# PARABLES OF THE LOVERS:
# THE HERMENEUTICS OF DIVINE LOVE IN MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

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## Abstract

Through a hermeneutic analysis of medieval Islamic texts, the thesis examines the development of ideas about Divine love—its ontological origin, nature, and telos—in Sufism, with a focus on the teachings of four luminaries within the mystical tradition: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 520/1126), Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 638/1240), and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/1273). It begins with a brief study of the development in the philosophy of love in Sufi thought up to the classical period in which these four figures lived. Love is shown to be central to the mystical path, even though its precise nature, as evidenced in the writings of these mystics, was interpreted with some differences. The thesis explores some of these varying nuances through a microanalytic, comparative study of their writings. It is shown that Rumi and Ahmad al-Ghazali inclined towards a more intoxicated approach, evidenced in the language of love, as found in their poetry, while Abu Hamid’s inclination was towards a more sober practice. Ibn ‘Arabi adopted a middle ground between the other writers, advocating an approach which lay in between the extremes of sobriety and intoxication. In the end, however, common motifs, ideas, and themes, outweighed the differences in their philosophies of love.

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# Introduction

This study focuses on the development of Divine Love in Islamic mysticism from the decades following the death of Muhammad up until the late seventh/thirteenth century, with special attention to the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries. Specifically, it examines the writings of four major Sufi figures from this latter period: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 520/1126), Ibn ʻArabi (d. 638/1240), and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/1273). While it highlights a common focus on love across the centuries and a shared foundation rooted in the revelatory sources of Islam, it also demonstrates that the theory of Love in the Muslim mystical tradition was far from monolithic.

After a review of the literature related to this topic and a description of my methodology this analysis shifts to exploring the development of early Islamic ascetical-mystical piety, with particular attention to the role of love in the burgeoning tradition. The Quran, for many modern scholars, and from the perspective of the Sufi tradition itself, provided the essential foundation upon which later ideas were developed.[1] In addition to the sacred text of Islam, the hagiographic accounts of early figures, such as Rabiʻa al-ʻAdawiyya (d. 185/801), early Islamic legends, such as the tales of Layla and Majnun, and the stories of pre-Islamic figures who appear in the Quran, such as Joseph and Zulaykha, gave a framework for subsequent innovation and creative meditation. The second chapter explores this and examines the consolidation of a distinct mode of piety in the form of what later came to be known as Sufism or *tasawwuf*.

[1] Atif Khalil and Shiraz Sheikh, "Sufism, Scripture, and Scholarship: From Graham to Guénon and Beyond," *Sacred Web* 44 (2019): 16-25.

Having established the roots of this developing tradition in the centuries following the death of the Prophet, the thesis turns to Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and his younger brother Ahmad al-Ghazali. In his *Kitab al-mahabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-rida* (*Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*) the elder Abu Hamid systematically outlines the importance of love for anyone seeking proximity to God. He posits that love is not merely an element of the Sufi path but its salient attribute. He builds on earlier theories that identified various degrees or types of love. His treatise exemplifies a "sober" approach to the language and expression of love, in contrast to the more "intoxicated" language found in the *Sawanih* (*Inspirations*) of his brother. The latter text, the first example of Sufi love poetry analyzed in this study, emphasizes the centrality of love in the unfolding of the cosmos, identifying it with the Divine Essence itself. Ahmad delineates the interconnectedness of God's love, God's love for creation, and the origin of love in human beings, presenting these as a unified experience of Divine Love. His text links the experience of true love with an inclination towards the spirit that connects each human to God, ultimately revealing the illusion of any independence from Him. Elements from Abu Hamid's writings appear again in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi and Ahmad's writings establish the poetic mysticism further explored in the final chapter on Rumi.

In the fourth chapter, the focus shifts to the writings and philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi. His doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (Oneness of Being) builds upon ideas in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's works and other early Sufis, including the notion that all love ultimately stems from God. Ibn 'Arabi's writings address the unity of God and the multiplicity experienced by humans, aiming to reconcile apparent contradictions. Love serves as the key mechanism motivating the return to God and underlies the mutual longing and *pathos* between the Necessary Existent (God) and the

contingently existent beings that emanate from and return to Him. Particularly significant to this study is his depiction of the Prophet Muhammad as the archetype of the perfect lover of God. While the Prophet figures in all the Sufi writings discussed, Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-Hikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) explores the nature of love in a chapter focused on Muhammad, emphasizing the connection between Divine love and human love. The contemplation of the Divine through a lover is further developed in the final chapter on Rumi. Ibn ‘Arabi’s approach is neither wholly “sober” nor “intoxicated.” Instead, it emphasizes a balanced path cultivated through courtesy achieved by traversing the states and stations of the Sufi path, and the development of the imaginal faculty necessary for receiving knowledge of the Divine.

The fifth chapter focuses on one of the most renowned mystics of this tradition, Rumi, and his poetry of love. Rumi’s work integrates many elements from the preceding chapters, including the centrality of love to creation and the understanding of God as the ultimate object of all love. His life and writings are particularly significant here for their emphasis on contemplating God through His creation, especially through human relationships. While Ibn ‘Arabi touches upon this theme in his poetry, Rumi’s companionship with Shams offers a unique allegorical framework through which he approached the Divine. Rumi’s poetry exemplifies the more “intoxicated” love language found in Ahmad’s verses, but his reflections on God through his companionship with Shams are distinctive within this study. This chapter concludes by reflecting on how both Ibn ‘Arabi and Rumi consider the nature of religion in light of a fully realized love of God and a deeper congeneity with Him.

Through an examination of these Sufi figures from across the Arabic and Persian-speaking worlds, this thesis seeks to establish the centrality of love in understanding God and forming any relationship with Him in the Sufi tradition,

particularly in its more theoretically developed articulations in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries. Furthermore, it argues that the seeds for this focus may be traced back to the formative period of Islam. The universal basis for the divine-human dialectic, as it appears in the Quran, and which lies at the heart of the experience of mystical love, does not constrain but serves instead as the foundation for the philosophical interpretations and artistic expressions that strove to convey and evoke an experience of sacralised love.

# Chapter One: Literature Review & Methodology

## 1.1 Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to highlight some of the main contributions to the study of love in Islam in Western scholarship, with particular attention, but not restricted to, Sufism. Since the literature in this burgeoning subfield is relatively extensive, my focus will be on those works that are of most direct relevance to the present work. I also explain the methodological approach that has guided my research and outline the reasons behind my selection of sources.

The first comprehensive analysis of love in Islam in English was produced by Joseph Bell in 1979, in his landmark work, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*.[2] While not directly focused on love in Sufism, his examination of love as it appeared in the writings of four Hanbalite authors who lived between the seventh/thirteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries shaped the format of later writing on the subject. In part, his monograph was intended to counter prevailing ideas about Hanbalism as a juridical school intrinsically inhospitable to mysticism. He also sought to contribute to the growing field of the study of love in Muslim literature, to help move it beyond previous analyses which tended to focus on the courtly love tradition and Arabic influences on European courtly love literature. Bell compared Arabic treatises on love with motifs found in the works of Greek philosophers and in the Hebrew Bible alongside ideas inherited from earlier Muslim, Arab, and Bedouin traditions. His primary goal, however, was to provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of love in the thought of Abu ʻl-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1200), Ibn Taymiyya (d.

[2] Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (State University of New York Press, 1979).

728/1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), and Mar'i b. Yusuf al-Karmi's (d. 1033/1624). While he sometimes employed the "motif research" method found in Anders Nygren's 1938 work, *Agape and Eros*,[3] Bell's focus was more phenomenological, detailing the unique elements in each writer's corpus. While his discussion of Sufism singled out texts critical of certain strains of Islamic mysticism (of particular note is his coverage of the controversy around the use of *'ishq* to describe love between human beings and God), he also discussed Hanbalite influences on the mysticism of later Sufi writers, including Ibn Abi Hajala (d. 776/1375), who criticized Ibn 'Arabi, amongst other "Sufi monists."[4]

In 1983, William C. Chittick published *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*,[5] followed six years later by *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*.[6] In both, Chittick made use of extensive translations of the primary sources, in Persian (for Rumi) and Arabic (for Ibn 'Arabi), to articulate core themes in the metaphysics, ontology, and psychology of the two thinkers. While the method aimed at facilitating a close engagement with the primary source material, aided by Chittick's own lucid commentaries, both books amounted to excerpts of larger texts. Chittick's rearranging of them, interspersed with his explanations, offered a systematic exposition of key themes, but an exposition in which, one might argue, the organic fluidity of the original material was lost, especially in the case of Rumi's poetry.[7]

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[3] Anders Nygen's *Agape and Eros*, *part 1, A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, trans. Philip S. Watson (The Westminster Press, 1938).
[4] Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam,* 182-183.
[5] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (State University of New York Press, 1983).
[6] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (State University of New York Press, 1989).
[7] We may also note the superb study by Annemarie Schimmel, which includes some important discussions of love in Rumi. *Rumi's World: The Life and Work of the Great Sufi Poet* (Shambala Publications, 1992). Four years after Chittick's work on Ibn 'Arabi, Claude Addas's French biography

Chittick played a critical role in advancing our understanding of love in Ibn ‘Arabi, particularly in the pages of the *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*. In his 1995 article, “The Divine Roots of Human Love,”[8] he examined the lengthy chapter on love in Ibn ‘Arabi’s *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Openings*), the relationship between love and Ibn ‘Arabi’s conceptualization of *wujud* (being), and the perfection of the human state as the culmination of love’s expression. Chittick argued that the achievement of human perfection is the goal of Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophy, rather than Oneness of Being (*wahdat al-wujud*).

In 1999, Carl W. Ernst explored love in Persian Sufism in “The Stages of Love in Early Sufism, from Rābi‘a to Rūzbihān.”[9] In this article he argued for the centrality of love in the Sufi path and identified the different classifications of love, from Rabi‘a to Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 606/1209). He brought attention to the nuances in the writings of the Sufis, including differences in the number and sequence of the stations of the Sufi path. He also identified what was common to their theories of love, particularly with respect to the ultimate goal of the annihilation of the ego.

In 2000 Franklin D. Lewis published *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalâl al-Din Rumi*.[10] This book sought not only to detail Rumi’s life and teachings but also to counter some of the misinterpretations that had been produced by the “Rumi-craze” that had taken over America. His analysis,

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of Ibn ‘Arabi appeared in English, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī* (The Islamic Texts Society, 1993). We may also note the earlier book by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn ‘Arabī* (Caravan Books, 1964), which offered one of the earliest expositions of Ibn ‘Arabi.

[8] William C. Chittick, “The Divine Roots of Human Love,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 17 (1995).

[9] Carl W. Ernst, “The Stages of Love in Early Sufism, from Rābi’a to Rūzbihān,” in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. 1, *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700-1200),* ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oneworld, 1999).

[10] Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalâl al-Din Rumi* (Oneworld Publications, 2000). Lewis explored the proliferation of Rumi’s poetry in the West and misinterpretations of it in popular books such as Coleman Bark’s *The Illuminated Rumi* (Broadway Books, 1997).

like Chittick's, comprised translated segments of the writings of Rumi and others within his circle, such as his son Sultan Walad (d. 712/1312), yet it was more analytical and historical than *The Sufi Path of Love*.

Then in 2002 Claude Addas added to the discussion of love in Ibn 'Arabi's writings with her article, "The Experience and Doctrine of Love in Ibn 'Arabī,"[11] which covered Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of love with special attention to key Quranic verses and hadiths, the life and death of Hallaj (d. 304/922), and the concept of *sukr* (spiritual intoxication). Addas examined Ibn 'Arabi's preference for the middle ground between intoxicated and sober love and further identified the correlation between beauty, knowledge, and love in the Shaykh's writings.

A broader analysis of love in Sufism was compiled in 2006 by Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani, entitled *Sufism: Love and Wisdom.*[12] It included contributions by Chittick, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and others. The book provided an overview of many elements of Sufism, including love and the necessity of directing one's consciousness to God as the Divine Beloved. Important essays in the edited volume included Jean-Louis Michon's discussion of *sama* and its relationship to the contemplation of beauty and Maria Massi Dakake's inquiry into "the feminine" in the Islamic tradition and Sufism. Dakake looked at Rabi'a and the depiction and perception of Sufi women as well as the use of gendered language in Sufi texts. This included Ibn 'Arabi's employment of gendered terms to describe "the Perfect Man," where she clarified that it did not imply, for the mystic, that women cannot achieve the highest station of realization, and instead referred to the state of the primordial androgynous Adam before "his" differentiation into a masculine Adam

[11] Claude Addas, "The Experience and Doctrine of Love in Ibn 'Arabī," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 32 (2002).
[12] Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani eds., *Sufism: Love and Wisdom* (World Wisdom, Inc., 2006).

and feminine Eve. Dakake demonstrated that for Ibn ‘Arabi, the original nature of Adam contained both masculine and feminine qualities.

Notions of the feminine in Islam were also explored in depth in Sachiko Murata’s encyclopedic 1992 study, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought,* and then later in 2019 by Rkia E. Cornell, in *Rabi‘a From Narrative to Myth: The Many Faces of Islam’s Most Famous Woman Saint, Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya.*[13] The latter work focused on the place of Rabi‘a within the “cultural memory” of Islam and sought to disentangle historical truths about her life from later attributions, projections, and mythical constructions.

In 2003 Binyamin Abrahamov compared Ahmad al-Ghazali and al-Dabbagh’s theories of love in *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazâlî and al-Dabbâgh*.[14] His aim was to expand on previous scholarship and further contextualize the love motif in Sufism in relation to earlier Quranic, Greek, Christian, and Jewish antecedents. While he built on the scholarship of Annemarie Schimmel and Bell, he did not engage with the work of Chittick or Addas on Ibn ‘Arabi. A brief comparative analysis of Ibn ‘Arabi and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s philosophy was later provided by Abrahamov in his 2009 article, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Attitude Toward al-Ghazalī.”[15]

A study of the language of love in Sufi writings was offered by Joseph E. B. Lumbard in his key 2007 article, “From ‘Hubb’ to ‘Ishq’: The Development of Love

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[13] Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (State University of New York Press, 1992); Rkia Elaroui Cornell, *Rabi‘a From Narrative to Myth: The Many Faces of Islam’s Most Famous Woman Saint, Rabi‘a al-‘Adawiyya* (Oneworld Academic, 2019).
[14] Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazâlî and al-Dabbâgh* (Routledge, 2003).
[15] Binyamin Abrahamov, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Attitude Toward al-Ghazalī,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 32 (2002).

in Early Sufism,"[16] which built on the established understanding of the controversy around the use of *'ishq* to describe love of God, examined also in Bell's work. Lumbard traced the early development of love in Sufism up to the passionate love rhetoric of Rumi and 'Attar (d. 617/1220). He also referenced Abrahamov, Chittick, Schimmel, and Ernst in his work and argued that Ahmad al-Ghazali provided, in the *Sawanih* (*Inspirations*), the first full metaphysics of love, where love was identified with the Absolute Itself. Lumbard also contextualized this idea in the broader development of the idea of love in Sufism. This included the articulation of love as a key station of the Sufi path and as an essential attribute of God.

By the early 2010s there was an increase in published works on love in Sufism as well as new translations of key works on love. Eric Ormsby produced an English translation of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's *Kitab al-mahabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-rida* (*Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*)[17] in 2011, which is central to my analysis of Abu Hamid's view on love. He relied on a 1916 copy of the *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (*Revival of the Religious Sciences*) alongside Richard Gramlich's German translation, and a 1996 translation out of Beirut which he considered unreliable.

Cyrus Ali Zargar focused on the relationship between form and meaning and the idea of witnessing God in everything in his 2011 book, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi*.[18] As Chittick had done in the *Sufi Path of Love*, Zargar demonstrated that, from the Sufi point of view,

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[16] Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "From 'Hubb' to 'Ishq': The Development of Love in Early Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2007).

[17] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment:* Kitāb al-mahabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-ridā, *Book XXXVI of The Revival of the Religious Sciences* Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn, 6th ed. trans. Eric Ormsby (The Islamic Texts Society, 2011).

[18] Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi* (University of South Carolina Press, 2011).

the "form" of everything in the world functions as a mask for the "meaning" behind it, and he used aesthetics as a framework to elucidate this relation. As with Abrahamov's book, Cyrus used a comparative methodology to interpret 'Iraqi (688/1289) and Ibn 'Arabi, with translations of the primary sources to support his analysis.

The lengthiest and most comprehensive treatment of love in Sufism to date appeared in 2013, with the publication of Chittick's *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God.*[19] His analysis built on established literature and his own expertise, evident in his earlier works on Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi, not to mention his translation of Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi's *Divine Flashes* (*Lama'at*).[20] His concentration in *Divine Love* was on love literature produced between the fifth/eleventh and the seventh/thirteenth centuries. Love, he showed, is not abstract, and the experience of mystical love does not entail a removal from the immediate concerns of everyday human life. The study revolved primarily around Rashid al-Din Maybudi's (d. after 520/1126) *Kashf al-asrar wa 'uddat al-abrar* (*The Unveiling of the Secrets and the Provisions of the Pious*), Ahmad Sam'ani's (d. 534/1140) *Rawh al-arwah fi sharh asma' al-malik al-fattah* (*Repose of the Spirits: Explaining the Names of the All-Opening King*), some of the Hanbalite theologian Ansari's (d. 480/1088) work, the writings of the Ghazali brothers, Ibn 'Arabi, and others. This wide sweep of medieval literature, the analysis of which formed the heart of Chittick's study, allowed him to detail both broader trends in the developing philosophy of love and specific incarnations of different themes and motifs in the writings of a range of authors, with a greater concentration on Persian texts. He also covered transformations and

[19] William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (Yale University Press, 2013).
[20] Fakhruddin 'Iraqi, *Fakhruddin 'Iraqi: Divine Flashes,* trans., William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (Paulist Press, 1982).

developments in the language of love. As with his anthologies of Rumi and Ibn ‘Arabi, this work facilitated access to primary source material otherwise unavailable in English. Chittick’s endnotes in *Divine Love* were sparse, with his primary aim being on expounding the meanings behind his translations of original sources.

A note should also be made of Chittick’s 2013 article, “The Religion of Love Revisited,” which established Ibn ‘Arabi’s philosophy of love and universalism as part of a broader cultural ambience reflected in the texts of Ansari, Maybudi, and Sam‘ani.[21] Nikos Yiangou also explored the idea of passionate love in Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (*Interpreter of Longings*) in his 2012 article, “The Ruins of Love: Ibn ‘Arabi’s Poetics of Perplexity.”[22] Recently, Michael Sells brought his poetic and linguistic gifts to the first complete translation, in over a century, of the sixty-one loves poems that form the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*.[23]

Leonard Lewisohn contributed another broad analysis of love in Sufi thought in his 2015 chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, “Sufism’s Religion of Love, from Rābi‘a to Ibn Arabī,”[24] where he demonstrated the centrality of love in the religious practice and contemplative experience of Sufism. He argued that Sufi ideas of love facilitated the belief that various religions were different manifestations of a single Divine Beloved. A year later, Lumbard produced the first full-length monograph on Ahmad al-Ghazali in English, based on his doctoral dissertation, *Ahmad al-Ghazalī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love.* [25] This appeared

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[21] William C. Chittick, “The Religion of Love Revisited,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 54 (2013).
[22] Nikos Yiangou, “The Ruins of Love: Ibn ‘Arabi’s Poetics of Perplexity,” *Kanz Philosophia, A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 2, no. 2 (2012).
[23] Ibn ‘Arabi, *The Translator of Desires: Poems,* trans. Michael Sells (Princeton University Press, 2021).
[24] Leonard Lewisohn, “Sufism’s Religion of Love, from Rābi’a to Ibn Arabī,” in the *Cambridge Companion to Sufism,* ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[25] Joseph E. B. Lumbard, *Ahmad al-Ghazālī, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (State University of New York Press, 2016).

three years after Nasrollah Pourjavady's translation of Ahmad al-Ghazali's *Sawanih,* entitled *Sawanih: Inspiration from the World of Spirits*.[26] In his text, Lumbard covered not only ideas presented in the *Sawanih* but also Ahmad's influence on Sufism and his presence in the *silsilah* (initiatic chains) of key Sufis such as Rumi, al-Baghdadi (d. 550/1155), and al-Suhrawardi (d. 563/1186). He also covered the hagiographic and historical accounts that have shaped our understanding of Ahmad's life, teachings and spiritual practices. The study included an examination of the controversial practice of *shahid-bazi* (witness play or gazing upon young men). He also detailed the lineage and controversy around different sources for this practice. His analysis dove into both the textual evidence for Ahmad's beliefs and life and the context in which certain sources were written, including the potential for false attributions or for biases in the accounts of different hagiographers and historians.[27]

Pourjavady's 2013 translation of the *Sawanih* identified the intention of Ahmad to write a text for a select number of advanced students. Its poetry is often abstract and difficult to access without the additional insights provided by an awareness of Ahmad's Sufi practice and thought as covered in Lumbard and Abrahamov's works. Pourjavady's translation relied primarily on the efforts of an earlier German translator, Helmut Ritter, and additional manuscripts that often arranged the poetry in different orders, making accessing the original sense of the text difficult. The translation further established Ahmad al-Ghazali's unique view on love as something not only central to the Sufi path but as the Essence of the Divine. As with Chittick's translations of Rumi, Ibn 'Arabi, and others, the use of capitalization

[26] Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih: Inspiration from the World of Spirits*, trans. Nasrollah Pourjavady (Routledge, 2013).
[27] Jawid Mojaddedi examined the hagiographic tradition in his 2001 work *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The* tabaqāt *genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (Curzon Press, 2001).

and gendered pronouns is an artifact of the translation process (aimed at identifying God as the subject).

Lumbard offered another conceptual analysis of the relationship between love and beauty in his essay, "Love and Beauty in Sufism," in the 2020 *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, edited by Lloyd Ridgeon, repeating and expanding on some of the earlier scholarship on the language of love and detailing the relationship between love and beauty as a quality that draws the soul toward unity.[28]

In recent years, we have witnessed a flourishing of monographs, articles, and chapters on love in Sufism. Mohammad Rustom's long-awaited study of 'Ayn al-Qudat came out in 2023, entitled *Inrushes of the Heart: The Sufi Philosophy of 'Ayn al-Qudāt*.[29] Following the formatting found in Chittick's studies of Rumi and Ibn 'Arabi, Rustom used translated passages to amplify his own expertise of key concepts, including love. The book includes a fascinating chapter on Satan's love of God, part of Rustom's analysis of 'Ayn al-Qudat's unique "Satanology," indebted as it was to the mystic-martyr al-Hallaj. More recently, and directly relevant to this study, Hany T. A. Ibrahim explored love in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi in *Love in the Teachings of Ibn 'Arabī*.[30] The work was a revised version of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Calgary, the seeds for which were planted in his MA Thesis at the University of Lethbridge.[31] While more comprehensive than Chittick's 2002 article, Ibrahim's 2023 monograph is highly analytical and forms a useful companion to Chittick's work on Ibn 'Arabi and Binyamin Abrahamov's 2015 translation of Ibn

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[28] Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "Love and Beauty in Sufism," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2020).
[29] Mohammed Rustom, *Inrushes of the Heart: The Sufi Philosophy of 'Ayn al-Qudāt* (State University of New York Press, 2023).
[30] Hany T. A. Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings of Ibn 'Arabī* (Equinox Publishing, 2023).
[31] Hany T. A. Ibrahim, "Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Love: A Textual Study of Chapter 178 of *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiya*" (Master's Thesis, University of Lethbridge, 2014).

'Arabi's *Bezels of Wisdom* titled *Ibn al-'Arabī's Fusūs al-Hikam: An Annotated Translation of the "Bezels of Wisdom."*[32] His systematic approach built heavily on love as it is found in the Quran and hadiths and connected them to Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics. In the same year, Omneya Ayad published *Love in Sufi Literature: Ibn 'Ajiba's Understanding of the Divine Word*.[33] Her book was a nuanced study of love in the thought of the famous twelfth/eighteenth-thirteenth/nineteenth century North African Shadhili mystic and writer, the author of a multi-voluminous commentary on the Quran, and a key transmitter of the teachings of Shadhili Sufism to modern Islam.

Finally, Cyrus Ali Zargar covered love in the writings of Farid al-Din Attar (d. 618/1221) in 2024, with his *Religion of Love: Sufism and Self-Transformation in the Poetic Imagination of 'Attār*.[34] Building on Hellmut Ritter's analysis of the human self in *The Ocean of the Soul,*[35] he focused on Attar's contributions to Islamic thought as an artist and a poet who primarily made use of Persian love poetry to articulate his mystical theories of love, longing, passion, suffering, desire, and unity.[36]

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[32] Ibn 'Arabi, *Ibn al-Arabī's Fusūs al-Hikam: An Annotated Translation of "The Bezels of Wisdom,"* trans. Binyamin Abrahamov (Routledge, 2015).
[33] Omneya Ayad, *Love in Sufi Literature: Ibn 'Ajiba's Understanding of the Divine Word* (Routledge, 2023).
[34] Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Religion of Love: Sufism and Self-Transformation in the Poetic Imagination of 'Attār* (Suny Press, 2024).
[35] Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn 'Attār*, trans. John O'Kane (Brill, 2003).
[36] The use and development of poetry was also covered briefly in Michael Sell's *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj*, *Poetic and Theological Writings* (Paulist Press, 1996) and more extensively in J. T. P. De Bruijn's *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Curzon Press, 1997) and Roger Allen's *An Introduction to Arabic Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

### 1.2 Methodology & the Selection of Sources for this Study

The primary method used for this thesis has been *hermeneutic*, as established by Hans-Georg Gadamer and summarized in the *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion.*[37] Combining the hermeneutic approach with critical textual analysis facilitated engaging with the material studied in this thesis in its various contexts, including in relation to the broader conversation going on about the nature of love in medieval Islam (as in the controversy around the use of *'ishq* which also required philological analysis). The method allowed me to situate the ideas of the various thinkers studied in their specific contexts and helped me demonstrate how the multiple and even conflicting readings and interpretations of the scriptural sources of Islam over the centuries were shaped by a range of historical and cultural factors and conditions.

Additionally, this study is also guided by a *phenomenological* approach. That is, it is primarily concerned with understanding something of how these figures understood love and how it shaped their experience of the world. This involved "bracketing out," as much as possible, my own presuppositions, beliefs, and attitudes so that I could enter the conceptual universe of the figures under study, to see how they viewed and envisioned their own lives, ideas, and experiences.

Finally, the relationship established between the unique cultural and religious contexts in which these writers lived can be related to the developing field of study focused on the history of emotions. Not only does this focus on love aim to delineate the unique interpretations provided by Sufi writers, it also covers the use of poetry

[37] Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion,* 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2022), 484-485, 487.

which, as the poets themselves describe, was intended to both describe and evoke specific feelings, emotions, and experiences.[38]

The selection of the four figures who are the focal point of this thesis was guided by two overlapping factors: (1) my introduction to and appreciation of their thought in the course of my academic study of Sufism and Islam, and (2) their impact on the historical unfolding of the Islamic mystical tradition, particularly on theories of love.

I was introduced to the writings of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali as an undergraduate student in a class on classical Islamic thought and found the autobiographical account of his "interior conversion" captivating. His writings are remarkably extensive (covering a wide range of Islamic subdisciplines, from theology and law to ethics and mysticism), and lucid. Moreover, they had a wide-reaching impact on the subsequent Islamic tradition. It is not surprising that many Sunni authorities considered him to be the "reviver of the faith" or *mujaddid* of the century in which he lived. In fact, he may be one of the most analyzed figures in Islamic studies in the West. His brother, Ahmad al-Ghazali, though not as well-known, was also important for this study due to his early contributions to the use of poetry and the language of passionate love in explicating Sufi ideas. The mystical and scholarly inclinations of the two Ghazali brothers offer us a window through which we may appreciate sober and intoxicated expressions of mystical love in Islam. It only seemed fitting to include Ahmad al-Ghazali alongside his brother in a study of the history of love in Sufism.

[38] The need for a further history of emotions in the Arabic world is addressed in Julia Bray's article, "Feelings matter! Emotions in Medieval Arabic," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 10 (2023). A focus on the influence of Arabic and the Quran on the articulation and experience of emotions can be found in the special issue, "Arabic Emotions: From the Qur'an to the Popular Epic," of *Cultural History: Journal of the International Society for Cultural History* 8, no. 2 (2019).

Ibn ‘Arabi was selected for similar reasons as Abu Hamid. Both stand out as two of the most towering figures in the history of Sufism, particularly in the Arabic speaking world, from Andalusia in the West to the regions of Syria (Sham) and Iraq in the East. After his death, Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings spread across the Muslim world and were eventually translated into Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and later Urdu. This ensured his influence on broader Sufi practice and the perpetuation of what came to be identified as the “Akbarian” or “Akbari” school, centered around the doctrine of the Oneness of Being or *wahdat al-wujud*. The Indian subcontinent, where Islam established itself, was particularly receptive to this tradition because of the prevalence of non-dualistic Vedantic philosophy in this region of the world.

Finally, Rumi was chosen due to his prominence in the Persian speaking eastern lands of Islam. He has often been identified as one of the greatest poets of the Persian language, and his *Mathnavi* has been called “the Quran in Persian,” not only for its hypnotizing poetic power and influence but also because those who encountered it were convinced that it had its origins in a secondary revelation of sorts, or what is known in Arabic as *ilham* (“inspiration”), as opposed to *wahy* (“revelation” proper). I was also attracted to Rumi because of his immense popularity in the West. The opportunity to study his poetry and thought in an academic context afforded a chance to distinguish the Rumi of modern Western culture from the historical Rumi.[39]

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[39] While this modern interpretation can sometimes appear as a failure to connect Rumi with Sufism, it also often manifests as a separation of Sufism from Islam and Rumi as a Muslim *and* a Sufi. In popular discourse this has been covered in Rozina Ali’s article for *The New Yorker* “The Erasure of Islam from the Poetry of Rumi,” January 5, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-erasure-of-islam-from-the-poetry-of-rumi#:~:text=The%20erasure%20of%20Islam%20from%20Rumi's%20poetry%20started%20long%20before,poetry%20from%20its%20Islamic%20roots, and in Elena Furlanetto’s “The ‘Rumi Phenomenon’ Between Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism: The Case of Elif Shafak’s The Forty Rules of Love,” *European Journal of English Studies* 17 no. 2 (2013). DOI: 10.1080/13825577.2013.797210. It is also covered in Franklin D. Lewis’s *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* and the centrality of Islam to Sufism, and vice versa, is also argued comprehensively in Eric Geoffrey’s *Introduction to Sufism: The Inner Path of Islam* (World Wisdom, 2010). It is also integrated into the analysis of Islam in Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick’s *The Vision of Islam* (Paragon House, 1994).

Additionally, the study of his poetry also helped better understand other major poets in the Sufi love tradition.

# Chapter Two: Background

## 2.1 A Brief Historical Overview of Sufism

Michael Sells in his *Early Islamic Mysticism* made use of a fourfold periodization of the development of Sufism from the time of the Prophet up until the Rumi. While many scholars agree that the origins of Sufi thought and practice can be traced back to the time of the life of Muhammad, the earliest period, from the Revelation to the second/eighth century, is considered pre-Sufi in Sell's periodization, as the word would not come into broader use until later.[40] In this early period different foci appeared in Islamic scholarship and the developing religious sciences. Those focused on the ways the Quran and *Sunnah* guided action and practice developed the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence); those focused on the correct understanding of Muslim creed developed the science of *kalam* (scholastic theology); and those who explored the self's internal relationship with God developed the science of Sufism (*tasawwuf*).[41] This division also coincides with the view of Islam as a religion with three dimensions. The first and outermost is *islam* (submission) which is the concern of the *fuqaha'* (jurists), who study correct activity. The second, *iman* (faith), is the concern of the *mutakallimun* (theologians), who study the doctrines of faith or belief. The third, and innermost, is *ihsan*, often translated as "doing the beautiful" but can

[40] Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 17, 19; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings of Ibn 'Arabī,* 44; Atif Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God:* Tawba *in Early Sufism* (State University of New York Press, 2018), 2-3; Alexander Knysh*, Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 25-26.

[41] William C. Chittick, "The Quran and Sufism," in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary,* ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 1737. While the term "Sufi" has often been described as having derived from the wool garment (*suf*) worn by ascetics living and practicing around early Muslim communities, this relationship remains debated among scholars and Sufis alike. There is evidence as early as the second/eigth century that the Sufis were associated with specific clothing that symbolized their material and spiritual poverty. See Jean-Jacques Thibon's "The First Communities," in *Handbook of Sufi Studies, vol. 1, Sufi Institutions,* ed. Alexander Papas (Brill, 2021).

also be understood as the development of good character and sincerity. This final dimension is the concern of the Sufis.[42]

The establishment of Sufism as a distinct expression within Islamic piety begins to emerge in the second/eighth century alongside a heterogeneous array of mystical ascetic and renunciant (*zuhd*) movements reacting to what they perceived to be the worldliness of the Umayyad and early Abbasid period, especially in the Abbasid capital of Baghdad.[43] Those focused on ascetic practice emphasized prayer, the recitation of the Quran, *dhikr* (recitation, remembrance), weeping, solitary retreat, and fasting (*sawm*) to realize their spiritual goals. These developing groups additionally held in common a belief that they were inheritors of the message first revealed in the Quran, often viewing Muhammad as a prototype of mystical ascension, and began expounding on the additional inner meanings of the Quran and *Sunnah*.[44] Early mystics like Sahl al-Tustari (d. 282/896) legitimized the idea that each verse of the Quran had multiple legitimate meanings; each verse had four "senses," those of "outward knowledge," that were accessible to the general population and those of "inner meanings" accessible only to the select few assisted by God in their understanding.[45] There is also evidence that, as Islam expanded into the Levant, Anatolia, and Egypt during this period, it was influenced somewhat by Hellenistic ideas, including Neoplatonism, as the result of a growing interest in the

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[42] Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (Paragon House, 1994), xxxvi, 244, 302-303.

[43] Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God*, 3; Arthur F. Buehler, *Recognizing Sufism: Contemplation in the Islamic Tradition* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 5; Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 15; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1.

[44] Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 2nd ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 43; Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God*, 2-3.

[45] Sahl b. Abd Allah al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an*, trans. Annabel Keeler, Ali Keeler (Fons Vitae, 2011), xviii.

philosophies of late antiquity.[46] Renunciant communities focused increasingly on the cultivation of the inner life as expressed through discourses on spiritual development and Divine love. This focus has been described as a "training" intended to develop *'ilm al-batin,* a 'knowledge of the interior' achieved through a combination of the ascetic practices mentioned above as well as *tawba* (repentance), trust in God, and a strict observation of both required and elective divine commands.[47] This second period is associated with figures like Ja'far as-Sadiq (d.147/765), Ibrahim b. Adham (d. 161-3/778-9), Rabi'a al-'Adwiyya (d.185/801), and al-Harith b. Asad al-Muhasibi (d. 242-3/857), amongst others, but writings from this period that would indicate the exact nature of the Sufi doctrine are often lost and fragmentary, or passed down through oral tradition and removed from their original context.[48] This is also when the developing mystical philosophy came into a somewhat strained relationship with the established creedal dogma, a conflict that would eventually peak, it seems, with an inquisition led by Ghulam Khalil against Sufis in Baghdad in 885.[49]

This is followed by the third period in which groups of mystics in Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia came into increasing contact and exchange, and eventually came to blend with the communities of Sufis in Baghdad, Basra, and Nishapur until they too were identified with Sufism. Sufi literature began to flourish in the form of

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[46] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 43; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 25-26. Abrahamov covers something of the debate around this point which is, in general, around the question of the degree to which Islamic thought, especially the Sufi philosophy of love, can be attributed to outside influence (Christian, Neoplatonic) or to organic developments from within the Islamic religion, rooted primarily in the revelation and *hadith* (25-27). Knysh in his *Sufism: A New History* also includes a discussion of the "proto-Sufi" inclinations to existing Christian ascetic-mystic ideas and practices (20-24).

[47] Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God,* 3; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 25, 27; Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 2.

[48] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 44; Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God,* 3. Ja'far as-Sadiq became an important figure for his categorization of the different meanings that can be drawn from the Quran. Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya for her stress of selfless love of God. Both are described in Schimmel's *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (41-2; 38-9). Ibrahim b. Adham became an important figure in *tawba* narratives as described in Khalil's *Repentance and the Return to God* (63-7).

[49] Atif Khalil, "Abū Tālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts (Qūt al-Qulūb)* in the Context of Early Sufism," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 2 (2012): 3-4.

commentaries, manuals to guide religious practice, biographies, and poetry, starting around the fourth/tenth century with the writings of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 378/988), Abu Talib al-Makki (d.386/996) and Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d.465/1072), to name a few.[50] One of the earliest books of Sufi exegesis is Abu ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami’s (d.412/1021) *Haqa’iq al-tafsir* (*True Realities of Commentary*) further building the Sufi exegetical logia.[51] While a response to the controversies of the past were by no means the motivation for the flourishing in writings during this period, such apologetics were present alongside the much greater efforts to indicate that Sufism was a “self-conscious mode of spirituality embracing all aspects of life and society.”[52] The bodies of followers and students cropping up around Sufi teachers expanded during this period and grew into established schools.

The fourth period, and the one most relevant to our study here, spans from the fifth/eleventh to the seventh/thirteenth century and is characterized by more complex and developed metaphysical philosophy in Sufi writings and the further establishment of Sufism within the accepted sphere of Islamic thought and practice. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.505/1111), his brother Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 520/1126), Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 638/1240) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/1273) all fall within this final period of development. This later period is also referred to as the ‘classical period’ of Sufism when the mystical schools that had emerged out of Basra and Baghdad further

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[50] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings,* 44; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism,* 17-18; Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 1. Sells begins this period with Sarraj and his *Book of Flashes* which helped further establish the growing Sufi tradition in the Quran and Shari‘a. Qushayri compiled the writings of Sarrãj, Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 386/966) and others in his writings bringing, in Sell’s view, Sufi writing to a new level of philosophical intricacy.

[51] Knysh, *Sufism: A New History,* 70-71. Al-Sulami in his *Haqa‘iq al-tafsir* describes four levels of meaning, as the result of a collection of previous scholarship from early Sufis like Ja‘far as-Sadiq: *‘ibara* (literal), *ishara* (allegorical), *lata’if* (subtle), and *haqa’iq* (realities) corresponding to the respective commoners, religious elite, God’s friend, and the Prophet’s level of understanding.

[52] Atif Khalil, “*Tawba* in the Sufi Psychology of Abū Tālib al-Makkī,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, no. 3 (2012): 102; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 18.

expanded as Sufism became more popular throughout the Islamic world.[53] Around the region of modern day Iraq this expansion and flourishing of Sufi literature and thought was assisted by the development of specialized Sufi lodges (*khanaqah*) and the formation of deeper connections between Sufis, local *madrasas* (colleges), and government officials.[54] In Andalusia, similar institutions called *ribats* appeared as early as the fourth/tenth century; however their exact connection to Sufism in their earliest years, as opposed to other forms of asceticism in Andalusia at the time, is less clear. *Ribat*s, *zawiya*s and *khanaqah*s (various words used to describe the institutions where Sufi's gathered, often translated as 'Sufi lodges') were multipurpose institutions providing a space for Sufi circles and teachers to meet with the broader pious community and contributed to further expanding their influence on Islamic religious thought and expression.[55]

### 2.2 The Path and Language of Love

As early as the second/eighth century Sufis were talking about Divine love and its relationship with religious piety. One of the earliest figures connected to this developing 'school of love' was Rabi'a al-'Adwiyyah of Basra. Although the sources of the sayings on love attributed to her remain a subject of scholarly inquiry and debate, she nonetheless appears repeatedly in Sufi accounts as an example of pure love, of loving God for His own sake.[56] Al-Sulami's *Dhikr an-niswa al-muta 'abbidat*

[53] Lloyd Ridgeon, "The Origins of Sufism," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2021), 10-11.
[54] A.C.S. Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 257; Denize Aigle, "Les autorites religieuses dans l'islam medieval," in *Les autorités religieuses entre charismes et hiérarchie*, ed. Denize Aigle (Brepols, 2011), 18.
[55] Green, *Sufism*, 57.
[56] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 44-45; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 38-9; Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 3-4.

*as sufiyyat* records a transmission of some of her sayings including "Verily, I love him [the Prophet]. But love for the Creator has turned me away from love of created things." Other sayings reflect the same deep and focused love of God.[57] Around the same time a work attributed to Shaqiq Balkhi (d. 193-4/810), *Adab al-'ibadat,* incorporated love into his framework of four waystations: *zuhd* (asceticism), *khawf* (fear), *shawq* (desire), and ultimately[58] *mahabba* (love). In the final stage fear and desire for God is forgotten for love of God alone as the wayfarer is brought near to Him.[59] The description of the Sufi path towards *tawhid* (Divine Oneness) as one that moves the seeker through various *maqamat* (stations), is present from the earliest centuries of the tradition. Generally, the stations refer to developments in the awareness and spiritual inclination of the seeker that must be pursued before they can move onto the next station, often with the station of love at the peak.[60]

Many have argued that the foundation of Islamic mysticism and the love tradition within it, like all Muslim spirituality, is rooted in the Quran. Two Quranic passages became foundational for later exegesis on the matter of love. The first, "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54) describes the sole object of God's love, human beings, and what ought to be the sole object of any human beings' love, God. It can further be read as indicating that God is the only true object of love.[61] In conjunction with the Islamic belief in *tawhid*[62] this is further taken to indicate that the object of God's love is ultimately Himself and, while His love permeates creation as a

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[57] Abu 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Sulami, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-niswa al-muta 'abbidāt as sūfiyyāt,* trans. Rkia E. Cornell (Fons Vitae, 1999), 78-9.

[58] This could, alternatively, be described as the penultimate stage as it is often recognized within the Sufi tradition that the highest point of unity with God is ineffable. Because of this, any description of a state closest to God can also be thought of as a penultimate state on the path.

[59] Lumbard, "From 'Hubb' to ''Ishq,'" 355-6.

[60] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings,* 2.

[61] Atif Khalil, "Sufism and Qur'anic Ethics," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2021), 159. Chittick, *Divine Love*, 9-10.

[62] *Tawhid* is also captured in the *shahadah* "There is no god but God."

motivator of His prescriptive command *Be!* it is substantively present in accordance with the capacity of a created thing to receive His love as determined by its ethical, or qualitative proximity (*qurb*) to Him.[63] Furthermore, one of God's names is *al-Wadud* (Love, the Loving). This implies that in so far as it is part of the Divine Nature, Love permeates all of reality. The only instance in which it cannot be found on the human level is when humans, due to freewill, fail to recognize the relation between love and God. They experience love but do not necessarily recognize its true origin.[64]

The second key Quranic verse that appears over and over again in Sufi treatises reads: "Say [O Muhammad]: 'If you love God, follow me; God will love you'," (3:31) and was understood to indicate something of the action required to express love of God and to receive His love; that is, to practice love by following the guidance of revelation embodied by Muhammad as the example par excellence of love of God.[65] An examination of the nature of embodying the revelation is discussed in Sufi ethics. Generally, the behaviour for travellers and lovers is motivated not so much by fear of Hell or the desire for Paradise, but by love of God for His own sake. Al-Makki provides a ranking of people in accordance with their feelings about death that illustrates this idea: The lowest rank, although still admirable, is the desire for a long life in order to acquire many virtuous deeds. The second rank is that of the believer in the station of *tashawwuq* (longing, desire, yearning) who, out of a

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[63] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 133; William C. Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," in *Love: A History,* ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Oxford University Press, 2024), 108-109.
[64] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (HarperCollins, 2008), 61.
[65] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 10; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings,* 39. The story of the Sufi ecstatic Nuri captures this use of the Quran to prove the reality of Divine love. He is charged and condemned for claiming mutual love with God, claiming God was with him in his home, and for cursing the muezzin while calling for blessings in response to a barking dog. His response to the charges is Quranic verses; respectively "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54) and "We are closer to him than his jugular vein," (50:16). For the final accusation he accused the muezzin of doing the call to prayer only to get paid but the dog's barking he praised as "there is nothing except that it hymns His praise, but you do not understand their praise," (17:44). See Atif Khalil's article "Abū Tālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts*, 5-6.

consuming love for God, yearns for death to be reunited with the object of his affections. The ultimate rank is for those who are content with their life as God designed it. They yearn for what God wants, love what God loves, belonging to the station or *maqam* of *rida* (contentment and total surrender).[66]

Love was invariably connected with other key concepts in the writings of Sufis and philosophers including beauty (*jamal* and *husn*) and knowledge. The saying of the Prophet, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty," established a base for the later arguments that the two were interrelated concepts by their nature, as proposed by the likes of Avicenna (d. 428/1037), who described love as being always directed at the perception of beauty.[67] Sufis recognized beauty as a quality of both the inner and outer dimension of the self and as a potential distraction from, or confirmation of, the Beauty of God, depending on the knowledge and development of the beholder. Similar to love, beauty was understood to be rooted in the divine with "*husn*" being used in the Quran to denote the names of God that are *husna* or "the most beautiful."[68] Each Name is another perspective through which the Essence conceives of, and interacts with, the cosmos. In His incomparability He is described through His attributes of *jalal* (majesty), and in his comparability through His attributes of *jamal* (beauty), the latter of which usually received more focus in the Sufi tradition. In the Sufi understanding of the unfolding of the universe from the Divine Essence, the

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[66] Atif Khalil, "The Gifts of Suffering and The Virtues of the Heart," in *From the Divine to the Human: Contemporary Islamic Thinkers on Evil, Suffering, and the Global Pandemic,* eds. Muhammad U. Faruque and Mohammed Rustom (Routledge, 2023), 149; Humeyra Ozturan, "Religion and Ethics: Introduction," in *Philosophy of Religion in Islam: A Reader of Classical Sources,* eds. Rahim Acar and M. Cüneyt Kaya (Bloomsbury Academic, 2025).

[67] William C. Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 95.

[68] William C. Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 95-96; Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 74.

names of majesty and beauty facilitate God's interaction with the cosmos.[69] This will be explained further in the chapter on Ibn 'Arabi.

'*Hubb'* is an important word used in the Quran for love. The word '*'ishq,'* an extra-Quranic term used to denote intense and erotic love, also began to appear in writings[70] on the relationship between human beings and God as early as the third/ninth century. Its use elicited accusations of *zandaqa* (heresy) and *ibaha* (licentiousness), as in the inquisition spearheaded by Ghulam Khalil, but by the fourth/tenth century *'ishq* came into more widespread use in Sufi treatises.[71] By the time of Abu Hamid and his brother Ahmad, Ibn 'Arabi, and Rumi there had been significant movement in the halls of theological, legalistic, and philosophical education to incorporate '*ishq* into the lexicon that described the experience of love for God.[72]

As will be seen in the study below, poetry became a key medium through which Sufi thinkers described the nature and experience of the path of love and much of the Sufi writings that have made it into the mainstream in the West have been collections from great poets like Hafiz (d. 791/1390) and Rumi. Some poetry, like poems of asceticism, made use of Quranic imagery and allusions and provided another vehicle through which the deeper hidden meaning of the sacred text could be explored, while others shared a similar foundation but made use of passionate love

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[69] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 358; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 20; Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (World Wisdom Inc, 2008), 23.

[70] As seen in the writings of Bayazid Tayfur inn 'Isa al-Bastami (d. 234/848 or 261/875), Abu l-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 295/908), and in the ecstatic exclamations of al-Hallaj. These early instances were often linked with more controversial figures seen as examples of the intoxicated "love-lost mystic." For more information see Karamustafa's *Sufism: The Formative Period* (3-6). Joseph Lumbard also covers this transition in his "From Hubb to 'Ishq: The Development of Love in Early Sufism."

[71] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings,* 46-47; Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 89; Khalil, "Abū Tālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts,*" 5-6.

[72] William C. Chittick, "Friendship and Love in Islamic Spirituality," in *Friendship in Islamic Ethics and World Politics*, ed. Mohammad Jafar Amir Mahallati (University of Michigan Press, 2019), 77-78.

language to articulate love of God.[73] Early Arabic Sufi poetry grew out of a pre-Islamic odic tradition and a courtly poetic trend that was characterized by the imagery of nomadic desert society and the wine and drunkenness imagery of classical love poetry. This is evident in Ibn al-'Arabi's *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (*Interpreter of Longings*) but more famously in Ibn al-Farid's (d.632/1235) al-*Khamriyya* (*Wine Ode*) and *Nazm al-suluk/al-Ta'iyah al-kubra* (*Poem of the Sufi Way*), and in the poetry attributed to al-Hallaj (d. 304/922).[74] Developed mystical love poetry started to appear in Persian around the sixth/twelfth century with authors like Rashid al-Din Maybudi (d. 520/1126) in his *Kashf al-asrar wa 'uddat al-abrar* (*Unveiling of Secrets and Provisions of the Righteous*), and Sana'i of Ghazna (d.525/1131), who was Maybudi's favourite poet.[75] It was common for famous literary and historical figures to appear in this poetry as well, particularly couples like Layla and Majnun, or Yusuf and Zuleikha. In the case of the former couple, the story of two lovers forced to be apart until after death despite constant efforts to be together provided plenty of room for interpretations that could be applied to the Sufi seeker's journey in love and longing for God.[76] This Sufi poetic outpouring was not without its controversies as

[73] Allen, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, 41, 63; Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Shambhala Publications, 1997), 147.

[74] Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 155, 157; 'Umar Ibn al-Farid, 'Umar Ibn al-Fārid, *Sufi Verse Saintly Life*, trans. Th Emil Homerin (Paulist Press, 2001), 1. Louis Massignon in his *Le Dîwân d'ál-Hallâj* (Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1955) collects poetry attributed to al-Hallaj from various sources, but the authenticity of this attribution for some of the poems is still being explored. See also Herbert Mason's three volume translation of Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr* (Princeton University Press, 1982).

[75] Annabel Keeler, "Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī and Discussions about Intoxicated Sufism," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2021) 54; Chittick, *Divine Love*, xxi.

[76] Nasr, *Garden of Truth,* 67-68; Chittick, *Divine Love*, xxiii; Lumbard, *Ahmad,* 157; Nizami*, The Story of Layla and Majnun*, trans. Rudolphe Gelpke (Omega Publications, 1966), xv-xvi. There were many versions of the story of Layla and Majnun, so the interpretations of various Sufis do not rely on a totally consistent iteration of the story whose historical events, if they occurred, likely date back to the second/eighth century. Nizami's consolidation of the account relied on a variety of sources that he brought into a single narrative in the mid sixth/twelfth century.

seen, perhaps most famously, in the life of al-Hallaj.[77] Even in modern analysis there is an ongoing debate around the interpretation and symbolism of love poetry in Sufi literature. Ahmad al-Ghazali was among the first to make extensive use of poetry to describe metaphysical realities around the theme of love. This method would also appear in Ibn al-'Arabi and especially in the work of Jalal al-Din Rumi.[78]

### 2.3 Four Writers on the Path

Having provided a brief overview of Sufism and the formation of the language and terminology to describe the "Path of Love" up until the seventh/thirteenth century, I shall now turn to examine the poetry, prose, and metaphysical ideas of four key figures who played instrumental roles in the development of the love tradition of Sufism. The following chapter will cover Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and his younger brother who lived, wrote, and taught in major centres of Islamic learning. While the elder brother is more famous for his systematic coverage of all elements of the religious life and Islamic sciences, he further established the Sufi path of Love within the larger body of mainstream scholarship, and the importance of love to that path. The younger brother's work shares a lot of the same themes as Abu Hamid's, even further centralizing love in his description of the seeker's journey to God. He also provides one of the earliest examples of the ecstatic love poetry that would come to mark the writings of Ibn 'Arabi and, more prominently, Rumi.

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[77] According to later accounts he was charged with heresy and executed in Baghdad after claiming "*ana al-Haqq"* (I am the Truth) in a state of ecstasy and union with God. See Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 7-10.

[78] al-Farid, *Sufi Verse*, 27; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 157; Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 147-148. Ernst's *The Shambhala Guide* (147-178) provides a brief summary of the developments of poetry as well as an interesting analysis of the development and maintenance of rhyming schemes throughout the Islamic and Sufi poetic tradition.

After covering the path of love as it appears in the writings of the two Ghazalis, I move in my analysis to Andalusia, North Africa, and those areas where Ibn ‘Arabi, throughout his travels, developed his doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* and its accompanying metaphysics of love. This study will then turn to what is now Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Turkey to cover the poetic outpourings of Jalal al-din Rumi and his contemplation of God through his teacher and companion Shams-i Tabrizi (d. ~646/1248).

# Chapter Three: The Ghazalis

## 3.1 The Lives of Two Brothers

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali and Ahmad al-Ghazali were born in the city of Tus in the historical region of Khurasan encompassing parts of modern-day Northern Iran and Southern Turkmenistan in the mid fifth/eleventh century. This was a period of relative stability for the region under the Turkic Seljuks who legitimized their rule, in part, through the patronage of schools, scholars, and religious figures via *waqfs* (endowments).[79] After being orphaned while still very young, the brothers were raised by a friend of their father and possibly connected to the path quite early by Abu ʻAli Muhammad-i Farmadhi (d. 477/1084-5),[80] who himself had studied Sufism under ʻAbd al-Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri (d. 465/1072). Despite this, Abu Hamid took to what can be described as a more philosophical and rationalistic path in early life. He became a well-respected scholar of Islamic law and theology under the tutelage of al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085). Abu Hamid was offered the prestigious position of Shafiʻi Law at the Nizamiyyah *madrasa* (college) of Baghdad.[81] Around 488/1095 he left this position, at least according to his own biography, because he went through a crisis of faith. In its aftermath, he spent an unknown number of years traveling, contemplating, and writing, before returning to Tus to teach a select group of students until his death. His spiritual crisis and subsequent "interior conversion" to the mystical life is

[79] Carole Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazālī: In Praise of Sufism," in *Routledge handbook on Sufism,* ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2021), 63; Lumbard, *Ahmad,* 52-53; Ann K. S. Lambton, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia: Aspects of Administrative, Economic and Social History, 11th-14th Century*, *vol. 2, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies* (Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 319.

[80] The connection to Farmadhi appears in Karamustafa (124) and Hillenbrand's (63) history. The former describes him as an early teacher of both the brothers and the latter as a "guardian," potentially associating him with the early friend that raised the boys after their parents died. Lumbard (*Ahmad,* 61) does not mention this figure as an early influence of Ahmad and Abu Hamid in his account but lists him as a later influence once Ahmad once he arrived in Nishapur.

[81] Lumbard, *Ahmad,* 10-11; Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 106.

recorded in his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-dalal* (*The Deliverance from Error*).[82]

Abu Hamid felt that his time was characterized by rampant worldliness and a loss of religious knowledge amongst those with religious authority as well as the broader public. To address this "malady" he composed the *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*) which, alongside his *Kimiya-i sa'adat* (*Alchemy of Happiness*) and his autobiographical *al-Munqidh min al-dalal* (*Deliverance from Error*), was intended to revive Muslim practice and belief across every element of society.[83] His writing drew on concepts established by, or attributed to, some of his Sufi predecessors, including Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728), Rabi'a al-'Adwiyya, al-Muhasibi (d. 243/857), Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 386/996) and al-Qushayri, as mentioned. Al-Makki's work, *Qut al-qulub* (*The Nourishment of Hearts*), which became one of the major inspirations for Abu Hamid's *Ihya'*, established three major elements in Sufism that would appear in Abu Hamid's work: *sabr* (patience), *ma'rifa* (gnosis) and *mahabba* (love). Abu Hamid's goal to reform the Islamic sciences and religion encompassed *kalam*, *fiqh*, the study of *hadith*, and *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) in an effort to create a coherent revitalized *din* (religion) in which each field was afforded its proper place and value.[84] However, he came to believe that this effort would be futile without a grounding in genuine spiritual and experiential knowledge. In his autobiography he describes how he acquired knowledge of Sufism through

[82] Nasr, *Garden of Truth,* 182; Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazālī: In Praise of Sufism," 63; Khalil, "Sufism and Qur'anic Ethics," 167. Kenneth Garden in his *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and His* Revival of the Religious Sciences (Oxford University Press, 2015) asserts that this crisis was, in part, sparked by historical events that caused him to question his position in the existing political regime (27-30).
[83] Nasr, *Garden of Truth,* 181; Karamustafa, *Sufism*, 106; Ridgeon, "Origins of Sufism," 3. Other works of his, including the *Mishkat al-anwar* (*The Niche of Lights*), were intended for a more select audience, including his later students, and focused more directly on Sufism and *ma'rifa* (gnosis).
[84] Nasr, *Garden of Truth,* 182; al-Farid, *Sufi Verse*, 28.

listening and study, but this had ultimately been insufficient to approach the essence of Sufism. Only through action, purifying the soul, and *dhikr* could he gain an awareness of this reality, an experience he compares to the difference between knowing about intoxication and experiencing intoxication.[85]

His works have been recognized for their reconciliation of the Islamic mystical tradition with the mainstream articulation of Islam by the *'ulama* or religious authorities of the religion. However, he was not the first to have done this. Al-Makki, who had such an influence on Abu Hamid, was among some of the earliest to promote this integration alongside others writing slightly afterwards, such as al-Qushayri and al-Hujwiri (d. 465/1072). As described in the introduction, this period is characterized in part by an effort to establish a "well-tempered" moderate Sufism.[86] Abu Hamid's work did further connect Sufism with the other Islamic sciences; his *Kitab al-mahabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-rida* (*Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment*) would continue to influence other Sufi and non-Sufi writers on love, including the Andalusian vizier Lisan al-Din al-Khatib (d. 776/1374) in his *Rawdat al-ta'rif bi-l-hubb al-sharif* (*The Garden of Knowledge of Noble Love*), and the Yemeni Sufi Muhammad Murtada al-Zabidi (d. 1205/1790). Seyyed Hossein Nasr additionally credits Abu Hamid's writings with "preparing the ground for the school of ibn 'Arabi."[87]

In contrast to his more philosophically oriented brother, Ahmad al-Ghazali's interests in the mystical path began early on his life. While he was initially eclipsed

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[85] Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 107; Hillenbrand, "Al-Ghazālī: In Praise of Sufism," 64, 66; Khalil, "Abū Tālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts,*" 1.
[86] Khalil, "Abū Tālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts,"* 2; Karamustafa, *Sufism,* 87-88, 106. "Antinomianism" in this sense, refers to the more controversial ecstatic tendencies found in some earlier Sufi communities and individuals.
[87] Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 183; Cornell, *Rabi'a From Narrative to Myth,* 201, 202. The relationship between Abu Hamid and Ibn 'Arabi is discussed further in the chapter on Ibn 'Arabi.

by his brother in *tabaqat*[88] accounts, he gradually began to become more important in Sufi bio-hagiographical works starting in the eighth/fourteenth century, where he would be portrayed as the spiritual superior of his more famous brother. He appears in the *silsilah*s (initiatic chains) of many Sufi orders. Some even considered him the *qutb* (Axis) of the age. Although less is known about his life than Abu Hamid's, a general outline has been established that includes him being orphaned alongside his brother and raised by a man with a connection to Sufism before spending his youth immersed in intellectual and Sufi circles in Tus, Nishapur, and Baghdad. When Abu Hamid had his spiritual crisis while teaching at the *madrasa* in Baghdad, Ahmad is said to have covered his teaching position and cared for his family while the elder brother looked to devote himself to the Sufi path.[89] It appears Ahmad also found favour with the Seljuk court and was proficient in *fiqh* and *kalam* while young but remained focused on Sufism throughout his life.[90] While Abu Hamid is often credited for helping further establish the legitimacy of Sufism alongside the other Islamic sciences, Ahmad's *Sawanih* (*Inspirations*) is one of the first Sufi texts on the metaphysics of love (*'ishq*), creating an important link in the developing Persian school of love with the language and sentiment of passionate love in Sufi metaphysics.[91] In his writing the words for love '*hubb'* and '*'ishq'* are used interchangeably while Abu Hamid used *'ishq* to denote a higher form of love. Ahmad's teachings and writings also influenced other

[88] A form of biographical literature intended to record the history of a given religious or scholastic group that immediately preceded the life of the author. It was often intended to orient their position as part of an established line of spiritual and philosophical transmission as a way of legitimizing certain individuals within the Sufi tradition. See Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The* tabaqāt *Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī.*

[89] Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 183-184; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 65.

[90] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 11, 15, 61. According to his biographer Shams ad-Din Ahmad al-Aflaki (d. 761/1360) Rumi is said to have described the difference between the brothers saying: "If he [Abu Hamid] had one iota of love (*'ishq*) like Ahmad al-Ghazali, it would have been better, and he would have made known the secrets of Muhammadan intimacy the way Ahmad did."

[91] Lumbard, "From 'Hubb' to 'Ishq'," 348; Chittick, *Divine Love,* xxi; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 112.

important figures like ‘Abdu’l-Qahir Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi (d. 563/1168) who founded the Suhrawardiyya order, ‘Ayn al-Qudat (d. 526/1131) whose own *Tamhidat* was influenced by Ahmad’s *Sawanih,* and potentially even Shams-i Tabrizi, although this is debated.[92]

### 3.2 Abu Hamid: Foundation of the Path of Love in the Quran and *Hadith*

Abu Hamid’s introduction to the *Ihya’ ‘ulum al-din* outlines the purpose of his work. Firstly, his intention is to counter a “malady of the majority,” as he saw it, during his time.[93] This “malady” was an ignorance of the true nature of this life; a lack of appreciation for the fact, as he describes it, that this life is fleeting and the Hereafter rapidly approaching. Because of this state in the world the text is intended to begin a renewal of the religious practice and belief through a reiteration and rediscovery of the knowledge of previous religious figures. This belief that people are unprepared for the afterlife exists alongside the idea that his time was one in which true “guides of the way…those who possess knowledge who are the heirs of the prophets” were almost entirely absent. The resulting state of the world is one in which impersonators abound, material gain is prioritised above all else, and the understanding of what constitutes good and evil has been thoroughly confused, and even reversed, for most people.[94] Secondly, the *Kitab al-mahabba* appears in a

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[92] Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide*, 244; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 3,6. With ‘Ayn al-Qudat and his *Tamhidat* the themes present in Ahmad’s *Sawanih* encountered Persian and Indian Sufi traditions. Firoozeh Papan-Matin focuses specifically on the transmission of *sama* (listening) rituals in “‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani, His Work, and His Connection with the Early Chisti Mystics,” in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010).

[93] Ghazali, *Love,* viii.

[94] Ibid, viii-ix. He describes this phenomenon in society as a “malady” near the close of the introduction to *The Book of Love* saying that “leading hearts to the knowledge that benefits everlasting life is more important than leading them to medicine that only benefits the health of the body. The fruit of this knowledge is the health of hearts and souls… How can the medicine that is used to heal bodies, necessarily destined before long to corruption, compare with this!” (xv-xvi).

collection of ten books in Abu Hamid's *Quarter of the Saving Virtues* which focuses on expounding different desirable qualities that facilitate the soul's movement toward God.[95] This is part of his focus on delineating the inner knowledge of the "states of the heart and the attributes of the soul."[96] This *Quarter* details a "knowledge of contingent action," rather than "direct knowledge," which is the ultimate goal of the righteous and cannot be achieved through books and teaching alone, a theme that will appear again in the writings of the other authors covered here. His work is structured to take the reader systematically from the outer aspects of religious knowledge, including forms of worship and practices in daily life, to its inner aspects. He styled the work after books of jurisprudence to further facilitate intellectual development in the sincere reader but maintained that ultimately truth and *ma'rifa* (gnosis) could only be achieved through experience.[97] Finally, as Eric Ormsby explains, Abu Hamid's writing in his *Kitab al-mahabba* responds to the idea held by some theologians and Sufis of his time that love could not be used to describe the relationship between human beings and God. This was part of a broader discussion that centered around the question of whether *mahabbah/hubb* and *'ishq* could be used to describe the love between human beings and God. In Abu Hamid's writing both words appear with *'ishq* indicating a higher love than *mahabbah*. In response to all these tensions, he systematically lays out a doctrine of Divine love.[98]

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[95] Ghazali, *Love*, xii.

[96] Ibid, xv.

[97] Ghazali, *Love*, xv; Lumbard, *Ahmad,* 141-142.

[98] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 141; Ghazali, *Love,* xix. Abu Hamid further argues this in his introduction to *The Book of Love* countering the broader belief as summarised by the quote of one scholar that love "has no meaning apart from persistent obedience to God," and that "genuine love is inconceivable except between the same genus and species." For Abu Hamid this view denies love and all its accompaniments and effects and further, the claim indicated a need for his book in order to challenge such arguments (2-3).

In line with his goal of building the reader's understanding of love systematically, Abu Hamid begins the *Ihya* by establishing the foundation of his philosophy in the Quran and *Hadith*. Love itself, at the most basic level, is defined by Abu Hamid as an inclination toward that which is pleasurable or which brings delight. As that inclination (*mahabbah*) grows to be consistent and based on greater and greater knowledge of the beloved it becomes love (*'ishq*).[99] In his view, the Quranic verse, "God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him…" (5:54), establishes the existence of love between mankind and God; and the verse "Among mankind there are some who take up equals apart from God, loving them like loving God. But those who believe are more ardent in their love of God…" (2:165), establishes that love exists in different degrees or ranks. Furthermore, rather than love of God being expressed only as obedience, as had been proposed by certain theologians before and during Abu Hamid's time, he proposes that obedience can be achieved only as an effect of love, which itself must come first.[100] He also uses the *hadith*, "not one of you believes unless God and His messenger are more loved by him than anything else,"[101] to confirm that love is necessary in order to be considered faithful. In relation to the Sufi path, characterised by states and stages of development on the path toward God, his own introduction to the *Kitab al-mahabba* describes love as the "utmost goal among the stages," with all other stages being a consequence of, or preparation for, the experience of love. The stages of *tawba* (repentance), *sabr* (patience), and *zuhd* (asceticism) lead to love and the states of *shawq* (longing), *uns* (intimacy), and *rida* (contentment) are the result of love.[102]

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[99] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 142.
[100] Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 43; Ibrahim, *Ibn 'Arabi*, 45-46; Ghazali, *Love*, 5.
[101] Ghazali, *Love*, 5; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 142.
[102] Ghazali, *Love,* 2; Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 42; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 293.

### 3.3 Abu Hamid: Perception and the Degrees of Love

The relationship between the perception of delightful things and different types of love is dependent on the faculty of perception which is interacting with the beloved as well as the development of the perceiver. Perception, in his view, is divided in two categories: *zahiri* (outward) perception which is facilitated by the five senses, and *batini* (inward) perception which is facilitated by an inner sixth sense called the '*aql* (intellect)[103] which is greater than all the other senses and without which human beings are reduced to the same level as beasts.[104] Each sense responds to a different kind of outward pleasure whereas the inner sense responds to spiritual pleasure (*qurrat al-'ayn*) which also is greater than pleasure derived from any other source. It is this '*aql* that can recognize God as the object of its love and is the essential and unique component to a human being. As he explains, "the love of God cannot be denied except by a person whose shortcomings relegate him to the level of beasts, since clearly he has not passed beyond mere sense perception in any way," indicating that a lack of love for God is not actually possible outside of the misperception of a human being blinded to reality.[105] Sachiko Murata describes the degree of comprehension through the intellect as a "tendency," the intellect being the "lordly" (*rabbani*) element of the human being that is drawn to knowledge of God and can know something of Him. It is in opposition to the "satanic" (*shaytani*) tendency

[103] This faculty is also referred to as the *nur* (light), *qalb* (heart), and *basira batina* (inward sight).
[104] Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 44-45; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 115; Ghazali, *Love,* 12.
[105] Ghazali, *Love,* 12; Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, 44; Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver,* 98. Al-Ghazali further divides the relationship of love and perception into (1) perception that is pleasurable and therefore loved and (2) perception that the perceiver is averse to and therefore hates. Perception is also further divisible into the relationship between the specific sense and its associated pleasurable perceptibles (e.g. hearing and beautiful sounds, taste and good food, etc.).

that pulls away from God, misguides, and draws attention and love towards the material world instead.[106]

Abu Hamid further divides the pleasures or causes of love into five types that correspond to different degrees of love. The first type of love is the human being's love for themselves; this is a natural inclination towards the self (*nafs, dhat*) and the continuation of the self's existence. He argues that self-existence is innately loved, and its non-existence despised. Even in the case of a person tormented by some affliction, the object of love is not non-existence but the cessation of suffering. This first type of love includes human beings' love for the perfection of their existence which can occur through the attributes, bodily health, material acquisitions and progeny, and through friends and family.[107] The second type of love, closely connected to the first, is for *ihsan* (doing good, doing the beautiful, benevolence). This is the love a human being has for whatever is good for them and perpetuates their existence. This also makes human beings susceptible to loving those who do good for them but may not otherwise be good. As he explains, "the heart irresistibly loves a benefactor and lacks the power to ward off this love."[108] The third cause of love is for a thing itself because it is recognized as good, regardless of whether it directly benefits the self. This is closely related to the fourth cause of love which is for beauty in essence (*fi dhatihi*). Beauty (*jamal, husn*), in this case, goes beyond visual and sensory experiences. In his work Abu Hamid unites different types of beauty (a beautiful voice, a beautiful line of calligraphy, a beautiful person) under the idea that beauty is the result of a thing's proximity to perfection; a thing is considered more

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[106] Murata, *The Tao of Islam,* 258; Al-Ghazali, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazalī*, trans. Montgomery Watt (One World Press, 1953), 95.
[107] Ghazali, *Love,* 14-15; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 45-46.
[108] Ghazali, *Love,* 15.

beautiful when more of its "possible perfections" are present. When all possible perfections are present the beautiful thing reaches *ghayat al-jamal*, the utmost degree of beauty, and evokes the most love. Furthermore, beauty is in things that are not subject to the perception of the five senses as in beautiful character, beautiful moral traits, or a beautiful life. The traits that compose beauty in this latter sense include generosity, chastity, and piety which can only be known by the intellect, the sixth inner sense. An awareness of this beauty in a thing's essence is somewhat innate but to recognize the extent of it and its relationship with God requires a developed "illumined intellect" that is not distracted by the outer forms and five outward senses.[109] The perception of inner beauty then relies on the development of the individual: "He who is deprived of the inner vision neither discerns them [inner beauty, inner meanings] nor takes pleasure in [loves] them…But he whose inner vision predominates over his outer eye enjoys a love for inner meaning far greater than his love for any outward senses."[110] The final cause of love is for a thing with which the lover shares an outer affinity and/or a hidden affinity (*munasaba khafiyya*), that is a spiritual affinity, which will be explained further when discussing the way the Sufi path develops the attributes of the Beloved in the lover. These different types of love are then ultimately united by Abu Hamid's argument about the reality of love in relation to God: that "God alone merits love."[111]

[109] Ghazali, *Love,* 17-19; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 48-49, 56; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 143.
[110] Ghazali, *Love,* 21.
[111] Ghazali, *Love,* 23; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 50.

### 3.4 Abu Hamid: "God Alone Merits Love"

In his *Kitab al-mahabba*, Abu Hamid argues that "God alone merits love,"[112] and that love of anything other than God without consideration of its relationship with God is a love based on ignorance and false knowledge. True knowledge, in this light, means an awareness of every beloved's contingent existence in relation to the necessary existent that is God alone.[113] With the first cause of love, for example, human beings love their own existence but through true knowledge they would realize that any human being, in essence, has no existence except by virtue of God's making. The same is true of perfection and of all things that are beneficial, good, and beautiful: "there is nothing in existence for Him abiding through itself, except the Abiding, the Living… So, if the recognizer (*'arif*) loves his essence and the existence of his essence pours from other than him, he must necessarily love the One."[114] This same sentiment, that all love is love of God, also applies to the attributes that evoke love, including beauty.

To expand on what was described above, all beauty emanates from the Absolute Beauty as the Prophet meant when saying "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty."[115] This intuitive draw to the beautiful is more obvious with the outward senses. He divides beauty into three types, the first being physical beauty that the outer senses are most receptive to. The two remaining types of beauty are abstract and divine/absolute beauty which are both the purview of the intellect concerned with inner realities and the development of knowledge of things "unendowed with form." Love for a beautiful thing, of outer or inner beauty, is determined by the degree of the

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[112] Ghazali, *Love,* 23.
[113] Ghazali, *Love,* 23-24, Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 51-52.
[114] Ghazali, *Love*, 24.
[115] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 145.

relative perfection of that thing, since in the end, it is only in God that perfection is complete and absolute (*mutlaq*); He is *al-Jamil al-Mutlaq* (the Absolute Beautiful). Even this inner vision of beauty and the intellectual development that connects it with God is conceived of in stages. The truth, the nature of the root of all love is initially unclear. In an analogy, Abu Hamid describes this early stage as akin to seeing a figure at dusk or imagining a figure in the mind's eye, while the later stage of love (*'ishq*) and perception is perfective and direct, akin to seeing a figure in broad daylight or actually seeing the figure imagined in the mind's eye. Realizing the fifth type of love to the highest degree, by having a hidden relationship and affinity with God, is the most difficult.[116]

The development of love and purity in this life is essential to Abu Hamid's argument, as it is only in this life that God will respond with love of His own. Further development can occur in the afterlife, as described above, but the initiation of intimacy has to begin here, before death, since the fruits of what begins here sprout there.[117] Intimacy, in this case, is cultivated in accordance with that fifth type of love, through the acquisition of an approximate affinity with God and the development of His attributes. Abu Hamid and other Sufi writers predicate their advocacy for a deep love and knowledge of God around the ultimate goal of His presence, not just paradise, that requires a deeper purity and more profound witnessing that is cleansed of the illusion of an independent self. To clarify, this summit of love does not overcome God's ultimate transcendence.[118] At this level of understanding all love is

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[116] Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 56, 63-64; Ghazali, *Love,* 57. This second stage can be called *mushahada* (direct witness), *liqa* (encounter), and *ru' ya* (sight) (57). In the discussion of vision of God, Abu Hamid clarifies that this is a question of "intensity of disclosure" rather than degrees of construction (59, 63).

[117] Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 57; Ghazali, *Love,* 67. As Ghazali says, "A person may obtain God's love only in this world, and while he is still in it."

[118] Ghazali, *Love,* 67; Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (The Islamic Texts Society, 1975), 41, 76-77. Lings describes this saying, "beyond this legal state [the Sufi] is concerned with actual purity which he

ultimately God's love for Himself as "there is nothing in existence but Him."[119] This sentiment, for Ghazali, calls back to a precedent found in figures such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who is reported to have said, "I have not worshipped Him for fear of His Fire, nor for love of His garden…rather, I have worshipped Him for love of Him."[120] He also supports this understanding with the *Poem of the Two Lovers* attributed by him to Rabi'a as well and drawn, in part, from the previous writings of al-Makki:

> "I love You with two loves: a passionate love,
> and a love of which only You are worthy.
>
> As for the passionate love,
> It has preoccupied me with the remembrance of you beyond all else.
>
> And As for that love of which only You are worthy,
> Your parting of the veils allows me to see you.
>
> No praise is mine for either one or the other,
> But all praise is yours for this [love] and the other."[121]

Here the process of losing oneself in love of God is associated with *ladhdha* (pleasure), the word Abu Hamid uses often in place of *dhawq* (tasting), and a preoccupation with remembrance (*dhikr*) of God above all other potential loves. Additionally, the "parting of the veil" reveals the nature of the reciprocity between lover and Beloved, with God ultimately being the only agent in the experience of love; It is ultimately God that bridges the gap and towards whom all praise should be directed.[122]

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can 'taste' and which has to be made total and permanent" (77). He also quotes Abu Hamid saying, "For a lover no greater felicity exists than to spend eternity with his Beloved…to be able to gaze upon Him uninterruptedly for ever and ever without distraction or impediment" (67).

[119] Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 108; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 49.

[120] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 47.

[121] Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 40, 62; Cornell, *Rabi'a*, 197-198.

[122] Cornell, *Rabi'a,* 200-201.

### 3.5 Abu Hamid: Realizing Love as an Act

Abu Hamid explains that the process of drawing near to God is itself a sign of His love and quotes the Prophet saying that "Nothing brings men near to Me like the performance of what I made obligatory for them, that through their works of supererogation My servant comes ever nearer to Me until I love him."[123] Human beings show their love by willingly participating in the process of purification, by developing true knowledge through the intellect, while God shows His love by perpetuating that process. The pursuit of perfection is only present in the lover as the Beloved is already whole in Himself and can only show love by bringing the lover closer to the Whole.[124] So, while love is present across the created cosmos, God's love is not directed toward all things equally; it is instead distributed in accordance with the created things' ability to receive His love and with their proximity to Him. In his *Mishkat al-Anwar* Abu Hamid explains how human beings are a microcosm, capable of knowing themselves, their true nature, and therefore something of God through their intellect which imitates God's Intellect. This knowledge is ultimately made possible by His mercy (*hadrat al-rahma*), just as His mercy created man as a microcosm.[125] This process of obtaining perfection requires knowledge and sacrifice on the part of the seeker. God then responds to any initial effort with a proportionally larger bounty, or love. Using the analogy of a pruning, Abu Hamid explains how this

[123] Ghazali, *The Faith*, 56-57.

[124] Ghazali, *Love*, 99, 105. Speaking on this, Abu Hamid writes, "God's love for man lies in His drawing him near, and out of himself, by warding off distractions and sins and in purifying his inmost nature from the spots of this world and in lifting the veil from his heart until he eyes Him as though he saw Him with his very heart…Man's love for God lies in his inclination to seize this absent perfection which he lacks" (104).

[125] Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 58.

initial sacrifice "is a diminishment with a view to an increase which will go far beyond what was there before the sacrifice."[126]

Beyond the theory of love as established so far, the goal of the Sufi path is the experience of love in the Divine. The process or act by which this occurs is not entirely explained by Abu Hamid in his *Kitab al-mahabba*, since it is not permitted, and beyond that, impossible. However, he does identify some of the elements that are necessary to facilitate the movement on this path, such as the need for the intellect to gain control of the lower self and overcome satanic tendencies.[127] In his description of *tawhid* (oneness, unity) he breaks down realization through love using the *shahadah,* "there is no god but God," to articulate his point. At the first level of understanding, the level of the tongue, "No god but God" is affirmed by the tongue alone, since *tawhid* has not been interiorized; it has only been repeated. At the second level, the heart also believes what the tongue is saying but this belief is marked by imitation (*taqlid*) and a failure to achieve realization (*tahqiq*) because the One has not been witnessed but His existence has been inferred from other acquired knowledge. At the third level, the Light of the Real facilitates the awareness of all things emerging from the One. This development of knowledge is tied to the development of likeness to God through these stations as the seeker moves to acquire the "lordly character traits" connected to the Divine attributes.[128] He is building on an established element of Sufi ethics based on the underlying tenant that like is drawn to like and so one should aim

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[126] Lings, *What is Sufism?,* 82-83; Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 109.

[127] Murata, *The Tao of Islam,* 258-259; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 145.

[128] Khalil, "Sufism and Qur'anic Ethics," 160; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 158, 417; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 145. In his *Kīmiya-yi sa'adat* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*), written later in Persian, he explains the first three stages of the fourfold division using the analogy of the master of a house: "one person convinces himself or believes that the master is in the house because so-and-so said he is in the house. This is the imitation of a common man, who heard it from his mother and father. Another person infers that the master is in the house because the horse and servant are standing by the doorway. This is like the belief of the Kalam expert. The third person sees him inside the house by way of witnessing. This is like the *tawhīd* of the recognizer."

to be characterized by the character traits of God in order to gain greater proximity to Him. This is referred to as *al-tashabbuh bi-llah* (gaining similarity to God) or *ta'alluh* (deiformity). This process of freeing oneself from defect and vices is developed through beliefs and practices, including *dhikr*, that come together in their intent to polish the heart, to clear it of anything other than God, so it reflects only His attributes.

These three levels of realizing *tawhid* build on the initiatory practices and tenants of broader Islamic belief and include repentance and renunciation. This is a process further maintained by *sabr* (patient endurance), *khawf* (fear), and *raja* (hope).[129] For Abu Hamid this deeper interiorization of the desirable character traits was the main focus of *tasawwuf,* more so than conventional *fiqh,* as "the jurisprudence of the heart" (*fiqh al-qalb*).[130] The lover then acquires deeper knowledge of God that can only be acquired through the clear focus of a heart that has otherwise been purified of worldly distractions and then continues to develop through this life and the afterlife.[131] Lings articulates a similar concept describing Sufi practice being of two kinds: "rites which are binding on all Muslims, and additional voluntary rites," with the intention being for the initial rites to gain an additional depth only accessed through the unique aspects of the Sufi path of love. Muhasibi, an author who had a significant impact on Ghazali, also describes in his *Kitab al-'ilm* a binary classification of believers in which the higher class has turned away from external

[129] Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God,* 83; Murata, *The Tao of Islam,* 259; Ghazali, *Love,* 69. Here he appears to be indicating the underlying beliefs and practices associated with the five pillars that the life of renunciation then builds on through additional practices and attention to purifying the heart.
[130] Khalil, "Sufism and Qur'anic Ethics," 164.
[131] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 209; Ghazali, *Love*, 70, 71. As he says: "The purpose of practical dealings [themselves] is to purify and cleanse the heart so that the truth may become manifest within it and so that it may be adorned with the privileged knowledge of hidden things."

vices and has also cleansed themselves of the inner vices through a greater interiorization of *tawba* (repentance).[132]

### 3.6 Abu Hamid: Is it Love?

To further tie love with true knowledge Abu Hamid established criteria and identified signs through which love could be determined to be sincere. Because human beings are susceptible to deception, the Sufi path requires not just a spiritual guide but also a process of self-examination to ensure the seeker's progress is not impeded by internal, psychic obstacles, the most dangerous of them the absence of truthfulness (*sidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*) in the quest, since the journey must begin with these qualities. The first test of love is if the lover yearns to meet the beloved. When the beloved is God, the full encounter occurs after death, and so the lover's approach to death can indicate something of the sincerity (or lack of it) of their love. For Abu Hamid, this is supported by the Quranic verse, "wish for death if you are truthful" (2:94). He also quotes al-Makki, who writes, "After love of encountering God, there is no trait God loves more in a man than frequent prostration."[133] This indicates that this yearning for God is so important for the believer that God desires it in His seekers more, even, than frequent prostration—a hallmark of Islamic piety and a symbol of the servitude before God's majesty demanded by Islam. This sign can also be present in degrees with the bliss one experiences upon meeting God after death being in proportion to his love of God and fear of separation from the world, during life.[134] Another sign of love is for the lover to love the same things that the

[132] Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God,* 141-142; Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 75.
[133] Ghazali, *Love,* 108.
[134] Ghazali, *Love,* 108-110; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 78.

beloved loves, to love what God loves and to hate what He hates. At one level this is following the desires of the beloved over one's own wants and at a higher level it is the desire only for what the beloved desires. In the relationship between the seeker and God the hatred of what God hates and love for what He loves is expressed through pleasure in obedience, even in suffering. Ghazali intertwines knowledge, love, obedience, and suffering saying that "wisdom and knowledge lie in hunger whereas disobedience and ignorance lie in satiation."[135] In this view disobedience is not the opposite of love but a miscalculation on the part of the seeker that prevents their love from being perfected because it is directed at the satisfaction of a misplaced desire. Abu Hamid also connects this idea of loving what God loves with the development of God's attributes in the lover. In emulating the Beloved, the signs of love can be found in the character traits associated with the Divine names. In one example, Abu Hamid calls for seekers to be compassionate and merciful, as God is, towards His servants, and "harsh toward his enemies."[136] Elsewhere he indicates that while many of these signs are present in all lovers of God, knowledge of His attributes is present in the most elite lovers of God. He quotes Junayd (d. 297/910) who captures this idea and the focused love of God for His own sake, found in the sayings attributed to Rabi'a:

> [The] elite attain love through the greatness of God's decree, through His power and knowledge and wisdom…Since they know His perfect attributes and His most beautiful names they are unrestrained in loving Him. In their view He deserves love because He is worthy of it, even if He were to take away all favours from them.[137]

[135] Khalil, "Abū Tālib al-Makkī & the *Nourishment of Hearts,*" 13; Ghazali, *Love*, 118.
[136] Ghazali, *Love*, 118.
[137] Ibid, 130.

Love for God through suffering, and the patience to maintain love of God through trials makes the seeker beloved to God and is another sign of love. Further, God may even send trials to the seeker out of His own love. Beyond responding to the trial with patience and love the lover who responds with *rida* (contentment, satisfaction) has even greater love and knowledge, and is further favoured by God.[138] This also raises an interesting question: If one has love for what God loves, hatred for what He hates, and also possesses *rida*, which is to say, satisfaction with the way things are, including trials and even sins, since they have been determined and decreed by God, how can these apparently oppositional ideals hold together? How can one be both loving and satisfied toward sin and suffering while also hating it? Abu Hamid explains this with the example of the death of "an enemy's enemy who also happens to be one's own enemy."[139] The situation evokes opposite responses, at once. Ultimately, the lover is content and pleased with all things to the extent they come from the Beloved, but is also displeased with sin since it involves the breach of divine commandments.[140] In other words, the lover is pleased with how things are, "from the divine side," but displeased also with the fact that some things involve sin, suffering, and even evil, the displeasure being "from the human side." To return to his analogy, it involves the joy one feels at the death of an enemy, but the displeasure at the fact that this enemy is also the enemy of one's own enemy.

Another sign of love is love for all things that mention the beloved, are a sign of them, or facilitate a degree of contact with them. For lovers of God, this involves

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[138] Ghazali, *Love*, 160; Hina Khalid, "Cultivating Prayerful Presence at the Bedside: From Mastery Towards Mystery," in *From the Divine to the Human: Contemporary Islamic Thinkers on Evil, Suffering, and the Global Pandemic,* eds. Muhammad U. Faruque and Mohammed Rustom (Routledge, 2023), 130; Atif Khalil, "Contentment, Satisfaction and Good-Pleasure: *Rida* in Early Sufi Moral Psychology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 43, no. 3 (2014): 373, 380.
[139] Khalil, "Contentment, Satisfaction and Good-Pleasure," 12.
[140] Ibid.

all of creation, but especially the Quran, the Prophet, solitude, and recitation of the Quran. These latter four speak to the Beloved or are a state of limited distraction in which the seeker can contemplate the object of their love.[141] Fear can also be a sign of love. In his *Kitab al-mahabba,* Abu Hamid establishes a relation between fear, awe, and the perception of God's names of majesty (*jalal*). Just as the seeker responds to beauty with love, they respond to God's grandeur and majesty with awe; in one case, God is encountered through His immanence, in the other, God is encountered through His transcendence. As a lover progresses on the path of love, they may fear losing proximity to God, they may fear that He will turn away or veil Himself entirely, or they may fear becoming unmindful or heedless of Him. Fear of this type is also the result of having achieved some proximity to God and is further associated with the most elite of lovers who fear separation even in their state of love. Any lover on the path may also fear stagnation, which itself is viewed as a punishment for lassitude or turning toward creaturely objects of love.[142] Lovers may also hide their love for God "out of fear of Him and jealousy of His secret."[143] In part this is because the lover does not want to misguide anyone as to the state of his love, which is not known to him, and does not want to misinform others. Furthermore, this secret love honours God's majesty. To make his point, Abu Hamid quotes the words of the mystic who said, "Those who refer most to God are those who are most distant from Him."[144]

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[141] Ghazali, *Love*, 114, 118; Watt, *The Faith*, 63. In Abu Hamid's *Bidayat al-Hidayah* (*The Beginning of Guidance*) that details proper expression of faith and practice he specifically directs that upon entering the mosque one should mentally set themselves to private devotion by saying, amongst other things: "O God, make us to guide and to be guided aright, not to err and be lead astray, at war with Thy enemies and at peace with Thy friends, loving men with Thy love and hostile with Thy hostility to those of Thy creatures who have opposed thee."

[142] Ghazali, *Love*, 120-121, 123; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 79.

[143] Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 80.

[144] Ghazali, *Love,* 127.

### 3.7 Abu Hamid: Unifying His Concepts

At the fourth level (to return to the degrees of realizing *tawhid*) nothing is seen in existence except the One, the Beloved, "nothing is present in the witnessing other than the One."[145] Here knowledge, love, pleasure, and vision coalesce in the intensification of the lover's relationship with God according to their development before death. As Abu Hamid says, "this bliss is in proportion to the force of the love: when love increases pleasure increases."[146] In the afterlife the degree to which one realised true knowledge during life, or achieved the beatific vision, will influence the degree to which God is manifest to them.[147]

In the broader Sufi tradition, God's desire to be loved is often confirmed by the *hadith qudsi*, "I was a Hidden Treasure, and I desired to be known." This can be related to Abu Hamid's association of knowledge with love, in which case the end of the *hadith* could almost be altered slightly to read that God "loved to be loved." This idea of the "hidden treasure" also appears as one of many signs of love Abu Hamid describes. In other words, the lover hides his love to protect the secret of his love from false interpretations or to preserve the intimate nature of that love. The only exception to guarding the secret is during states of mystical intoxication (*sakra*), when the lover is overcome and reveals that inner love and secret. If the state is genuine, they will be forgiven.[148]

The relationship of love between human beings and God is a vertical relationship that does not presume a lack or deficiency on the part of God. While love of beauty cannot occur without a measure of knowledge or gnosis (*ma'rifa*), its degree

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[145] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 158, 417.
[146] Ghazali, *Love,* 67.
[147] Ibid, 59.
[148] Ghazali, *Love,* 126,128; Abrahamov, *Divine Love,* 80-81.

is determined by the extent to which the believer recognizes and loves God and sees His beauty manifest in the world. From the perspective of the Essence, love is directed, ultimately, at God's knowledge of Himself, at His own Beauty which human beings are capable of manifesting because of their capacity to realize the divine attributes. As Abu Hamid explains: "When someone loves only himself, his acts, and his compositions, his love does not transgress his essence and the concomitants of his essence, since they are connected to his essence."[149] Lings describes those who have purified their hearts for the Beloved as seeing with the "Eye[s] of water." Rather than viewing the Beloved through the lens of their own subjective existence, through the illusion of independence, for realized lovers of God, there is not only one Object but one Subject.[150] Although Abu Hamid maintains that God is always transcendent, in his *Mishkat al-Anwar* he explains further that the *al-'arifun bi-llah* (Knowers of God) come to realize nothing exists except God through their annihilation in the *al-Ahadiyyah* (Absolute Singularity of God), a sentiment that Ibn 'Arabi elaborates in great detail, as we shall see below.[151]

### 3.8 Ahmad al-Ghazali: First There was God's Love

While love is a key component of Abu Hamid's Metaphysics, Ahmad takes this centralization even further, viewing love as the Divine Essence Itself. The

[149] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 115; Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love," 170.
[150] Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 71-72. He later translated another *hadith* that describes this relationship between God's love, the seeker's love of God, and the relationship with God that follows His guidance, which is the method for purification: "Nothing is more pleasing to Me, as a means for My slave to draw near unto Me, than worship which I have made binding unto him; and My slave ceaseth not to draw near unto me with added 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 whereby he graspeth and the Foot wheron he walketh" (74).
[151] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 49.

ontological relationship with God is summarized in the *hadith qudsi*, "I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, therefore I created creation in order that I would be known." In Ahmad's interpretation of this saying, love is the underlying substance of creation. It is a self-disclosure (*tajalli*) of the Divine Essence, which is Itself Love. All created things are thus "a glance from loveliness."[152]

Love can be understood to have two beginnings in Ahmad's metaphysics; the first is before creation and the second in creation. The former is with God's love as it is directed at human beings (His "loveliness" towards us). And the latter, which is ultimately retraced to the former, is the human's love for God (His "beloved-ness" to us). This, for Ahmad, is the meaning of the Quranic verse, "He loves them and [therefore] they love Him."[153] Love is the natural response of the human being to God and creation, and it is the natural function of the heart. As Ahmad writes, "the function of the heart is being a lover…it is certain that the heart has been created for love and being a lover and knows nothing else."[154] In further exposition on the verse, he explains that "The root of love grows in Eternity. The diacritical dot under the *ba* in *He loves* (*hubb*) *them* became a seed scattered in the ground of *they love Him*. Or rather the dot was scattered in *them* and *they love Him* grew up."[155]

His interpretation of "The Day of the Covenant" as it is laid out in the Quran (7:172)[156] established God's love for human beings. He asked, "Am I not your Lord?" to which they respond, "Yes indeed," establishing their love for Him as a result of Him first making them His own beloveds. So, in one sense love has two beginnings,

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[152] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 113-114; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih,* 23(11); Keeler "Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī," 54.
[153] Chittick, *Divine Love*, viii; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 163.
[154] Lumbard, *Ahmad,* 115, 163.
[155] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 299; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 44(58).
[156] "And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' they said 'Yea, we bear witness'-lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Truly of this we were heedless,'"

but in another the human experience of love in time is beginningless, because of its root in God's love for humankind.[157] The one love, in his cosmology, appears in many aspects or, rather, all aspects of the created world as he writes in the *Sawanih:*

> Love is its own bird and its own nest, its own essence and its own attribute, its own feather and its own wing. It is both the air and the flight, the hunter and the game, the goal and the searcher for the goal, the seeker and the sought. It is its own beginning and its own end, its own sultan and its own subject, its own sword and scabbard. It is both the garden and the tree, the branch and the fruit, the bird and the nest.[158]

While this is the nature of reality, according to Ahmad, he also believes that most people are distracted by creaturely objects of love and fail to recognize the reality of love as it relates to the Essence. This awareness is facilitated by the spiritual journey which begins with the heart as the "function of the heart is to love, and in the absence of love it is idle."[159] As seen in the writings of his brother, but perhaps more explicit here, knowledge is connected to love, but it is ultimately insufficient alone. The relationship between love, the Essence, and creation is less important to Ahmad than the path of love that the spiritual seeker must traverse to be annihilated in the Beloved.

### 3.9 Ahmad al-Ghazali: Love and Recognition

Where his brother's work excelled in outlining the theological and doctrinal aspects of love, Ahmad Ghazali's focus was on the mysteries of Divine and human

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[157] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 163-164. Rashid al-Din Maybudi, writing around the same time, similarly marks this Covenant of *Alast* as "the beginning of the state of lovers, and the binding of the pact and Covenant of love with them, that first day when God was present and reality attained." See Annabel Keeler's "Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī and Discussions about Intoxicated Sufism," in the *Routledge Handbook on Sufism* (55) for more about this and the tendency for Sufi writers to make use of ecstatic language and descriptions of wine and intoxication, to describe the experience of love on the path.
[158] Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 23(10); Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 164-165.
[159] Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 41(48); Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 168.

love, particularly in his *Sawanih.* Despite these differences, Ahmad echoes the sentiment hinted at in his brother's *Ihya*, that his writings were intended to be instructive, but they could not, without practice and an immersion into the mystical life, facilitate witnessing. Ahmad frequently reminds his reader of the space between his words and the meaning they are pointing towards. This is most apparent in his *Sawanih* where he states that his words are only allusions, forms (*suwar*), capable of moving the reader only so far towards understanding their realities (*ma'ani*), including love, which are supra-formal. As he says, "outward expressions (*'ibarat*) in this discourse cannot but be illusions to different ideas… they [the inner meaning of words] can only be perceived by inner vision (*basirat*)."[160] Note the similar sentiment as is seen in Abu Hamid's work of an inner perception or intellect that facilitates recognition of love. Ahmad's intention with his poetry is to induce the necessary inspiration in the reader to follow the "path of wayfaring love," and to develop the insight to do so; his goal is to guide, rather than transmit, through his poetry.

Related to his declarations about the nature of the written word, knowledge (*'ilm*), in his view, is helpful in recognizing and following the path but is inferior to love and gnosis or recognition (*'irfan*). He establishes the difference between knowledge and recognition across several passages in his *Sawanih*, saying that the "end of 'knowledge' is the shore of love…knowledge is the moth of love. Its knowledge is the outer aspect of the affair. In it the first thing that burns is knowledge."[161] In his *Majalis* he further clarifies, again using the image of a moth, the superiority of recognition to knowledge: "Knowledge has become confused for you with recognition. Do you know what recognition is? [It is] the burning of moths in the

[160] Chittick, *Divine Love*, xxiii, 311; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 152-153; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 14.
[161] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 155-156, 161.

flame of the candle;" while knowledge is transmissible it cannot compare to recognition which is the experience of love, i.e., "tasting" it oneself.[162]

Recognition is achieved through the cultivation of the heart which, in Ahmad's cosmology, is the element of the human self that recognizes beauty, and therefore, Love's many faces in the realm of created beings. This idea will be elaborated on more in the section on Rumi but there appears, in Ahmad's work, the association of outward form with inner realities. So, outward beauty can be a distraction but, for the lover, it also points to spiritual realities that orient the seeker towards the source of all beauty.[163] The heart is the faculty that can be turned toward the love of the world or towards what the spirit loves. The spirit is, in his view, where love manifests most fully and it is the mediator between the heart and the highest level of reality that is "the secret," or the "hidden treasure."[164] The spirit is the core element, the essence, of the human being. In the Quran, God is reported to have said that He "breathed into him," namely Adam, "of My spirit" (Q 15:29). The heart witnesses the beloved and the beauty which evokes love. Thus, Ahmad declares, "Seek the heart! And seize it!"[165] By developing the beautiful attributes and polishing the heart, through the ritual practice of remembrance or *dhikr*, and *sama* (listening to sacred music and sounds), the heart is turned toward the spirit and becomes the locus through which God can witness His own attributes. The heart itself cannot grasp Love itself, only its manifestations, since "love never shows the whole of its face to anyone."[166] At the first phases of the journey the lover-wayfarer witnesses the beloved's beauty in the manifest things through the faculty of the heart but ultimately,

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[162] Ibid, 155.
[163] Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love," 169.
[164] Nasr, *Garden of Truth,* 183; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 167-168; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 34(33).
[165] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 169.
[166] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 313-314; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 169.

through the path, it realizes that there is only the Love which the spirit loves. At the highest stage there is only the lover, and the word "beloved" ultimately describes Love loving Itself through the manifestations of Its Own beauty. As Joseph E. B. Lumbard explains, "Once Love has descended into the world, it begins to seek itself through the love of the lover."[167] In one sense the capacity to love is initiated by God's love and so develops from the outside into the spirit, but from the perspective of the created being, love is perceived from the innermost spirit and moves outward to penetrate the awareness cultivated in the heart.

### 3.10 Ahmad al-Ghazali: The Path of Love

To explore the path of love in Ahmad's writing further, he describes the states and stages of the Sufi path as a fourfold development towards love's fulfilment. The first stage is when one loves something other than the beloved; these are the secondary causes of love when their origin remains unrecognised. This is the starting point in Ahmad's description of the path. This love is, in a sense, an illusion because there is only one beloved, even though the human being's awareness of this fact may be limited. In reality, human love has no specific object; even if one thinks the object of their love is a specific person or thing, it is always directed towards God. The second stage is when one loves what is of the Beloved, the manifestations and attributes. The third stage is when one loves the Beloved alone. Part of this development is realizing the poverty of the seeker in relation to the beloved which further indicates a sense of the reliance of the lover on the beloved. As Ahmad states, "The Beloved is the beloved in every state, thus self-sufficiency is its attribute. And

[167] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 174.

the lover is the lover in every state, thus poverty is its attribute."[168] This reveals that at the level of the created things there is an interdependence between lover and Beloved. Chittick explains this when he states that the lover's role is to manifest the attributes of the Beloved in order to fulfil their own need for the Hidden Treasure to be manifest. This in turn creates the Beloved's need for the lover at the level where the Divine Essence has created the distinction between lover and Beloved.[169]

This cultivation of awareness, the development of the attribute, is not a painless process especially in those stations when an awareness of the beloved also forces the lover to reflect on their own lack, their own non-existence in relation to the only Existent.[170] As Ahmad explains, "In the beginning there is yelling, howling, and lamentation, because love has not yet taken over the whole domain…once love conquers the lover's domain, then these things are withheld, and lamentation is replaced with observation (of the beloved's form) and leanness (of the lover's existence), because impurity has been replaced with purity."[171] Suffering, pain, and separation cannot be completely avoided even at the third stage, however, because any sense of duality creates opposition and tension, making hardship an essential characteristic of the lover's experience of love in a process of separation along the path through which "the lover becomes tame and surrenders."[172] Only through the complete dissolution of any sense of independence, of lover and beloved, until all that remains is love and the perception of all things as a modality of love, can this be overcome. At this final stage the lover and beloved are one, union and separation are the same, and the wayfaring from state to state is replaced with a "fixity (*tamkin*) of

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[168] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 305, 312; Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 175; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 39(43).
[169] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 388.
[170] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 174-176, 179; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 30(25).
[171] Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 30(24).
[172] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 177; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 421-422.

love" that leaves any sense of differentiated self behind.[173] Ahmad also describes a fourfold relationship oriented around the utility of jealousy that captures both the stages and a sense of growth through trials. Further it identifies God as the actor cultivating the focus of the lover on Him:

> The face toward the creatures is the sword of the Beloved's jealousy (*ghayrat*), wielded so the lover will not look at others. The face towards the lover is the sword of the present moment's jealousy, wielded so that he will not look at himself. The face toward the Beloved is love's jealousy, wielded so that he will feed on love and not be tied to wanting, for he must not seek anything outside it… All three faces are jealousy's sword, cutting off the gaze from others, for this work reaches the point where the lover is the other, and the Beloved is also the other. This is the ruling power of love's shining, for the food of love's perfection comes from unification. In it there is no room for the distinction between lover and Beloved.[174]

At this final stage the person still exists in the material realm, but they see the many names and attributes of love as self-disclosures of God:

> We saw the structure of the universe and the source of the world.
> And passed easily beyond cause and caused.
> And that black light which is beyond the point of *la*,
> We also passed beyond this; neither this nor that remains.[175]

*La* in this passage refers to the *la* that is the first word of the *shahadah*, that is "no." In Ahmad's view the "no" here is the ultimate negation of everything except God. The "black light" refers to what Sufis also call "the station of no-station," or subsistence (*baqa'*), that is a state beyond knowledge and distinction which can only be comprehended experientially in the depths of a heart turned completely towards the spirit. It is the point of love beyond the God of Belief, described earlier.[176] It is a state in which the lover has fulfilled the Trust established at the Covenant of *Alast* and is

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[173] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 182.
[174] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 418; Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 18(4).
[175] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 182,183.
[176] Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 183; Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 102.

inaccessible even to scholars and the learned unless they have also become lovers.[177] This, in Ahmad's view, is a state beyond duality that very few achieve. He states, "Now, not everyone can find his way to this station…This Reality is a pearl in the shell and the shell is in the depths of the ocean. Knowledge can advance only as far as the seashore; how could it possibly reach the depths?"[178] Even at this point, however, the Beloved per se remains beyond the access of the "newly arrived" or the created things and the lover's 'union' is an awareness of the Beloved's proximity: "though the Beloved may be a thousand parasangs distant, the lover knows her to be present and counts her as closer than all close things."[179]

## Conclusion: Love throughout the Stations

Both Ghazali brothers place love at the summit of their understanding of the Sufi path and tie it to the perception of God's Beauty and the perception of His manifest beauty in the world of created things. While the human being can perceive something of God's relationship with creation through knowledge, it is ultimately an inner dimension, the intellect, that experiences the manifest reality as the many beautiful faces of God. The Sufi path, and the writings of Sufi figures concerned with the path of love, direct the seeker through states and stages that develop the intellect, and purify the heart, so it can become aware of this truth as they understand it. Both brothers indicate that the Essence remains beyond comprehension, and instead the experience of love is one of an awareness of God and His true relationship with all created things. Ahmad, however, captures more of the "love-drunk," ecstatic element

[177] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 317.
[178] Ahmad Ghazzali, *Sawanih*, 19(4); Lumbard, *Ahmad*, 183.
[179] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 390.

associated with more controversial Sufi figures. Further, his poetry makes use of the themes and images associated with passionate love in the world. Ibn ‘Arabi expands on love as the mechanism motivating creation and incorporates it into his famous exposition of the doctrine of Islamic monotheism described by his students and followers as *Wahdat al-Wujud* or “Oneness of Being,” a subject to which I shall now turn.

# Chapter Four: Ibn ‘Arabi

## 4.1 The Life and Times of Ibn ‘Arabi

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-‘Arabi, also known as *al-Shaikh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Shaykh) and *Muhyi al-Din* (The Reviver of Religion), was born in 560/1165 in the besieged Andalusian city of Murcia. At the time of his birth, Almoravid power was declining in what is now Spain and Almohad power was expanding. In the region of Murcia, this expansion brought the Almohads into conflict with Ibn Mardanish (d. 568/1172), who, after facing defeat in a battle near Murcia, fled into the fortified city where he remained for several years. It is in this context that Ibn ‘Arabi was born.[180] His father appears to have been well-connected to the Almohad powers of the region. Around 568/1172, a group of nobles left Murcia to further align themselves with the Almohad ruler, and this is likely when Ibn ‘Arabi’s family left for Seville. It was in Seville that the young man received the bulk of his education and met various spiritual figures, men and women he believed to have been of great spiritual accomplishment, who would guide him on the mystical path.[181] One of the most significant meetings during his early life was with Averroes (d. 595/1198) in Córdoba. This interaction was not only important in the Shaykh’s accounting of his own life but has subsequently been portrayed as a meeting between the rationalistic (Averroes) and mystic lovers (Ibn ‘Arabi) of knowledge that would shape the future of the Christian and Islamic worlds respectively.[182] Another important figure from his early life was Fatima bint al-Muthanna (d. unknown), also known as Fatima of Córdoba, whom the

[180] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur,* 15-17; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages,* 92.
[181] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 26; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 92; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions*, 263-264.
[182] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages,* 92.

Shaykh describes as "one of the lovers of God." She had developed a small group of followers in the region during his youth and appears as a spiritual motherly figure in his later recollection.[183] Besides these figures, Ibn 'Arabi credits Isa, or Jesus, with his conversion to the mystical life, calling the prophet his "first teacher" in the *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (*Meccan Openings*). The prophet Isa, according to the Shaykh, called him his "beloved" and "ordered [him] to practice renunciation (*zuhd*) and self-denial (*tajrid*)," and this experience is credited with pushing Ibn 'Arabi to turn away from the world and towards God.[184] Throughout the late sixth/twelfth century, he continued to learn under different teachers while travelling around Andalusia and North Africa. These journeys were often marked by "theophanic visions" that informed some of his writings on Sufism and Islamic cosmology, discussed further below. One such vision prompted him to visit Mecca in 598/1201 and to begin composing *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*. He had settled in Damascus by 621/1223, where he died in 638/1241.[185]

### 4.2 His Writings and Influences

Ibn 'Arabi's writings include a mixture of metaphysical prose and mystical love poetry, but the exact number of writings that can be attributed to him remains debated. Recent studies by Stephen Hirtenstein and Jane Clark have estimated the number of separate titles at around 94 based on their survey of more recent scholarship. However, this number is contested. Osman Yahia found 106 of the Shaykh's works that survive today, and Ibn 'Arabi and his students described some

[183] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 87; Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. Ralph Austin (Paulist Press, 1981), 3.
[184] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 39.
[185] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages,* 95, 96-97; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 264.

317 works. For this study we will only cover a few that are most relevant to understanding his views on love.

The first, often considered his *magnum opus*, is *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah*, was composed in two editions. One was in 598/1202 and the second was between 632/1234 and 636/1238. Like Abu Hamid's *Ihya',* it discusses almost every facet of the Islamic sciences, including jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy. It additionally describes some of Ibn 'Arabi's own spiritual experiences contextualized within, and informing his broader metaphysics.[186] His most well-known book of poetry is the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (*The Interpreter of Longings*). This collection was composed in Mecca around the year 611/1214, after the Shaykh met the woman Nizam while circumambulating the Kaba. In it he primarily speaks about the meaning of love and the connection between love and knowledge in Sufism. He adds more context to this collection in his later *Dhkha'ir al-A'laq: Sharh Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* (*The Provisions of Deep Attachments in the Explanation of the Interpreter of Longings*), which aimed to respond to criticism received about the allegedly profane nature of some of the poems in the *Tarjuman*. In this commentary, he describes the *Tarjuman* as a discussion of the Divine Realities behind earthly human love. Nizam was to him no more than a theophany through which he contemplated God. Like the sentiment found in Abu Hamid's and, to a greater extent, Ahmad's writings, the language of passionate love is used in this collection to point towards higher Divine truths and the ecstatic spiritual experience of those truths.[187]

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[186] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings,* 5-6; See also Jane Clark and Stephen Hirtenstein "Establishing Ibn 'Arabī's Heritage: First findings from the MIAS Archiving Project," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 52 (2012): 1-32.

[187] Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, 210; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 8, 64.

The Shaykh attributes most of his insights to an "opening" (*fath*) of his heart that allowed for the reception of "bestowed Divine Knowledge" (*'ilm ladunni* or *'ilm wahbi*) while practicing *dhikr* (recitation) or *khalwah* (contemplative solitude). Other sources that the Shaykh identifies include the angel of inspiration (*ilham*), in the case of the *Futuhat,* and the Prophet, for his *Fusus al-hikam* (*Bezels of Divine Wisdom*).[188] In Ibn 'Arabi's writings on the Quran, he indicates that his insights were the result of spiritual unveilings (*warid al-waqt*) and did not necessarily have to rely on established exegesis or the writings of the *ashab al-afkar* (possessors of theories) that were amongst some of his detractors.[189] Besides these spiritual sources, there are indications of other influences in his writing. He mentions Abu Hamid and his works, including the *Ihya'* and the *Kimiya al-sa'ada* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*)*,* amongst others. He does criticize Abu Hamid in places for his concern with theological and philosophical reflection, which the later Sufi viewed as an obstruction to the Sufi path. Most often, however, his writing indicates a positive attitude towards Abu Hamid, describing him as one of "our companions" in reference to their shared position within broader scholarship. He further appears to have drawn from the idea Abu Hamid establishes in his *Kitab al-tawhid wa'l-tawakkul* (*Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence),* that God is the only real existent.[190] He was also influenced by Dhu'l Nun (d. 245/859 or 248/862), whom he describes as one of the founders of the approach to Sufism he followed, and Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyya through the writings of Dhu al-Nun and al-Makki.[191]

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[188] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 15; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions*, 265.
[189] Knysh, *Sufism: A New History*, 91.
[190] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 235; Abrahamov "Ibn al-'Arabī's Attitude Toward al-Ghazalī," 102-105.
[191] Cornell, *Rabi'a*, 206-207.

The *Bezels of Divine Wisdom* is the third book most relevant to our discussion here. It was composed in 630/1232 and covers twenty-seven "bezels" through the Shaykh's interpretation of different prophets found in the Quran and *hadith*. Its formatting is quite unique compared to other works of Quranic exegesis from around his time. It is worth noting that his approach to exegesis relied on his belief that the Quran had an infinite number of sound meanings. The text stands out, in part, for his discussion of the equality of all human beings. His chapter focused on the prophet Muhammad covers his interpretation of the concept of Divine love, making it particularly relevant to our discussion here. All these texts, and many more, combine to form the root of the developing Akbarian (from the honorific title for Ibn 'Arabi *Shaykh al-Akbar*) school of Islamic Mysticism.[192]

In the eighth/fourteenth century, Dawud al-Qaysari (d. 751/1350) wrote a popular commentary on the *Fusus al-hikam,* titled *Marla'khusus al-kilam fi ma'ani Fusus al-hikam* (*A Preamble of Select Discourse on the Meaning of the* Fusus al-hikam). In its Prolegomena (*Muqaddimat al-Qaysari*), he consolidates Ibn 'Arabi's work and connects some of the Shaykh's more obscure language with the philosophical and theological vocabulary of Qaysari's time. Qaysari was linked to Ibn 'Arabi through a line of teachers, including 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (d. 730-36/1329-35), and Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi (d. 673/1274)[193] who had both been counted

[192] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 7, 74-75; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions*, 264-265; Knysh, *Sufism: A New History*, 91, 93.

[193] Viewed as one of the foremost of Ibn 'Arabi's students, al-Qunawi organized and reiterated Ibn 'Arabi's teachings in his *Miftah ghayb al-jam'wat* (*Key to the Unseen of [Absolute] Unity and Its Dispersal [in the Entities of the Physical World]*) and other writings. Qashani is considered another major follower of the Shaykh who further popularized his teachings in his *Ta'ilat al-Qur'an* (*Commentaries on the Qur'an*). See Knysh's *Sufism: A New History,* (93-101). William C. Chittick examines the support for the connection between Ibn 'Arabi and Qunawi in his article "The Last Will and Testament of Ibn 'Arabi's Foremost Disciple, Sadr al-Din Qunawi," *Sophia Perennis* 4, no. 1 (1978).

among the Shaykh's followers during his life.[194] This work brought Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics even further into spiritual and academic circles, which increasingly overlapped with one another.[195] Qaysari further facilitated the dissemination of Ibn 'Arabi's work throughout the Ottoman Empire while working as the director of the first Ottoman University and associating with other key figures of Ottoman scholarship, including Mulla Shams al-Din Fanari (d. 834/1431). The Shaykh's work was also brought into the intellectual and mystical thought of Twelver Shi'ism through Haydar Amuli (d. 790/1387-791/1388) whose *Jami' al-asrar was manba' al-anwar* (*The Compendium of Mysteries and Fountainhead of Lights*) connected the work with Iranian Sufism, correlating Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of the "perfect man" with the concept of *walaya* (spiritual authority) revolving around the Imam. 'Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 898/1492) also further propagated Ibn 'Arabi's work throughout Iran, India, China, and East Asia via his own commentaries.[196] Throughout all of this literature, when focusing more narrowly on love, three overarching topics appear and will be helpful in covering Ibn 'Arabi's work. They are Love's origin, the nature of a life of love and/or the experience of love, and the goal of love.[197]

### 4.3 Love's Origin

*Wahdat al-wujud* or the "Oneness of Being" is the doctrine that has become perhaps the most synonymous with the name of Ibn 'Arabi, and a brief description of this idea will provide a foundation for the further study of love. While Ibn 'Arabi did

[194] Mukhtar H. Ali, "Ibn al-'Arabi, The Greatest Master: On Knowledge, God, and Sainthood," in *A Companion to World Literature,* ed. Ken Seigneurie, (John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 2, 3.
[195] Ali, "Ibn al-'Arabi," 3.
[196] Ali, "Ibn al-'Arabi," 4-5.
[197] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 9.

not describe his metaphysics using "*wahdat al-wujud,*" the phrase appears as early as al-Qunawi or his student Sa'id al-Din al-Farghani (d. 699/1300).[198] Ibn 'Arabi does use the phrase *al-wihda fi al-wujud* or "Oneness in Being" in *The Meccan Openings* when both affirming multiplicity and denying that the created entities possess any *wujud* in themselves.[199] In the Shaykh's view, God is the only "Real Existent" or the only "Real Existence" (*al-wujud al-Haqq*), and the rest of creation is only contingently or metaphorically existent (*wujud majazi)*. At the origin of all being is the True Light, Nondelimited Being, or Necessary Being, all these terms being used to indicate a similar unified and completely transcendent concept that is the source of all other modes of delimited being.[200] This ultimate Nondelimitation means that God is both incomparable and unconstrained by incomparability. This expands the infinitude of Him to include delimitation and His disclosure in limited beings or things.[201] In congruence with the broader Sufi understanding of the nature of God, Ibn 'Arabi describes God as both immanent and transcendent, with His Essence being ultimately and permanently inaccessible to human Beings.

The process of Nondelimited Being manifesting in delimited being is explained through a series of tripartite relationships. In one of these explanations, the first pole of the relationship is Necessary Being from which all other things receive a degree of *wujud*. These created beings are the second pole, delimited and including everything that is only contingently existent.[202] The relationship between contingent

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[198] Claude Addas in his *The Voyage of No Return* attributes its origins to al-Qunawi while William C. Chittick in his *Ibn 'Arabī: Heir to the Prophets* (Oneworld, 2005) attributes its origin to al-Farghani. See Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings* (91-92).
[199] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 92.
[200] William C. Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabī," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* eds. Edward N. Zalta et al. (Stanford University Press, 2020), 12-13; Chittick, "The Divine Roots," 61.
[201] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 190-110; Ali, "Ibn al-'Arabi, 5-6. Chittick explains Nondelimited Being further in *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* as God being "not delimited by nondelimitation" (109).
[202] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 93; Chittick, "Ibn 'Arabī" 23-24.

being and Necessary Being is the "Reality of Realities," which is the point of integration through which manifest entities and Being interact via the manifestation of the Most Beautiful Names. In other words, each created thing is a unique expression of the infinite possible ways *wujud* can delimit, define, and specify itself as a particular collection of certain Divine attributes, humans being the exception.[203] For human beings this can be viewed as a three-fold relationship with Being/Essence interacting with existence/the cosmos through Divinity/the Supreme Barzakh, a concept that will be expanded on below.[204]

As mentioned, the manifestation of the cosmos is conceived of through a discussion of the Divine Names and Acts in relation to the Essence. Each Name is another perspective through which the Essence conceives of, and interacts with, the cosmos and the created things, with some names being more central in his description of this process than others:

> The divine love derives from God's names Beautiful and Light. Light goes forward to the entities of the possible things and dispels from them the darkness of their gaze upon themselves and upon their own possibility. It occasions for them a seeing that is Light's own seeing, because light alone allows anything to be seen. Then God discloses Himself to the entity through the name Beautiful, and it falls in love with Him.[205]

Here we see the initiation of creation in God via Light and the Beautiful names which take the entities from possibilities into manifest existence. Light, in this passage, is further associated with knowledge and an ability to understand the nature of the entities as non-existent in themselves. Their light and beauty ultimately come from

[203] Chittick, "The Divine Roots," 61.
[204] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 357.
[205] Chittick, "The Divine Roots," 63.

God, who alone is the Beautiful.[206] The arising of apparent multiplicity was necessary for God to witness "His Beautiful Names," according to the belief that "God is Beautiful, and He loves beauty," and the *hadith* of the "Hidden Treasure."[207]

While all contingent beings partake in certain of the Divine names, only human beings have the potential to realize all names and attributes because they were created in the Divine image as described in the *hadith,* "Verily God created Adam in His form."[208] As Ibn 'Arabi explains in the *Bezels,* God yearns for the "favoured ones" who He can see but who may not be able to see Him because of their state. This state can be their state of development, but it can also refer to the separation that remains between lover and Beloved, until death. On one level there is a mutual longing between the lover and Beloved:

> The Beloved longs to see me,
> And I long even more to see Him,
> The hearts beat fast, but destiny bars the way,
> I groan in complaint and so does He.[209]

However, because human beings were created in the image of God and He "breathed into man of His spirit, He is yearning [in reality] for Himself."[210] Muhammad Faruque explains this as God wanting "to see His own infinite reality in an all-inclusive object encompassing the totality of His never-ending self-manifestation." This does not mean that God was incapable of knowing Himself before creation, but that His view

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[206] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 358; Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi,* trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton University Press, 1969), 148.
[207] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 12; Ali, "Ibn al-'Arabi, 5-6; Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 163.
[208] Atif Khalil, "Ibn 'Arabī on the Circle of Trusteeship and the Divine Name *al-Wakīl*," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 12 (2023): 65.
[209] Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 273.
[210] Ibid.

of Himself through His own Essence differed from the knowledge of Himself seen through another being as if through a mirror.[211]

### 4.4 Divine Love and Creation

This process of manifestation relies on Divine Love, as Qaysari summarizes: "[D]ivine [L]ove necessitates the manifestation of the Essence through each attribute becoming differentiated on the plane of knowledge, then in the external existence where it acquires multiplicity."[212] Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of the *hadith* of the "Hidden Treasure" further confirms this. Love, as an attribute of *wujud,* by its nature, works to express what is hidden. *Wujud* had been established by earlier Quranic exegesis as God's "unqualified love" for creation; the unidirectional (meaning cannot be directed toward God from creation) mercy (as in *rahman,* the All-Merciful) that encompasses all creation and gives it a degree of existence. It is the tendency of *wujud* to show itself to what is not it, and that is the cause of creation.[213] Furthermore, "I loved to be known," established a complementary connection between love and knowledge. As the Shaykh states, "If it had not been for love…nothing would have been desired and [consequently] nothing would exist."[214] This relates the Essence, with God's knowledge and attributes while preserving the unity of all things and the appearance of multiplicity, from the perspective of created beings. As Ibn 'Arabi explains, "Nothing makes one thing two other than itself…Adam was made two by

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[211] Muhammad U. Faruque, "Hume on Trial: Can Evil and Suffering Be Justified?," in *From the Divine to the Human: Contemporary Islamic Thinkers on Evil, Suffering, and the Global Pandemic*, eds. Muhammad U. Faruque and Mohammad Rustom (Routledge, 2023), 105.
[212] Mukhtar H. Ali, *The Horizons of Being: The Metaphysics of Ibn al- 'Arabī in the* Muqaddimat al-Qaysarī (Brill, 2020), 71.
[213] Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 97.
[214] Addas, "Doctrine of Love in Ibn 'Arabī."

that which was opened up out of his short left rib, that is, the form of Eve. He was one in his entity, then he became a pair through her, though she was none other than himself."[215] The cosmos, or the macrocosm, and the human being, the microcosm, reflect His beauty back to Himself. This cosmology resists any accusations of duality or pantheism. As he explains, his philosophy succeeds where others, especially the Manichaeans, failed because they "were not able to come out of this duality to the One Entity, which is nothing but God," who is beyond all entities existing in multiplicity.[216]

The created entities are the object of God's love for their reflection of His Beauty *and* for their non-existence in relation to Him. Ibn 'Arabi finds that love is always tied to beauty *and* something that is non-existent in relation to the lover. From the perspective of God, His love motivates the creation of the non-existent (in themselves) immutable entities. As Chittick summarizes, "God's love attaches to the created things because the created thing is non-existent. Thus, the created thing is the object of God's love constantly and forever."[217] This love maintains creation, but to whatever degree existence is present it belongs to God and so is not itself the object of His love. Once the entity (*ashya*) manifests God's light the Beloved becomes the only object of the entity's perception. It forgets itself and, in that sense, does not know love as an entity other than God. In other words, the object of God's love is continuity, the continuity of His own manifestation of the existent entity at each moment. Because continuity extends infinitely into the future, His love is for the continuation of creation in time, it is what animates the continuous manifestation of His infinitude through the entities. Once the entities are qualified by a degree of existence they

[215] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 358-359.
[216] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 360.
[217] Chittick, "The Divine Roots," 63; Chittick, "Love in Islamic Philosophy," 90.

cannot be the object of love as they are not separate from Him. A degree of separation being a necessary condition of love.[218]

To summarize, Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysics seeks to establish an ultimate unity between apparently oppositional qualities. This is what he calls “seeing with two eyes,” the unity of all things even if they appear contradictory to the understanding of human beings that are limited by the knowledge God has revealed to them of Himself. The universe and its relationship with God and love can be understood in two ways. From one perspective, the universe is the single object of God’s love and is non-existent in itself. From the second perspective, everything in the universe is a disclosure of *wujud* and so possess a degree of existence that is being borrowed as a result of God loving Himself, a quality often summarized as the entities being “He/not He.” In the Shaykh’s view the Divine name *al-Wadud* (Loving)[219] refers to this relationship by which God loves the Hidden Treasure and brings it into existence through loving the non-existent things.[220] Being able to hold all these elements that seem disparate is the goal of the Sufi path. The ideal of the *dhu’l-‘aynayn* (Possessor of the Two Eyes) is to see God as both incomparable and similar in a unified vision. One eye perceives the way things are God and the other the way things are not God; one sees His Unity and the other the apparent multiplicity.[221]

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[218] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings,* 58; Chittick, “The Divine Roots,” 64-65.

[219] Found in the Quran: “Truly it is He Who originates and brings back. And He is the Forgiving, the Loving,” (85:13-14).

[220] Chittick, “The Divine Roots,” 66-67; Knysh, *Sufism: A New History*, 91-92.

[221] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 361, 356, 362. Chittick describes this saying, “he witnesses God as incomparable. Everything he sees is but a sign saying, ‘God is not this.’ On the other hand, he witnesses Him as similar. Everything he sees says, ‘God is like this; God is disclosing Himself in this; God is not other than this; God is this’” (361). Using the metaphor of Light and darkness Ibn ‘Arabi describes, “The Real is sheer Light, while the impossible (*al-muhal*) is sheer darkness (*zulma*)... Creation is the Barzakh between Light and darkness. In its essence it is qualified neither by darkness nor by light, since it is the Barzakh between… This is why He appointed for man two eyes and guided him on the two highways, since he exists between the two paths. Through one eye and one path he accepts light and looks upon it in the measure of his preparedness. Through the other eye and the other path he looks upon darkness and turns towards it” (362).

### 4.5 The Importance of the Prophet

While Ibn ‘Arabi recognizes[222] the manifestation of God’s love through all true revelations, it is the Prophet Muhammad, in his metaphysics, who functions as the Logos for all creation *and* all prophets. The Prophet Muhammad is the “Reality of Realities,” the “Perfect Man,” and the one existing at the “station of no-station” (*maqam la maqam*). As the perfection of Divine Reality, encompassing all Divine attributes and names, the Prophet provides guidance for seekers to the Reality beyond all stations on the Sufi path. To love God is also to love the Prophet and to follow him and the revelation as proven by the verse from the introduction, “if you love God, follow me, God will love you and forgive your sins.” (3:31) This verse is further supported by an extensive prophetic history (encompassing *hadith* and sunnah) that established the Prophet as the example par excellence for realizing one’s innate love of God and their calling a His vicegerent.[223] In a passage of the Quran, the Prophet is described as having reached a point “two bows’ length away, or closer” (53:9) to God. For Ibn ‘Arabi the two bows were the descent and ascent that encompasses creation; the manifestation and return of all things to the One source. The Prophet encompassed all this reality as God’s first creation and the final goal of creation. His innermost reality, called the “Muhammadan Reality” or the “Reality of Realities,” is the principle from which all creation arose and the *barzakh* between the Essence and all of creation.[224] The “Muhammadan Reality” is also present in the prophets that preceded Muhammad, in their messages, in the *awliyya* (saints) that are also called the “friends of God,” and in other spiritual beings including the “Knowers of God.” It qualifies the lovers on the Sufi path that have reached the “station of no-station,”

[222] See the section on *The Religion of Love* for more nuance on this belief.
[223] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 172; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 39.
[224] Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 188; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 37-38.

further explained below. This ties into Ibn ‘Arabi’s belief that revelation is required to know God, to discern His love in the believer, and to focus one’s love on God.[225]

The orientation of his metaphysics around the example of the Prophet is also evident in his view of sober and intoxicated states of love in God. As indicated in the introduction and the chapter on the Ghazalis, there was an ongoing debate in both Sufi circles and the broader Muslim community about the legitimacy of so-called ‘intoxicated’ spiritual states. Hallaj and his claim “I am the Real” became one of the most well-known examples of this controversial state of intoxication. Some argued that Hallaj had achieved a state of Divine drunkenness (*sukr*) that he had accessed through God’s love for him. Ibn ‘Arabi’s view differed somewhat from the view emphasized by Abu Hamid, that sobriety (*sahw*) was the mark of the “people of authority” (*ahl al-ihtijaj*). Instead, the Shaykh’s view, which he felt was in line with his belief that the Prophet was the greatest lover of God and exemplified this state, valued a state of stability (*i‘tidal*) or equilibrium between sobriety and drunkenness. As Hany Ibrahim explains, this harmony was essential to witnessing (*shuhud*) *tawhid* at the highest levels of Divine love and Ibn ‘Arabi indicates in the *Futuhat* that “God has given me an excessive share of love, but He has also given me the ability to control it.”[226] This state has also been explained as an outward sobriety alongside an inner intoxication in love of God.

In his *Bezels* Ibn ‘Arabi further contemplates the perfect love and wisdom of the Prophet through the *hadith*, “[Three] things have been made beloved (*hubiba*) to me in this world of yours [creation]: women and perfume, and my solace (*qurat ‘ayni*)

[225] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 39, 94, 107; Ali, “Ibn al-‘Arabi, 7.
[226] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 60-62; Addas, “Doctrine of Love in Ibn ‘Arabī.”

lies in prayer."[227] In his view, after Adam[228] was created in God's image He created Eve in the image of Adam, and it is this that causes the longing that Adam (man) and Eve (woman) have for each other. From the perspective of Adam, he loves what was created in his image just as God loves His image in Adam. As for Eve, she is yearning for Adam as a person longs for their home. When a man loves a woman, he "loves her through God's love for him,"[229] as a being in the image of God; God ultimately loves only Himself, since there is no 'other.'[230] Sexual union represents not only an expression of God's mercy and love for human beings, but also the way to experience the most complete witness of Divine love in creation. Through intimacy with a woman, a man may witness God in the passive (*munfaa'il*) and active (*fa'il*) form, as majesty and beauty, at the same time. Muhammad's love of women was for this complete manifestation of Divine love that could be witnessed in them. Only through recognizing women as Divine disclosures (*mujalla*) can men love women with Divine love, otherwise they love them out of lust as "mere form, devoid of spirit." This latter love being an ignorant love that does not recognize the true Beloved.[231] In the *Futuhat,* Ibn 'Arabi explains and expands on this ignorant state of love for any created thing in itself and compares it to the state of the lovers of God saying,

> Though no one loves any but his own Creator, he is veiled from Him by the love for…Hind, Layla, this world, money, position and everything loved in this world. Poets exhaust their words writing about all these existent things without knowing, but the gnostics never hear a

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[227] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 76.

[228] Note that this first Adam is understood to be an androgynous primordial precursor that encompassed both male and female aspects until Eve was created from this first Adam, bringing the second, gendered-male Adam into existence at that same moment. So, this mutual yearning between man and woman can also be understood as a yearning for completeness. See Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 78.

[229] Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 273-274.

[230] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 162; Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 273-274; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 76.

[231] Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 275-276; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 77; Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 192.

> verse, a riddle, a panegyric, or a love poem that is not about Him, hidden beyond the veil of forms.[232]

The Shaykh also had a propensity for contemplating God through women, including in relationships that were not sexual, as appears to have been the case with Nizam. Upon meeting her he appears to have quickly come to view her as a theophany of the Divine attributes, including beauty, love, and knowledge.[233]

### 4.6 Imagination and True Knowledge

Ibn ʻArabi views knowledge of the relationship between absolute Being and the created worlds as occurring through the vehicle of imagination, which has multiple implications in his metaphysics. First, it should be established that he divides the cosmos into three levels that exist in varying proximity to Absolute Being, which ultimately transcends them all. The level closest to the Essence is the "World of Spirits," and the level furthest from God is "The Corporeal World." In between these realms is the *barzakh*, which has many meanings in the Shaykh's writings, as seen above, but in this case refers to "The World of Imagination" (*ʻalam al-khayal*), also called "delimited imagination" (*al-khayal al-muqayyad*). This third realm is the intermediary between the Spiritual and Material realms. All of the cosmos, all realms, are the "Nondelimited Imagination (*al-khayal al-mutlaq*) of God" between the poles of absolute non-existence (*ʻadam*) and Absolute Being.[234] The idea of the "*barzakh*,"

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[232] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 181.

[233] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 139-140; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 64-65.

[234] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 15-16; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 59. Here is another example of the polyvocality of Ibn ʻArabi's lexicon. Just as the "World of Imagination" is a *barzakh* between two realms, the whole cosmos is itself a *barzakh* between absolute being and absolute non-being. Furthermore, each created thing is a *barzakh* between two other things composed of a unique combination of attributes that places it at a particular spot in the ontological hierarchy of the cosmos (13-14).

the connection between two things that is neither one completely but participates in them both, can also be used to describe the imaginal realm or imagination. This is the third sense of *khayal* (imagination). It describes the faculty within human beings that encompasses the rational capacity, perception via the five senses, and the reflective capacity (as in self-reflection). This form of imagination is also called "contiguous imagination" (*al-khayal al-muttasil*).[235] Knowledge of the Real or "witnessing" (*shuhud*) is acquired through the faculty of imagination and through an interaction with the imaginal realm because Truth descends through the spiritual realm and the imaginal realm into the corporeal realm. As evident here imagination does not refer to something fantastical and unreal, but to a faculty that induces knowledge, witnesses the Divine, and accesses higher spiritual states (*hal*).[236]

### 4.7 Knowledge of Love and the Human Experience

Having established Ibn 'Arabi's cosmology, something of his metaphysics, and his view of love, these can now be connected to the relationship between love and knowledge from the perspective of human beings. Beauty can be best reflected in God's *'abd* (servant), and vicegerent. In other words, the macrocosm, all of the created realms composed of all attributes, can be best realized in the microcosm, the human being. Human reality originates from the planes of reality closest to the Essence and so are the most complete, at least in potentia, through their association

[235] Corbin, *Creative Imagination,* 153; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 116-117, 162. In the writings of Abu Hamid, imagination is the faculty that perceives embodied things in the world or in the mind's eye. When witnessing God, the initial state is one of imagination. This is when the image is incomplete in the seeker. This vision is eventually perfected as seeing (*ru'ya*). This does not mean that this witnessing occurs through the eyes but refers to the clarity of the experience of God at "the utmost degree of disclosure." See Abrahamov's *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, 63-64.
[236] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 59; Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 3, 6.

with, and interiorization of the Divine attributes.[237] As with God's love, their love is always for something non-existent in relation to themselves, and because of free will human beings are always moving on the journey to God, whether they are aware of it or not. They remain on the journey, growing closer or further from God in their cultivation of attributes until death. As a consequence of the Fall, human beings are subject to forgetting their origin and calling to be God's vicegerent, and must rely on ethical transformation and remembering (*dhikr*) to realize this relationship and achieve the goal of the "universal or unqualified servant."[238] This is unlike all other created things which are fixed in their station and in their relationship to the Divine attributes at the moment of their creation. The Fall was not a descent in the unique capacity of the human being to be vicegerent, but a fall to a place where the capacity for wholeness could be recognized through an experience of separation.[239]

As "images of *wujud*," people possess love and all other of His attributes. Love can be directed at God or another of the created entities but, if everything is a self-disclosure of God, then the object of anyone's love is always ultimately God. As the Shaykh says, "none but God is loved in the existent things…Though no one loves any but his own Creator."[240] As was seen in Abu Hamid's causes for love, Ibn 'Arabi also describes beauty and *ihsan* as qualities to which the human being responds with love. In addition to these two "reasons for love," he adds the supererogatory prayers (*nawafil*) as a practice that not only causes love in the seeker but emulates the relationship of God with existence; existence being the supererogatory addition to the

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[237] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 12; Ali, "Ibn al-'Arabi, 5-6. This concept has been conveyed through the analogy of a prism which refracts a single ray of light into multiple colours. The light represents Essence, and the colours are the realms of multiplicity or the infinite Divine Names through which creation comes into being.

[238] Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," 25-26; Khalil, "Ibn 'Arabī on the Circle of Trusteeship," 66; Chittick, *Divine Love*, 190.

[239] Chittick, *Divine Love*, 172; Faruque, "Hume on Trial," 104.

[240] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 181.

"Real Existent" that is mandatory.[241] God in His Essence is unknowable, but the human beings' capacity to realize His attributes is greater than all other created things, making their desire for God, to love Him, greater, especially for those who acquire some knowledge of God and realize their separation from Him. It is only the friends of God, those 'in the know,' that recognize this relationship between any possible beloved and the Real (*al-Haqq*).[242]

This process of remembering and cultivating love of God is constant and never-ending. As established, just as the object of God's love is non-existent in relation to Himself, so is the human's object of love, God, always separated from them, to some degree, because of His infinitude:

> Knowledge of God [as such], as we have said, cannot exist, so the property of desire is more complete in the servant of God than in someone who perceived the object of his desire. Hence, desire is true desire only when it is attached to an object that cannot be perceived. Desire itself remains qualified by existence only so long as its object is qualified by non-existence. If the desired object were to be found or established, then the property of desire would disappear. It follows that desire will never disappear from us, because its object can never be achieved.[243]

One's knowledge of God's signs and attributes, of His interactions with the cosmos, can grow and with that knowledge, one's love of God. This process of perceiving God relies on both rational and the imaginal knowledge, garnered through the imaginal faculty described above. It is the "ontological mode" through which God manifests Himself. Reason, or rational knowledge, is most receptive to God's incomparability and purely rational thinkers are limited to understanding God only in His incomparability. Imaginal knowledge, on the other hand, is the knowledge that can

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[241] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 113-114.
[242] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 58; Chittick, "The Divine Roots," 67.
[243] Chittick, "The Divine Roots," 67.

comprehend true love of God through witnessing His comparability via His self-disclosures.[244] This is also explained as a knowledge of the heart versus a knowledge of the rational faculties. Speaking on love of God he says that "This belongs only to the heart, since reason comes from the world of delimitation…sense perception, it obviously and necessarily belongs to the world of delimitation, in contrast to the heart."[245]

Similar to what was seen with Abu Hamid, the Shaykh also explains knowledge by describing two types of vision, an idea touched on in an earlier section, that correlate with the two basic worlds of creation and with the rational and imaginal faculties. Outer sight, vision, perceives the visible world and the entities. The other type of vision is insight, the sight of the heart and of the rational faculties which perceive knowledge and the Unseen world and can love God. Both types of vision are ultimately perception through Him as the Manifest (another name of God). Insight into the world of the Unseen takes place in accordance with God's desire and the degree to which the faculty, in the person, is undistracted by *rayn* (rust on the heart) which is repaired through the "polishing" that occurs by the invocation of God (*dhikr*), recitation of the Quran, the control of *shahwa* (passion), and, consequently, the development of the attributes of God to which revelation summons.[246] In the case of the inner vision, he further delineates the relationship between rational and suprarational (imaginal) knowledge using the analogy of a kernel to indicate the ideal balance between the two faculties. For those in which rational faculty is proportional, it is a kernel upon which the lover understands the attributes of God as His. For the "man of the rational faculties," the kernel is absent. Instead, they possess only the

[244] Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, 153-154; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge,* 180.
[245] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 109.
[246] Ibid, 218-219, 223.

"shell" of rationality; they are delimited by the attributes they falsely differentiate from the attributes of the Creator. This is evidenced by reflecting on Him rather than realizing it is ultimately Him doing the reflecting.[247] Chittick explains the ideal rational faculty as one which "accepts from God the knowledge of Him that He gives to it and does not try to go beyond its own limitations by reflecting upon Him. [It is to] accept or receive (*qabul*) unveiling and revelation."[248] This further reveals a relation between the development of knowledge and a state of contentment associated with the higher levels of love. This love of God is only obtained at the deepest level through tasting, as seen in the writings of Abu Hamid and Ahmad. As Ibn 'Arabi explains in the *Futuhat,* "Knowledge of the mystical states can only be had by actual experience…as is also the case with knowledge of the taster of honey, the bitterness of patience, the bliss of sexual union."[249] Receptivity to love, and therefore knowledge of the source of love manifest through revelation, guides one to salvation and felicity with God, as indicated by the importance of the Prophet.[250] Progress on the Sufi path develops knowledge and love of God together through the development and use of the imaginal faculty in proper proportion as, again, the achievement of the state of love is also one of balance in Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics.

[247] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 180, 238-239.
[248] Ibid, 238.
[249] Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 25.
[250] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 180; Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," 32.

### 4.8 Trials and the Path of Love

The idea that suffering is an unavoidable characteristic of the material world, the *dunya*, is found in various places in the Quran, which describes this life as a trial intended to prove those of good conduct.[251] Ibn ‘Arabi also ties love and suffering into his cosmology. In his view, suffering and trials only push the lover towards greater love of God, and the presence of trials in the life of a lover can indicate their favour in the eyes of the Beloved. Through these trials, the lover overcomes any egotism and undesirable attributes until they reach an internal death; they “die in God” (*al-mawt fi Llah*) and experience only the Beloved. As a result of this mystical death, the lover may desire actual death in order to return to the object of their love, but an additional sign of this state is contentment—touched on above in regards to the acquisition of knowledge–that accepts the will of the Beloved.[252] Trials can also be willingly taken on by the lover in order to gain certain attributes and grow closer to the Beloved. Fasting (*sawm*) is a good example of this, as the abstention from food is intended to decrease the lover’s desires for anything other than the Beloved and mirror the self-sufficient nature of God through a recognition of the seeker’s subsistence in Him. As Atif Khalil states, fasting is meant to develop a state of inner tranquillity and the internalization of the attribute of God’s self-sufficiency (*al-sifa al-samadaniyya*), indicated by His name, *al-Samad*.[253] The trial of a lover dissatisfied with their state out of a desire for further spiritual growth, is another example of the benefit of discomfort in Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysics. In his *Meccan Revelations*, he

[251] Khalil, *“*The Gifts of Suffering,” 146. A verse in the chapter of the Cave in the Quran states “We have made that which is on the earth an adornment, to try them, to see which of them is best in conduct” (18:7), as one example.
[252] Ibrahim, *Teachings of Ibn Arabī,* 63.
[253] Atif Khalil, “White Death: Ibn al-‘Arabī on the Trials and Virtues of Hunger and Fasting,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 141, no. 3 (2021): 579-580.

describes "abandoning *rida*" (*tark al-rida*) as essential to maintaining progress on the path of love. He recognizes contentment as an important station, an important element of developed character. However, "since that which is sought from Him is infinite and hence has no end," surpassing the state of *rida* becomes a sign of the "Folk of finding God."[254] Incorporating what has been established of the reason for man's creation and the purpose of the Fall, suffering can even be seen as an essential component to the realization of human beings' separation from God, their capacity for proximity to him, and their ability to facilitate that movement towards or away from Him. In his work on Dhu'l-Nun the Shaykh repeats a story of an ascetic woman the man met in the desert that describes suffering and love as features of pursuing the Beloved saying, "it consists of a constant sadness and an ardent desire without end."[255]

There are several other epithets of the lover that are tied to trial and the outer reflection of a higher inner state. The first is emaciation (*al-nuhul*) of the body and spirit (or subtle matter). The spirit that has been annihilated (*fana*) through witnessing is in a state of emaciation, recognizing only God in creation. This is the emaciation of the "Knowers of God" especially, but also other lovers, who are constantly immersed in witnessing God (*shuhud Allah*). Emaciation can also be in the body, especially for early initiates on the path who are partaking in the traditional practice of extreme asceticism and are subsisting on limited food as a method for focusing one's attention on God. This is similar to the epithet, attributed to lovers, of withering (*al-dhubul*)

[254] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 104; Khalil, "Contentment, Satisfaction and Good-Pleasure," 12-13, 17n34.

[255] Cornell, *Rabi'a*, 107; Faruque, "Hume on Trial," 104-105. The story as it appears in Ibn 'Arabi's work pulls from the Poem of the Two Lovers as it appears in al-Makki's *Qut al-qulub* (*The Nourishment of Hearts*). In that work al-Makki attributes the poem to Rabi'ah, although it is unclear if Ibn 'Arabi is also making this connection, considering the timing, or if he is describing another ascetic woman that he does not name. See Cornell's *Rabi'a* for more information on the poem as it appears in al-Makki's writing (196-198).

when the state of reflecting on God's majesty cause the spirit to wither or when their bodies respond to the supererogatory prayer and fasting practices.[256]

### 4.9 *Nawafil* and the Development of Courtesy

Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes the role that supererogatory prayer and pious devotion to God play in the lover's journey to God. These non-mandatory acts (*nawafil*) or "choices of servitude" (*'ubudiyyat al-ikhtiyar*) facilitate the lover's attainment of the state of effacement (*fana*) described in the *hadith al-nawafil,* where God, we are told, becomes the hearing and seeing of the seeker. According to the tradition, "I am His hearing by which he hears, His sight by which he sees, His hand by which he grasps, and His foot by which he walks."[257]

Sufi writers have often also stressed the importance that courtesy, manners, or propriety (*adab*) play in the mystical ascent. That is the ability to behave correctly in all circumstances in order to show courtesy to God, including by being courteous towards His creation, and to maintain a state of witnessing God which cannot endure when one loses courtesy. The "Knowers of God," because of the *adab* that God has bestowed on them, recognize Him in all forms and, as a result, behave appropriately to each of His manifestations. Note that this is another example of the seeker internalising God's Most Beautiful Names in the form of the virtues. The *adab* of the seeker reflects the *adab* of God.[258] As he says, these lovers are "like the clear and pure

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[256] Ibrahim, *Teachings of Ibn Arabī,* 123-124.

[257] Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 130, 232; Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions*, 142.

[258] In any case when the human being is reflecting an attribute of God, (mercy, courtesy, love, etc.) some items of clarification should be considered. First, the idea of "reflecting back" does not mean that God lacks anything, as explained in the section on God's love for creation. Further, some attributes cannot be directed by creation towards God, only towards other elements of creation, as is the case with mercy. Some attributes can only be expressed towards God alone, as is the case with repentance.

glass goblet which undergoes constant variation according to the variation of the liquid within it." The colour of the lover and the colour of the Beloved are the same.[259]

Ibn 'Arabi recognizes four states, or experiences, associated with love that characterize the mystical journey. It begins with the initial entering of love into the heart of the lover in the form of *hawa* (inclination). The experience of *hawa* can be one of self-interested love, a powerful and even irrational inclination to fulfil selfish inclinations, or it can be an inclination towards following the Divine rulings (*hukm al-sahi'ah*) regardless of what the seeker desires for themselves. This latter state of *hawa* is cultivated through the negation, on the part of the lover, of selfish attachments in favour of the path, at which point *hawa* becomes pure love (*hubb*). Chittick translates this first state as "caprice" and identifies it with those that follow, out of wilful ignorance, their own desires as if they (the desires) were another god. This misdirection of love makes one also guilty of *shirk*, worshipping others as if they were God.[260] The term *wudd* (affection) is used to describe another state of love in which the seeker experiences a "constant faithful fixation (*thabat*) of love" akin to the attribute of God associated with His name "Loving" (*al-Wadud*). This mode of love can characterize all other states of love, including *hawa*, as a mode bestowed on God's servants as a result of their belief.[261] The third type of love is *'ishq*, the overwhelming experience of perfect love (*hubb*) that blinds the seeker to everything in existence except their Beloved. This leads into the final, perfect form of love indicated by the word "*hubb*." This ultimate form of love occurs when the only desire the lover has is for what God desires; their will and God's will are the same. *Hubb* is

[259] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 109.
[260] Ibrahim, *Teachings of Ibn Arabī,* 107-108, 109-110; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 137.
[261] Ibrahim, *Teachings of Ibn Arabī,* 109; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 108.

experienced through the heart, which is also the only aspect of the human being that can love God.[262] Those who have experienced true love also include the prophets, those who "are God's sincere servants, not being owned by their own caprice (*hawa*) or that of God's creatures."[263] Below all these expressions of love is *hubb al-hubb* (the love of love), when a person is in love with the feeling of love to the extent that it surpasses their focus on the beloved.[264]

### 4.10 The End of the Path of Love

Knowledge of God additionally relies on the two types of God's commands: the *al-amr al-takwini* (engendering command) through which non-existent entities come into existence by becoming "cloaked," in a sense, by certain divine names, and the *al-amr al-taklifi* (prescriptive command) relevant only to human beings, and taking the form of guidance as to the *haqq* (truth) of things.[265] The latter involves the instructions of revelation and prophecy, what humans are commanded to do and avoid. The former, on the other hand, involves what actually comes to pass, the deterministic decree on the part of God. Expressed differently, the latter entails what God wants humans to do. The former entails what He brings to pass. The realization of love requires an adherence to the latter, on the volitional domain, that is to say, through our own free will.

The goal of the Sufi path is to be aware of God's "withness" to all things. This state of perception is also the state of the true servant in which God is continuously

[262] Ibrahim, *Teachings of Ibn Arabī,* 107.
[263] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 56.
[264] Ibid, 112.
[265] Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," 30-31.

disclosing Himself through the form of one aware of His "withness."[266] In the "operative" sense, spiritual union is the result of love for the Divine. Divine Beauty in particular (as the component that evokes love), is a state in which, in one sense the human is immersed in God and, in another sense, the Divine becomes present in the human. The *hadith* "when I love him, I am the hearing by which he hears, the sight by which he sees, and the hand with which he grasps," indicates this relationship but, as Ibn 'Arabi attributes all existence to God alone, this should be understood as a process of coming into an awareness of the true nature of existence.[267]

While lovers of God will show courtesy to His Theophanies, there is an even higher degree of courtesy in which the lover leaves manners behind and is effaced in God, who acts through them. The state in which the lover recognizes elements previously attributed to themselves were God's Actions and Attributes. In his chapter of the *Bezels* focused on the prophet Ishmael he describes this quality further saying, "One who is pleasing is loved so that all one does is also loved, indeed, all is pleasing, since the individual being itself does not act, but its Lord in it."[268] They are the "courteous person (*adib*), without knowing it."[269] This highest state can be called "annihilation in Essence" (*fana'fi l-dhat*) that builds on the development that occurs through "annihilation in Actions" (*fana' fi l-af 'al*) and "annihilation in Attributes" (*fana' fi l-sifat*). Annemarie Schimmel, in *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam,* describes *fana* as *enterwerden* rather than annihilation. This German word captures the sense of "being naughted" as the opposite of *werden,* often translated as

[266] Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," 365, 366.
[267] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 114-115.
[268] Ibn al-'Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 105.
[269] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 80.

"becoming." It is a process of exchanging base qualities for the qualities of God through constant effort until the lover is immersed in *wujud*.[270]

Ibn 'Arabi refers to those who have reached this state by several names. As an indication of their embodiment of the "Muhammadan Reality," they are sometimes called the Muhammadans. They have inherited their knowledge and state directly from the Prophet. In a similar vein they may also be called "lovers of God." They have moved beyond all stations on the path to the station of love that is accessible only to the "Perfect Human." This peak of the path is also described as the station of Oneness (*maqam al-Tawhid*), and station of no-station.[271] The "Perfect Human" encompasses all of His names and so "God acts through [them] in respect of Allah, the all-comprehensive name" rather than them only being qualified by certain attributes or names.[272] The names and attributes are perfectly balanced and the lover fulfils their role as God's vicegerent in all situations, witnessing Him in all things.

## Conclusion: The Religion of Love

To conclude this section on the Shaykh, I want to touch on his idea of a "religion of love" that can only be understood in conjunction with the value he had for the Islamic revelation and the unfolding of the Sufi path of love. While Ibn 'Arabi holds Islam in a higher place than other religions, he also describes himself as ultimately following the religion of love in which one witnesses God in all revealed forms. In one of his most famous poems, he declares:

My heart has become capable of accommodating all forms,

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[270] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions*, 142; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 40-41.
[271] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 376-377; Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 94-95; Knysh, *Sufism: A New History*, 90.
[272] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 375.

for gazelles a meadow, for monks a monastery.

For idols a [sacred] house, a *Ka 'bah* for the circumambulating pilgrim,
the tables of the Torah, and the scrolls [scripture] of the *Qur'an.*

I profess [follow] the religion of love, wherever its caravans turn,
this religion [love], is my religion, the faith I keep.

We have an example in Bishr [lover of] Hind and her akin,
And in Qays [lover of] Layla, and likewise, Mayyah and [her lover] Ghaylan.[273]

For Ibn 'Arabi, the heart (*qalb*) of a Divine lover can reach a spiritual level where it is receptive to every theophany, to the continuous renewal of God's manifestations. Each of the symbols here (gazelles, the Torah, the Quran) is received as a face of God. This implies not only a receptivity to the constantly renewing Divine forms to which one is witness, but also a relative detachment or non-attachment to previous self-disclosures of God. As Hany Ibrahim argues in his coverage of this poem, the highest religion for Ibn 'Arabi is this "religion of love," and the highest state on the spiritual path is the station of love. This is a state bestowed on the lover by God when the seeker follows the Revelation of Muhammad.[274] In his view, to worship a God confined to the form of a specific creed would be to delimit Him; it is akin to worshipping an idol. Only those that have surpassed these limited "gods of belief"[275] can love God as His in Himself, in His infinite, non-delimited nature. These greatest "Knowers of God," who will know God on the Day of Resurrection,[276] love and recognize Him in every form, for they have reached the "station of no-station"

[273] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 67; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 118; Chittick, "The Religion of Love."
[274] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 69-70.
[275] Different from the "God of Belief" described in Ahmad's cosmology.
[276] This is according to a *hadith* which describes God showing Himself to the *ummah* (community of Muslims) in a "Form (*surah*) other than His form (*ghayr suratihi*) which they know," and they do not recognize Him until he appears to them in a form they recognize.

(*maqam al-la maqam*). This is not an undiscerning acceptance of all religions on Ibn ‘Arabi’s part; instead, it is the capacity to witness the Beloved in the symbols and mythology of revealed religious forms while at the same time maintaining the beliefs and practices of one’s own revealed tradition, without which one would not be able to attain mystical realization. This is because only an authentic, living mystical path nestled in a revealed religion can lead to the full effacement in the Divine beloved. One path is required to reach the station of no-station and only at that station can the many forms of the Divine theophanies be recognized. In the Shaykh’s view, all paths lead to God, but it is only the path of Muhammad and the Quran that leads to the highest experience of felicity and of God in infinite fulness.[277]

[277] Ibrahim, *Love in the Teachings*, 71,72; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 303.

# Chapter Five: Rumi

## 5.1 The Life and Times of Jalal al-Din Rumi

Determining the history of Rumi's life in great detail is limited by the lack of extensive primary source material on the subject and the abundance of hagiographic accounts that mix historical realities with the legendary qualities often present in such venerative texts. Critical readings of these sources, as seen in the writings of William Chittick, Annemarie Schimmel, and Franklin Lewis, in connection with recent translations of primary sources, including the *Maqalalat* (*Discourses*) of Shams-i Tabrizi and a collection of Rumi's letters, provide a picture of Rumi's life. It is generally agreed upon that Mu'mina Khatun gave birth to Jalal al-Din Rumi, also referred to by the honorific Maulana (our Master), on the thirtieth of September 604/1207 of the in the town of Wakhsh in the Balkh region of modern-day Tajikistan. His father, Baha al-Din Walad (d. 628/1231), was working in the Balkh region at the time. Wakhsh was part of the declining Ghorid empire contemporaneously experiencing a growing conflict with the Khwarasmshah and a looming threat of Mongol invasion.[278] By 610/1213 Baha had moved his family from Wakhsh to Samarqand, possibly because of the growing conflict in the region. After this relocation, there is around a decade in which the family's whereabouts are not known for certain. They may have made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and there are some indications that Rumi studied for a time under Arabic scholars, writing some of his earliest Arabic poetry in Aleppo or Damascus.[279]

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[278] Schimmel, *Rumi's World*, 11; Lewis, *Rumi,* 19, 199; Ibrahim Gamard, "Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and His Place in the History of Sufism," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2021), 103-104.

[279] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 10, 12; Lewis, *Rumi* 160.

By the early 620s/1220s, Rumi and his family had travelled further into Anatolia, settling for a time in Laranda (Karaman in Greek), which had come under Seljuk rule a few years before.[280] Around 626/1229, Baha was invited to teach at the *madrasa* in Konya, also under the Seljuk sultanate, and his family once again relocated.[281] Throughout this early period of his life, Rumi studied the various Islamic sciences of the day, from Islamic Law to theology. His father was a well-recognised authority in those fields. The writings of Borhan al-Din (d. 639/1241), one of Baha's disciples, indicate that Rumi was being referred to as *mawlana* (our master/teacher) during this time, even before he took over his father's teaching position.[282]

After Baha's death, Rumi took over his teaching position, and this is when his focus shifted towards learning about the deeper Sufi aspects of his father's beliefs under the spiritual guidance of Borhan.[283] Under Borhan's tutelage, Rumi travelled to Syria to further his education under other spiritual and Sufi leaders. It is possible that during this time he came into contact with Shams, who describes having seen Rumi for the first time during this period while he was studying in Damascus. While he may not have come into contact with Ibn 'Arabi directly, Rumi developed a close relationship with one of his foremost disciples al-Qunawi.[284] At this time, he also came in contact with Salah al-Din Zarkub (d. unknown), an illiterate goldsmith and student of Borhan, who would feature in some of his later poetry in a similar capacity

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[280] Lewis, *Rumi*, 163.

[281] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 11, 13; Lewis, *Rumi,* 199.

[282] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love:* 2; Lewis, *Rumi,* 209.

[283] Shams-I Tabrizi, *Me & Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi,* trans. William C. Chittick (Fons Vitae, 2004), xiii; Lewis, *Rumi,* 209; Schimmel, *Rumi's World*, 14. Schimmel describes Rumi as having been introduced to these aspects of Baha's spiritual discipline only after his death, through Borhan. Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present*, contends that Rumi had likely already been introduced to the Sufi path through his father's teachings and his own studies in Syria. Both agree, at least, that his study of Sufism does not appear to have been serious until he began learning under Borhan.

[284] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 15; Lewis, *Rumi,* 314-315; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 355n23.

as Shams.[285] During this period Rumi's importance to the community only expanded as he appealed to the merchant community and inherited many of Baha and Borhan's disciples after their deaths.[286] His position as a teacher continued to expand alongside his understanding of the Sufi path until his meeting with Shams. It was also during this pre-Shams period that he began writing the *Mathnawi-yi Ma'nawi* (*Couplets of Spiritual Meaning*) at the behest of some of his followers. This collection of six books became well known throughout Central Asia, and India in the centuries after his death, and it has since spread to regions all over the world.[287]

### 5.2 Shams-i Tabrizi

Shams-i Tabrizi, whose name means "The Sun of Faith from Tabriz,"[288] arrived in Konya around the year 624/1244. From their initial meeting him and Rumi were virtually inseparable. William Chittick summarizes the consensus on the impact of this meeting saying that it transformed Rumi "from a sober jurisprudent to an intoxicated celebrant of the mysteries of Divine Love,"[289] shirking his teaching duties and spending time doing *sama*. This practice included listening and dancing to poetry and music as a form of prayer and remembrance of God. Rumi appears to have both participated in this tradition and to have contributed to it with his own music and poetry.[290] In response to this shift in Rumi, his followers became increasingly hostile

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[285] Lewis, *Rumi,* 382.
[286] Ibid, 257.
[287] Gamard, "Rūmī in the History of Sufism," 116-117; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 5. The *Mathnawi* contains original writings from Rumi as well as didactic poetry and stories he has pulled from other important Sufi figures, often altered slightly to focus on something particular Rumi wished to convey to his followers.
[288] Lewis, *Rumi,* 270.
[289] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 3.
[290] Chittick, *Me & Rumi*, xiii; Gamard, "Rūmī in the History of Sufism," 112.

towards Shams and after about two years he left suddenly for Damascus, leaving Rumi distraught.[291] Seeing his father's state, Sultan Walad went to Damascus and convinced Shams to return to Konya, which he did for several months before disappearing again, this time for good.[292] After a period of mourning, this loss sparked a poetic outpouring in Rumi as he contemplated the Divine through His manifestation in Shams and other important companions in his life.[293] He continued teaching and writing until his death in 672/1273. His son, Sultan Walad, took over Rumi's teaching position sometime after his death and firmly established the Mevlevi order in what is now Turkey.[294]

### 5.3 The Love Between Shams and Rumi

After Rumi's meeting with Shams his poetry and writing became increasingly oriented around their love and friendship. Several scholars have identified how this love was unique and often expressed through erotic language and love poetry and yet was not romantic. Sultan Walad makes clear in his own writings that Rumi fell deeply in love with Shams soon after they met, but this was a Platonic love akin to that between intimate friends or between a disciple and mystical teacher. There also appears to have been a familial quality to their relationship, with Shams describing, in

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[291] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 17, 18; Chittick, *Me & Rumi*, xiii.

[292] Lewis, *Rumi,* 354, 336, 353, 357. The nature and reason for Shams's disappearance is not entirely clear. Hagiographic accounts blame the growing animosity amongst Rumi's followers for his disappearance. Aflaki, in the hagiography the *Manaqeb al-Carefin* indicates that Shams was murdered as a result of this animosity, potentially by Rumi's son Ala al-Din (d. unkown). Letters between Rumi and Ala al-Din from after Shams disappearance do not indicate that Rumi was suspicious of his son. Rumi asks his son to return to Konya after Ala had fled the city due to accusations he had been involved in Shams disappearance. Writings from Sultan Walad do indicate jealousy and even a murderous intent directed toward Shams but also remorse for that sentiment after Sham's first disappearance. Essentially, it is difficult to determine the details of Sham's disappearance.

[293] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 5; Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 23, 24. Amongst these others was Salah al-Din who he had met with Borhan.

[294] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 31, 32.

his *Discourses*, how Rumi would allow his wife to be in his presence which was contrary to the cultural norms of the time.[295] Annemarie Schimmel further argues that *shahid-bazi*, a practice of contemplating the Divine through beautiful young men,[296] cannot be applied to this relationship as both men were well-educated and spiritually adept by the time they had met; this was a different form of witnessing.

Rumi does speak of the Witness (*Shahid*) in his writings, often focusing on the Witness within the heart of those who have been transformed into the object of God's love; in whom He witnesses Himself. Because God is the source of True Beauty, any contemplation of beauty can become contemplation of God when the contemplator is aware of the source. This is seen most prominently in admiration for the female form but appears here in the companionship between Shams and Rumi.[297] The descriptions of romantic love serving as an allegory that points to the deeper realities Rumi was witnessing through the medium of Shams. Rumi's son writes that "After much waiting, he [Rumi] saw his [Shams] face; [mystical] secrets became as visible as daylight to him… He invited him to his house, saying "O king, hear from this poor beggar (*darwish*): although my house is not a place worthy of you, yet I am your sincere lover."[298] Schimmel compares this to the fire in the burning bush, through which Moses hears the voice of God to articulate this point. Shams and the bush are the forms through which God is made known to Moses and Rumi respectively.[299] Rumi's love poetry featuring Shams, dedicated to him, or written using his name as the pen-name (*takhallus*), articulates Rumi's experience of Love of God through the

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[295] Lewis, *Rumi,* 316, 317; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 3.

[296] This practice, sometimes translated as "witness play" or "gazing upon beardless young men," was a controversial ritual of contemplating Divine beauty through its manifestation in young men. Ahmad Ghazali has been associated with the practice. See Lumbard's *Ahmad al-Ghazalī* for more on this practice, the purpose of it, and the related controversy (30-36; 106-108).

[297] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 286, 288-299.

[298] Gamard, "Rūmī in the History of Sufism," 109-110.

[299] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 21, 22; Lewis, *Rumi,* 412.

form of Shams.[300] Even beyond this specific mode of contemplation, he uses love poetry and erotic imagery to articulate and evoke spiritual experiences.[301]

### 5.4 Form and Meaning

In Rumi's writing, love is the core driving force of the Sufi path and the most real experience on the seeker's journey towards unity with God. While his writing frequently talks of love, all of his passages are ultimately intended to motivate the listener or reader towards realizing love themselves.[302] In one poem he explains this directly saying:

> The lover's ailment is separate from all other ailments: love is the astrolabe of the mysteries of God.
> Whether love be from this (earthly) side or from that (heavenly) side, in the end it leads us yonder.
> Whatsoever I say in exposition and explanation of Love, when I come to Love (itself) I am ashamed of that (explanation).
> Although the commentary of the tongue makes (all) clear, yet tongueless love is clearer.
> Whilst the pen was making haste in writing, it split upon itself as soon as it came to love. [303]

By their nature, any descriptions of love for God, friends, and the beloved are always passing through the form that is language. This form, like all forms in Rumi's cosmology, is directly related to the meaning but is not the object of love in its essence. The use of passionate language in the cases of mystic prose is intending to signify the contemplation of the Beloved, God, without necessitating romantic intent towards that form in the conventional sense. This concept has been seen in the study

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[300] De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry,* 54, 58; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 197.
[301] Schimmel, *Rumi's World,* 23-24.
[302] Nasr, *The Garden of* Truth, 61; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 194; Chittick, "Love in Islamic Thought," 231.
[303] Rumi, *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Cambridge University Press, 1926), 10. For a translation of the same poem in rhyming couplets see Jawid Mojaddedi's *Rumi: The Masnavi, Book One* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 10-11.

above and builds on an established idea that the material world is a "veil" over deeper truths. Further, the form can be a distraction, or it can direct the lover to deeper underlying meanings depending on the proclivities of the observer.[304]All of the created universe is a theophany of God and experiences and descriptions of love for and in God cannot be captured even in the language of romantic love, making writing on love simultaneously insufficient and inexhaustible.[305]

### 5.5 Love and the *Nafs* in Rumi's Cosmology

Building on the established Sufi cosmology of love, in Rumi's view God, in His Essence, interacts with creation through his Divine Attributes or Names, Love being one of the most important of these. As one attribute of God, it would be accurate to say that God is Love, but this does not capture the whole picture:

> When we say that God is not in the heavens, we do not mean that He is not in the heavens. What we mean is that the heavens do not encompass Him, but He encompasses them. He has a connection to the heavens, but it is ineffable and inscrutable, just as He has established a connection with you. Everything is in the hand of His Power. Everything is the locus of His Self-manifestation and under His control.[306]

God is Love but He is also His other attributes, and His Essence is beyond all attributes, just as it is beyond desire or need.[307] Love directed at God is the truest form of love, reflecting his Divine Name most directly and, as shown, coming from His Love.[308] The act of creation was motivated by God's desire to witness his own Hidden

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[304] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 19-21; Lewis, *Rumi*, 405-407.
[305] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 295.
[306] Ibid, 45.
[307] Ibid, 195-196.
[308] Lumbard, "From 'Hubb' to 'Ishq'," 346-347.

Treasure revealed in the prophets and the saints.[309] The *hadith qudsi* that is often translated as "I desired to be known, so I created the world," confirmed for Rumi that every aspect of creation is caused and maintained by love and participates due to its need for union and constant movement towards (or away from, in the case of human beings) unity.[310] The act of creation, however, is not all that is needed to reflect God's Beauty as He also desired recognition for His creation as a Self-manifestation, including His creation of man as the microcosm that God created to know and witness the full extent of His own Beauty.[311] God's love then is directed to those who have cultivated beautiful traits and purged themselves of ugly ones, with various verses in the Qur'an identifying the traits God finds ugly, such as hypocrisy and forgetfulness, and traits he finds beautiful.[312] Each person possesses the potential to reveal the Hidden Treasure in themselves as "God's love find its fullest reflection in man"[313] when they cultivate these beautiful traits.[314]

Two kinds of love are described in Rumi's metaphysics, "true love" (*'ishq-i haqiqi*) which is love of God, and "derivative love" or "metaphorical love" (*'ishq-i majazi*) for something other than God. It is metaphorical in the sense that love of any beloved can direct one towards Love of God and can teach the seeker about love, but it is not sufficient by itself. In one sense *'ishq-i majazi* is idolatry but in another, because all love comes from God, any experience of love is ultimately from Him even if the lover does not recognize the source.[315] God being the only True object of love is further proven by His faithfulness in comparison to all other potential, faithless,

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[309] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 139; Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 197.
[310] Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love*, 198.
[311] Chittick, "The Spiritual Path of Love," 8-9; Chittick, "Love in Islamic Thought," 231.
[312] Chittick," Love in Islamic Thought," 231.
[313] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 232.
[314] Chittick, "The Spiritual Path of Love," 8.
[315] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 291-292; *Chittick*, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 200.

lovers. God is the only Beloved that does not fade or falter.[316] In the *Mithnawi* Rumi explains this idea further in a *ghazal*:

> If your intimates other than God possess faithfulness, what happened to your father and mother?
> If you can depend on someone other than God, where are your nursemaid and tutor?
> Your intimacy with milk and breasts has gone, your dread of grammar school has gone.
> This was a ray upon the wall of existence: The radiance has returned to the Sun.
> When the ray falls upon something, you become its lover, oh courageous man! Whatever you love in existence has received a gold plating from God's Attributes.
> When the gold returns to its origin and the copper remains, your nature becomes disgusted and divorces it…
> Light goes from the wall to the Sun - go to the Sun that always moves in proportion!
> From now on take water from heaven, for you have seen no faithfulness from the drainpipe.[317]

While even derivative love is from God, objects of this type of love can be deceptive if the lover does not understand God to be the true object of their focus. Recognizing this requires discernment and discipline to overcome the deception of the lower *nafs* and lower intellect that wants to seek joy in the world of form and the domination of the ego, rather than subsistence and annihilation in God.[318] At the higher levels the intellect can point one towards God and help overcome the intellect dominated by the ego that is a "denier of Love, even if it pretends to know the mysteries. It is clever and knowledgeable but not naughted."[319] The higher level of the intellect is a polishing instrument that watches out for traps that appeal to the desires of the *nafs*. This is also

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[316] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 202.
[317] Ibid, 202.
[318] Chittick, "The Spiritual Path of Love," 10, 11; Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh, "Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation," *Mawlana Rumi Review* 5, no. 1(2014): 49-50.
[319] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 223.

why Sufi's stress the transmission of knowledge via relationships between students and teachers in order to ensure that the spiritual wayfaring does not meander.[320]

### 5.6 The Development of the Intellect

Any realization of the Beloved and development of the higher intellect requires the collaboration between, and application of, theory, practice, and realization. Theory allows the lover to identify the True Beloved and it appeals to the higher intellect, but it is incomplete by itself. The foundation of love that is established by theory is further realized through practice or action, specifically the cultivation of disciple under the guidance of a spiritual teacher and building on the mandatory practices of the Islamic tradition. This student-teacher relationship further develops love to the point of realization. Realization is ultimately annihilation and subsistence as the lover overcomes any sense of multiplicity or self to be completely united with the Beloved.[321] Through overcoming the partial or lower intellect one comes to realize the Universal Intellect, embodied in the Prophet and saints, within themselves, eventually reaching a state where even the intellect, and love, must be left behind to realize only God.[322] As Rumi explains:

> Do not remain a man of intellect among the lovers, especially if you love that sweet-faced Beloved.
> May the men of intellect stay far away from the lover, may the smell of dung stay far away from the east wind!
> If a man of intellect should enter, tell him the way is blocked; but if a lover should come, extend him a hundred welcomes!

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[320] Zarrabi-Zadeh, "Jalal al-Dīn Rūmī's Mysticism of Love-based Annihilation," 53.

[321] Gamard, "Rūmī in the History of Sufism," 105; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 212.

[322] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 220-221; Lewis, *Rumi,* 401-402. This is further explained by Rumi and translated in Chittick's *The Sufi Path of Love* (222): "At the words of my Heart-ravisher, the intellect flew from my head. The Universal Intellect did not catch a scent of the rest of the story - so what place was there left for me?"

> By the time intellect has deliberated and reflected, love has flown to the seventh heaven.
> By the time intellect has found a camel for the hajj, love has circled the Kaaba.
> Love has come and covered my mouth: "Throw away your poetry and come to the stars![323]

In this verse and others, the steps to realization first cultivate sober rationality in the higher faculties of the intellect, before ultimately giving way to the madness and bewilderment of Love. In one passage Rumi explains, "Intellect is good and desirable to the extent it brings you to the King's door. Once you have reached His door, then divorce the intellect! From this time on, the intellect will be to your loss and a brigand."[324] While his poetry can lean towards these exclamations of intoxicated love their remains a need for the intellect in the Sufi journey; an intellect that can then be transformed through love of God.[325]

Rumi's belief in the need for annihilation is further substantiated by his idea of a jealous God. The word *ghayrat* in Arabic and Persian describes a concept similar to the English word "jealousy." The nature of God's jealousy is an abhorrence of love directed at entities other than Him. Although, in Reality, there is nothing other than God, His jealousy is towards those derivative loves that are the focus of those that do not realize He is the only Reality.[326] He responds to the complete focus of the lover who has left behind all other beloveds by bringing them closer to Him. Rumi speaks about the nature of God as a jealous Beloved in the *Fihi ma Fihi* saying: "What sort of beloved is He? As long as a single hair of love for yourself remains, He will not show

[323] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 266.
[324] Ibid, 222.
[325] Ibid, 224.
[326] Ibid, 304-305.

His face; you will be unworthy of union with Him, and he will give you no access."[327] The goal of the Sufi path is to recognize God as the Real at the expense of the differentiated self. A realization so complete and self-effacing that not even a "single hair" of love remains for the self.

### 5.7 Images and Congeneity

Recognizing the reality of God's relationship to creation is known through imagination (*khayal*) and images. Although the word can refer to many things, for these purposes it is signifying the idea of an "image" which is a form or concept as it exists in the mind and heart. Just as forms in the material world indicate a meaning that has inspired the form, these images imply a reality beyond conceptualizations.[328] To escape the "image" and obtain the "Real" Chittick explains that the Sufi aims to turn all their attention towards the Beloved, and to cultivate character traits that will encourage the Beloved to allow the seeker closer to Him. The path of love articulated by Rumi aims to realize these traits or Divine Attributes in accordance with the concept of congeneity, namely, the idea that like is drawn to like.[329] The discipline of the Sufi path is intended to develop the essential congeneity required to be drawn back to God and not cast away from Him as His opposite.[330] In a verse that captures this idea and the established belief that God is the only true actor, Rumi says,

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[327] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 212; Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "From 'hubb' to ''ishq'," (252) describes a similar sentiment in the writings of Abu Hamid. That "the desire for just one hair of creation will prevent him from fully realizing his identity as lover."
[328] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 248-249.
[329] Atif Khalil, "Sufism and Qur'anic Ethics," in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (Routledge, 2021).
[330] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 95; Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 119.

> What is congeneity? A sort of insight through which people find their way to each other… When God places within you the attributes of Gabriel, you seek a way to the sky, like a bird…
> When He places within you the attributes of asininity, you will fly to the feed trough, even if you have a hundred wings.[331]

He explicitly associates this quality of congeneity to inner development saying, "Without doubt congeneity derives from meaning not from water and clay. Beware! Do not become a form worshipper! Seek not the secret of congeneity in form!"[332] The process of developing a likeness to God can often include a period of obsession with the image of a beloved that further enflames the lover towards unity, but the essence of the Beloved remains beyond the form of any of His manifestations.[333] As the seeker travels along the path towards the Beloved, undergoing the process of purification and development, the initial lower levels of the imagination, which correlate the least with the Real, are replaced with images more closely aligned with Reality until the two can no longer be distinguished from one another and any form can be transcended completely.[334]

All of this effort to develop similarity to God, to the extent of one's capacity as a finite being contingent on Him, are manifestations of Love. Through His mercy, an attribute often closely associated with love, as has been seen above, the lover is brought towards the Essence of the Beloved.[335] Another Persian Sufi Poet Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi, writing at around the same time, shares a similar conception in his *Lama'at* saying that "Love's fire falls into the heart and consumes all it finds, erasing from the heart even the image of the Beloved."[336] Even as form and intellect are left behind for

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[331] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 96.
[332] Ibid, 95.
[333] Ibid, 256.
[334] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 256.
[335] Ibid, 160-161.
[336] 'Iraqi, *Divine Flashes,* 117.

subsistence in the Beloved, Rumi writes how eventually even Love must be left behind for complete subsistence in God: "The go-between was Love, who pulled me to you. First I am Love's slave, then Yours."[337]

### 5.8 Union and Separation

The experience of developing proximity to God along the Sufi path entails oscillating between two essential states of intimacy between the lover and the Beloved. These are union (*wisal*) and separation (*firaq, hijran*), also described as "expansion" and "contraction," or "life and death," and remain until the traveller achieves complete annihilation of the self and permanent subsistence in God.[338] These two states are compatible with the conceptualization of God's Attributes as being divisible into the two categories of Severity and Gentleness (also Majesty and Beauty) that all work to reveal the "Hidden Treasure." For the lover, even suffering and separation pulls them towards God.[339] The disappearance of Shams was a period of suffering and transformation for Rumi. A talk given by Shams, and recorded by one of his disciples, shows the value that this separation had for Rumi. He said, "Since I am not in the situation where I might order travel for you [Rumi], I will place the need upon myself for the welfare of your work, because…separation cooks and refines."

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[337] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 258.

[338] Ibid, 232.

[339] Murata, *Tao of Islam,* 221; Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 234, 235. He includes a passage from the *Mathnawi* which articulates the way a lover is reminded of the Beloved in moments of bliss and in suffering using the story of Zulaykha's love for Joseph: "Zulaykha made everything a name for Joseph from the rue-seed to incense…And if she said, 'the bread has no salt' and if she said 'the heavens are revolving backwards,' And if she said 'My head has begun to ache,' and if she said, 'My headache is better'-If she praised something, she was praising his embrace; and if she blamed something, she was blaming separation from him. If she piled up a hundred thousand names, her aim and her desire was always Joseph."

Sultan Walad subsequently recorded that this separation cultivated realization in Rumi as "he found him (Shams) within himself, like the clear moon."[340]

In some accounts, this experience of separation from the Beloved contains a tone of animosity towards God for the elusive nature of the permanent Union that is desired but has not yet been achieved.[341] The experience of suffering is understood to be, in part, a reflection of the incomplete knowledge of the seeker in comparison to God's knowledge. This ignorance makes things that ultimately lead to Him appear as suffering to the lover, even though they are essential steps of the path. Furthermore, Rumi's cosmology relies on complimentary opposites that can only be understood through the existence of their opposite, meaning that felicity is only comprehended through its opposite, misery.[342] As a further incentive towards love of the Divine, the feeling of joy experienced in pursuit of things other than God is not True Joy and will ultimately lead to far more suffering than that experienced in the cycle of separation and union on the path to God.[343] As in the case Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi advocates strongly for accepting, and even pursuing, suffering on the path towards union with the Beloved as a catalyst for purification and deliverance from attachment to the world and lower self.[344] In the *Diwan-i Shams-i Tabrizi*, he writes that "first Thou emptiest

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[340] Gamard, "Rūmī in the History of Sufism," 110.

[341] David Martin, "Selected Ghazalīyāt (Love Poems) Translated from the Classical Persian of Khāqānī, Sa'dī and Rūmī," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15, no 1 (1984): 27-28. Martin provides an example of this in his translation of one of Rumi's ghazals from the *Dīwan-i Shams-i Tabrīzi*: "…malice and grace You are. sugar and poison You are; O leave off tormenting me! sun-room You are. and house of singing Venus You are. garden of hope You are; open up Friend!"

[342] Murata, *Tao of Islam,* 251; *Chittick*, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 238. See also Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love,* 245: "Separation and parting from Thee is difficult, oh Beloved, especially after Thy embrace!" and "Union with this world is separation from that world. Health of this body is the sickness of the spirit. It is hard to be separated from this caravanserai - so know that separation from that permanent abode is harder! Since it is hard for you to be separated from the painting, think what it will be to be parted from the painter! Oh you who cannot bear to be without this despicable world! How can you bear to be without God, oh friend, how?"

[343] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions,* 293; *Chittick*, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 236-237.

[344] Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 237, 238.

the lovers through the anguish of separation, then Thou fillest them with gold to the tops of their heads!"[345] And, in a similar vein, "As he says 'The birds of consciousness… were sent from the spheres… to realize the worth of union with God and to see the pain of separation from Him."[346] In Rumi's view all things remind the true lover of the Beloved.

## Conclusion: Unity with the Beloved

While love is ultimately surpassed in the state of complete Union, the Beloved is also infinite and so the journey of the lover never really ends. As Rumi writes in his *Mathnawi*, "It is greater than a hundred resurrections, for the resurrection is a limit, whereas love is unlimited."[347] This ultimate state of love and unity is summarized in Rumi's *Diwan-i Shams-i Tabizi*. A poem, written under the pen name of Shams, echoes what was seen in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi:

> What is to be done, O Muslims, for I know myself not,
> Neither a Christian am I, nor a Jew, nor a Magian, nor a Muslim.
> Neither of the East am I nor West, nor of the land, nor sea;
> Nor of nature's quarry, nor of heaven circling above…
> Neither of this world am I nor the next; nor of heaven nor hell;
> Nor from Adam nor Eve nor of Eden, nor paradise or its porter.
> My place is the placeless, my mark the markless;
> Not either body nor soul for I am myself the Beloved.[348]

The goal of the path of love is ultimately this Unity beyond all dualities, and all formal distinctions. Rumi lays out a path that is based firmly in the Islamic revelation, expands into the Sufi supererogatory works, reaches its peak in the ecstatic experience

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[345] Ibid, 240.
[346] Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 221.
[347] Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions*, 134; Lewisohn, "Sufism's Religion of Love," 178-179.
[348] Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 24-25.

of love for the Divine before all, even love, is left behind in complete effacement in the Beloved.

## Conclusion

After a literature and methodology review, the second chapter of this study covered the delineated the growth of Sufism as an ascetical-mystical movement with a distinct focus which separated it from *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *kalam* (scholastic theology), and *falsafa* (philosophy). The thesis revealed how love became increasingly central to the language of the Sufism, particularly from the time of the early female mystic Rabia (d. 185/801 CE). Shaqiq Balkhi (d. 193-4/810) incorporated love into the framework of his four waystations of the Sufi path, and new theories based on the Quranic exegesis of Sahl al-Tustari (d. 282/896) and others, further set the stage for later developments. Verses on the love between God and human beings, and the attributes of love and knowledge (*jamal* and *husn*), became particularly important to the developing tradition and appear frequently in the texts of later Sufis. Additionally, Hellenistic influences, particularly in the form of Neoplatonism, significantly contributed to developments that would appear in more mature form in Sufi philosophy. By the turn of the sixth/twelfth century debates about the nature of love for God inspired, in part, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's *Book of Love* and the increasing acceptance of *'ishq* or "passionate love" between God and humankind. It was also exemplified in Ahmad al-Ghazali's *Sawanih*. This second chapter also covers the evolution in poetry from the pre-Islamic odic tradition to Ahmad's poetry and the Persian prose of Rumi. This established some of the underlying influences on the four key figures covered in the subsequent chapters.

The Ghazali brothers provide the first example of the different approaches to the Sufi path of love. As shown, this does not mean that the path itself, that is the development needed to acquire proximity to God, was different but that the language used to describe it and the acceptable expression of that peak experience of love was

not always agreed upon. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali identifies love as key to the Sufi path of developing proximity to God, with some stations on the path leading to love and others being a consequence of it. This development was further facilitated by the cultivation of the inner awareness (the intellect) most receptive to recognizing God as the object of its love. In his *Book of Love*, love begins with love for the self and the perpetuations of the self's existence and culminates in a realization of the dependence of all potential beloveds on God, who is the only existent. In his language of love, *'ishq* describes the most fully realized love of God and the experience of *ladhada* (pleasure) and is the result of constant remembrance (*dhikr*) of Him. This love can then carry the lover through suffering and trials.

The systematic coverage of Abu Hamid, which included covering the various signs of the true lover of God, differs significantly from the writings of Ahmad al-Ghazali, whose poetry is much less linear in its internal logic. Furthermore, he centralizes love even further in his metaphysics, describing it as the Divine Essence Itself. While both Ghazali brothers recognize that the experience of love is ultimately beyond what can be explained or taught through the written word, Ahmad's intention through his poetry is to induce the necessary inspiration in the listener to pursue the Sufi path. This differs from Abu Hamid's writing which is more akin to a manual, describing various stages and signs of developed love for God in chapters intended to build on one another. Like his brother, Ahmad's theory relies on the pursuit of awareness in an inner faculty beyond the five senses that helps the lover recognize the primary and secondary causes of love. As seen in his brother's writings, Ahmad links suffering, beauty, and knowledge with the experience of love, with suffering being an essential element of separation and unavoidable except at the point when the lover is completely absolved of any sense of independence.

The fourth chapter turned to the writings and philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabi. For him love is the force that creates and continuously animates the cosmos as it describes the tension between the Necessary Existent and the created things. Building on the metaphysics established by figures like Abu Hamid and Dhu’l Nun, Ibn ‘Arabi finds that all love is ultimately an experience of God’s love, but he takes this unification even further. He incorporates love into a doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (Oneness of being) that insists on the unity of all things in God while accepting the experience of multiplicity from the perspective of created things. His writings on love in the *Bezels of Wisdom* focus on the Prophet Muhammad, as both the greatest exemplar of love for God and of stability. Where Abu Hamid emphasized sobriety (*sahw*) as the mark of the “people of authority” (*ahl al-ihtijaj*), the Ibn ‘Arabi valued a state of equilibrium between the poles of sobriety and drunkenness. In his view this middle ground was essential to achieving the highest degrees of witnessing (*shuhud*) Divine love. Like Abu Hamid and Ahmad, the realization of Divine love relies on a special inner receptivity to knowledge of the Divine. He calls this *khayal* (imagination), which is the faculty that witnesses the Divine and accesses higher spiritual realities. Progress on the Sufi path relies on knowledge developed through the imaginal faculty, this knowledge transforms everything into a witnessing of God, including trials and suffering.

Like Abu Hamid, Ibn ‘Arabi recognizes stages of love that can begin with a self-interested love, which he calls *hawa,* and culminates in the experience of pure love, which he calls *hubb*. Here the terminology differs between Ibn ‘Arabi and Abu Hamid. At the highest stage everything is effaced in God as the lover realizes the “Muhammadan Reality,” or the “Station of no-station” (*maqam la-maqam*) as all attributes are present and balanced in the seeker and they take on the all-

comprehensive name of Allah. From this state Ibn ‘Arabi recognizes a “Religion of Love” that is echoed in the later poetry of Rumi in verses that describe an ultimate unity to all religious diversity.

Finally, this study covered Divine Love in the poetry of Rumi, with a particular focus on the practice of contemplating God through his creation, as found in the relationship between Rumi and Shams. This practice of approaching God through contemplation of His Beauty as it is manifest in created things is described in the chapters on Ahmad and Ibn ‘Arabi, in slightly different forms, as well. Beyond this deep friendship, Rumi’s writings are similar to the poetry of Ahmad in their use of passionate love imagery and language to articulate spiritual experiences. For him, love is an essential component of the Sufi path and is more important than knowledge, but knowledge, practice, and realization are all deemed necessary for progress on the path and realization of God as the true Beloved in any experience of love. As with Abu Hamid, Ahmad, and Ibn ‘Arabi, progress on the Sufi path relies on cultivating the character traits, the attributes, of God that will encourage the Beloved to allow the seeker closer to Him in accordance with the concept of congeneity. This was then tied into his larger metaphysics that recognizes a deeper layer of meaning beneath every form. This meaning is not completely separate from the form that “veils” it, but the intellect is needed to move from the “image” to the “Real” that is beyond all conceptualizations and forms. This experience of proximity along the Sufi path is not wholly linear, instead the seeker constantly oscillates between two essential states of union and separation until they achieve complete annihilation of the self and permanent subsistence in God. This is similar to how Ibn ‘Arabi understands suffering but Rumi makes use of this poetic language (life and death, expansion and contraction) to describe the constant ebb of the seeker towards the Divine in any state,

and the view that all things, even trials, can be a gift pushing the seeker towards their object. This chapter closes with a poem that echoes the unity across religious diversity found in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabi. Like Ibn ‘Arabi this does not appear to indicate a broad acceptance of all religions, instead it is a capacity to witness the Beloved in all forms while maintaining one’s own beliefs and practices which induced this state of realization.

This thesis focused on the concept of Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism from the second/eighth century until the late thirteenth, with a focus on major figures of the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries. It has delineated the development of Sufism and its theory of love from the earliest decades after Muhammad to the writings of Jalal al-Din Rumi, demonstrating both the rooting of this tradition in a shared Quranic foundation and the unique developments across different Sufi thinkers.

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