficiencies because they recognize such weaknesses as universal. Nor do they detract from the laudable virtues which are possessed by those who are inferior to them, on the contrary they acknowledge these qualities to the full. That which God has implanted in their fellow men is abundantly clear to them. They know, through their true knowledge, how to assess the validity or invalidity of the claims of their fellow men, how to retain their equanimity at all times whenever they perceive that which is reprehensible in their fellow men. In all that they do they are led by pity for their fellow men and complete trust in God and they are devoted to seeking true knowledge. While they study true knowledge their tongues pronounce praise of their God, their hearts hasten to put into practice that which they learn, their ears listen and are fully receptive, and their bodies press on to the service of God—may He be exalted! When they gather true knowledge their conduct is fine and when they understand it they acknowledge that this is a grace of God's to them. Nor do they cease to be assiduous in their seeking after knowledge and extreme devotion to it and they are constantly in the company of him who has true knowledge until they themselves have obtained the fullest part of it, the greatest share of it. When they have achieved that which they sought for as aid and the object which they required, when they have achieved that state of knowledge in the light of whose truths they can act at all times, then do they return to the reconsideration of what they have written and the reassessment of the aim to which they directed their writing. It is this state which withdraws them from contact with the community and which causes them to dwell in seclusion worshipping God. Then the need of the people for them is real and

*Khaliwa*

their status as those fully devoted to the search after the true knowledge of God is recognized and the level of their attainment in that knowledge is known.

Their superiority is recognized and respected universally, their status—as it were—sallies forth into the world where it is accepted on all sides. Some are completely devoted to their studies, ignoring the mass of humanity in their preoccupation with the worship of God, giving preference to those holy works which God reveals to them by means of the knowledge they acquire and refusing any substitute for the worship of God, rejecting any change from that isolation revealed to them by God. And others are inclined to spread their knowledge, have the urge to teach it, and find in teaching their greatest virtue. They therefore are happy to spread their knowledge for God's sake, and are completely devoted therein. They seek to obtain God's greatest regard and hope for a blessed return to Him in the hereafter. In this they are never without God's right guidance. As a result, whatever they may say is by virtue of their knowledge and their silence, is deference to their maturity. When they seek to give an explanation it is well within the comprehension of their audience and when many people gather round them they are happy to serve them, and when they are about to leave they give them their counsel. They pass on such knowledge as they have acquired in simple language soundly expounded, their counsel comes from the heart and their words are exact. They are patient with the uninitiated and do not hold error against those that err and have missed the point. None the less they never pretend to agree with anyone who is wrong. They forgive those that do them wrong and give to those who have withheld from them, they requite good for evil, they overlook those that trespass against them, they do not seek for their actions a reward from man, nor are they concerned either with praise or commendation. All their energies are concentrated on God in all their actions and with complete sincerity. With their good works they seek God. They do not accept world things from those who offer them out of their generosity, nor do they long for free-will offerings. They see the world in that perspective ordained by God and are content with the portion with which God has provided them. They do not

occupy themselves with what is not lasting nor do they toil with what is ephemeral. He turns his desire away from the trapping of this world and turns his back on the beckoning of its bright fascination. A little, provided that it is pure, satisfies him, he is content with what is sound and upright, he abstains from anything doubtful and he turns his back on complex matters even to the extent that he does not take advantage of certain things which are explicitly lawful and is chary in his approach to what is indispensable. Of all that the world can offer and all that is therein he prefers abstinence and adherence to constant and active worship of God. He has pity for those who are taken up with the things of this world and is sorry for those whose attitude to the world is demanding. He does not consider this world to be an adequate portion for those that seek it nor a fair price in return for the effort of those that devote themselves to it. He looks on this world fully conscious of its transience and aware of its imminent disintegration. This is the limited significance of the world in his opinion and its status so far as his knowledge is concerned. And this person, over and above what I have already described, is always alone and much in retirement, continually devoted to his worship of God. He finds spiritual satisfaction, happiness and inner content in confirming his good works in the direction of his Master and his hope for reward is fixed on his return to God in the next world. When he comes out of retirement to appear before those who have come to him to seek that perfected knowledge which he has, he does so with complete concentration and genuine good will. He regards this as a pious and good work. Moreover, he is always in a state of concentration on the main objective, when he is in retirement he is completely occupied with the worship of God, making every effort to approach closer to Him. Thus it is, that this state of consciousness of purpose to come nigh unto God is also realized when he comes before his fellow men to spread abroad the learning he has, and to be a teacher of that which God has taught him. At all times he is afraid of God and hears him, a cautious and respectful awareness of God and ever present with him. He does that which his knowledge demands and is just both in advice and in his decisions. He is one of the experts in religious law, and

those whose religion is strong and complete are made firm by them. These are they who have filled and beautified their lives with consciousness of God (text, *dhikr li'llāh*, an allusion to the practice of *dhikr*). They pass their lives in good and fine works and thus they leave behind them for their fellow men a praiseworthy memory and the brilliance of their light shines clearly for their fellow creatures. He who makes a choice from the brilliance of their light is illuminated thereby, he who follows in their footsteps is guided on the right path, he who follows their mode of life will be happy and never depressed. God has granted them everlasting life and the fulfilment of a peaceful death and they find that their good works performed during their lifetime accompany them to the next world and give them pleasure. God has made the completion of their lives their best moment and their spiritual state at death most elevated.

And now, you who have asked me about the quality of the genuinely learned who act according to their knowledge during their lifetime; I have described for you something of their nature and given you a considerable description of their fine actions. Had it been my wish to give you an exhaustive description of them and the account of them which they merit, my letter would have been very long and my answer far larger. What God has inspired me to mention on this subject is sufficient for one who is on the right path and adequate means to attain the ultimate good for him who performs that which is preferable.

The learned man said to the wise man: "O, gentle and merciful teacher, instructor of good counsel and of wisdom, your description of these people has made my heart worry and you have filled my breast with fear. By your description I know my status and my rank and I fear that my knowledge which I now have may be beyond my endurance, because of what you have made clear about the extremity of my incompetence and the persistence of my being left behind. When I became aware of what you say I deposed myself, and became convinced of my misfortune and inadequacy. How, then, can I find a way out of the baseness of being backward, a road of departure from the blameworthy qualities which I have, a point of entry to initiation on to the path of the initiated. For in my view to

withhold myself from this step is a sin, and to remain in the state in which I am now is a complete loss."

The wise man said to him: "You must realize that you asked about an exalted matter, an elevated and enormous subject. It is easy for those who practise its virtues to overcome fearful obstacles in their search for it, to carry great burdens and to bear exile from their native land and to dispense with property. Few indeed are they whose love for God is so strong that God has made it easy for them to give up their bodies and their very lives, for whom the achievement of their desire overrides everything. O, questioner about the status of the elect, about the ranks of the learned and the states of the great leaders, those that follow in the footsteps of the prophets, set about giving up everything which might divert you from the path of the initiated, which might hold you back from God's guidance and from righteousness. Be zealous towards God and in that which will bring you nigh unto Him. Know that your devoted attention to anything in this world, whether it be small or great, is a barrier between you and the next world, a means of obscuring your vision when it should be clear. Stop your consciousness from giving its attention to that which when perceived will make you lacking and inadequate. Purify your consciousness, make clean your inward thoughts by exclusive concentration on the main purpose, by complete and exclusive devotion, being of single purpose, zealous to achieve your objective. When you are cured of what was hidden in your secret thoughts, your external appearance, which is known and seen, will be vindicated.

"Beware lest you deviate towards anything, though its significance be trifling it will lead you away from that which is clearly virtue; surely he has the worst of the bargain at all times who sells much of permanent value for little of what does not last, who is occupied with worldly matters at the cost of neglecting the next world.

"O, you that seek the ideal in state and path to God, your prime undertaking which brings you nigh to your God, is the practice of denying the world and turning away from all things towards which the appetites of your soul may lean, be they small or large. For even the small things to which you lean must take something from you in her perception, preoccupy

your heart and distract your mind. And it is in proportion to the strength or weakness of that small desire for the world that the strength or weakness of your preoccupation will vary. It is in accordance with the incidence of this distraction that the understanding of that which you seek will be obscured. For your actions will be effective and your hearts will be preserved in purity only when the distractions of the world are cut from both of them.

“If it should happen that something distracts, even though it be small, it becomes at once your labour and the object of your labour, and makes distant from you your awareness and comprehension. It will hold you back from achieving that perfect state. Be wary of what will incline you to worldly things and turn you in their direction even though its power may be trifling. In becoming completely free from all this you will exclusively achieve a fully balanced state, perfection of action and speech.”

The scholar said to him: “I submit to your guidance unreservedly, and concentrate entirely upon it. I have no other occupation for my heart than it and recognize in it my right course of action. My hopes that through the righteousness of your guidance and through the rightness of your preaching and through the veracity of your counsel to me that God will bring me to all that for which I hope and the fulfilment of what I seek. I have seen the very springs of wisdom flowing from the deep, enclosed secret of yourself out upon your tongue and reaching me and imparting to me some measure of what you intended for me and I tasted of its water what I could assimilate and it brought me new life and proof of your desire to be of use to me. So give me more of that whereby life becomes stronger, and which brings me back from death, which was my past state, to that future so fraught with change. For, surely, the only thing left to me on account of which I can turn to God on your behalf is to entreat Him to vouchsafe to you a fine reward for what you have done for me, that this recompense to you should be in keeping of what is worthy of Him and His companionship to the faithful.

“O, wise man, since you have woken me from the slumber of error, and roused me from the dreams and the dozing of

forgetfulness, it has become possible for me to apprehend your purpose. That which I found has compelled me to do certain things, and I found that the discovery of my own inadequacies impelled me to overcome them and achieve a clear judgment and certain knowledge."

Now in what concerns what God has made easy of inspiration and what knowledge itself requires by way of further extension . . .

*A Letter of ABU'L QĀSIM AL-JUNAYD to ABŪ YA'QŪB YŪSUF IBN AL-ḤUSAYN AR-RĀZĪ—May Allah have mercy on them both*

May God reveal to you the true nature of His revelation, and grant you the greatness of His favour and graciousness. May He contain you by embracing you yourself in the fullness of His beneficences which, when they reach you, are the grace of His raising you and exalting you. Then will you be where no other is a mediator between you and Him, but you will be in a relationship with God based on that which God has given you. That which God has given you is something chosen only for the chosen among the elect. He gives you a place, after selection, among those whom He has specially for His saints. He chooses you by His choice of the great ones whom He loves. These are they whom He has marked out by this preferment for the height of His companionship.

⊗ Their first steps directly towards Him on the paths which lead to Him are to remove all other than God on their way to Him. By God's aid they reach Him first of all others that seek Him, their footsteps are elevated up to Him alone when they have left behind all great desires. Then do the lights of revelation shine upon them generously, God's companionship flows over them like the rising flood, with all the generosity of an exuberant flow. Its downpour is overwhelming, like that of heavy, continuous rain, like the rich milk of steady piety. It utterly overwhelms and stupefies the human perception of those whom God marks out by piety. God dazzles those whom He wishes by the brightness of His sudden appearance.

⊗ Now to what extent and by what means is this stage of piety entered? I refer to this stage of piety which is achieved in the



## KITĀB AL-FANĀ'

*A Discourse of the* IMĀM ABU'L QĀSIM AL-JUNAYD IBN MUḤAMMAD—*may God sanctify his soul*<sup>1</sup>

“Praise be to God who severs the earthly bonds of those of His worshippers who seek Him and only Him and who grants the favour of His truths to those who reach Him, who find their support in Him, when He gives them (real) existence and grants them the favour of His love. Those that know Him does He list as His saints enjoying the various degrees of His benefactions. To them does He show the strength which emanates from Him and He endows them with something of His (divine nature) so that the passing thoughts which they encounter do not take possession of them. Nor do those qualities exist in them which might cause them ultimately to be lacking in the ability to achieve true unity with Him, *Tawḥīd*, to be completely divorced from this world. All this, then, is in accordance with God's call to them, their potentiality for intimacy with Him, the appearance of the Unseen and the proximity of the Beloved.”

I heard Junayd continue as follows: “Allah granted me the favour of this intimacy and then veiled Himself from me with the veil of my corporal limitations. And I am myself the source of my tribulation. Woe is me! Allah first beguiled me<sup>2</sup> and then disappointed me (of His vision by my own physical weakness). It was my presence with Him which was the cause of my absence (from this world). My joy in my vision of God was the goal of my intense effort. But now my strength is gone and my spirit is departed. I have no taste for life nor can I savour the joy of His vision. I can no longer find true pleasure nor true pain. The world is become vapid. Yea, the very words I was wont to use have passed beyond my control. No phrases come to me, nor does any incentive invite me. That which was revealed to me has left me at the stage at which I was at the beginning.”

<sup>1</sup> The title calls this work a *Kalām*, which may be translated “discourse.” It seems to us that Junayd when writing this essay chose the literary form of the spoken word and of questions and answers.

<sup>2</sup> The Arabic word is *akādī* which literally means “desired me.”