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Kings of Love



Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy
Director: Seyyed Hossein Nasr
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Tehran 1978

Kings of Love

**The Poetry and History
of the
Ni'matullāhī Sufi Order**

65536

by
Nasrollah Pourjavady
and
Peter Lamborn Wilson



**Preface by
Seyyed Hossein Nasr**

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**Imperial Iranian Academy
of Philosophy**

Tehran

1978

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to Javad Nurbakhsh
and
Seyyed Hossein Nasr

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سَمَاءُ الْوَهْدِ الْوَهْدِ

Preface

Sufism, being at once a metaphysical truth and a tradition which has been unfolded gradually during the fourteen centuries of Islamic history, in many languages and among many peoples, can be studied both as a meta-historical, eternal truth and a distinct historical and artistic reality. It can be seen as one of the major embodiments of the *sophia perennis*, with appropriate means of reaching the *sophia* within the matrix of the Islamic tradition; or it may be viewed as the activity, teachings and writings of masters and disciples, stretching over the ages in many climes. The present study combines both approaches in a manner which is at once authentic from the traditional point of view and scholarly according to the criteria of contemporary scholarship. It deals with the basic teachings of Sufism and at the same time with the history and poetry of a single Sufi order, the Ni'matullāhī Order, which has been one of the most dominant spiritual forces in Persia and certain regions in India during the past six centuries. Moreover, the work combines metaphysical and historical studies with the translation of a notable selection of the poetry of the masters of this order, ranging from the 8th/14th century to the present day. In carrying out this task, it makes use not only of all the available written material but also of the indispensable oral tradition to be found in the *khaniqāhs* of the Order and in the hearts of its members.

The starting point of the book is the life and teachings of the founder of the Ni'matullāhī Order, Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī, the great saint who hailed originally from Aleppo, but migrated to Persia, where he settled and died in Mahan, which remains to this day one of the most beautiful sanctuaries and pilgrimage centres in Iran. The biography as well as the doctrines and works of Shāh Ni'matullāh are followed by a

systematic study of the history of the Order not only in Persia itself but also in the Deccan in India. The activities of the Order are traced to the Safavid era, through the obscure period when much of its activity went underground, its revival in the Qajar period and finally its life in present-day Persia.

The second part of the book is devoted to the translation of a few samples of the vast ocean of poetry in Persian produced by the masters of the Order and their disciples, from Shāh Ni'matullāh, who composed an extensive *Diwan* of some 14,000 verses, to Javad Nurbakhsh, the present 'Pole' of the Order, who continues to write classical Sufi verse of great beauty. The section on poetry marks a major contribution to Persian poetry in English translation, virtually all of the material having been rendered into English for the first time. The Persian poems are rendered into a living English poetry in a style which is usually imbued with the qualities of faithfulness and sincerity. Most of the verses translated are exactly what their authors meant them to be, spiritual advice to those aspiring to follow the Way, as these lines of Shāh Ni'matullāh exemplify:

Take one step beyond yourself –
The whole path lasts no longer than a step.

(p. 193)

Or, again:

Engage yourself as much as you can, my friend, in remembrance of God;
If you can work, remember Him at your labour.

(p. 199)

No spiritual teaching could be more central and principal.

The work ends with very useful information concerning the Ni'matullāhī spiritual chain (*silsilah*) and the proliferation of the Order into various branches during the past century or so.

Kings of Love is important at once for the study of Sufism, Persian literature and the general culture of Persia and certain regions of India. Moreover, it is the first work in English known to us which traces the complete history of a particular Sufi order through a study of both the lives and ideas of its masters, and the translation of their poetry. Martin Lings, in his masterly work *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, which

has served as a source of inspiration for the authors, combined a metaphysical and biographical study with translations of poetry for a single master, the sublime Algerian shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī; but until now no one has attempted to follow this method for a whole Sufi order, a history spreading over several centuries. The authors, despite the fact that they are both young scholars, have succeeded in this difficult task by combining a profound attachment to Sufism with laudable scholarship and a keen sense for both Persian and English poetry.

The two authors of this book reflect in their personal experience and lives the spiritual condition of many contemporary men, and demonstrate in their successful collaboration that although East is East and West is West, the twain do meet under the light of that supernal sun which is neither of the East nor of the West, as the Holy Quran asserts (*lā sharqīyyan wa lā gharbiyyan*). Nasrollah Pourjavady is a young Persian scholar who, after years of study in America and an experience of the wasteland of nihilism and scepticism, finally reached the far-away shore where the wasteland ends, and re-discovered meaning and certitude within Sufism – more particularly, within the Ni'matullāhī Order, to which he is now attached. Peter Lamborn Wilson, after becoming dissatisfied with current philosophies and life styles in his native America, left for India in quest of the light which illuminates the inner being and the peace which 'passeeth all understanding'. But after years of wandering in India, it was in Persia, and again within the perspective of Sufism, that he was to find that Holy Graal after which he had set out over the continents. The collaboration between these two is a testament not only to the living nature of Sufism but also to its particular role in our day outside the traditional confines of *dār al-islām*. The Ni'matullāhī Order, as a matter of fact, is one of the few Sufi orders (along with the Shādhilī, to which it is closely related in its *silsilah*) to spread to the West in recent years in an authentic and unadulterated manner.

Concerning Sufism, which the Sufis themselves have called the 'religion of the heart', F. Schuon has said, 'La religion du Coeur est la Religion primordiale dans le Temps, et quintessentielle dans l'âme' (*L'esotérisme comme principe et comme le voie*, Paris, 1978, p. 230). This religion of the heart, which is

also the religion of love in the sense of the Arabic or Persian *'ishq*, was the concern of all those spiritual masters who kept alive the teachings of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī and through him of the patriarchs of Sufism, going back to the Holy Prophet himself. The study of this religion of the heart and the translation of that poetry which flows from the heart, is also the concern of this book, which brings to life for those acquainted with the English language the living presence of one of the major depositories of this message from the heart, a message which has always been and will always be. The masters of Sufism echo today what Shāh Ni'matullāh uttered some six centuries ago; for as one of the contemporary masters has said:

Come out of yourself, join the ranks of our companions;
I, the Master, will turn your heart towards God.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr
Tehran
Rajab 1398 (A.H.)
June 1978 (A.D.)

Introduction



So far there has not appeared in any European language a history of a Sufi order, told from the point of view of that order, but making use of the critical tools of the historian. *Kings of Love* is an attempt at such a book.

Perhaps the most important fact about the Ni'matullāhi Order is that it not only still 'survives' but is indeed one of the largest and most widespread Sufi orders in present-day Iran. Our history begins in the 7th/15th century with the founding of the Order by Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī, and ends in 1977 with the spread of the Order to the West under the leadership of its present Master (or Quṭb) Dr Javad Nurbakhsh. While attempting to trace the history of the Order over these six centuries, we have also tried to present, almost as a parallel book, an anthology of the poetry written during those centuries by the masters and disciples of the Order, once again beginning with Shāh Ni'matullāh and ending with Javad Nurbakhsh. Needless to say, the Ni'matullāhis wrote prose as well as poetry, but since the prose has usually dealt with doctrine or history, we have made use of it largely in the sections of our book devoted to those subjects.

We have not tried to present a complete study of Sufi doctrine *per se* since this would necessitate another complete book, at the very least. Readers who are totally unfamiliar with Islam and Sufism, therefore, would do well to begin this book with the bibliography, where we have listed a number of works about Sufism which we ourselves have used, and which could provide this sort of background material. What we have tried to do is to aim *Kings of Love* at readers with at least a general idea of Sufism and its historical development, as well as at scholars who desire information about one Persian Sufi order in particular. As for Sufi doctrine, we have dealt with

many of its important aspects, but have concentrated on the expositions of Ni'matullāhī authors and the writers who most deeply influenced them; our purpose has been to present Ni'matullāhī Sufism as it developed and as it now exists, and in order to do this without writing a vast encyclopaedia, we have naturally had to limit ourselves to a certain degree.

We had better admit at the outset that *Kings of Love* is not a 'scientific' book in the sense that word has come to possess among most modern Western scholars. We begin with certain axioms: for example, that Sufism is an Islamic phenomenon, however much it may have benefited in its mode of expression from sources of inspiration outside Islam. Of course, the esoteric history of Sufism begins, if you like, with the expulsion of Adam from Eden. It is man's method of regaining Paradise. In this sense, Sufism has always existed; let us call it sufism with a small 's', as opposed to Sufism with a capital 'S' which begins with the Prophet of Islam, and is the perpetuation of that archaic Wisdom within the bosom of the Islamic Revelation. When the Sufis themselves wish to describe the esoteric path within another religion, they call it 'sufism' – taṣawwuf-i hindī, taṣawwuf-i masīhī, etc. – but this should not lead us to look outside Islam for the origins of Sufism, as so many orientalists have done for one reason or another. From our point of view, this insistence on the Islamic origin of Sufism is completely objective: one need not call upon faith to 'prove' what even the scholars are now coming to accept as fact.

However, we go further than this: we are speaking from the point of view of Sufism. We accept Sufism for what it claims to be, and what its great exponents have claimed it to be. We have not used any alien criteria in describing it: we have not sought its origins in history, in economics, in psychology or the like, any more than in non-Islamic Traditions, but rather as the Sufis themselves seek the origin of Sufism – in the Origin of All, the Absolute, the Truth.

This being the case, it may be asked whether a phenomenon such as Sufism, which claims sources beyond history, is in fact susceptible at all to 'the critical tools of the historian'. Have we not caught ourselves in a kind of double vision, trying on the one hand to do justice to a doctrine of meta-history and on the other hand to describe an actual

historical development, a series of events which took place *in* history?

Ultimately the reader must judge for himself. But in our own opinion we do not feel any unbridgable contradiction between what is ultimately Real and 'what really happened' in the historian's definition. For the Sufi, it is not only in the moment of Revelation that the Divine penetrates history; this is in fact occurring at every moment, for those with eyes to witness it. Revelation is the descent of meta-history into history; it takes place on every ontological level of the Hierarchy of Being at once, and is both esoteric and exoteric. But for the man who is truly awake, who is capable of 'unveiling' history, every moment recapitulates the moment of Revelation. If something 'really happened' it must reflect the Real; it must be symbolic and thus subject to hermeneutic exegesis. Just as Nature itself is a divine Book for those who know how to read it, so too is history a Book 'for those who understand'. At no point, therefore, is the historian of Sufism (or indeed any historian) forced to choose between the Truth and 'fact'; he may, however, often find himself disagreeing with the materialists, the economists, the scientists and the orientalist about 'what really happened'.

Let us take for example the extreme case of miracles. Islam does not particularly emphasize miracles as the breaking of the natural order, since in the Quranic perspective the natural order itself is the greatest of all miracles and the most convincing demonstration of God's greatness and beauty. Nevertheless, the Quran does call upon Muslims to accept certain miracles in the more usual sense of that word: the virgin birth of Jesus for one. On a lower level, we read in many hagiographical works of certain *karāmāt* or supernatural acts of the saints. Now, the modernist position on these matters is too well known to our readers to warrant repeating here. For the modernist, such history is merely a pleasant allegory at best, a fable which mankind has outgrown; at worst it is rank superstition. The Sufi on the contrary argues, first, that a great many men of outstanding intelligence have attested to these occurrences, and that it would be unscientific, to say the least, to dismiss their evidence as unworthy of investigation; second, the Sufi, the *living* Sufi, has witnessed and experienced certain unusual phenomena, which are in fact among the most

common and least interesting events which may occur along the Path he has chosen to follow. In short, the Sufi disagrees with the modernist. He affirms the reality of miracles and *karāmāt*, he calls them 'facts', he calls them history.

The historian of Sufism need not, of course, accept as literal fact virtually every incident in virtually every hagiographical tract. If he is to speak from the point of view of Sufism, however, he will accept at least two points as axiomatic: one, that the miracles described in Revelation (including the miracle of Revelation itself, and the miracle of existence) are beyond dispute, though not beyond investigation; and two, that the stories of the saints, whether literally true or not, are historically revealing and must be taken into consideration. If we read of a certain saint, as we do of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī for example, that he 'knew the secret of alchemy', we ought not to follow the example of so many outraged or embarrassed orientalist who have consigned such data to the rubbish heap. For whether we believe in alchemy or not, the fact remains that Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī believed in alchemy; his followers believed in alchemy; his followers believed that he knew the secret of alchemy; alchemy is a historical phenomenon subject to investigation on many levels, from doctrinal to scientific; etc., etc. By refusing therefore to deal with this hagiographical material we have lost a 'fact' of incalculable importance, which might have taught us a great deal about our subject. Even if we were to discover some obscure document which might appeal to the modernist as 'hard fact', could it possibly be of more value than the 'fact' that Shāh Ni'matullāh knew the secret of alchemy?

When we descend from such matters to the questions of dates, places, movements of historical figures, political situations and the like, we can work on the same plane as any other historian. Sufis can make mistakes about dates, just like anyone else; and historians can try to correct them without disrespect. Indeed, since the Sufis, like Traditional man in general, see history as symbolic, they are often more interested in the meaning of what happened than in when or where it happened. They might laugh at our concern with 'book knowledge' and advise us to devote our time to more valuable pursuits. We would have to agree with them, but we would have to point out as well that modern man has developed a

vast appetite for dates and places, and that within reason there is no harm in trying to satisfy this appetite. We would point out that we depend on the Sufis themselves, on the exemplary stories of their lives as well as the efficacious beauty of their poetry, to bathe all these facts and figures in a transforming light, to put them in their proper place, to help them become stepping-stones to higher aspects of the Truth.

* * *

The historical sections of *Kings of Love* grew out of our original intention simply to provide settings for the poetry of the Ni'matullāhī Order: bezels for gem-stones, to borrow a Sufi metaphor. We still consider the poetry to be the real marrow of the book, and therefore would like to discuss briefly our approach to the translation of this Sufi poetry. The culture of Persia is saturated with Sufism. Although it is not true to assert that all Persian poetry is Sufi poetry, it is nevertheless certain that even a great deal of the non-Sufi literature of Iran has been influenced by Sufi vocabulary and concepts. The seven greatest poets of Iran, whose verses even today stock the Persian memory with images and quips, mot-tos and philosophy, fuel for the living imagination, are sometimes said to be Ḥāfiẓ, Rūmī, 'Aṭṭār, Sanā'ī, Sa'dī, Firdausī and Nāṣir-i Khusraw. Of these the first four were without doubt Sufis; Sa'dī is thought by many to have been a Sufi; Nāṣir-i Khusraw was an esoteric philosopher influenced by Sufism; and the great *Shāhnāmāh* of Firdausī, like all national epics, is at least coloured or informed by esoteric concepts and symbolic sense. If one adds Jāmī or Nizāmī or even 'Umar Khayyām to this list of the first rank, one has done no more than add three more Sufis.

The poets of our anthology do not belong to this first rank, but, in a literary tradition as rich as Persia's, this does not mean that they are poor poets – far from it. The best of them, Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī himself and perhaps Nūr 'Alī Shāh, are worthy of inclusion in any survey of the best of Persian poetry. What must be emphasized however is that almost without exception our authors are not primarily poets who happen to be Sufis, but rather Sufis who happen to have written poetry. What is most interesting about their work,

therefore, is not so much its style as its content. Even in their most exquisite lyrics these writers were expressing spiritual states in a most explicit manner. One might say that where the work of other Persian poets is permeated with the odour of Sufism, like the odour of roses, our Ni'matullāhī poets present the rose itself.

According to a Persian proverb, the perfect translator is like the perfect landlord, whose tenants never notice his presence. It is also said that the perfect translator of poetry is perfectly bilingual, and a first-rate poet in both languages. Obviously, such conditions have only very rarely, if ever, been fulfilled. Obviously, the process of translation is usually, perhaps always, a process of compromise. It does not follow from this, however, that translation is betrayal; only bad translations are betrayals. The Chinese say that translation is like the back of a rich brocade; one sees the threads, the knots, the pattern, something of the colour, but misses the full impact of the brocade itself. The task of the good translator, by this definition, is to make the back of the brocade as interesting and attractive as possible.

Another possibility exists: the translator may not be bilingual but he may be a good poet in his own language. He may turn the original poem into a new brocade, perhaps radically different from the original at points, but beautiful in its own right. He may even, like FitzGerald or Pound, seem to violate the original in the process of his 'transcreation'. Although we have no quarrel with such poets, we have not attempted to follow their example in our own work. Nor have we adhered to the admirable model of such men as Wilberforce Clarke or R.A. Nicholson, who preferred as literal a rendition as possible to any flights or inspirations of their own. We have attempted to follow a middle course between these two extremes, trying to preserve as much of the content of the original as possible without violating the ideal of striving to make good English poetry.

In doing so, we have chosen one of the many ways open to the translator: that of collaboration. This has its drawbacks, like any method which involves compromise, but it also has certain distinct advantages, the greatest of which is that, given a real understanding between the partners, neither language will suffer much violation in the process of ferrying the poem

from one bank of the river to the other. It has been our great pleasure in the course of this work to have arrived at such an understanding, a communication which in its best moments has transcended the words themselves and allowed us to reach out across the empty spaces of time and death and feel something of the poets we have read together. We only hope that our readers will feel, as we have often said in jest, that a Sufi and a poet together may add up to a Sufi poet.

One thing at least is certain, that the problem of translating from an Islamic language to a European language is no longer the problem it once was. Certain Islamic words, such as 'Sufi' itself, have virtually entered the English language; in other cases, English words (such as 'theophany', 'theosopher', 'gnosis', etc.) have expanded their meaning at the hands of great scholars and thinkers who have made it their business to create a vocabulary in English which can hold the freight of Islamic thought. Finally, through the creative efforts of translators such as FitzGerald, Arberry, Nicholson and others, the content of Persian poetry has gradually been finding its way into the treasury of the English language: one need no longer explain such images as the nightingale and the rose, or the moth and the candle. Indeed, in any list of 'Islamic languages' made today, one may as well include English (as well as French and German), for there is no doubt that highly important and even precious works of Islamic thought and Sufism have been composed in those languages – including poetry.

* * *

Must we in the end try to define Sufism? We have striven to present the most important concepts of Sufism in the words of the Sufis themselves, expanding them with commentary where necessary; and to juxtapose various quotations, at times in a sort of mosaic, in order that the wisdom of one author may shed light on that of another. Doctrine – words – may not be the thing itself. But it is undoubtedly true that words which reflect the Truth can only be written by those who have experienced the Truth, and we have therefore felt it would be rash indeed to try to explain anything in our own words. Great Sufis have often been asked, What is Sufism? or What is a Sufi? and their replies have cut through the rational,

historical and descriptive layers of the questioner's consciousness to provide answers which speak directly to the heart. Some of the most famous formulations by early shaykhs have been extremely simple:

Sufism is to be with God without any other attachment.

The Sufi is like the earth upon which the ugly is scattered and the beautiful grows . . . He is like a cloud, the shadow of which spreads over everything, or like rain which falls on all.

Junayd (d. 298/910)

Sufism is to make the Threshold of the Friend thy pillow – and no matter how much thou art pushed away, not to leave.

Rûdbârî (d. 322/934)

The Sufi is the child of the moment (Ibn al-waqt).

Sufism is an empty hand and a happy heart.

Sufism is a burning flash of light.

Shiblî (d. 334/945)

They asked Shiblî why the Sufis are called Sufis (perhaps expecting some learned comment on the derivation of the word from 'wool' or 'bench' or 'purity' or 'wisdom'). He replied, 'Because something is left of their egos. If nothing remained, they would have no name'.¹

Is it necessary, then, to say what Sufism is *not*? False shaykhs, charlatans and the misguided have been with us always, though perhaps never in such great numbers as in these latter days. Something is no doubt to be gained by pointing out their errors, especially when it is still so difficult to find genuine expositions or to make contact with genuine sources of teaching. But this has not been our purpose in the present work. Not many years ago, despite the already proliferating number of studies and texts of Sufism, the authors of this book themselves were totally unaware whether genuine Sufism still survived, and if so, where. Now, if nothing else, we feel at least we know the answers to those two questions. Our purpose in *Kings of Love* has been to try to share them with you.

* * *

In conclusion we would like to thank the following people

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Note

1. Some of these quotations are from Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Al-risālat al-Qushayriyyah*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd ibn al-Sharīf, two volumes, Cairo, 1974, pp. 552-7.

Part I

HISTORY

I The Life of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī

Initiation

Nūr al-Dīn Ni'matullāh Walī, a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad in the 19th generation through Muḥammad Bāqir, the fifth Shi'ite Imām, was born in Aleppo in 731/1331.¹ At the age of five, he was taken by his father, who was a dervish, to a majlis or meeting of the Sufis. The father, Mīr 'Abdullāh, spoke about the battle of Uḥud, in which the Prophet, fighting in hand to hand combat, suffered a blow which broke five of his teeth. The hermit saint, Uways al-Qaranī, who was miles away in his retreat in Yemen, realized what had happened and at once broke all his teeth.

The child wondered why Uways had done such a thing, since God had given him no command concerning it; but he said nothing during the majlis. That night however he dreamt of Uways, who told him, 'In love of your ancestor (Muḥammad) I broke the thirty teeth of avarice for this world and the next.'²

At first this story may seem odd, even bizarre, but it has an important meaning – in order to understand it, something must be said about Uways. He lived in the desert near the village of Qaran, and although he lived at the same time as Muḥammad he 'was prevented from seeing him chiefly because of his high sense of duty to his own mother and also owing to the fact that he was subject to states of ecstasy which periodically overmastered him. He is said to have received instruction in a mysterious way from the spirit of Muḥammad.'³ The Prophet once told his followers, referring symbolically to Uways, 'Lo, the breath of the Merciful comes to me from the quarter of al-Yaman.' Uways died during the civil wars fighting for 'Alī in the battle of Šiffin; for this the Shi'ites consider him one of their own, and in Persian art Uways is represented as the prototype of the dervishes, wearing the

robe and cap and carrying the axe and begging bowl of a wandering faqīr. In Turkey he was considered the patron saint of many trade guilds, including those of the barbers (who pulled teeth), the archers and camel drivers.

But most significantly, Uways is the founder of a Sufi Order which flourished in India and still flourishes in Iran. Due to the unusual nature of his own initiation, Sufis without living masters are often called Uwaysīs. Like Khidr or the Hidden Imām of the Shi'ites, Uways is an ever-living spiritual force (although unlike them, he did suffer physical death); he appears in visions and offers initiation or help in spiritual difficulties.⁴ Thus this experience of the five year old Nī'matullāh was more than a childish dream—it was a mark of his future spiritual rank.

Evidently, then, Shāh Nī'matullāh showed early promise of brilliance. Not only had he a precocious understanding of religious matters, but his memory was developed to the extent that, even as a young child, he had memorized the whole of the Quran. In the course of his education, presumably in Aleppo, he studied all the traditional sciences, including kalām (scholastic theology) and the principles of fiqh (religious jurisprudence), and read a number of books of philosophy and Sufism which had a lasting effect on him, among them the *Miršād al-'ibād* by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt* (*The Book of Directives and Remarks*) by Avicenna, and most important, the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*Bezels of Wisdom*) by Ibn 'Arabī.⁵

As a young man, Shāh Nī'matullāh had mastered all the usual branches of knowledge, but found that these sciences failed to satisfy him; he was attracted to Sufism, but could not be satisfied with Sufism from books. Accordingly he began to search for the Perfect Master, who would be able to help him realize his full spiritual potential.

Shāh Nī'matullāh began wandering, seeking his murshid (spiritual master), and in the course of many years of struggle he is said to have served many different shaykhs without finding one who was able to wake in him the spark of divine knowledge.⁶

After these many apprenticeships, Shāh Nī'matullāh made a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he met the eminent Sufi essayist and biographer Shaykh 'Abdullāh Yāfi'i. 'When I entered the

mosque I saw a man engaged in teaching Traditions of the Prophet, and at once perceived myself as a drop, and this man as the Ocean. I waited until he had finished his lecture. Suddenly he glanced at me, and handed me a manuscript which he had been holding. "O Sayyid", he said, "all the ḥadīths or traditions of the Prophet which are judged spurious are in this book, and anyone who wishes to determine their degree of authenticity must make use of it."⁷ At that, I proffered the hand of servitude (irādah) to him, and grasped the skirt of his robe (in token of submission).⁸

ʿArif al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdullāh b. Asʿad b. ʿAlī b. Sulaymān Nazīl al-Ḥaramayn al-Yamanī al-Imām Yāfiʿī⁹ was born in the Yemen around 698/1298, and died in Mecca in 768/1367. He spent his early life in Aden and was taught by Shaykh Abu al-Ḥasan Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Ṭawāshī (d. 748/1347). There he was invested with not one but two khirqahs,¹⁰ one from Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Barbarī (see Chart I), although he is said to have received his mastership from six shaykhs altogether.¹¹ Yāfiʿī was a shaykh of the Shādhilī Order, and the founder of the Yāfiʿiyyah branch of the Qādirī Order of Sufis;¹² Sufi orders are not 'sects', and it is perfectly possible to initiate or be initiated in more than one at a time.

In 718/1318, Shaykh Yāfiʿī settled in Mecca, where he continued to live, except for an extended journey to Jerusalem, Damascus and Cairo (724/1324–738/1337), until his death. Jāmī¹³ has written about him in his 'Lives of the Saints', the *Nafahāt al-Uns*: 'Yāfiʿī . . . relates that in his youth he was in doubt whether he should devote himself to the pursuit of knowledge, which would gain him a reputation for learning, or to devotional practices by which he would reap the fruits of sweetness and obtain security from the annoyance of scholastic bickerings.

"In this state of perplexity and confusion," he said, "I enjoyed neither rest nor sleep. I had a book in the study of which I used to spend my days and nights. And in this restless state I opened this book, and in it I noticed a leaf which I had never seen before, and on the leaf were written a few verses which I had never heard from anyone:

Give up your anxieties, and leave your affairs to Fate
For oft times difficulty is made easy; and often ease turned to
discomfort.

Many a tiresome business gives you contentment in the end.
God does what he wills – so do not set yourself up in opposition!¹⁴

When I read these verses, it was as if water had been thrown on my fire, and the violence of my fever, perturbation and restlessness was allayed.”

Jāmi also quotes Yāfi'i as saying that a disciple of his in Damascus, Shaykh 'Alā' al-Dīn Khwārazmī, once closed himself in a room to say his evening prayers. Suddenly he noticed two men in the room with him. After discussing esoteric matters ('the condition of the faqīrs') with him for some time, the men said, 'Please convey our greeting to your master, 'Abdullāh Yāfi'i.' Khwārazmī replied in surprise, 'How do you know him? for he is in the Hejaz in Arabia!' They replied, 'This is not hidden from us,' whereupon they rose and advanced towards the mihrāb (prayer-niche).

'I was under the impression,' Khwārazmī related, 'that they were going to say their prayers, but they disappeared through the wall.'¹⁵

During the time Shāh Ni'matullāh spent with Shaykh Yāfi'i he earned his keep as a shepherd for the Shaykh's flocks. Despite his spiritual attainment, Yāfi'i was cursed with an evil-tempered wife (not unlike many other saints and sages), who would, for example, often fling their child in front of his prayer mat just as he was about to begin his devotions. Shāh Ni'matullāh did his best to placate the woman by helping with household affairs, cooking meals and so on, and generally tried to reconcile the Master and his wife. But Yāfi'i had given her up for lost, and used to tell him 'your methods will only end with us fighting again.'¹⁶

Besides his attainments as a Mufti (judge) and as a renowned expert in Law and ḥadīth,¹⁷ Yāfi'i was also an eminent historian, and composed among other works a general history down to the year 750 A.H., for which he was well-known, the *Mir'āt al-jinān*.

Travels

After his years with Yāfi'i, Shāh Ni'matullāh began to travel quite extensively, a common practice among Sufis at certain stages in their development. The first place he visited was

Egypt; some accounts say he went there before meeting Yāfi'i, others say after, still others say both before and after. But the extraordinary stories told about Shāh Ni'matullāh in Egypt must certainly concern a man already spiritually well-advanced, and thus probably took place after his initiation and study with his Master.

For example, Razzāq¹⁸ tells how Shāh Ni'matullāh was sitting in a house on the banks of the Nile, overlooking the river, with a disciple of one of his early Shaykhs (Sayyid Muḥammad Āftābi) named Sayyid Ḥusayn Ikhlāfī. In the course of their conversation, Ikhlāfī expressed a desire to 'profit from Ni'matullāh's achievement'; Shāh modestly and politely replied that, on the contrary, he wished the same from Ikhlāfī. So Ikhlāfī got up and opened a window, and to Shāh Ni'matullāh it seemed as if the Nile were full of blood. Ikhlāfī closed the window, and on opening it again, Shāh Ni'matullāh saw the current flowing with dismembered hands and feet. Yet a third time the Sayyid closed and re-opened the window, and this time the river was filled with milk. Finally, the fourth time, the Nile appeared once again plain water.

The show being completed, Shāh Ni'matullāh remarked, 'We have no state like this. Our only claim is the alchemy of Muḥammadan poverty.'¹⁹ So saying, he got up and left.

After going some distance, Shāh Ni'matullāh called a dervish to him and handed him a closed box, telling him to deliver it to Sayyid Ikhlāfī. On opening the box, Ikhlāfī found inside it a piece of cotton sitting unsinged in the middle of a field of burning coals. Astonished, he regretted his display of trickery and his failure to benefit from Shāh Ni'matullāh's acquaintance. The dervish who had delivered the miraculous box was also greatly impressed, and when he returned, Shāh Ni'matullāh saw in his mind the unspoken desire to learn more. Picking up a rock from the ground, he handed it to the dervish, who saw that it had become a jewel. 'Take this to the bazaar and have it priced,' he said. In the market, a jeweller told the dervish he had never seen a jewel like it, and at once offered him 1000 dirhams for it. The dervish returned to Shāh Ni'matullāh, who ordered him to crush the jewel and mix it into a drink, which all the disciples shared. It was then, according to the legend, that Shāh Ni'matullāh spontaneously composed and sang the ghazal beginning:

We alchemize the dust of the Way with a single glance;
with the corner of our eye we remedy a hundred pains.²⁰

In Egypt Shāh Ni'matullāh met a man who made a 40 day retreat (khalwah), eating only a single almond a day. 'Is this,' he asked his dervishes, 'a manly or womanly retreat?'

'Please tell us.'

'A womanly retreat is to eat as little as possible. A manly retreat is to fast every day, to break fast each evening with a ship-load of food, and not to break wuḍū for the entire 40 days.'²¹ The disciples were incredulous, so Shah Ni'matullāh immediately undertook and successfully completed such a retreat.²² As Rūmī says, 'This one eats and it all gives birth to avarice and envy. That one eats and it all becomes the light of God.'²³

On leaving Egypt, Shāh Ni'matullāh travelled to Persia, where, in Tabriz, he may well have met another Sufi poet named Mu'in al-Dīn 'Alī, called Qāsim Anwār.²⁴ Both men in different ways were destined to play important roles in the rise of Shi'ism in Persia. Ni'matullāh's descendants married into the Safavid family, and, of course, his ideas about Sufism were such that, even in his lifetime, it was possible to see his Order's affinity with the Alid cause. Qāsim Anwār was a disciple of Ṣadr-al Dīn Ardibīlī, an ancestor of the Safavids, and was himself accused of Hurūfī leanings.²⁵ Both he and Shāh Ni'matullāh were influenced by the mystical lyricist Maghribī,²⁶ and since both were living in Eastern Persia at the same time at a later period, it is not impossible that their paths may have crossed more than once.²⁷

From Azerbaijan Shāh Ni'matullāh went on to Transoxania, where the hordes of the Mongol invader Timur the Lame were currently ensconced. There, around 763/1361, he settled in Shahr-i Sabz, after some time in Samarqand. Persia had hardly had time to recover from the scourge of Gengis Khan when Timur, unquestionably one of the most blood-soaked figures of history, arrived to begin the practice of raising pyramids of severed heads in the public squares of those cities unfortunate enough to attract his attention. The difference this time was that Timur's invaders were at least nominally Muslim (Gengis had professed Buddhism), and Timur himself had, as perhaps his only saving grace, a great

respect for holy men and for the laws of Islam. One might perhaps attribute this respect either to selfish interest or to superstition, rather than to real religious understanding. But, in any case, it is certain that Timur was himself a member of the Naqshbandiyyah, which was (and is) one of the most widespread Sufi Orders in the Islamic world. It is impossible to blame the Naqshbandīs in any way for Timur's cruelty; in fact, if it were not for them, who can say what Persia might have suffered from the Timurids? But one thing is sure: the Naqshbandīs are one of the most Sunni of the Sufi orders, and one of the few major orders to emphasize the origin of their silsilah (along one line, at any rate) with the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, rather than 'Alī. Thus, Timur could hardly have been encouraged to accept the Shi'ite-leaning Shāh Ni'matullāh with open arms. Amīr Kalāl, who was both a Naqshbandī and a general in Timur's army, was alarmed by Ni'matullāh's influence on the Mongols, for, in fact, several important generals had become his disciples. 'Men who know how to fight have sworn allegiance to him,' Kalāl told the Emperor; and Timur replied, 'Two kings (shāhs) in one country lead to trouble.'²⁸

It is, to say the least, extremely unlikely that Shāh Ni'matullāh was in any way politically engaged against the Mongols, but it seems obvious that he wanted to exert a spiritual and civilizing influence on them. In whatever way Timur may have understood the matter, he decided to banish Shāh Ni'matullāh; but his respect for saints prevented him from acting in his usual brutal manner. He sent a message to Shāh Ni'matullāh asking, 'Shall you come to see us, or shall we come to see you?' Shāh responded by saying, 'We should behave according to the tradition of the Prophet', implying that Timur should come to him.²⁹ The Emperor did come, and brought food with him; while they ate, he asked Shāh Ni'matullāh, 'Why does a holy and scrupulous man like you eat food which does not belong to you, and is therefore ḥarām (forbidden, unclean)?'³⁰

'Since my sustenance is from the ḥalāl (clean, permitted), it was put into your mind to visit the dervishes (i.e., you are the means of bringing me food meant for me),' Shāh replied.

On hearing this, the Mongol determined to trick the saint, and ordered his chef to go and steal a lamb somewhere, and

cook it. Going out on the road, the cook met an old woman with a lamb, and seized it from her. He hurried back and prepared the meat, and carried it in to the two men. As soon as Shāh Nī'matullāh had tasted it, Timur exclaimed, 'you claim not to eat what is ḥarām, but this lamb was taken by force from an old woman! What do you say about that?'

'We must look into the matter,' he replied. 'Send for the lady.'

When the woman arrived they questioned her; she said, 'I inherited some sheep from my husband. Recently my son took some of them to the market in Sarakhs, but I heard some bad news about him, and was afraid that he might not return. I made a vow that if he came back safely I would give a lamb to Shāh Nī'matullāh. After a few days he showed up safe, but as I was on my way to Shāh Nī'matullāh with the lamb, this cook here attacked me and stole it from me.'

Timur apologized, but banished Shāh anyway.³¹ The saint commented:

Of the kings of this world I have seen many, but was there ever a Sultan as crippled as Timur the lame? No!³²

Shāh Nī'matullāh's relations with Timur's son, Shāh Rukh, were much better. Shāh Rukh was crowned in 807/1404, and presented a complete contrast to his father in every way. His piety never came under suspicion as either hypocrisy or superstition; he strove for peace and order; he spent vast amounts in patronage of artists, writers, architects, musicians and calligraphers, and was in many ways personally responsible for the Timurid 'renaissance', centred around Herat, which involved such men as the miniaturist Bihzād and the poet Jāmī. In him, the attempts of the Sufis to Persianize and Islamicize the Mongols came to successful fruition.

After Shāh Rukh took Kirman in 819/1416, it is very likely that the King and the saint remained in reasonably close association. By that time, Shāh Nī'matullāh was already world-famous, and had begun to write. Gifts and visitors came to him from as far away as India. He had literally hundreds of thousands of disciples; and there is no doubt that Shāh Rukh, though not perhaps an actual initiate, was among the devotees of the saint. His questions about Sufism inspired Shāh Nī'matullāh to write one of his treatises. If we may jump

ahead in our story for a moment, to Friday the 14th of Rajab in 828 (1st June, 1425, the day after 'Alī's birthday, six years before Ni'matullāh's death), we can present evidence of a very close relationship between the spiritual master and the king, evidence which throws light on the interesting question of the Sufis' attitude towards worldly power. On that day, Shāh Ni'matullāh called together his disciples in Māhān and spoke to them on the subject of the Hidden Hierarchy of Sufism, the true rulers of the world (see Part I, chap. II, pp. 40-42).

'Worldly rulers', he said, 'are manifestations of only one of the divine attributes, but the True King is he who rules over all the manifestations of all the Names of the Absolute: the Perfect Man whose sayings are supreme. Worldly rulers must spread his word by the sword.' Making a pun on the name of Shāh Rukh, Ni'matullāh says, 'In every atom of the universe the king (shāh) has shown his face (rukḥ).' He then predicted that the descendants of Timur would be those worldly rulers who were destined to 'spread by the sword' (i.e. militarily and politically) the message of the true Quṭb, the Perfect Man: 'Since the children of Timur will follow the children of the Seal of the Prophets and spread the word of the Seal of the Saints, it is incumbent upon them now to befriend the children of Muṣṭafā (the Prophet) and to love them, so that there will be a universal union, and its effects be made to appear.'

In the course of his address, Ni'matullāh praised Shāh Rukh and called him the Khalīfat al-Mulk, or Vicegerent of the Kingdom (the material world). He sent the king a couch which he had received from India, and ordered one of his disciples, Ḥājj Khusraw Turk, to go to Herat and give Shāh Rukh the following message: 'He should take the cloth which he has ordered to be made as a covering for the Kaaba to Mecca himself in person. If he agrees to this, he should let me know of his intention, so that I can arrange the trip for him. If he does this, I will take all the kings of the world in my grasp and bring them into his presence.'

The author of this account,³³ another of Ni'matullāh's disciples, adds, 'After fourteen months I myself went to Herat, where I found that Ḥājj Khusraw Turk had died, and I could not discover whether the message had reached the king or not. I tried to deliver it myself through some intermediaries,

but without success. If Shāh Rukh had surrendered his love and friendship to the sainthood of Shāh Nī'matullāh and gone to Mecca, he could have had the love and friendship of *all kings* surrendered to him in turn. But the time was not right. Shāh Nī'matullāh had wanted to demonstrate that the kings of this world should surrender the necks of their love and loyalty into the hands of the rule (wilayāt) of the Seal of the Saints, and follow him and his vicegerents. This applies especially to the Timurids, since Shāh Rukh and his sons and courtiers and administrators have done their best in upholding the Sharī'ah and in spreading the Ṭarīqah'.

But let us return to the days when Timur himself had just banished Nī'matullāh from Transoxania. At that time, he travelled first to Mashhad, where he performed a forty-day retreat, then went on to Herat, a city which, even then, was beginning to regain its position of political and cultural supremacy under the patronage of the Mongols. It reached its height under Timur's son, Shāh Rukh, and grandson, Bāysunqur, but at that time it was well-known as a centre of Sufi activity, having been the home of the famous shaykh Khwājah 'Abdullāh Anṣārī. During the year Shāh Nī'matullāh spent there he met and married the granddaughter of Amīr Ḥusayn Harawī (d. ca. 720/1320), the man who asked the questions which prompted Maḥmūd Shabistārī to compose his *Gulshan-i rāz*.³⁴

Despite the great amount of wealth which passed through Shāh Nī'matullāh's hands in the form of gifts and donations, he always worked for a living, and spent most of his time in Herat farming, a job he liked and did well. A story is told of the time he was living in the Kirman region: a certain dervish had been visiting Shāh Nī'matullāh quite often. One day, Shāh suddenly asked him, 'What is it you want?'

'I understand you know alchemy,' the dervish answered.

'Yes, we know it.' Later, in the early spring when the time came to plant melons, Shāh Nī'matullāh gave some seeds to the dervish and to one of his own servants, and told them to plant them and tend the crop. Very soon, 'by the barakah (grace) of Shāh Nī'matullāh's attention', an enormous harvest of huge melons was sent to market. Shāh gave most of the money to the dervish, and told him, 'If you want alchemy take up farming.'³⁵

Shāh Ni'matullāh always told his disciples to work for a living if they could, for, as he said, 'God has created man for worship and gnosis, and put him in need of three things: eating, since the life of the body depends on it; clothing for covering the body and keeping it from harm; shelter for rest and comfort. One cannot obtain these things except by earning a living, begging or stealing. The last two are rejected by God, so only working is accepted and condoned.' But Shāh Ni'matullāh wanted the dervishes to be 'men whom neither commerce nor trafficking diverts from the remembrance of God' (Quran, XXIV, 37).³⁶

After Herat, Shāh Ni'matullāh moved on to Kubanān (near Kirman) where he stayed for seven years, and where his son, Shāh Khalīlullāh, who later succeeded him as head of the Order, was born in 775/1373. Shāh Ni'matullāh was then 45 years old. Many people came to visit him:

If you are searching for treasure in a ruined place
come and see Ni'matullāh in the city of Kubanān.

He made a number of side-trips during that period, to Yazd, Taft and other neighbouring towns and villages. While engaged in building a khāniqāh in Taft he journeyed to Abarqū where he constructed a garden with a pavilion. On the way from there to Bāfq he stayed overnight in a caravan-serai which was attacked by a band of robbers. They tied up all the merchants and were carting off the valuables, but when they came to Shāh Ni'matullāh he pierced them with an angry look and literally paralysed them. After untying the merchants, Shāh Ni'matullāh lectured the highwaymen and then let them go.

In Bāfq, the people brought Shāh Ni'matullāh a plate of dates, and after eating some he planted five date-stones. The trees which grew from these seeds stood for many years and the people of Bāfq valued the fruit for its barakah.³⁷

The large and important city of Kirman, former stronghold of the Zoroastrians,³⁸ came to attract Shāh Ni'matullāh by its beauty, its clear brilliant sky (for which it is famous) and the hospitality of its people, who have traditionally been amenable to esotericists. He called his family from Kubanān and they settled in Kirman. During one of his excursions out of the city he found the village of Māhān, about 40 kilometres to the

south, which was then a summer retreat for some of Kirman's wealthier families. Its climate was perfect and its water, unlike Kirman's, very good. The people were eager to receive him there, so he moved again, and spent the last 25 years of his life between Māhān and Kirman. It was in Māhān that he began to compose his poetry and essays, and for the rest of his life the growing Order centred there.

A Voice from Shiraz

One night, as Shāh sat with his disciples in Māhān, he said, 'A dervish in Shiraz is singing one of my ghazals!' Sometime later, a Sufi from Shiraz arrived in Māhān and told how he had dreamt one night, after singing a poem by Ni'matullāh, that Shāh himself had appeared, clapped him on the back and congratulated him. He left for Māhān the next morning.

A voice from the Unseen was echoing this:

'O Ni'matullāh, I am the One who seeks you.'³⁹

This story suggests that Ni'matullāh was gaining a number of devotees in Fārs, and it may have been in response to their request that he considered making his last major voyage. The city of Shiraz had recently (812/1409) come under the rule of a grandson of Timur, Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh, who later built a khāniqāh for Shāh Ni'matullāh in that city, and it was his invitation which persuaded Shāh to come.

As Shāh Ni'matullāh's entourage approached the city, many people came out, as was the custom, to greet him, and met him by Sa'di's tomb, which was at that time outside the city limits. Among the crowd was the famous logician, philosopher and gnostic Sayyid Sharif Jurjānī, who had been taken from Shiraz to Samarqand by Timur after his campaign in Fārs, and returned home after the tyrant's death. As Shāh Ni'matullāh and Jurjānī embraced, it began to rain, and Sayyid Sharif exclaimed: 'Witness God's generosity: His Bounty (Ni'mat) in my arms and His Mercy falling on us!'

During his stay in Shiraz, word got around that Ni'matullāh, Iskandar and Jurjānī would appear together at the 'Atiq Mosque for the Friday congregational prayers. An enormous crowd gathered. One of Sharif Jurjānī's students brought the prayer carpets of the three men ahead of them to the mosque and laid them out with the King's in the middle, Jurjānī's on

the right and Shāh Ni'matullāh's on the left. The crowd was waiting for Shāh to appear, and, when he entered through the great doors which opened on the bazaar, they went wild, trying to get near him, touch him and kiss his hands. In the confusion Sayyid Sharīf was nearly crushed, but Shāh Ni'matullāh took hold of his hand and steered him through the mob. When they came to the prayer mats, Sharīf picked up his and Shāh Ni'matullāh's and reversed them, putting his own to the left and Shāh Ni'matullāh's to the right of the ruler's.

Later, the student, jealous for his Master's reputation, asked Jurjānī why he had made the switch. 'Don't question this,' Sayyid Sharīf told him. 'You are not aware of the stations of the Saints.'⁴⁰

Shāh Ni'matullāh had apparently not misjudged his time, for during his stay in Shiraz it is said that 30,000 people paid allegiance to him.⁴¹

Another contact between Shāh Ni'matullāh and the province of Fārs was not actual but literary – a famous 'exchange' of poems between Shāh and Ḥāfiz of Shiraz, the greatest poet of the Persian language and certainly one of the greatest poets of any language.

Shāh Ni'matullāh and Ḥāfiz never met, but in their respective Dīwāns, poems can be found which seem to form a sort of dialogue between the two men. One of Ḥāfiz's ghazals in particular is thought to be a reply to a poem by Shāh Ni'matullāh,⁴² the one which he is said to have written in Egypt. There is some textual evidence for this assertion, but Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh has maintained in his *Life and Works* that the story is most probably the other way around. Among other arguments, he has pointed out that Shāh Ni'matullāh did not begin to compose poetry, according to the most complete accounts of his life, until the age of 60, when Ḥāfiz was already dead.⁴³ Dr. Nurbakhsh thinks that, in fact, Shāh Ni'matullāh wrote his ghazal in reply to that of Ḥāfiz, although Ḥāfiz was no longer alive to read it. Of course, if Ni'matullāh did indeed write his poem in Egypt, Ḥāfiz could have replied to it; but neither case can be proved with any degree of finality.

Those who believe that Ḥāfiz was replying to Shāh generally see Ḥāfiz's poem as a bitter mockery, an attack on Shāh

Ni'matullāh's spiritual claims. Even if it were true that Ḥāfiẓ was replying to Shāh, however, it still seems very unlikely that a Sufi of Ḥāfiẓ's attainment would have stooped to such an attack.

Assuming that Ḥāfiẓ wrote first, we see him longing for the guidance of a true master, and comparing the real 'alchemist' with the fake:

Those who alchemize the dust of the Way with a glance,
pray they look once at us from the corner of their eye.

Better to hide my pain from false physicians,
hoping my remedy may lie with the Hidden Treasure.

Neither cleverness nor austerity will bring you a happy end,
so why not leave it all to her whim and favour?

Acquire Divine Knowledge, for in the excess of their love
the People of Vision sometimes bargain with those who
know them.

How much misfortune hides behind the veil?
What shall we not see, when at last the screen falls?

Be not surprised if even the stones weep at this tale:
those who have hearts tell the story of the heart quite well.

Drink wine; a hundred sins with strangers behind the curtain
would be better than a single hypocritical prayer.

I am afraid Joseph's proud brothers will make robes for
themselves
from the coat of colours still scented with his sweetness.

Stroll past the tavern, hoping that those within
may see you pass, and pray for you.

Hide yourself from the envious and call me, call me to
yourself;
the generous do good in secret for God's sake.

Union forever, Ḥāfiẓ, can never be obtained –
Kings care little for the cares of beggars.

Still assuming that Shāh Ni'matullāh replied to Ḥāfiẓ and not the other way around, Shāh Ni'matullāh's ghazal was obviously written in order to contrast the state of the seeker with the station of the saint. Ḥāfiẓ was the greatest Sufi poet, no doubt, but Shāh Ni'matullāh was the hierarchical Pole of the Universe. As Dr. Nurbakhsh once remarked, comparing these two poems, 'Ḥāfiẓ was a poet and a Sufi; Shāh Ni'matullāh was a Sufi and a poet.'

We alchemize the dust of the Way with a glance;
from the corner of our eye we remedy a hundred pains.

In the prison of form we still rejoice –
watch what we do then in the World of Essence!

Careless in revelry, joyful in drunkenness,
how could we admit the sober to our gatherings?

The Saki's face is in our eye, the winecup in our hand –
why then should we listen to reason?

We breathe Love's breath, and with one inhalation
change strangers into friends.

Come out of yourself, join the ranks of our companions;
I, the Master, will turn your heart towards God.

There is no doubt that one of these poems was written in response to the other; besides the internal evidence, there is the fact that both employ the same metre. But the argument as to which came first is really of little interest beside the light they throw on the different characters and states of the poets who wrote them. If Shāh Ni'matullāh is accepted at his word, it can be seen that he speaks invariably from the station of Sainthood (walāyat), at the very least. At the most, he reveals himself as the qutb, with very little ambiguity, if not in so many words. The claim reveals itself most clearly when Shāh Ni'matullāh's poetry is compared with even the most ecstatic verses of certain other mystical poets who seem to speak from stations lower than that of Divine Unity.

Last Years

Beside the great number of devotees in Persia, the Order was also gaining influence in India, where Shāh Aḥmad Bahmanī,

King of the Deccan, called himself 'the meanest of Shāh Nī'matullāh's disciples'. Aḥmad himself is perhaps the only India ruler ever to have been called 'Saint' (Walī); the people of the Deccan, both Hindu and Muslim, had begun to use this title for him when, in a year of drought, his prayers for rain were promptly answered. He had been a disciple of the great Indian Sufi Gīsū Darāz, but when Gīsū Darāz died he began to search for a new spiritual director. It is possible that Aḥmad himself had been converted to Shi'ism around 833/1429.⁴⁴ Certainly he had invited a great number of Persians, including Sayyids from Najaf and Karbalā, to come to the Deccan, and despite the jealousy of some of the locals, the kingdom was thriving with the help of the 'outsiders'. He now began to send letters to Shāh Nī'matullāh, begging him to visit India.

Shāh Nī'matullāh, perhaps because of his advancing age, or perhaps for purely spiritual reasons, did not want to go, but he sent one of his disciples, Mullā Quṭb al-Dīn, back to India with Aḥmad's messenger. The Mullā carried with him a box containing a green 12-pointed crown (green being the Prophet's colour and 12 being the number of Shi'ite Imāms). When the King met Shāh Nī'matullāh's disciple, he exclaimed that he had seen him in a dream, approaching, carrying a crown; and Quṭb al-Dīn agreed that it was so.⁴⁵ In his letter to Aḥmad, Shāh Nī'matullāh addressed him as 'the greatest of kings, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Shāh, Walī' and Aḥmad was so pleased that he began at that time to use 'Walī' as his title.

Aḥmad wrote again to Shāh Nī'matullāh, this time begging him to send a son; but, as he had only one, he decided instead to send his grandson, Mīr Nūrullāh. When Nūrullāh was a child, Shāh Nī'matullāh called him in jest 'the King of India',⁴⁶ and now indeed he was treated with royal honour. Aḥmad himself came out to greet him, and at the place of their meeting he caused to be built a town which he called Nī'matābād, and which, under Aḥmad's son (Aḥmad II) was to become an important city. Nūrullāh received the title Malik al-Mashā'ikh 'King of the Shaykhs', and was given a place in the court above all others. Finally, he married the King's daughter.⁴⁷ After Shāh Nī'matullāh's death in 834/1431, Khafīlullāh and most of the rest of the family left

Persia and moved to India, where the city of Bidar became the seat of the Order for more than three centuries.

After his return from Shiraz to Māhān, Shāh Ni'matullāh, referring to the story of King Solomon, was able to say

I've lived for near a century
and not one ant was harmed by me.

A contemporary account of Shāh Ni'matullāh describes him as having an attractive face with a full beard; he was tall and had large hands. His eyes remained keen all his life, though he did not sleep at night. He wore rough cheap clothes. (Shāh had designed a Sufi costume for his Order, but put no restriction on his disciples in the matter of dress, for 'in any kind of clothes, man can worship God'.)⁴⁸ He used to sit in front of the qiblah never leaning against anything. When the Sufis met to eat he would take a pinch of salt to give the signal to begin, but no one ever actually saw him eat. 'When he talked to people, he would consider their aptitude, saying no more or less than was proper. In his presence everyone felt drawn into the Ocean of Unity by his words. No one dared to speak in his presence, and from his beauty of expression and eloquence the listener might think he was reciting from a book. In the evening he would withdraw, and no one knew of his spiritual state; mostly he was occupied with attention towards God. Not one night did his relatives see him sleep. If one of his disciples came to visit him, if it were urgent he would receive him immediately but if not he would see him after his devotions. In case he was wrapped in a state, people who came to see him would not succeed in meeting and disturbing him.'⁴⁹ 'Other Sufi Masters used to pick and choose their disciples, but Shāh believed that, for the sake of social morality, everyone was in need of Sufism, and therefore taught the alphabet of love to whomsoever sought for it. He used to say, "Anyone rejected by other shaykhs I will accept, and make perfect according to his aptitude."⁵⁰

In 834/1437, his hundredth year, during a visit to Kirman, Shāh Ni'matullāh 'emptied his khirqah'.⁵¹ Before his death he had assembled his disciples and introduced his son Khalilullāh as successor. He also said:

Whoever washes our body is from among the Supports and
whoever prays for us is among the Poles.⁵²

Two days later a dervish named Nizām al-Dīn Kijī, who was known to be living in Abarqū, suddenly appeared and washed the corpse for burial. They took the coffin to the congregational mosque in Kirman and waited to see who would lead the prayers. Amīr Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibrāhīm appeared in the same mysterious manner from the city of Bam and, without uttering a word, stood in front of the congregation and started the service.⁵³

The dervishes carried the bier on their shoulders all the way to Māhān and buried it there in the centre of the town. As soon as Aḥmad Shāh Bahmanī heard of his Master's death, he sent a donation to Persia for the construction of a mausoleum. This chamber, now the central domed burial vault of the Māhān complex, was eventually completed by 'Alā' al-Dīn Bahmanī in 840/1436; the exquisite carved sandalwood doors, which are still to be seen, were donated by Aḥmad Shāh. In 999/1601, the Safavid emperor Shāh 'Abbās constructed the western gallery, which leads into a court donated soon after Shāh Nī'matullāh's death by one of his disciples. Finally, in Qājār times, the large oblong court with its minarets was erected by Muḥammad Shāh, another royal dervish.⁵⁴ The grave of one of Shāh Nī'matullāh's descendants lies behind a lattice of the main vault. This tomb is said to belong to one 'Shāh Khafīlullāh', who has been variously identified as Shāh Nī'matullāh's son and his grandson. The former is unlikely: Shāh Nī'matullāh's son Khafīlullāh is generally considered to have been buried in the Deccan, in Bidar – and no grandson of this name is known.

Eric Schroeder⁵⁵ has pointed out the 'curious' similarity Shāh Nī'matullāh's tomb in Māhān bears to the 'old Iranian palace plan, with sarāi and ḥarīm.' The courts he compares with sarāis and the burial chamber with a throne room. The vaulted halls on either side are like places of honour for grandees and viziers; the mirror rooms and small court are like a ḥarīm.

Certainly the symbolism of all this is appropriate enough for a saint who was 'Shāh' of the saints, and the unusual design constitutes part of the unique charm of Māhān. The garden, with its cruciform pool and four 'paradisaal' quarters, gains its serene power from only two elements, the evergreen trees and the water, with a simplicity which is both profound and subtle.

'Ni'matullāh wrote:

If there be a little security, that too I see
 within the borders of the mountains.
A companion, contentment, and a quiet corner
 I now see as most to be desired . . .
I smell the rose-garden of the Law;
 I see the rose of Religion in flower.

In the smiling courts of his tomb the verse has been fulfilled. The shade of planes and cypresses falls beside wide pools wherein the ripples of a trickling fountain are lost to sight before they reach the margin. The enamelled dome and façades reflect, or tranquilly expect, a sky of cloudless blue. The white interior, an image of illuminated mind, seems to admit an even purer day.⁵⁶ In Persia, a land of great architecture and beautiful gardens, Māhān is surely one of the most dignified and deeply peaceful examples of sacred art to be found. Its domes seem to provide points of contact between the starry heavens and the holy earth, just as Shāh Ni'matullāh himself was a nexus between this world and heaven.

Morning, dawn, the nightingale, the rosebud – all are one.
Beloved, lover, Friend and love – all, all are one.
The more I look inside his house the more I see
That the circle, point and compass – all are one.⁵⁷

Notes

1. His father was an Arab by birth, and his mother a Persian from Shabān Kārih in Fārs. They had lived for some time in the Makrān, or coastal region of Baluchistan. How or why they moved from there to Syria is not known, but all the early accounts of Shāh's life report his birth in Aleppo. (See for example the *risālah* by 'Abd al-Razzāq Kirmānī, p. 24; or *Jāmi 'i Muftīdī (JM)*, p. 140; in *Materiaux pour la Biographie de Shah Ni'matullah Wali Kermani* by Jean Aubin, Tehran, 1956.)

2. Razzāq, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–26.

3. *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines* by John A. Subhan (Lucknow, India), revised ed., 1960, p. 310, ff.

4. The significance of this type of initiation has been discussed by Henry Corbin. See for example 'The Disciple of Khidr', pp. 53–77 of *Creative Imagination in the Šūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, 1969).

5. The list of teachers and books from Razzāq, p. 31.

6. *JM*, p. 145.

7. Yāfi'i implies that he is in possession of a higher knowledge than this – many Sufi masters express an outward disdain for books to certain seekers, even if they are in fact very learned, to emphasize the ultimate importance of oral transmission, personal contact with a spiritual master, etc. See for example the stories of Rūmī and his master Shams-i Tabrizi, in 'Mawlānā Djalāl al Dīn al Rūmī and Shams-i Tabrizi' by Rasih Güven (Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1966), pp. 223–239.

8. Razzāq, p. 35.

9. The following account of Shaykh Yāfi'i (with noted exceptions) is from E. Dennison Ross's note to the 1910 Calcutta edition of *Marhamu'l-'Ilali 'l-Mu'dila* (based on a unique manuscript in the possession of the Asiatic Society of Bengal), called 'The Book of the Salve of Baffling Mysteries, for the Removal of Doubts and the Refutation of the Mu'tazila, by Means of the Tenets of the People of the Most Excellent Sunna; containing an account of the 72 sects opposed to the Sunna, and of the Heretics.'

10. Khirqah, a robe, often of patchwork design, handed down by Sufi masters to disciples as proof of spiritual attainment. The first such cloak, according to the Shī'ite ḥadīth quoted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (in *Sufi Essays*, London, 1972, pp. 109–110) was given to Muḥammad during the mi'rāj (Night Ascension) 'in a box made of light, locked with a lock made of light'. Muḥammad gave it to 'Alī, who covered it little by little with patches, and handed it down through his son Ḥasan through all the Imāms to the Mahdī, who has it now. In the same chapter, Nasr quotes Ibn Khaldūn as saying that 'Alī gave a cloak to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and that this tradition was continued by Junayd (p. 106).

11. *Zindigī wa āthāri Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī Kirmānī*, by Javad Nurbakhsh, Tehran 1337 S., p. 15. (Note: We will henceforth call this book *Life and Works*.)

12. A Sufi Order founded in Baghdad by 'Abd al-Qādir Jilānī (d. 561/1166), introduced to North Africa and Spain by his son, to Turkey, to black Africa, to Persia and India and Indonesia – in short, the most widespread Sufi Order in the world. The branch in Mecca was founded during 'Abd al-Qādir's lifetime. See *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (Leiden, 1961), pp. 202–5.

13. Mullā Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, one of the greatest poets of the Persian language, a late contemporary of Shāh Ni'matullāh; a member of the Naqshbandī Sufi Order; born in Jām in Khurāsān 817/1414, died and buried in Herat 898/1492. Author of *Nafahāt al-uns* (Biographies of the Saints); the *Lawā'ih* ('Flashes'); the *Bahāristān* ('Land of Spring'), *Salā-*

mān wa Absāl, Yūsuf wa Zulaykhā, Laylā wa Majnūn, etc. See pp. 507–516, Vol. III, of E.G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge, 1956; first edition, T. Fisher Unwin, 1902).

14. Ross notes that these verses, with slight variations, are also to be found in the *Arabian Nights* (see Macknaughten's edition, Vol. I, p. 34).

15. The foregoing account from Jāmī is in Ross's translation. For the original, see *Nafahāt al-uns*, ed. M. Tawhīdīpūr, Tehran, 1336 S., pp. 585–587.

16. Razzāq, p. 36.

17. Ibn 'Arabī says that to be a Traditionist and a Sufi 'is a truly amazing combination' (*Sufis of Andalusia*, trans. R.W.J. Austin, London, 1971, p. 136).

18. pp. 37–38.

19. Nasr (*Sufi Essays*, *loc. cit.*) says that in the same 'box made of light' which contained the cloak, the Prophet found 'poverty' (faqr). Muḥammadan poverty, based on the verse 'O Mankind! Ye are the poor in your relation to Allah. And Allah! He is the rich' (Quran, XXXV, 15) has often been given as a definition of Sufism. 'Poverty is my pride' was a saying of the Prophet. Ibn 'Arabī spoke of this 'poverty' when he advised the mystic to be 'a servant of the Lord', rather than 'a lord of the servant', in the chapter on Isaac (*Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A.A. Affifi, Beirut, 1946, p. 90; see also *La Sagesse des Prophètes*, trans. Titus Burckhardt, Paris, 1955, p. 90).

20. The stories of the box and the rock are from *JM* (pp. 156–158). The whole tenor of this book tends towards miracle stories, which, however, are not only not impossible but are also highly significant if subjected to the science of ta'wīl or 'spiritual hermeneutics' as Corbin calls it.

21. Wuḍū, or ritual ablution, is a precondition of prayer and other ritual acts. Among the things which break the state of purity after wuḍū are sleep, defecation, urination, breaking wind and ejaculation.

22. *JM*, pp. 159–160.

23. *The Mathnawī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Persian text edited by Reynold A. Nicholson (Leiden, 1925), I, 272.

24. Born in Sarāb near Tabriz in 757/1356, Sayyid Qāsim Anwār was a disciple of Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Ardabīlī, son of Shaykh Ṣafī, the founder of the Ṣafawī Order; and after him of Ṣadr al-Dīn Yamānī, a disciple of Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī. After an attempt on the life of Shāh Rukh in Herat in 830/1426–7, by a Ḥurūfī heretic supposed to have been involved with Qāsim Anwār, the poet was forced to flee the city. He died in Kharjird, in

the district of Jām, in 837/1433–4. (See E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. III, pp. 473–87.)

Shāh Nī'matullāh may have met Anwār on several occasions, and from the respect with which he mentions him, it is apparent that he did not share the suspicion of heresy with which many of Anwār's contemporaries and later commentators viewed him.

25. Ḥurūfī: An extreme Shī'ite sect, founded by Faḍlullāh Astārābādī at the end of the 8th/14th century, introduced into Turkey by one of his disciples, 'Alī al-A'lā, and adopted by the Bektāshī dervishes (who today are the only inheritors of the Ḥurūfī doctrines). The sect placed great importance on the symbolism of the alphabet and the lines of the human face (which manifest God, since man was made in His image). They are supposed to have considered their masters divine incarnations, and are reputed to have used wine in their ritual (also a charge made against the Bektāshīs). The Ḥurūfīs attracted a great deal of opposition from orthodox religious and political leaders. See *The Shorter Encyc. of Islam*, pp. 141–42. Also J. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London, 1965).

26. In his Tarjī'ī-band No. 3, Shāh refers to Maghribī (8th/14th century) and Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (or more properly 'Arāqī) (7th/13th century) in the refrain:

A cup of wine, the reveller and the Saki:
Together both Maghribī and 'Irāqī.

Kullīyyāt-i ash'ār-i Shāh Nī'matullāhi Wālī, ed. Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, 2nd edition Tehran, 1352 S. pp. 713–716. (Note: We will refer to this book as the *Diwān*.)

27. A.J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (London, 1958), pp. 417–418.

28. *Life and Works*, p. 24; *JM*, p. 164. Could Timur have been referring to Sa'dī's *Gulistān*: 'Two kings cannot fit into one clime, but 40 dervishes can sleep on one rug'?

29. 'He is most exalted among you who is most pious' (Quran XXXIX, 13); not richest or most powerful.

30. Timur was certainly putting a very narrow legalistic interpretation on the question; since he had offered the food, the stricture against eating what is unlawfully acquired could hardly have applied to Nī'matullāh. Shāh later pointed out Timur's strictness about the Sharī'ah in a short poem:

You ask about Timur the Lame?
I'll tell you what he was like:
Though he was sinister, his path was threaded right –
All that he did was according to the Law.

(*Diwān*, p. 828)

Timur may have been referring to the custom of many Sufis who refused to

accept anything from kings, since they assumed that rulers, by definition, take everything by force.

31. The story is from the account of Daulatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā'*, (Tehran 1338 S.) pp. 252–253. Daulatshāh tells the story about Shāh Rukh, Timur's son and successor. But, as Dr. Nurbakhsh has pointed out (*Life and Works*, p. 25), if the story is true at all, it should be told of Timur himself, since the saint got along relatively better with Shāh Rukh, and besides, was living in Kirman when Shāh Rukh became king in 807/1404. In fact, another similar tale, involving a chicken, is told about Rūzbihān-i Baqlī (d. 601/1204, more than a century before Shāh was born) by his great-grandson, Sharaf al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Rūzbihān in *Tuḥfatu ahl al-'irfān*, the story of Baqlī's life (ed. Javad Nurbakhsh, Tehran, 1348 S.), pp. 51–52. This does not mean, however, that the same thing could not have happened to both saints.

32. *Dīwān*, p. 175.

33. From the *Rasā'il-i Darvish Muḥammad Ṭabasī*, ed. by I. Afshar and M.T. Daneshpazhuh (Tehran 1351 S./1972), 'Jāmi-i jahān namāy-i shāhī' (The Royal World-displaying Cup), pp. 321–369. Ṭabasī was one of Ni'matullāh's closest disciples; he and his descendants were later given charge of the Ni'matullāhī khāniqāh in Ṭabas.

34. *Gulshan-i rāz*, translated by E.H. Whinfield as the *Gulshan-i raz*, the *Mystic Rose Garden* (London, 1880).

35. *JM*, p. 105.

36. Zayn al-Ābidīn Shirwānī, *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥah* (R.A.S.) ed. Aṣghar Ḥāmid Rabbānī (Tehran, 1339 S.), pp. 240–241.

37. The Prophet said, 'Even if you know the world will end tomorrow, plant a tree.' A close association between trees and holy men exists in Islam as in other religions, and trees are often found growing over, or out of, a saint's tomb. Muslims believe that physical objects associated with spiritual men possess something of their spiritual power (*barakah*), and revere them as vessels of grace, just as Christians preserve relics of the saints.

38. Curiously enough, the *Dīwān* of Shāh Ni'matullāh was later published for the first time 'by the initiative of pious Parsis' (Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, p. 414; quoting the preface by Maḥmūd Amīn al-Islām Kirmānī to the 1948 Tehran edition).

39. *Dīwān*, p. 497; and for the story itself, see *JM*, p. 184.

40. *Razzāq*, pp. 86–87.

41. *JM*, p. 181.

42. See Hamid Farzam, 'Hafiz et Chah Vali' (in Persian), *Revue de la Faculté des Lettres d'Isfahan*, 1345 (1966) No. 2-3, pp. 1-28.
43. *Life and Works*, pp. 64-67.
44. John N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* (London, 1953), p. 107.
45. *Life and Works*, p. 48; also 'The Religion of Ahmad Shah Bahmani' by W. Haig, *JRASGBI*, Jan. 1924, pp. 75-77.
46. *Life and Works*, p. 49.
47. Hollister, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
48. *R.A.S.* p. 602.
49. Sayyid Mahdī Tabrizī, cited in *Life and Works*, pp. 16-17.
50. *Life and Works*, p. 80.
51. 'Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided' (Quran III, 163. Trans. by A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*; London, 1964. The Sufis do not use the word 'dead' in connection with a saint.
52. For the doctrine of Supports and Poles, figures in the world's hidden spiritual hierarchy, see *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 115.
53. *JM*, p. 192-193.
54. *A History of Persia*, by Percy Sykes (London, 1930), Vol. II, pp. 156-157.
55. In *A Survey of Persian Art*, ed. A.U. Pope (London, 1939), Vol. II, pp. 1158-1159.
56. *Ibid.* p. 1159.
57. *Diwān*, p. 850.

II The Sufism of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī

The Path and the Guide

According to a Tradition of the Prophet, 'The ways towards God are as numerous as the creatures themselves'. In one of his prose works,¹ Shāh Ni'matullāh explains that each soul, according to its aptitude, belief and capacity, has a way towards God; but the shortest and most luminous is the Straight Path of the eager ones, the Sufis. In general, all the paths can be classified under three headings. The first is that of 'the People of Transactions'. Islamic Law is usually divided into worship ('ibādāt) and transactions (mu'āmalāt), the former having to do with prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and the like; the latter dealing with contracts, inheritance, marriage and so on. Those who engage in an excess of prayer and fasting from a purely exoteric point of view, however, are really trying to bargain or 'do business' with God. Thus Shāh Ni'matullāh calls them not the people of worship but the people of transactions. Of course, prayer and fasting form part of all the paths, and it can be said that acts of worship can be approached in different ways by different people. There is the prayer of ordinary people, prayer of the Elect, and prayer of the Elect of the Elect, just as there is a greater and a lesser Jihād.²

This first group, the people of transactions, work on their *ẓāhir*, their outer selves. The second group, the people of self-denial, mortification and purification of soul and character, work on their *bāṭin*, their inner selves. More of these will reach the goal than the first group, but they still cannot reach the Reality of the Sufis. Ḥallāj once asked Ibrāhīm Khawāṣṣ (a disciple of Junayd), 'In which stage of asceticism is your soul?'

'I have sat in the corner of satisfaction and trust in God for

thirty years', he answered, 'subduing my soul with ascetic practices.'

'O my brother,' Ḥallāj exclaimed, 'you are in a very excellent station, but you have wasted your life building up your *bāṭin*. Are you not aware of the annihilation of the annihilation in God?'

The stage referred to by Ḥallāj is in fact the third and highest path, the way of those who fly towards the Absolute. These are the People of Love, and the Sufis consider that their journey is made through divine attraction – that is, that God draws them to Himself. Their path is based on voluntary death, according to the ḥadīth 'Die before you die'. This death or extinction has ten conditions: repentance, asceticism, trust, contentment, detachment, attention to invocation, perfect attentiveness towards God, patience, contemplation, and satisfaction. These 'conditions' are in fact the stages of the Sufi Path, and have been described differently by different masters; even Shāh Nī'matullāh himself has given varying lists and descriptions of the 'stages and stations'.

One constant factor in every description of the Path, however, is the need for a guide: the spiritual master.³ 'The shaykh amongst his disciples is like the Prophet amongst his People'.⁴ In the path of religion, of union with the World of Certainty, it is necessary to have a perfect shaykh, a leader who knows the Path, who possesses sainthood (*walāyah*) and is able to dominate other souls. Even Moses, who was himself a perfect prophet and a messenger of high degree, had to follow Shu'ayb for ten years before he reached the stage of being able to talk with God; and even after that, after receiving the Torah, again he had to become a disciple of Khidr. The only aspect of the Path which a master does not control is its very beginning, for only God can draw a disciple to His Way; the seed of aspiration is planted in the earth of the heart only under the effect of God's Grace and attention. The Prophet tried as much as he could to plant the seed in the heart of Abū Ṭālib, but was told, 'Lo! Thou (O Muḥammad) guidest not whom thou lovest, but Allah guideth whom He will' (Quran XXVIII, 56). However, when the seed is planted and begins to sprout, a prophet or a shaykh is needed for its fostering and growth.

The Sufis are absolutely unanimous in their agreement on

this need, for it is only in the most extraordinary cases that a man is perfected by God Himself without any human intermediary (as with Jesus), or by a force outside the material world, such as Khidr the Hidden Prophet, Uways, or the Mahdī – and even then there is still a master, albeit not a 'human' one.

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī lists some of the reasons why men on the Path need a master:

1. Even the worldly journey to the Kaaba requires (according to the rules of pilgrimage) a guide.
2. Just as there are bandits on the roads, there are worldly distractions on the inner path; the shaykh is our protector.
3. There are uncertainties, wrong ideas, doubts and dangers which only he can dispel.
4. There are tests and trials which impede the travellers which only a shaykh can resolve, thus refreshing them in their aspiration.
5. Diseases will appear in the psyche of the aspirant, and just as a doctor is needed for ordinary illnesses, a master is needed for them.⁵
6. The traveller will attain certain stations, his spirit will be stripped of the garment of clay, he will receive radiations from the manifestation of the spirit, and he will find the taste for expressing *ana'l haqq* ('I am the Truth') or *subhānī* ('Glory to me!'). The deception and delusion of having reached perfection and union will appear in him, and he will fail to understand that the saints and prophets have gone higher than this stage. A well-experienced shaykh is needed to bring him out of this delusion.
7. The traveller will receive certain signs or indications from the Unseen World (dreams, visions, etc.), and since he is ignorant of the language of that world, a shaykh who knows it must interpret these unveilings, and gradually teach him that language.
8. A traveller who tries to take up the journey under his own power will be stuck at the first stage for many years, for his progress will be slower than that of the ants; some of the

stations demand the ability to fly, and a novice cannot fly. The shaykh is a bird who can take the traveller with him in his flight.

9. The journey can be accomplished only through dhikr, invocation, and dhikr done without permission is useless.

10. Just as in the court of a king when a person wants to attain position he can do so most easily through the mediation of a friend who is close to the throne, so also in the spiritual world there are certain 'near ones', whose requests God will grant.

Quṭb and Imām

The central term in describing Shāh Nī'matullāh's Sufism is 'quṭb,' the Pole of the Period, the insān al-kāmil, or perfect 'divine' man. He is the point around which the spiritual hierarchy revolves, although he is often unknown even to other members of that hierarchy. Some quṭbs have revealed themselves, like Ja'far al-Šādiq, Junayd, Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī, Ibn 'Arabī and Shāh Nī'matullāh himself; but more often, his identity remains hidden. The origin of the doctrine of the quṭb, and of the rather complex structure of the hierarchy, is unclear; although the Quran and ḥadīth often indicate that God, in His mercy, will not leave the world without a spiritual centre, even if the cycle of Prophecy has been closed. Basically the idea is that God will ordain the world to continue in existence while there are those in it who love Him; and that among these there must inevitably be one whose love and knowledge are perfect. The existence of the world, then, depends on the presence of a quṭb in it. The 'cycle of initiation', or of sainthood, depends on him, not necessarily in any practical way, but simply because of his existence.⁶

Just as there are no hard definitions of the stages of the Path, so there is no certain definition of the term quṭb, nor any final description of the 'hidden hierarchy'. Shāh Nī'matullāh, for example, says that there are two sorts of quṭbs: those who came before Muḥammad and those who came after him. The first were the messengers, of whom there were 330; and the latter number only twelve, up to the Day of Resurrection. The last figures in each of these categories really occupy unique positions: they are Jesus and the Mahdī. Each of the twelve

quṭbs (obviously the twelve Imāms of Shī'ism) 'occupies the heart of a prophet; the first was in the heart of Noah, the second of Abraham, the third of Moses, the fourth of Jesus, the fifth of David, the sixth of Solomon, the seventh of Job, the eighth of Elias, the ninth of Lot, the tenth of Hud, the eleventh of Ṣāliḥ, and the twelfth, the Mahdī, of Shu'ayb.'

However, aside from these twelve, there are also four quṭbs for each of the four directions, and seven abdāl ('substitutes') under their direction. There are, again, also twelve nuqabā', one for each of the signs of the Zodiac; 300 abdāl in the heart of Adam; 40 in the heart of Noah; seven in the heart of Abraham; five in the heart of the angel Jibra'il; three in the heart of Mikā'il; and one in the heart of Isrāfīl. This last is in charge of both the spiritual and material worlds. He is the quṭb, or rather the Quṭb of quṭbs. He delegates a vicegerent for the spiritual world, and another for the material world. When he dies, one of them takes his place, and presumably everyone on the hierarchical scale moves up a notch.⁷ This 'system' is certainly extremely unclear, nor is any light thrown on it by Shāh Ni'matullāh's disciple, Darvīsh Muḥammad Ṭabasī,⁸ who is apparently quoting an address delivered by Shāh Ni'matullāh himself, and introduces a new term, 'ghawth', by which he seems to refer to the Mahdī. In this scheme, Shāh Ni'matullāh becomes the Quṭb of quṭbs; the vicegerent of the spiritual world is named as Qāsim Anwār (see Chapter I, page 18), and the vicegerent of the material world as Shāh Rukh, the Timurid king of Herat.⁹ Ṭabasī offers us a diagram of the hierarchy (see next page).

These elaborate descriptions, which we have greatly simplified here, are more useful for discovering the attitudes of Shāh Ni'matullāh and his followers than for arriving at any final description of the hierarchy of Sufism which is, after all, 'hidden', a mystery, no matter how much an author may choose to reveal or conceal. The 'positions' granted to Qāsim Anwār and Shāh Rukh are particularly suggestive. On the one hand, Qāsim's connections with the Safavid Order and the rise of Shī'ism need to be studied in the light of the great respect shown him by Shāh Ni'matullāh and his disciples. On the other hand, in the relationship of Shāh Ni'matullāh and Shāh Rukh, already described at some lengths in Chapter I, we can trace quite clearly the concept of the just king as seen

in Sufism, the king who bows to the saints and in effect derives his authority from them.



Some Persian poets use Sufi ideas and even terminology in a loose way, more ‘artistic’ than ‘gnostic’. Shāh Ni‘matullāh, however, writes always as a Sufi in a specific framework of Sufism. In a sense his poetry is in a sort of ‘code’ in which the typical imagery of Persian poetry can be interpreted to refer to inner states, or the theoretical aspects of Sufism. Especially central to his whole poetic ‘world’ is the concept of waḥdat al-wujūd, ‘The Transcendent Unity of Being’, the philosophical-mystical position of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers.¹⁰

What, however characterizes the poetry, what sets it apart from that of Shāh Ni‘matullāh’s contemporaries, is the position from which he makes his statements. He quite openly writes as the central figure of the world’s spiritual hierarchy.

We give here a mosaic made up mostly of the final lines of

some of his ghazals, in which, according to poetic rules, he worked his own name ('Ni'matullāh' or 'Sayyid') into the poem as a signature:

There is no more drunken reveller than Ni'matullāh

And if you say there is, come and show him to me!

(*Dīwān*, p. 34)

I am the Guarded Tablet, the treasure of the Treasury of the Throne;

The heart of my Lord (Muḥammad) is the storehouse of my secrets.

(p. 138)

We are intoxicated, the rival of God's Bounty (Ni'mat Allāh),
Cup in hand, listening to the music of the reed.

(p. 706)

Is there anything which does not contain God's Bounty?

No. Then see Ni'matullāh in everything.

(p. 395)

Do you want to reach Ni'matullāh?

Then leave both annihilation and permanence behind!

(p. 619)

Others have seen God through His Bounty,

But we see Ni'matullāh through Him.

(p. 21)

Ni'matullāh appeared, like light.

Take a look – behold: it is Love.

(p. 108)

Do you know who Ni'matullāh really is?

He is the memorial of the Prophets and saints.

(p. 8)

I am the Bounty of God wherever I go

I am with God, I am with God, I am with God!

(p. 8)

Finally, we quote in full one of the master's most self-revealing poems (from the *Dīwān*, pp. 551–2):

We are drunken lovers, seeking God Himself;

We worship wine and we are different from these creatures.

On the Mount Sinai of existence, like Moses, we have fainted,
Footless and headless, crazy, eager for the encounter with
God.

We are the spirit that cannot be embodied. WE ARE NOT.

We are the restless wave that cannot keep in place upon the
sea.

Our Friend resides in the cloister of our heart;
In His eyes we are the pure, the purified Sufi.

We are drowned in the universal ocean, we do not seek water
now;

O you who are standing on the shore, how do you know where
we are?

We are the ones who have passed from beneath the shade;
We are the Humā'¹¹ itself, and have no need to seek its shadow.

We are he in whom no 'we' nor 'I' remains,
We are in the essence of Permanence, beyond Annihilation.

Sometimes we are like the crescent, sometimes the full moon,
Sometimes descending in the West, sometimes rising in the
East.

What are you up to, Sayyid? We have revealed the hidden
secret;

We have lost ourselves and seen that we are God, we are God!

As we have seen, there are strong and obvious parallels between the concept of *qutb* and certain doctrines of Shi'ite Islam, and since the Ni'matullahis are now more or less a Shi'ite Order there is the temptation of seeing Shāh Ni'matullāh's claim in the framework of Shi'ite doctrine.¹² But the fact is that Shāh was born and in all probability died a Sunni. The quarrel between Shi'ites and Sunnis, in any case, is a late development; although it has existed in some form since the beginnings of Islam, it did not take the extreme form it now sometimes assumes until the time of Shāh Ismā'il Ṣafawī;¹³ and even today, for example in the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent or amongst the Kurds, it is not unusual to find the practice of a Sunni school of law combined with a reverence for the Twelve Imams. In the thirteenth century, the Sunni Ibn 'Arabī wrote a treatise on the Imāms. The Shi'ite Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, was universally recognized as the greatest Sufi of his time.¹⁴ In fact, the Imāms were considered by Sunnis as Sufi masters, *qutbs*, especially up to and including the eighth, 'Alī Ridā', the 'Imām of Initiation'; many Sufi Orders include these eight in their *silsilah*.¹⁵ There was undoubtedly no reason for Shāh Ni'matullāh to feel the necessity of declaring himself categorically either Shi'ah or Sunni, for, although there was tension between the two, it was as common then as now for most true Sufis to feel themselves above this,

as above any other duality. Although he could say in one ghazal:

O you who are the lover of 'Alī's family,
you are a perfect believer – there is none like you.

Choose the Sunni way, which is our path,
lest you be lost and destroyed.

Whoever loves the Four¹⁶
is a pure follower of the only real school, and a saint.

I am the friend of the Companions – all of them –
the friend of the Sunnis and the enemy of the Mu'tazilites.¹⁷
(*Dīwān*, pp. 684–5)

he was also capable of writing this:

In the two worlds, the Fourteen Innocents¹⁸ should be chosen;
the door of the House should be knocked on five times.¹⁹
(from 'Love of 'Alī,' *Dīwān*, pp. 746–747)

and finally, he resolved the seeming paradox:

They ask me what school, what rite I follow –
O you unaware ones! what school could I have?
Shāfi'i and Abū Hanafi²⁰ have placed mirrors before me –
each in his own way is apt – but mine is the Way of my ancestor
(Muḥammad).

My knowledge of the science of prophets and saints
is more perfect than that of any school.
(*Dīwān*, pp. 734–5)

By these three poems it must be understood that Shī'ism and Sunnism, though different in many ways, are not mutually exclusive, not 'sects' in the Christian sense of the word. To the Sufis, who are united not only in their ultimate goal, God, but also in their love for the Prophet and 'Alī, who transmitted the esoteric teaching of Islam to the Orders, there can and must be no irreconcilable quarrel between any of the orthodox branches of Islam. Shī'ism and Sunnism are both providentially revealed in order to develop, for different types of Muslims, two aspects of Islam which were present in essence from the very beginning.²¹ But the Sufi's need to interiorize the elements of Islam includes the absolute necessity of transcending these legitimate but limited points of view. This is what Shāh Ni'matullāh has said in these three

verses, and this in fact is what the overwhelming majority of the Sufis have proclaimed. Jāmī (who, being a Naqshbandī, could be expected to have supported Sunnism exclusively) put it in a very blunt manner:

O Magian boy of our Time, bring me the winecup,
for the quarrel of Shi'ite and Sunni is making me vomit.

They ask me, 'Jāmī, to what school do you belong?'
and I reply, 'A hundred thanks to God that I am neither
dog-like Sunni nor asinine Shi'ite!'²²

They asked Majnūn, 'Who was right, 'Umar or 'Alī?' and he replied, 'Laylā!'

To return to the concept of the *quṭb*, although it finds its justification in the Quran and ḥadīth, it was probably not developed by that name as part of the doctrine of Sufism until the 7th/13th century, by Ibn 'Arabī. The doctrine of the *quṭb* and the hidden hierarchy is developed at great length in the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, from which all later expositions largely derive, even though they may differ from Ibn 'Arabī's in various details, or even in fundamentals such as the relation between *quṭb* and Imām. Shi'ite followers of Ibn 'Arabī, for example, though they accepted Jesus as the 'Seal' of pre-Muḥammadan Sanctity, believed the Twelfth Imām to be the Seal of Muḥammadan Sanctity. Ibn 'Arabī, on the other hand, claimed that the identity of the Muḥammadan Seal was revealed to him, and hinted strongly that it was he himself.²³ Henry Corbin, in his *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, has shown that, far from being an empty boast, this claim of Ibn 'Arabī's is, from the point of view of spiritual history, no more than plain 'fact'. He represents in many ways a central figure of Sufism, and of esotericism in general; every Sufi and nearly every theologian who came after him had to relate, either positively or negatively, to his teachings, and the vast majority of Sufi literature after the 13th century contains, in some part, a commentary on his work.²⁴

This is especially true of Persian poets. Corbin also points out the symbolic significance of Ibn 'Arabī's migration from Andalusia and Morocco to the 'Orient,' to Egypt and Syria: the West, both Muslim and Christian, was left with the Aristotelianism of Ibn Rushd (Averroes) while the East inherited the Neo-Platonism and Pythagoreanism, along with the pure

Quranic ṭasawwuf of which Ibn 'Arabī was the real transmitter. The last Western thinkers to be influenced, directly or indirectly, by Ibn 'Arabī, were Christians like Dante and Roger Bacon – perhaps to a certain extent the Alchemists; while, in the East, much important thought after Ibn 'Arabī (and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī) was based on esotericism, even when, as with such figures as Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā, a reconciliation with philosophy was again found to be possible.

As for Shāh Ni'matullāh, his poetry provides the perfect example of Ibn 'Arabī's Sufism activated in a poetic context. He rendered some of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* into Persian verse and commented on it. In a risālah commenting on the *Fuṣūṣ* he wrote:

The words of the *Fuṣūṣ* became set in our heart like a jewel in its station.

It reached him [Ibn 'Arabī] from the Prophet of God, and from his spirit became attached to us.²⁵

The Works of Shāh Ni'matullāh

We are making no attempt here to give a complete exposition of the Sufi doctrines of Shāh Ni'matullāh, but rather to touch on various points or threads which we will find woven through the entire history and literature of the Order. In the same way, this is not the place to try to offer a complete classification and bibliographical study of Shāh Ni'matullāh's very numerous writings, which would take a book by itself. We have already quoted from his poetic *Dīwān*, an enormous work of some 14,000 lines, containing lyrical, didactic and philosophical verse of great quality; and Part II, Chapter I will be devoted to a selection of these. Of his prose works, only 120 are known to have survived, although some commentators claim he wrote more than 700 in all.²⁶ All of these are in Persian, except for three in Arabic, two of which have been translated into Persian by Javad Nurbakhsh. A cursory examination of references to other works contained in Ni'matullāh's prose writings would suggest that the Quran and ḥadīth were the strongest influences on the development of his Sufism, followed by the sayings and writings of the great Sufi masters, particularly the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn 'Arabī. There is much poetry interspersed with the prose, both by Ni'matullāh himself and by other writers; and two of the 'essays' are in fact

entirely in verse. Many of them were written in response to the questions of disciples. Although they usually centre on one subject, they are rather discursive in organization, full of digressions and side-tracks; and, like the poetry, they are very repetitious.

For the sake of convenience, we have divided the essays into five categories, in order to give an idea of the subjects which most interested Nī'matullāh and his disciples.

1. *Interpretations* of chapters in the Quran (such as the Fātiḥah, or 'Opening' Sūrah) or individual verses (such as the 'Light Verse', or the Shahādah, 'There is no god but God'); of the Prophetic Traditions (such as 'Poverty is my pride') or the sayings of 'Alī (such as his answer to Kumayl ibn Ziyād on the meaning of Truth); and of the works of great Sufi masters, such as the *Lama'āt* of 'Irāqī,²⁷ or the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn 'Arabī. (There are four essays on the *Fuṣūṣ*, two of which are brief explanations of the whole book: 'Translations of the Imprints of the Bezels of Wisdom' and 'On the Significance of Attributing Each Wisdom to a Particular Word or Name (of a Prophet)'. There is also a 'Translation of the Poems of the *Fuṣūṣ* into Persian' and a 'Commentary on the Chapter of Adam'.)

2. *Explanations* of symbols; of the secret meanings of the letter of the alphabet (three essays); the symbolism of angels; of numbers; of acts of worship, daily prayer, religious taxation, pilgrimage; and of Sufi clothes (the *Tājnāmah*).

3. *Definitions* of Sufi vocabulary and concepts. Aside from the risālah on 'Vocabulary', which is actually a translation of a work by 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (a famous commentator on Ibn 'Arabī), Shah Nī'matullāh also wrote separate essays on particular concepts or terms, such as the meaning and secrets of true faith, unity, poverty and trust. In other works he discusses the esoteric meanings of such words as reveller (rind), Sufi, Sufism, quṭb, miracle, annihilation, permanence, love, 'taste' (dhawq), inspiration, manifestation (tajallī), revelation, etc. We have made use of these works in discussing the vocabulary of his poetry, later in this chapter. He also discusses purely philosophical terms such as existence, substance, the permanent archetypes and others familiar to readers of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.

4. *Expositions*: pure metaphysical expositions of problems of ontology, the stages of being, the five planes of existence, the archetypes; theological problems such as free-will and pre-destination, the Divine Essence, the Names and Attributes; cosmology, creation, manifestation, heavenly bodies and souls, the earthly substances, angelology, the concept of man as microcosm and the universe as macrocosm, and the Perfect Man. Although none of his essays is actually called 'Inṣān-i kāmil', in fact it might be said that his entire work is an exposition of this doctrine, for in almost every essay he eventually ends up discussing it from one point of view or another; all roads lead to the Perfect Man.²⁸

5. *Teachings*: didactic works on the method and practice of Sufism, of counsel and advice (two to his son, one to his grandson Nūrullāh, one to his disciples in general); and several essays of instruction on specific subjects such as the rules for making a retreat.

The Language of Love

By Shāh Ni'matullāh's time a poetic vocabulary of symbols with very specific references to Sufi terminology had developed, and if various poets subjected this 'system' to the alchemy of their individual talents, it is still possible to discover, given the context, how certain words were used. This is especially true in Shāh Ni'matullāh's case, for he was less concerned with imagery than with getting the message across. Once a few basic symbols are grasped, it is easy to see that his entire *Dīwān* contains, finally, only a limited number of ways of re-stating a single theme, that of waḥdat al-wujūd. Originality is not highly valued in Sufism, except perhaps as a means of giving new ornamentation to eternal ideas and truths. No one will bother to accuse Shāh Ni'matullāh of a lack of originality once it is understood that he is valued primarily for the clarity and simple beauty with which he repeated and repeated his theme. In fact, if the word 'originality' is taken in its original meaning, which is connected with the idea of the Origin of Being ('The One Who Originates' being in fact a name of God), then Shāh Ni'matullāh is indeed the most original of poets.

Above all, he is the Master of Love, indeed the King of the Kings of Love. We have attempted throughout this book to

give some idea of the very complex relation between Love and the Intellect, which some Sufis have called 'the two wings of the bird'. According to Shah Nī'matullāh

The Intellect is a means for understanding the state of slave-hood.

Love is a means for understanding Lordship.

'Unity is for God; gnosis for us; and Love is a bond between us and Him'.²⁹ Here Love is the bond, link, yoke (yoga), the Path itself which leads to knowledge of Unity. Elsewhere, Love itself is spoken of as the goal, or the Absolute itself.

Love is the *method* inasmuch as 'God is beautiful and loves beauty', so that the love of beauty and its contemplation is an 'act' which partakes of both the Divine Attributes and Divine Essence. Beauty, whether formal or essential, is an attribute of God, 'that which is unveiled for the hearts of men from the Lights of the Unseen'.³⁰

This manifestation, or *tajalli*, can appear in beings ('I saw my Lord in the best form' – ḥadīth),³¹ or in essence. About this second form of *tajalli*, God has said 'The heart does not deny what it sees' (Quran LIII, 11). *Tajalli*, however, can also be experienced beyond both form and essence, and this is 'like a light which does not abide'. As the Prophet said, 'There is a time in which I am with God, and no angel nigh to God, nor prophet who has descended, will fit in it'. The perfect faithful slave is always with the Absolute, and the Absolute (through *tajalli*) with the slave, in a state of constant manifestation: 'He is with you wherever you are' (Quran LVII, 4).

You are thirsty and search in every direction;

You are drowned in water, yet you seek water.

In this highest stage, Love may be spoken of as the *goal*, for Love in this sense is union. Here, however, words begin to crack and split under the inward pressure of transcendent meaning. In this sense Love, knowledge and union can no longer be defined; 'Love, Beloved and lover – all are one!'

In order to understand Nī'matullāh's themes of Love and Unity, it will be valuable to give tentative definitions for some of the terms and symbols he uses, implicitly and explicitly, most often. This will also help to explain all the other Nī'matullāhī poetry which we are to encounter as well.

'Al-fanā' designates extinction of individual limitations in the state of Union with God'.³² Baqā' 'designates the spiritual state of subsistence beyond all form, that is the state of re-integration in the Spirit, or even in Pure Being. Also means the Divine Eternity'.³³ Fanā', according to Shāh Ni'matullāh, 'is the last stage of the journey towards God. Baqā' is the beginning of the journey in God. Every annihilation begets permanence, just as every corruption necessitates regeneration. 'Abdullāh Anṣārī has said, "The world of not-being is a good world, for wherever you stand in it, no one will ask you who you are". This dervish [Shāh Ni'matullāh himself] adds:

Pass beyond being and not-being –
It befits you not to stand here. Pass by!³⁴

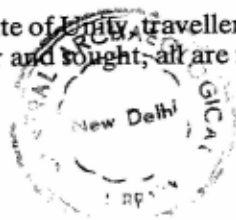
According to the Sufi doctrine expressed in Ni'matullāh's poetry, baqā' follows the experience of fanā', and in a sense includes it. Until one dies to selfhood one cannot live in God: a theme universal to all religions, from the nirvana of Buddhism to the death and resurrection of Christ. In Islam, the Shahādah (profession of faith) Lā illāha ill' Allāh, contains the doctrine of fanā' and baqā'; 'There is no god' is negative and moves towards fanā'. 'Except God' suggests affirmation, and tends towards the state of baqā'.

One of Ni'matullāh's chief disciples, whom we have already had several occasions to quote, Darvish Muḥammad Ṭabasī, wrote eight risālahs which undoubtedly reflect the Master's teachings – in fact, much of these essays might be 'lecture notes', or polished versions of Ni'matullāh's oral instructions to his disciples. He makes such extensive use of direct quotations from Ni'matullāh's poetry and prose that it becomes difficult to separate or distinguish his own writing from his Master's. Of the risālahs, two are quite long. One is called 'Terminology,' and offers definitions of Sufi words, supported by quotations from a number of sources, especially the *Gulshan-i rāz*. Another, containing twenty-eight chapters on various terms and practices of Sufism, includes this dissertation on fanā' and baqā':³⁵

'All things perish except His Face.'

(Quran XXIX, 88)

In the state of Unity, traveller, journey, destination, aspiration, seeker and sought, all are naught – 'everything perishes'



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—and even the affirmation of this very statement is naught, and the negation of it is also naught. Affirmation and negation are contraries, and duality is the source of plurality. There (in *fanā'*), neither negation nor affirmation will survive, nor will there be any negation of negation or affirmation of affirmation. This they call annihilation, '*fanā'*'. The destination of the creature is annihilation, just as its origin was non-being:

'As He originated you, so you will return.'

(Quran VII, 28)

But even this definition cannot be applied to *fanā'*, since aught which can be expressed in words, or which enters into fantasy, aught which reason can touch, is totally negated (*muntafi*):

'To Him the whole matter shall be returned.'

(Quran XI, 123)

Be aware then, that *fanā'* is the annihilation of the slave ('abd) in the Divine Presence, for when the slave's self is annihilated, he yet remains (*baqā'*) with God. *Fanā'* means putting the ego in the crucible of annihilation, dying to whatever is less than God, that your face may face Him in such a manner that whichever way you turn, you see only Him . . . When the slave is annihilated or dies to that which belongs to himself, he will then remain to what belongs to the Absolute, to Truth (*Ḥaqq*). When this *baqā'* appears after *fanā'*, then we may say that the *fanā'* was genuine, and that in the *fanā'* the slave was worthy of praise, and that the *fanā'* came about through the overwhelming domination of the Truth . . . You must, in worshipping, seek not your own ends, but be annihilated to your pleasures, and magnify the command of your Lord, that you may obtain your permanence with the Truth. In all dealings seek not your own gain, but be annihilated to your desires, and regard only what you may receive from God, that you may remain in the enjoyments of Him Who is not you. In the mind of the slave the thought of God must be so great that no time remains for any ungodly business. When the slave dies to his own carnal pleasures, dies to watching the ebb and flow of enjoyments, he will yet remain to the sight of that which flows from Truth. He will then know what comes from God, and that 'I' is a part of it, and that the whole of existence belongs to Him. The Lord does what he wishes with his own property, and, when the slave realizes this, all quarrels and litigations will cease, all fade away. He will know that whatever flows from Truth is true, that he has no choice but to agree: opposition will fade away, all that remains is surrender without argument, agreement without rebellion. He will

remain to the Truth in the sense that God himself remains, just as God himself desires. When neither volition nor intention, will nor thing-to-be-willed, survive – whatever appears in the slave then is the will and object of the will of the Truth itself.

Many Sufis have seen a parallel between *fanā'* and *baqā'*, and 'intoxication' and 'sobriety,' two terms common in Ni'matullāh's poetry. Among these Sufis, some have considered that a certain antagonism must exist between those mystics who prefer intoxication, and those who prefer sobriety. 'Alī al-Hujwīrī, author of a basic text of Sufism, the *Kashf al-mahjūb*, says that:

'Abū Yazīd (Baṣṭāmī) and his followers prefer Intoxication to Sobriety. They say that Sobriety involves the fixity and equilibrium of human attributes which are the greatest veil between God and Man, whereas Intoxication involves the destruction of human attributes like foresight and choice and the annihilation of man's self-control in God, so that only those faculties survive in him that do not belong to the human genus, and are the most complete and perfect . . .

'Al-Junayd and his followers prefer Sobriety to Intoxication. They say that Intoxication is evil, because it involves the disturbance of one's normal state and loss of sanity and self-control; and, inasmuch as the principle of all things is sought, either by way of annihilation or subsistence, of effacement or affirmation, the principle of verification cannot be obtained unless the seeker is sane. Blindness will never release anyone from the bondage and corruption of the phenomena. The fact that people remain in the phenomena and forget God is due to their not seeing things as they really are. For, if they saw, they would avoid falling into this error . . . On this account, the Apostle said in his prayer: 'O God, show us things as they are, because whoever thus sees them, finds rest.'³⁶

Junayd himself describes sobriety thus: 'He (the worshipper) is himself, after he has not been truly himself. He is present in himself and in God after having been present in God and absent in himself. This is because he has left the intoxication of God's overwhelming *ghalabah* (victory), and comes to the clarity of sobriety, and contemplation is once more restored to him so that he can put everything in its right place and assess it correctly. Once more he assumes his individual attributes, after *fanā'*; His personal qualities persist in him, and his actions in the world, when he has reached the

zenith of spiritual achievement vouchsafed by God, become a pattern for his fellow men.'³⁷

It might seem from one point of view that Shāh Ni'matullāh inclines towards Abū Yazīd's position. 'How can we admit the sober to our gatherings?' . . . 'O Reason, you are sick and sober!' On the other hand, one only needs to read the math-nawī (presented as the final selection of Ni'matullāh's poetry) to see how he sets 'a pattern for his fellow men'. Ultimately, however, there seems to be no unbridgeable gap for the followers of the school of waḥdat al-wujūd between sobriety and intoxication – in true unity 'neither negation nor affirmation will survive, nor will there be any negation of negation nor affirmation of affirmation'. Hujwiri's either/or proposition is valid on one level, but in the state presented by Ibn 'Arabī in his 'Treatise on Unity,' or by Shāh Ni'matullāh in his *Dīwān*, paradox engulfs all dualities: 'Pass in sweetness beyond annihilation and eternity.'

Shāh Ni'matullāh says, 'I am the seeker and the sought, both beloved and the one who loves – lord and worshipper in one body' – just as Abū Yazīd was inspired and made to say, 'There is no one inside my cloak but God . . . Praise be to me!' and Ḥallāj 'I am the Truth!' (ana'l-ḥaqq). But then again he sometimes seems to agree with Junayd, who insists that even if the worshipper loses himself in fanā', he still remains separate from God.³⁸ 'At the very point of Union, separation overwhelms us and we fall far from the Friend; yet He is closer to us than ourselves.' The only solution to these seemingly opposing attitudes must be found in the affirmation of a suprarational mystery: 'I cannot tell secrets with pen and paper.'

* * *

WINE is perhaps the central symbol of Persian Sufi poetry; 'wine is the rapture that maketh the Sufi beside himself at the manifestation of the emanation of the Beloved.'³⁹ If there is any doubt that the 'wine' of 'Umar Khayyām and Ḥāfiz was a purely spiritual wine (and the Sufis themselves entertain no such doubt), Shāh Ni'matullāh at any rate cannot be suspected of indulging in practices forbidden by Divine Law. Indeed, Shāh was known to have set himself in opposition to a

certain laxity in practice of the sharī'ah, which is supposed to have gained ascendancy in his time due to Indian and Christian influences. He set an example by praying in public. In one poem, he gives an excellent definition of Sufism as the interiorization of the sharī'ah:

Knowing the science of religion is sharī'ah
and putting it in action is ṭarīqah.
If you combine knowledge and action in sincerity
for the sake of God, it will be ḥaqīqah.⁴⁰

His wine was distilled by a heart at one with the Divine, and simple drunkenness would only have put obstacles in the way of his ecstasy; 'if wine could make us reach God, every drunkard in the gutter would be a saint'. As Rūmī says:

The light of dawn has shown forth, and from Thy light we
are engaged in drinking the morning-drink with the wine of
Thy Manṣūr [Ḥallāj].

Inasmuch as Thy gift keeps me thus (enraptured), . . . what
is (other) wine that it should bring me rapture?

Wine in ferment is a beggar suing for our ferment; Heaven
in revolution is a beggar suing for our consciousness.

Wine became intoxicated with us, not we with it . . .⁴¹

One of the most complete explanations of the allegory of wine is to be found in Maḥmūd Shabistārī's *Gulshan-i rāz*. He uses Quranic texts to illustrate his points:

Drink wine from the cup of 'the face that endures' (LV.26);
the text 'their Lord gave them to drink' (LXXVI. 21) is its
cupbearer.

'Pure wine' is that which gives you purification
from the stain of existence at the time of intoxication.⁴²

The Quranic wine is that referred to in the verses:

This is the similitude of Paradise
which the Godfearing have been promised:
therein are rivers unstaling
rivers of milk unchanging in flavour,
and rivers of wine – a delight to the drinkers,
rivers, too, of honey purified. (XLVII. 19–24)⁴³

They shall recline on jewelled couches face to face, and
there shall wait on them immortal youths with bowls,
ewers and a cup of purest wine (that will neither pain
their heads nor take away their reason).⁴⁴

Ḥāfiẓ commented:

Drink wine, for if eternal life is to be obtained in the world
Its only source is the wine of paradise.⁴⁵

It may be that what angered some of the exoterists against the Sufis was not the drinking of wine, which it was obviously impossible to charge them with, but the assertion that anything of Paradise can be 'obtained in the world'.

Frithjof Schuon points out⁴⁶ that knowledge is comparable to fire in its aspect of doctrinal orthodoxy, and also to water, in its aspect of fixative and peace-giving faith. Love is also comparable to both fire and water: the analogy with fire is obvious; and love's 'moistness' stands in opposition to the fiery 'dryness' of knowledge. 'The combination between the two principles "fire" and "water" is nothing other than "wine" which is both "liquid fire" and "igneous water"; liberating drunkenness proceeds precisely from this alchemical and as it were miraculous combination of opposite elements. It is thus wine . . . which is the most perfect image of liberating gnosis.'

Shāh Nī'matullāh, like other authors before him, divides the manifestation of divine knowledge into four symbolic categories, represented by wine, honey, milk and water. The last two are concerned with merely human knowledge. Knowledge in the form of revelation, firm faith, purity of inspiration or realization of anything 'knowable or unknowable' is manifested in the form of honey. But that knowledge which is perfect is the taste and form of wine. Most people are too weak for intoxication, but prophets and saints drink the wine of Paradise; even after draining the whole jug of pre-eternity to post-eternity, they grasp the sleeve of the saki and (like Bāyazīd) cry out for more.⁴⁷

The whole universe is as His winehouse,
the heart of every atom as His winecup.
Reason is drunken, angels drunken, soul drunken,
air drunken, earth drunken, heaven drunken.⁴⁸

Once wine is taken as a symbol of both the method and, in a sense, the goal of Sufism, a number of other parallels become possible:

THE WINESELLER, or Magian Pīr, or vintner, describes

the murshid or Master. Zoroastrians were in charge of the actual wine business in fifteenth-century Persia, and the connotations of 'magic' and ancient mysteries appealed to the poets. (Christians appealed to them for somewhat the same reasons, although it should be noted that many Islamic esoterists made reference to Magi and Christians because of real spiritual affinities.)⁴⁹ Thus the exact meaning of Shāh Ni'matullāh's claim to be 'Commander of the Winesellers' becomes clear: it is another reference to his position as qutb, Master of masters.

THE SAKI, cupbearer or Magian boy, is at once the murshid and also God as He is mirrored in the Perfect Master, for the 'liberating drunkenness' proceeds from the Divine through the medium of the master himself. 'The saki is the manifestation of love, which causes drunkenness'.⁵⁰

THE CUP finds its symbolic twin in other religions: the Sant Graal (which may have a Persian origin in any case), the skull-cup of Hindu and Buddhist Tantrik iconography, etc. As with 'Umar Khayyām, the cup sometimes stands for the human body, which itself is a necessary container, a temple for the soul and spirit. Finally, the cup might represent the heart which is filled with love and understanding.

'What is the difference between cup and wine?', one of Shāh Ni'matullāh's disciples (probably Shāh Rukh) asked him.⁵¹ He answered:

Fill a cup made of bubbles of wine
With wine, see them both together:
One essence but with two names –
Call it cup, call it wine, as you like.

Or, again:

Make a cup of ice, fill it with water;
Set it before the fire for the People of God.
When it melts, do not bother to ask
Of ice and water. They are one. Understand this!

THE MINSTREL. Music became an integral part of the Sufi method, especially in Persia. The spiritual concert (*samā'*) produces a state of ecstasy in the listener who is properly prepared, because its non-verbal, non-categorical meaningfulness prefigures the absolute beauty which is the

Sufi's goal. In Hinduism as in other religions, manifestation begins with sound – thus sound can be organized to mirror the unconditioned Origin of Being, and the 'word', which itself proceeds from the primordial Silence. As long as it is not taken as an end in itself, and indulged in only through frivolity, music can be a potent aid on the spiritual path. As Muḥammad al-Ghazālī says, 'Listening to music is important for him whose heart is dominated by the love of God, for the fire is made stronger, but for him in whose heart is love for vanity, listening to music in a deadly poison, and it is forbidden to him.' And Sa'dī comments:

I will not say, O brother, what the spiritual concert is
until I know who is listening to it . . .

The rose is torn apart by the morning breeze, but not the
log; for it can only be split by an axe.

The world subsists on music, intoxication and ardour, but
what does the blind man see in a mirror?⁵²

Music was used in Ni'matullāh's gatherings, but it was of a sort which accorded, in his opinion, with the Sharī'ah; that is, though there was no dancing or whirling like that practised by the Mevlevis, the dervishes clapped and used the reed-flute and 'daf' (tambourine). In a session of samā', Ni'matullāh would sit before the qiblah, facing Mecca, and at his order the disciples would turn their attention towards God and begin the dhikr, swaying their heads from side to side. When it was finished they would prostrate themselves, and Ni'matullāh would lead them in prayer.⁵³

THE RIND is the Persian word used, among others, by the Ni'matullāhī poets to describe the people of the tavern. It is an impossible term to translate; in our translations, several different words have been used to render it into English. The connotations are 'a reveller, a profligate, a clever fellow'; basically, the dervish or qalandar who is too clever to resort to useless asceticism, but experiences the joy and expansion of Union, and whose outward actions may cause him to be labelled a profligate by the puritanical. 'A rind is he who shuns all sort of action and has no inclination towards being. He has transcended himself and self-worship; in the tavern of the Magi, revelling, he drinks wine without cease, but shows no drunkenness.'⁵⁴

'Rind' can also mean, apparently, 'a good perfume; as of a tree in the wilderness, or of incense'. For the Sufis, says Shāh Nī'matullāh, a rind is he who has ascended to union after detachment – to that end where there is no more end, the end of ends – and has thus perfumed his being with the scent of the divine attributes, and returned from the World of the Unseen to the sensible world in order to purify the outward manifestation:

In the quarter of the tavern I aspired
To drink every last drop in the cellar,
To become chieftain of all revellers in the world,
And donned the robe of love, myself a reveller.

The ascetic longs for vain desires, the gnostic for the encounter. The ascetic stares into the cup, while the rind seeks the wine itself. The man of sober intellect sees only himself, while the lover sees Him. The object of the people of speculation and theory is the acts of God, while that which is witnessed by the rind is the Agent. The folk of dry land seek us by our attributes, while the people of the sea seek us by us.⁵⁵

THE TAVERN – Kharābāt – is first of all the khāniqāh; then the world as a whole, when seen through the eye of intoxication; then, the state of fanā'. It is the place where wine is sold in exchange for reputation, merit, worldly wealth and ultimately, individual being, or egoicity.

The tavern is the nest of the bird of the soul,
the tavern is the sanctuary that has no place.
The tavern-haunter is desolate in a desolate place,
in his desert the world is as a mirage.⁵⁶

The symbolism of lover and Beloved gives another set of symbols to Shāh Nī'matullāh's poetry, based in part on the emotions of the worldly lover, which correspond with and prefigure those of the lover of the Divine; and also on the parts of the Beloved's body. The dark hair, or CURL, symbolizes the beauty of manifestation which at once mirrors and veils God's beauty. The TRESS is compared to a lasso, as 'the attractiveness of God's grace' which ensnares the lover. Certain lines of Shabistārī suggest a comparison with the Hindu doctrine of Māyā, 'illusion,' as being on the one hand the 'playfulness' (līlā) of Shakti in her beautiful aspects (or Shiva

himself dancing); and on the other hand, some of the very darkest aspects of Kali, the goddess of destruction.⁵⁷

With His face and His curl He makes day and night,
sporting with them in marvellous fashion . . .
If he shakes aside these black curls of His
no single infidel is left in the world.
If He leaves them continually in their place,
there remains not in the world one faithful soul.⁵⁸

THE MOLE, or beauty spot, is like the point of manifestation, the primordial blackness before the expansion of the Cosmos. 'Alī said 'the Quran is contained in the Fātiḥah; the Fātiḥah is contained in the bismillāh; the bismillāh is contained in the B (ب) and the B is contained in the point (diacritical mark). I am that point.' 'Mole means the point of Utility – the "hidden ipseity," single in itself, but embracing all phenomena.'⁵⁹

THE LIPS are red, as if wine-stained; a kiss thus represents Unity in intoxication, the channel of Life – the breath of the Merciful (nafas al-Raḥman):

From His eye proceed languishing and intoxication,
from His ruby lip the essence of being.
Because of His eye all hearts are burning,
His ruby lip is healing to the sick heart . . .
By a frown He finishes the affairs of the world,
by a kiss He ever and anon revives the soul.⁶⁰

The EYEBROW is often compared to the qiblah, or arched prayer niche in a mosque. DOWN, or fine hair, is like the 'dust' ('amā') or undifferentiated matter, which can only be seen when light shines through it. Also, 'down is the world of pure spirits, which is nearest to divinity . . . Passing from the land of darkness, i.e., the veil of plurality, quaff the water of life (unity), in the verdant mead, or oasis of down (the spirit world).'⁶¹

These definitions are not fixed. Different poets may use the terms differently from poem to poem. Several images are used to demonstrate that nothing is separate from God, that everything is 'in' Him, but that the sum of all 'things' is not Him. The waves are not separate from the ocean, for example, but the ocean cannot be limited only to the waves.

Wave, drop, ocean and foam are all one –
water is the essence but in appearance it is four.

* * *

The method of Sufism cannot be explained in detail here, but it consists essentially of invocation or remembrance (dhikr). Man's present low state of spiritual sleep stems from forgetfulness; invocation is simply the act of constant recollection.

Najm al-Dīn Rāzī⁶² quotes the Quranic verse, 'Remember thy Lord when thou forgettest' (Quran XVIII, 24); that is to say, after the forgetfulness of anything not-Me, remember Me, so that your remembrance will not be coloured by any partnership or duality. The spirit of man in its descent into creation passed through the spiritual and material worlds, and finally attached itself to the body. During this journey, whatever the spirit beheld remained with it as a memory, and what it saw caused it gradually to forget God, until so many veils of memory were draped upon it that it totally forgot its origin – and so God forgot it. As He says in the Quran: 'They forget Allāh, so He hath forgotten them' (IX, 67). This forgetfulness was the 'disease of their hearts' (II, 9); and since the cure of a disease is its opposite, the medicine of 'Remember Allāh with much remembrance' (XXXIII, 41) was prescribed from the healing-house of the Quran.

'Lā ilāha ill' Allāh' is the dhikr which takes the spirit back to God, an invocation which itself can reach God. It consists of a negation and affirmation, since forgetfulness itself is made up of negation and affirmation: the negation of the remembrance of God, and the affirmation of things other-than-God. So this medicinal syrup, composed of the vinegar of negation and the sugar of affirmation, is needed to remove the bile of forgetfulness. With 'Lā ilāh' every relative thing is negated, with 'ill' Allāh' the Glorified One is affirmed. Adherence to this invocation will gradually detach the soul from relativity and finally cut it off with the scissors of 'Lā ilāh', so that in the end the beauty of the Sultan of 'ill' Allāh' will manifest itself from behind the curtain of Glory.

One of the later shaykhs of the Ni'matullāhī Order, Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, adapted the teachings of Rāzī on the dhikr to the specific purposes of the Order;⁶³ he lists thirteen conditions for the proper performance of dhikr:

- (1) The disciple must be truthful in his devotion.
- (2) He must feel the pain of aspiration and desire for the journey.
- (3) He must become estranged from the creatures and intimate with the dhikr.
- (4) He should base his dhikr on sincere repentance.
- (5) He should remember constantly, trying not to neglect a single moment.
- (6) He should be in a state of ritual purity (wuḍū), for the remembrance of the Friend is war with the enemy; war without weapons is difficult, and purification is the weapon of the faithful. ('Sufism', said Junayd, 'is war without peace.')⁶⁴
- (7) He should wear clean clothes.
- (8) He should sit facing Mecca if possible.
- (9) Whenever possible, he should sit crosslegged, with his right hand on his left thigh, holding the wrist of his right hand with his left hand. He should close his eyes, and keep his heart attentive.⁶⁵ (After mentioning several other postures for dhikr, the author states that his own Master, Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, instructed his disciples to bring up the 'Lā ilāh' from the navel to beneath the right breast and from there take the 'ill' Allāh' to a position beneath the left breast, and back again to the right, without moving the tongue.)
- (10) His heart should be in a state of contemplation such that during the recitation it is always with the Master, seeking his help; for the disciple is veiled with many veils, and cannot pay correct attention to God, but the Master is familiar with the Absolute Unseen. Although his form is of this world, his heart receives emanations from God, and by attending to the heart of the Master, the disciple can share in this emanation (or 'overflow'), until he attains the position where he can receive it directly and without any intermediary.
- (11) He should keep silence and speak no more than is necessary.
- (12) He should put aside all objections to God, and be ready to accept and be satisfied with whatever comes from the Unseen World. He should not question the sayings, states and qualities of his Master.
- (13) He should reduce his intake of food, not to the point of impairing health, but to induce 'lightness'.

The stages of the Way are often compared with those of

alchemical transmutation: the dross of the soul, when subjected to certain processes activated by dhikr, becomes itself the pure gold of Unity. The Sufi (in the strict sense of the self-realized or Perfect man) contains within him the philosopher's stone which transforms the entire world into the realm of spirit, 'Paradise on earth'. Rūmī gives an exposition of method both in terms of alchemy and the recurrent trinity of sharī'ah, ṭarīqah and ḥaqīqah:

In short, the Law is like learning the theory of alchemy from a teacher or a book, and the Path is (like) making use of chemicals and rubbing the copper upon the philosopher's stone, and the Truth is (like) the transmutation of copper into gold. Those who know alchemy rejoice in their knowledge of it, saying, 'We know the theory of this (science)'; and those who practise it rejoice in their practice of it, saying, 'We perform such works'; and those who have experienced the reality rejoice in the reality, saying, 'We have become gold and are delivered from the theory and practice of alchemy: we are God's freedmen.'⁶⁶

Something must be said about Shāh Ni'matullāh's use of the word 'aql, usually translated 'intellect'. In the higher sense of the word, intellect is the tool God has given us with which to penetrate the metaphysics of Truth; it is generally said that the purpose of creation is the gnosis of God. God has many names, representing as many attributes: Allāh is the name which comprehends them all. Man, being the central creation, must comprehend all the names, the origin of all attributes and creatures. So he was given the intellect and the faculty of discrimination in order to know the name 'Allāh', which represents all other divine names and qualities. Intellect, then, is the sign of man's universality, for, having known 'Allāh', he knows all. On the lower level, however, 'aql is seen as man's petty attempt to explain the Inexplicable, and, in his pride, to measure even the phenomenon of Divinity with the tiny yardstick of his individual mind. Thus, in this context, the word has usually been translated as 'reason', as in 'O Reason, you are sick and sober'.

Finally the concepts of contraction and expansion (al-qabḍ and al-bast) which constitute two essential stages of the Path and its alchemical process, are important to the total concept of Shāh Ni'matullāh's poetry: contraction is the 'spiritual

state following from fear of God'. It is the 'opposite of expansion . . . of the soul through hope or spiritual joy.'⁶⁷ According to the *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥah* of the Ni'matullāhī author, Mast 'Alī Shāh (Zayn al-'Ābidīn Shirwānī)⁶⁸ expansion dominated and was more characteristic of Shāh Ni'matullāh, his poetry and his Order than contraction. Many of the saints described in 'Aṭṭār's *Lives*, who belonged to the 'generation of ascetics' which preceded the first real flowering of Sufism *per se*, were dominated by qabḍ, but to Shāh Ni'matullāh and other Sufis of his type the search for and discovery of God was essentially a joyful occupation.

Notes

1. *Rasā'il-i Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī*, ed. Javad Nurbakhsh, vol. I, Tehran, 1340 S., 'Sulūk', pp. 5-28.

2. On returning from a battle, the Prophet told his companions, 'We have come back from the lesser Holy War to the greater', by which he meant war against the carnal soul, the struggle to reach God.

3. The following description of the Master is from the very important treatise on Sufism by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, the *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, ed. M. Amin Riyahi (Tehran, 1352 S.) Chap. IX. This work greatly influenced Shāh Ni'matullāh and was often quoted or even imitated by his school.

4. 'Every spiritual master, by his knowledge and his function and in the graces attaching to them, is mysteriously assimilated to his prototypes and, both through them and independently of them, to the primordial Prototype, the founding *Avatāra*. On the level of this synthesis, it could even be added that there is but one sole Master, and that the various human supports are in the nature of emanations from Him, compared to the rays of the sun which communicate the one self-same light and are nothing apart from it.' F. Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. by P.N. Townsend, New York, 1975, 'Nature and Function of the Spiritual Master', p. 227. In Ni'matullāhī Sufism, this analogy extends also and especially to 'Alī, the prototype of sainthood (shāh-i walāyat), the first link in the chain of initiation. 'I and 'Alī are of the same light', said the Prophet; or, in the above symbolism, situated on the same ray.

5. 'Every spiritual alchemy involves an anticipated death and consequently also certain losses of equilibrium, or periods of obscurity, in which the disciple is not fully master of himself; he is no longer completely of this world, nor yet of the other, and his experience seems to call into question all the existential categories of which we are so to speak woven. In these 'trials'

and in the 'temptations' which accompany them . . . the spiritual master plays the role of 'motionless center'. To the temptation of giving rational form to irrational troubles he opposes objective immutable and incorruptible Truth'. Schuon, *ibid*.

6. For bibliography on the doctrine of the qutb, see *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 'Badal', p. 55.

7. *Rasā'il*, Vol. IV, 'Qutbiyyah', pp. 76-85.

8. *Rasā'il-i Darvish Muḥammad Ṭabasī*, 'Jām-i jahān namāy-i shāhī' ('The Royal World-displaying Cup'), pp. 321-69.

9. It is interesting to note that Ṭabasī mentions the fact that the four 'rightly-guided' Caliphs of Islam possessed both the inner and outer khilāfah, although 'the sun of walāyah (sainthood) appears through the Lion of God ('Alī)'.

10. See 'The Treatise on Unity' attributed to Ibn 'Arabi (*Risālat al-ahadiyyah*, JRAS, Malayan Branch, October 1901); and Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, London, 1971, Chap. V.

11. The Humā is a supernatural bird who hovers over the heads of men destined to become kings.

12. The Twelfth, or Hidden Imām, al-Mahdī, has come to be considered by some Shī'ite thinkers as the true qutb, the ultimate initiator and spiritual guide in Shī'ite esotericism, thus playing a somewhat similar role to the qutb in Sunni Sufism. ('The qutb and the Imām are two expressions possessing the same meaning and referring to the same person' - Sayyid Haydar Āmulī, *La Philosophie Shī'ite*, p. 223; quoted by Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, p. 111.) Since, however, the Ni'matullāhīs still use the term qutb to describe their Master, a distinction must be made between the Imām as the eternal qutb, and the Pole of the Age (of which there may be only one at a time, in theory), and the 'Pole' of a certain religion, or 'realm' of a religion (of which there may be several). Here, in any case, we are involved in terminology which has been understood differently by different thinkers at different times. (See *Sufi Essays*, pp. 58 and 66.)

13. To this day, few Shī'ite Sufis will repeat Shāh Ismā'il's curse against the first three Caliphs, believing it impossible that the Prophet could have surrounded himself with evil men. Sufis are reluctant to curse even genuine villains; one Sufi Master, when asked to come to a Muḥarram gathering and curse the Caliph Yazīd (murderer of the Imām Ḥusayn), replied, 'I prefer to stay here and curse my nafs (carnal soul).'

14. Among others he initiated Jābir ibn Ḥayyān the alchemist, and, in a visionary dream, the Sufi Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī (*The Sufi Orders in Islam*, J. Spencer Trimmingham, Oxford, 1971, p. 262).

15. Many Sufi Orders include the first eight Imams in their silsilahs, including the Shādhiliyyah, Dhahabiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Kubrawiyyah, Nūrbakhshiyyah – in fact, any Sufi Order tracing its 'descent' through Junayd to Ma'rūf al-Karkhī, who was a disciple of Imām Riḍā. (See Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, chart opp. p. 46 *et passim*.)

16. Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, the first four 'rightfully guided' Caliphs.

17. The Mu'tazilites are, politically, a group of Muslims who stayed neutral during the struggle between 'Alī and his enemies. Later Mu'tazilites quarrelled with the Sufi Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Atomism and rationalism, belief in free will and the created origin of the Quran: these were some of the Mu'tazilite doctrines which eventually led many Islamic theologians (especially Sufis like Muḥammad al-Ghazālī) to condemn them as heretics. Their philosophy survives today only marginally, among the Zaydī Shī'ites (*Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, pp. 421–27).

18. Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭimah and the twelve Imāms are considered to have been 'inerrant', without sin (ma'ṣūm).

19. A reference to Ahl-i Bayt, the House of the Family of the Prophet, specifically to the 'Family of the Cloak' (Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn) whom the Prophet, in a highly symbolic gesture, once covered with his robe.

20. Founders of two of the Sunni Schools of Law.

21. For a fuller and more lucid exposition of these points, see the chapter 'Seeds of a Divergence' in F. Schuon's *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, London, 1976.

22. See Iḥsān Yār Shāṭir, *Shi'r-i Fārsī dar 'ahd-i Shāh Rukh*, Tehran, 1334 S., p. 17.

23. *Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 31. Nasr points out (in *Sufi Essays*, p. 108) that Ibn 'Arabī considered Christ the Universal Seal of Sanctity and himself the particular, or Muḥammadan, Seal; while the Shī'ites 'believe that these titles belong to 'Alī and the Mahdī respectively'. He also notes (p. 111) that 'there may have been direct Shī'ite influences upon later Sufi formulations . . . Al-Shībī in his *Al-Ṣilah* . . . Vol. II, pp. 52–53, writes that Ibn 'Arabī has made use of Shī'ite sources in formulating his doctrines of *ḥaqīqat al-muḥammadiyyah*, *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the Mahdī'.

24. See Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabī*, Introduction.

25. Trans. by Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, p. 99. For original see *Rasā'il-i Shāh Nī'matullāh*, Vol. V, p. 79.

26. The *Rasā'il* of Shāh Ni'matullāh includes 86 treatises in nine volumes published between 1340 S. and 1354 S. Thirty-five *rasā'il* remain unpublished, which is another good reason for not yet attempting a complete classification.

27. The *Sharḥ-i lama'āt*, perhaps the longest of Shāh Ni'matullāh's prose works, is published as a separate volume (Tehran 1354 S.)

28. See our translation of one of the most interesting of these treatises, 'The Stages of the Soul', in *Sophia Perennis*, Vol. I, no. 1, Spring 1975.

29. *Rasā'il*, Vol. VIII, 'Lawā'ih', p. 55.

30. *Ibid.*, 'Ayniyyah', p. 31.

31. See Corbin, *Creative Imagination*, pp. 272-277, where he discusses the ḥadīth: 'I have seen my Lord in the form of the greatest beauty, as a youth with abundant hair, seated on a Throne of grace; he was clad in a garment of gold [or a green robe]; on his hair a golden mitre; on his feet golden sandals.'

32. Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, p. 144.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

34. *Rasā'il*, Vol. VI, 'Mukāshifāt', p. 136.

35. *Rasā'il-i Darvīsh Muḥammad Ṭabasī*, pp. 110-114.

36. *The Kashf al-Mahjūb*, by 'Alī b. 'Uthman al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London 1970), pp. 185-6.

37. *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, Dr Ali Hassan Abdel Kader, London, 1962, p. 90.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

39. This definition is given by Lāhijī in his commentary on Shabistarī's *Gulshan-i rāz* (Whinfield's translation) in a note to line 805. In the *Dīwān* of Shāh Ni'matullāh (p. 937) a glossary of terms defines wine as 'the domination of love'. For the full text of Lāhijī, of which Whinfield has given only a few lines, see the *Sharḥ-i gulshan-i rāz* of Shaykh Muḥammad Lāhijī, ed. Kaywān Samī'i (Tehran 1337 S.)

40. *Dīwān*, p. 854. Islam is often described as a circle, the circumference of which is the Sharī'ah, the radius the Ṭarīqah (Path or Way) and the centre Haqīqah (Truth). At any point along the radius, a circumference can still be drawn; in other words, the Law always pertains to, opens on, the Path. At the centre, the point of Union, the circle is subsumed and in fact continues

to exist implicitly. (See *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, S.H. Nasr, pp. 121–123). Thus the Sufis will always continue to pray outwardly, even when their very existence has become prayer, unless a state of ecstasy prevents them from any action whatever; which state the Sufis explain by quoting the Quran: 'O believers, draw not near to prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are saying' (Arberry's translation, Quran IV, 43).

41. *The Mathnawī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, ed., trans., and commentary by Reynold Nicholson (E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series. IV, London, reprint 1960), I., ll. 1809–1812.

42. *Gulshan-i rāz*, ll. 816–817.

43. Quran, Arberry's translation. The word used here for wine is *khamr*, which specifically means wine. A ḥadīth reported by Ibn 'Umar in *Muslim* states: 'He who drinks wine in this world and dies when he is addicted to it, not having repented, will not drink it in the next.' (*Mishkat al-Masābiḥ*, trans. James Robson, Shaykh Muhammed Ashraf, Lahore; Vol. I, 1963, Vol. II, 1963, Vol. III, 1964, Vol. IV, 1965), II, p. 776.

44. *The Koran*, trans. Daud (Penguin, 1968), 'That Which Is Coming,' p. 108. The word here translated as wine, *sharāb*, is also a generic term for 'drink', and is thus translated by Arberry and Pickthall.

45. *Hafez, Selections from the Rubaiyat and Odes*, Anon. (London, 1920), p. 22.

46. In 'Understanding and Believing,' *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer, 1969, pp. 134–135.

47. *Rasā'il*, Vol. VII, 'dhauqiyyah', pp. 47–51.

48. *Gulshan-i rāz*, ll. 825–6.

49. See for example the discussion of Zoroastrian influence on Suhrawardī in Nasr's *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 60–61; or Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*, trans. R. Nicholson (London, 1911), XII, 13–16.

50. Ṭabasī, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

51. See *Rasā'il*, Vol. VIII, 'Su'āl wa Jawāb' ('Questions and Answers'), pp. 195–213.

52. These two quotations are from 'The Influence of Sufism on Traditional Persian Music' by S.H. Nasr in *Sword of Gnosis*, ed. by J. Needleman (Baltimore, 1974).

53. *Life and Works*, p. 83; and the *Risālah* of 'Abd al-'Azīz Wā'izī in *Materiaux*, pp. 302–3. Much has been written in Sufi literature on samā'. See for example the *Awārifu-l-Ma'ārif* by Shaykh Shahābu-d-Dīn 'Umar bin Muḥammad-i-Sahrawardī, trans. by Wilberforce Clarke (New York, 1970), pp. 29–37; the *Bawāriq al-ilmā'* by Majd al-Dīn al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī (Aḥmad al-Ghazālī) in *Tracts on Listening to Music*, ed. and trans. by James Robson (London, 1938); the *Kashf al-mahjūb* of al-Hujwīri, pp. 393–420.

54. Ṭabasī, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

55. *Rasā'il*, Vol. VII, 'The Stages of the Rind', pp. 16–17.

56. *Gulshan-i rāz*, ll. 842–3.

57. For a discussion on Tantrik Hinduism see the many works of Sir John Woodruffe (Arthur Avalon).

58. *Gulshan-i rāz*, ll. 775, 769–70.

59. Lāhijī in *Gulshan-i rāz*, note to section entitled 'On the Mole'.

60. *Ibid.*, ll. 745–6, 754.

61. *Ibid.*, Lāhijī's note on 'Down'.

62. See *Mirṣād al-'ibād*, pp. 266–8.

63. See Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh Hamadānī (M. Ja'far Kabūdrāhangī), *Marāḥil al-sālikīn* (Tehran, 1351 S.), pp. 112–19.

64. Al-Qushayrī, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 553.

65. This position is said to represent the letters 'lām' and 'alif', 'lā' (no), and thus to symbolize the negation of the self.

66. *Mathnawī*, Nicholson's translation, introduction to Book V, Vol. VI, p. 3. See also Burckhardt's *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, pp. 99–110.

67. Burckhardt, *Introduction*, pp. 151 and 154.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 240–1.

III The Disciples and Descendants of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī

Despite the scope and brilliance of his writings, Shāh Ni'matullāh's most important contribution to Sufism was the Order he founded, which is today without doubt (especially if all its branches be considered) the most active and widespread in Persia. How – and to whom – did Shāh Ni'matullāh transmit his barakah, that initiatory light which burns as brightly today as it did in the 15th century? Who guarded that light and cultivated it during the centuries between Shāh's death and the moment, late in the 18th century, when it would suddenly spread like brush-fire across all Iran?

These questions have received almost no attention from Western scholars, and little more even from the 'official' historians of the Order itself in the 19th century. There are gaps – but enough is known to trace something of Ni'matullāh's history in those years.

Shāh Dā'i Shīrāzī

Something has already been said about one of Shāh Ni'matullāh's disciples, Darvīsh Ṭabasī, whose essays were only recently re-discovered and published in Iran. Ṭabasī was so 'annihilated in the Master' (*fanā' fi'l-shaykh*) that his writing can scarcely be distinguished from Shāh Ni'matullāh's, and in fact probably consists mostly of lecture notes. Much more interesting from the literary point of view is Shāh Dā'i Shīrāzī, another of Ni'matullāh's heirs who has only recently begun to receive the attention he deserves.¹ Persian literature contains so many great authors that even Shāh Ni'matullāh himself is usually considered only of the second or third rank. By these exalted standards, Shāh Dā'i must be fourth rank – at best – but he is without doubt an excellent writer, and the fact that he has gone unnoticed for so long is due not to any

innate lack of quality but to the luminescence of his competition.

Born 810/1406-7, died 870/1464-5 and buried in Shiraz, he was first initiated into Sufism by Abū Ishāq Bahrāmī, known as 'the Shaykh of Four Books', a khalīfah or representative of both Shāh Nī'matullāh and Qāsim al-Anwār.² When he had advanced as far on the Path as Bahrāmī could take him, the Master told him, 'Before the two great men (Shāh Nī'matullāh and Anwār) pass away, you should go and meet one of them.'³

Soon afterwards, Dā'ī dreamt of a Sufi meeting, where an old man sat before a flowing fountain, busy sewing. Dā'ī realized that the old man was Bāyazīd al-Baṣṭāmī; Bāyazīd told him: 'This job of sewing first belonged to Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, and in his hand he had wool.⁴ Then the task passed to me, and in my hand there is thread. Now it is Shāh Nī'matullāh's turn, and in his hand it has become silk!'

Next day, when Dā'ī reported the dream to Bahrāmī, the Master declared, 'It is decreed: you will go to Kirman, to the King of Māhān.' Although it was winter, Dā'ī set out at once for Māhān with his brother and a few companions. The way was beset with many difficulties, and as many miracles and visions. When they finally reached the goal, Nī'matullāh received Dā'ī and initiated him at once. Dā'ī wrote:

I reached Māhān and my soul awoke;
Shāh Nī'matullāh has become the master of my heart.⁵

Dā'ī returned to Shiraz. When Shāh Nī'matullāh died, Dā'ī was 24 years old. When Bahrāmī died in 841, Dā'ī became the khalīfah of the Order in Shiraz, and it was about then that he began to compose his poetry and essays, which were later to be copied and collected by his son.⁶

Our author's takhalluṣ (pen-name), Dā'ī, means 'he who prays' (it is also the term for an Ismā'īlī missionary); it did not belong to him exclusively, but rather to his family, which traced its descent from a king of that name.⁷ Although Dā'ī himself was a member of several Sufi Orders, including the Aḥmadi-Qādirīs of Asia Minor, and the Ṣafawīs, there is no doubt that his first allegiance was to Shāh Nī'matullāh, whom he praised in a number of poems:

Come spread your arms to heaven, O Dā'ī,
 If like us you are one of the beggars of God's Bounty
 (Nī'mat Allāh).⁸

Most of Dā'ī's essays were written at the request of one of his disciples; among the sixteen treatises⁹ there is an essay on clothes, an interpretation of some Quranic verses, a Persian translation of one of the short works of Ibn 'Arabī, a verse commentary on some of the maxims of 'Alī, and so on. His prose style is lucid and flowing. In *Rāh-i rawshan* ('The Clear Path') he declares that in speaking, a Sufi must use short concise sentences, and not force himself into artificialities in order to produce rhymed prose or clever stories or apt quotations. Of course, if these occur naturally and spontaneously, so much the better – otherwise the Sufi should avoid such restrictions. These rules in fact describe Dā'ī's own style very well; and this 'giving up of forced and vain formality' is sometimes given as a definition of Sufism.¹⁰

Among Dā'ī's essays, one of the most interesting is the *Kalimāt al-bāqīyyah* ('Eternal Sayings') which consists of a number of aphorisms illustrating various points of doctrine and practice. For example:

Nothing is before God and nothing is after Him; nothing other than He Himself is above Him or below Him. All that which is before or after Him, whether hidden or apparent, is One – His right and left, up and down, near and far, are all One. It is for this reason that He cannot be said to have any place or direction.

(p. 20)

Man should never imagine that he can see God the Absolute in His Real Form, for this is impossible. Anything which can be made to fit man's senses or reason or fancy or imagination is not the Absolute, but rather an aspect of His Attributes which has been reflected in the mirror of sense, reason, illusion or imagination.

(p. 21)

He who 'gains' something is merely crippled by that which he gains.

(p. 23)

No one has ever known God and the soul as they really are. Nay, no one has even known a single atom as it really is.

(p. 23)

Whatever man knows he knows only according to his aptitude and capacity. Therefore sometimes he is faithful and sometimes he denies; sometimes he makes exalted claims and sometimes he ends up impotent.

(p. 23)

One saint is like the ocean, and he is called the qutb; another is like the fiery oven, and he is called 'fard' (unique). There is a saint who is so overwhelmingly fearful that one cannot look at him; and another at whose face people glance with the eye of scorn, unable to recognize him.

(p. 24)

To know the Sufis one needs a perfect mind, or a dominating love, or eyes through which he can see the whole world, or a secluded heart.

(p. 24)

The thought of Shāh Dā'ī, like that of his master Shāh Ni'matullāh, was greatly influenced by that of the great Andalusian Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī. In some ways it might be called a popularization of Ibn 'Arabī, for although Dā'ī is perfectly capable of pure metaphysical exposition, he ties it as often as not to examples couched in lyrical or narrative verse.

One of the most delightful examples of metaphysical verse to be found in Dā'ī's *Dīwān* is a section in mathnawī metre which we have called 'The Tale of the Fish'.¹¹ In his preface to this fable, Dā'ī explains that before the emergence of consciousness (shuhūd, 'witness'), God was a hidden treasure (referring to the ḥadīth-i qudsī, 'I was a Hidden Treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the world that I might be known'). As the philosophers have said, being or existence cannot be defined, even though it is far more clear than anything else. The mind can never reach Essence (or the Absolute) because Being is without definition or limitation or description of any sort. There is no plurality in His Essence; He is neither composite nor simple, neither substance nor accident. He is the Essence of all created beings because He Himself is stripped from the chains of creation.

Ibn 'Arabī's position is identical: 'The Absolute in such an absoluteness . . . (God in Himself as He really is), is absolutely inconceivable and inapproachable', that is, transcends every definition man can think of. Thus He is 'the Mystery of mysteries, . . . the most indeterminate of all indeterminates,

the abysmal darkness . . . something that lies at the source of all . . . existents and makes them exist. It is Existence as the ultimate ground of everything'.¹²

And yet, Dā'ī points out, since He is the Essence of the created world, He is not totally removed from conditionality. If He is the unconditioned, He is also the conditioned – if He is the Worshipped, He is at the same time the worshipper. 'At this stage, there exists between the two (God and the world) a relation of reciprocal need (iftiqār, lit. 'poverty'). As Kāshānī (a well-known commentator of Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) says, 'The world is in need of the Reality for its existence, while the Reality is in need of the world for its self-manifestation'.¹³

Our definition and His Unity are one and the same, Dā'ī asserts. His Transcendence (tanzīh) and His Immanence (tashbīh) are one and the same. Seeing Reality as Transcendence is 'merely half of the (perfect) knowledge of God', according to Ibn 'Arabī. 'The pure intellect . . . which has freed itself completely from anything physical and material . . . cannot by nature see God except in His Transcendence'. The other half of knowledge, however, deals with Immanence, 'because God is Transcendent and Immanent at the same time'.¹⁴

Although there is but one ocean and countless waves, Dā'ī explains, all these waves are water in the same ocean. Determinations (the waves) are simply a mental construct, and if this mentality is put aside, all the waves will appear again as water; no determination will remain. According to Ibn 'Arabī, 'The most appropriate symbol of Life (or existence) is afforded by "water" . . . "The secret of Life is in the act of flowing peculiar to water". And everything in existence has a watery element in its very constitution, because water is the most basic of all elements. Everything is alive because of the "water" it contains. And this "watery" element . . . corresponds to the He-ness of the Absolute.

'Each single thing is in itself a unique existent (like a wave), and yet it immersed in the limitless ocean of Life . . . In the first aspect, everything is unique and single, but in the second aspect everything loses its identity in the midst of the "water" that flows through all.'¹⁵

THE TALE OF THE FISH

Now once upon a time a school of fish
had met in council to discuss the tale
(familiar to all) that fish had life
and breathed and took existence from one source:
The Water. Furthermore, that *all* which lives
from Water gains its living, finds its life
in Water. Water's fame fills all the world,
and Water fills the oyster's ear with pearl,
the eyes of heavy clouds with mercy, mouth
of dust with flowing bounty. All the earth
has pledged its soul as mortgage to this source,
this element which with one drop renews
the world – which with such light abounds, it seems
that Heaven's very eye is fixed upon it.
Man (so says the tale) appeared from but
a single drop of it, and from it sprang
the vasty ocean of all heart and soul.

The school of fish were puzzled by all this,
and thus began to argue what it meant:
one of them said, 'Beware! What right have we
to sully with our words the bright-faced one,
His Majesty the Water?' Then a fish
(more optimistic) spoke and said, 'But wait!
Such disappointment must be a mistake,
for what if the whole tale were true, what then?'
'There must be proof!' a third demanded, 'for
without some hard facts, who knows what is true?'
A fourth burst out: 'Ah! Now I see it all!
All is unveiled through intuition, for
on such a Path, mere thought has far less chance!'
'That would be fine, my friend', the fifth
fish said, 'if everyone possessed, like you,
the eye of intuition; but, in truth,
they simply don't – and there's an end to that.'
'The Inner State! That's the real thing, not words',
another shouted. 'Only Water pure
will satisfy the thirsty ones.'

'No, wait',
then spoke another delegate. 'I think
that only Love can guide us now, and if
you do not have His Love, give up and call
the conference off.' Thus spoke the fish, and thus
they wrangled, flinging forth opinions till

the sea grew warm with all their hot debate,
when from the circle of contention, one
of the companions stepped, and cleared his throat.
'I am the humblest and most ignorant
of fish, yet hear me, and if what I say
meets with approval, then abide by it
and put an end to strife'; thus was his speech.
'I know that, in a distant quarter of
our sea, there lives an ancient fish, who more
than any here possesses wisdom, Truth,
sagacity. On all horizons of
our sea, in science there is none like he,
but listen: all his knowledge and degree
of wisdom does not spring from written page
or dusty book, for in his school (they say)
such seas of ink are but a vagrant stream,
and knowledge such as he possesses, from
the inmost level of the heart springs forth.
In deepest trenches of our unplumbed sea
he roams, and shuns the shallows and the shores.
Come, let us to him with our questions swim,
let all the drops return unto their source.
Perhaps our puzzle will be solved by him
and thereby all our hearts gain rest at last.'

This sound advice at once infused the fish
with new enthusiasm, and as one
they clamoured their acclaim and new-found hope
that promised a solution to their quest.
So, one by one they swam, set out towards him;
anxiety suffused their hearts with blood,
their eyes with tears, their journey with dispatch.
Boundless hardship plagued their path – success
came only after infinite distress.
But finally they found the ancient one
who of all fish in that Age was the Pole,
and to his august presence bowed themselves
in deep humility and courtesy
as well they might. Their spokesman rose and said,
'O Shaykh, O thou who sought and found
the secrets of the universe, now peer
into our hearts, for God's sake, hear our plea.
We have been told that Water is the source
and origin of all, the ferment of
all union and all separation; but

how strange this seems to us, how hard to grasp,
since we have never seen this Water, not
a one of us, not once in all our lives!
Towards thee we have been swimming day and night
yet from this ocean of perplexity
have found no exit. Not a trace of Him,
this fabled Water, not a single drop
before our eyes has fallen – and obsessed
by questing, tossed in raging floods of doubt
and torrents of dismay, we come to thee
as our last hope. Now could it be that thou,
for love of God and in thy grace, might feel
some pity for our plight, illuminate
the darkened minds of fish and demonstrate
this Water to us like a noble sun
in such a way that clouds might never veil
its face nor hide its brilliance from our sight.'

The ancient fish was silent. On his breast
he sank the chin of meditation, till
at last from his communion with the World
of the Unseen, he raised his countenance
and spoke. 'Ah, fish! If you could bring to me
from all existence one thing, and one thing
alone that is *not* Water, then I might
reveal to you the Essence which you seek.
But mark this well, that there is naught but He!
This endless ocean which surrounds us, that
is He, and so are we. We each came forth
from Water, and unto the Water shall
return.' Upon the fishes' minds these words
worked miracles. Their hearts and eyes became
a veritable sea of lights. They cried
'So He it is who all this while hath sought
Himself; and He and I and we and thou
are but a pretext, subterfuge and trick!
Our doubts and questions rose from this one fact,
that Water's veil is Water – nothing more.
Thank God our troubling doubts are put to flight,
imagination and warped fantasies
dispelled at last and laid to rest. Now we
have learned that all our voyaging is but
an inward voyage, and in all our sea
none swim beside us. All, all, all is He!'

MORAL

The less, the more – the good, the bad – the sweet
 and bitter: If we wish to pry within
 the secrets of a thing, we must perforce
 have recourse to its opposite, its twin.
 But know that our Creation's eyes are blind
 because HE has no opposite, no like,
 comparison nor similitude; and in
 His Essence, all such opposites are one.
 How faint, how small our knowledge of this truth,
 for knowledge is distinction, nor can we
 distinguish aught except between two things.
 The portals of Distinction have been closed
 by Unity, and if you should attain
 to gnosis in the One, then recognize
 that though He be possessed of attributes,
 His Essence is but One – 'Say: He is One!'

Shah Dā'ī's lyrical poetry, though not as outstanding as that
 of Shāh Nī'matullāh, is still worth reading. To end this
 account of Dā'ī's life and works, we quote several examples:

- I. Lovers: He Whom you seek
 is with you
 Search within and without
 He is with you.

At each breath He sets
 a lover's exam
 and if you pass the test
 He is with you.

The soul's inmost secret is lit
 with His grace
 I have seen the middle of the secret:
 He is with you.

The people of the heart have sacrificed
 their heads and purses
 Appreciate this free offer:
 He is with you.

Now He says seek me in the heart
 now with your eyes

Both are simply an excuse
He is with you.

In every atom of the universe
the flash of the sun
I know no better clue than this:
He is with you.

On my tongue His remembrance
in my eyes His grace
O Dā'ī, He is with you in word and sight
He is with you.

(6335)

- II. Most folk are either drunk or sober but we,
engaged with thy face, are disengaged from all the rest.

The cross-eyed can see only double, but nothing
but One takes shape before our eyes.

Everyone reaps something from this world but we
have gained nothing since the Day of Covenant but love.

No one has ever breathed one breath in joy
who has not for one breath been free from himself.

Go ask Dā'ī about this blissful condition
who washed his hands of all but the Friend.

(6285)

- III. Each atom explodes in flame
through the sun of thy face
The lover's heart
and soul were singed
But thou art love and thou
art lover and beloved
So what has the heart
gained from all this?

(8091-2)

- IV. If you desire
to see Him inwardly
beyond created things
outside 'here' and 'there'
first become an eye
all eye from head to toe
then open the eye of heart
and soul and . . . see.

(8173-4)

'O King of the World! I spend one day carding cotton
and the next three days plucking cotton from my beard.'

Getting cotton out of the beard of the carder is as hard
As keeping flies off cotton candy!

Bushāq was still a child when Shāh Nī'matullāh visited Shiraz, but he may later have been attracted to the Nī'matul-lāhī Order through his friendship with Shāh Dā'ī. Bushāq had then already begun to write his remarkable parodies of all the great poets of Persia, in which he translated the language of love and gnosis into the language of food. It is worth quoting his preface to *The Treasure of Appetite* (*Kanz al-ishṭihā*) to give some idea of his intentions:

Thus saith the weakest of the servants of God the All-Provider, Abū Ishāq, known as the Cotton-carder, may his comforts endure! At the time when the tree of youth was casting its shadow, and the branch of gladness was heavy with the fruit of hopes, a few verses, of an extemporized character and appropriate to every topic, were produced by me. I thought within myself, 'The wisest course is this, that I should in such wise guide the steed of poetry through the arena of eloquence, and so spread the banquet of verse on the table of diction, that those who partake at the board of pleasure should obtain the most abundant helping; and that the masters of eloquence should be filled with admiration therefor, so that this may conduce to my greater fame and popularity.' For I had heard this verse, which says:

'Whatever verse I may utter, others have uttered it all,
And have penetrated all its domain and territory.'

For some days my thoughts ran in this channel: 'Having regard to the epic narrative of Firdawsī, the salt of whose speech is the flavouring of the saucepan of every food; and the *mathnawīs* of Nizāmī, the sugar of whose verses is the dainty morsel of sweet-tongued parrots; and the *ṭayyibāt* of Sa'dī, which, by general accord, are like luscious honey to the palate of the congenial; and the odes of Khwājah Jamāl'ud-Dīn Salmān, which take the place of milk and honey in the mouths of philologists; and the products of the genius of Khwājū of Kirman, the carraway-syrup of whose utterance is a cure for the melancholics of the fetters of verse; and the subtle sayings of 'Imād-i-Faqīh, whose sweet utterances are as fragrant spices and delicious potions; and the fluent phraseology and

well-weighed thoughts of Ḥāfiẓ, which are as a wine fraught with no headache and a beverage delicious to the taste; and other poets, each of whom was the celebrity of some city and the marvel of some age, what fancies can I concoct whereby men can be made glad?

While I was thus meditating, on a favourable morning, when according to my wont and habit, the smoke of an unfeigned appetite rose up from the kitchen of my belly, there suddenly entered through the door my silver-bosomed sweetheart, my moon-faced darling, whose eyes are like almonds, whose lips are like sugar, whose chin is like an orange, whose breasts are like pomegranates, whose mouth is like a pistachio-nut, smooth-tongued, melodious of utterance, lithe as a fish, sweet-voiced, with a mole like musk; even as the poet says:

By reason of the sweet smiles of the salt-cellar of her mouth
Blood flows from the heart, as from a salted kebab.

Said she, 'I have quite lost my appetite, and suffer from a feeling of satiety; what is the remedy?' I replied, 'Just as in the case of that person who went to a physician, complaining that he was impotent, and the physician thereupon composed for him the (book entitled) *Alfiyyah Shalfiyyah*, which when he had perused it he at once took to his embraces a virgin girl, so I will compose for thee a treatise on the table, such that when thou hast once read it, thy appetite will return.' So for her sake I girded up the loins of my soul, and cooked a meal garnished with verbal artifices and rhetorical devices, and baked in the oven of reflection with the dough of deliberation a loaf which rivalled the orb of the sun in its conquest of the world; so that I can proudly exclaim:

I have spread a table of verse from Qāf to Qāf;
Where is the fellow-trencherman who can rival me?

Bushāq could not help poking fun at Sufism, as this one example from his 'Glossary' (farhang) reveals:

'Biwārid' is a kind of pickle which the ragged Master Vinegar sends to sit in a forty-day retreat in the solitary cell of the picklejar till it receives revelations from the World of the Grape-syrup Bottle. Then he is taken to the Sufi-house of the dining table and sits on the prayer-mat of white bread with the green-salad disciples, and finally in the world of gnosis, he recites this verse:

I have suffered the pain of separation
Until now I have reached Union, just as
The Quranic Verses of Mercy come
After those of the torments of Hell!

But there is no doubt that Bushāq was a Sufi – if the evidence of later historians were not enough, we have the proof of the eulogy by his contemporary, Shāh Dā'i. In an age where 'mysticism' is generally considered a grave affair, an age which has forgotten that laughter is also an aid on the Path, Bushāq's 'sincerity' may be viewed with doubt; but his contemporaries seem to have seen no contradiction between his spiritual attainments and his sense of humour.

Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj said 'I am the Truth'
Bushāq al-Ḥallāj says 'I am the Pudding'.
That was the Ḥallājian claim
And *this* is the essence of it!¹⁹

Among the great writers re-cooked and carved up by Bushāq was Shāh Nī'matullāh himself. Although Bushāq's poetry is extremely difficult to translate, due to the innumerable references to medieval menus, recipes, long-forgotten dainties and culinary paraphernalia, these parodies of Shāh Nī'matullāh are eminently worthwhile. We have therefore translated both the original models by Nī'matullāh (among his most beautiful and spiritually exalted works) and the take-offs by his disciple.

Shāh Nī'matullāh:

I am in such a state with my beloved, source of my life,
that my soul no longer fits within me –
Between me and that heart-thief such a secret lies
that my heart, too, no longer fits within me.
The tavern: the Saki, and we the drunkards
cup of wine in hand;
In the solitary quarters of the heart
nothing, no one has a place but the beloved.
This pain! what sort of riot can it be
that does not spread to every heart?
This love: what kind of grief
that will not fit in every head?
My heart, the incense – love the fire –
my breast the smoking censer –
In longing to be gulfed by flame
my frankincense will spill and overflow.

What word is this I read
 that is not found on any page
 What wisdom within me
 that will not fit in any book?
 Go, head-spinning Reason, tire and weigh us not,
 for now is the gathering
 Of airy spirits, no spot,
 no room for heavy souls.
 I am the favourite of the King's High Court
 I am the companion of God's Bounty
 I kiss the lips of the goblet
 and words, words will no longer fit.²⁰

Bushāq's parody:

I am in such a state with the pudding
 that there's no room left for the sauce;
 Ah, such a burning desire for lamb-chops
 that my heart will not fit within me anymore.
 What secrets bubble in the boiled sheep's-head
 not every heart may know;
 What sort of delicacy is its brain
 that will not fit in every skull?
 The pudding is the incense, the fire the dried-dung fuel,
 the censer is the pudding pot;
 In the yearning for burning
 that incense will not fit the censer.
 I am the favourite of bread and pudding
 I am a match for any amount of sweetmeats,
 I bite the lip of the pastry
 and words, words no longer fit my mouth.
 In the presence of the chicken and the honey-cake
 forget about the spilled macaroni;
 This is the gathering of airy spirits!
 No room for such a soggy mess.
 Go, sweet ice-cream,
 tire us not
 For in the gathering of marzipan
 there's no room for aught but sugar.
 The stomach of Bushāq
 is so stuffed with pie
 He no longer searches for candy
 and artichokes just won't fit anymore.²¹

Shāh Ni'matullāh:

Drowned in the shoreless ocean sometimes
we are waves, sometimes the sea itself.
We are the songbird of the Beloved's rosebed
as her lover we sing the canticles of love.
We are the sun of the sky of heart and soul
and thus we move from horizon to horizon.
We are not fit for any job
except the work of making love.
Today we are drunk and in love
and know nothing of the headaches of tomorrow.
Our beloved has become the very light of our eyes
and thus and only thus do we have sight.
Careless drunk, staggering drunk
we come from the tavern of love.
Since we first saw her face, her tresses,
sometimes we are believers, sometimes Christians.
All creatures are blind and sightless
or they would see us manifest as the sun itself.
We have come into this world
only to show God to His Creation.
If you are sick and seek physicians
we are the doctor for everything and all.
If anyone should ask for God's Bounty
tell him to come to us, to Ni'matullāh.²²

Bushāq's parody:

We are macaronis in the Casserole of Gnosis
sometimes lumps of dough and sometimes pie.
On the surface of the stew we are dollops of rich grease
and we befriend the yoghurt-meatball soup.
Now we are the Simurgh on the slopes of sheeptail fat
now the Phoenix on the Mount of Meat.
We have descended to this kitchen only that we might
reveal the meatsauce unto the spaghetti.
Like the dates within a bowl of rice-pudding
sometimes we are manifest and sometimes not.
This boiled sheephead now becomes the light within our eyes
and thus through its eyes we have our sight.
We've skewered up our egos like kebabs upon the spit,
disciples of the haggis at this feast.

Clots of honey-comb are we afloat amidst the butter:
sometimes we are up and sometimes down.

Like Bushāq the Masterchef are we
fit for nothing but such gluttony!²³

At one point in his life, Bushāq finally made the pilgrimage to Māhān to sit at the feet of the Master he so admired. When Shāh Nī'matullāh met him, he asked, 'What have you said in your poetry?'

Bushāq replied:

The report of the Peas at the Table of Khālilullāh
Ask from me, since I am the panegyrist of Nī'matullāh!

'Aha!' Shāh Nī'matullāh exclaimed. 'So *you* are the Macaroni of the Casserole of Gnosis!'

Apologetically Bushāq replied, 'Others talk about Allah. I talk about Nī'mat Allāh' (The Bounty of God – i.e. food).²⁴

We may assume that Shāh Nī'matullāh was not displeased with these quips, and initiated Bushāq in Māhān; Nī'matullāh's son, Shāh Khālilullāh, may have actually instructed him in Sufism, for as the Gastronomer sings:

He who like Bushāq has supped the soup of Khālilullāh
Will become like Nī'matullāh the Commander of the World!²⁵

The Nī'matullāhī Family in Persia and India

Leaving aside Shāh Nī'matullāh's less well-known and less interesting literary disciples,²⁶ we come to his family – or rather the family of his only son, Shāh Burhān al-Dīn Khālilullāh. We have already described Khālilullāh's birth and early training in Chapter I, and shown how, in effect, he was raised to be a Sufi Master. Even while Shāh Nī'matullāh himself was alive, his disciples revered Khālilullāh as a murshid, as we noted in Bushāq's lines in praise of the 'peas of Khālilullāh', and as can be seen in this advice from Darvīsh Tabasī to his own children:

The last will and testament, the final advice of this faqīr to the dervishes and to his own children, is that they should adhere firmly to the straight Path of the Muhammadan Law and the Sufi Path of 'Alī, and in obedience to Haḍrat Amīr Sayyid Nī'matullāh *and his progeny*; to be firmly established in the spiritual states of the circle of his dervishes, and not to step

outside the shadow of the Eternal Government or the infinite grace of the dervishes at the door of God; so that in this world and the hereafter they may be respected and revered.²⁷

Just before Shāh Ni'matullāh died, Khālilullāh, who was then 59, was appointed Qutb of the Order. After remaining in Māhān for a few years, he left for Herat at the invitation of Timur's son Shāh Rukh, and on his arrival there he was received with great honour. So exalted was this Sufi Master in the eyes of the king who had established Herat as the seat of Timurid culture, that he was given the privilege of riding to Court (like Shāh Rukh himself) in a howdah – presumably on a camel. Once at Court, he would sit on the same golden throne as the king himself. Shāh Rukh's courtiers became jealous, and one day one of the high officials accosted Khālilullāh and announced; 'Three objections to your behaviour have been raised: first, you ride in a howdah like the king himself, thereby showing disrespect. Second, you show more disrespect by sitting on the throne. And third, you pay no taxes on your land in Kirman.'

Khālilullāh answered: 'The sultan is no greater than his father Timur, and when my father visited him he went in a howdah. Once he told Timur, "My state is a world without end, while yours extends only from China to Shiraz." Secondly, my father told me, "Whoever feels hesitant about my children's precedence over them is a bastard", and I'm sure Shāh Rukh isn't a bastard. As for you, I don't know . . . you seem a bit hesitant.'

'As for the taxes, I must point out that the quarrel between Imām Ḥusayn and Caliph Yazīd was ostensibly on the same subject. Whatever you want from me I will give you – go and take it!'²⁸

Shāh Rukh's respect for Khālilullāh passed on to the next ruler of Herat, the enlightened Bāysunqur, who, it is said, used to pour water for the Master to wash his hands. After some years in Herat, Khālilullāh told one of his four sons, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad, to stay in Māhān, while he and his other two sons, Muḥibb al-Dīn Ḥabībullāh and Ḥabīb al-Dīn Muḥibbullāh, journeyed to the Deccan to join his fourth son, Nūrullāh, who had already been there for some time, having been sent by Shāh Ni'matullāh in response to a request from Aḥmad Shāh Walī, the Sufi king.

The family flourished in their adopted homeland. Khalilullāh himself remained there until his death in 860/1455-6. He was buried in a sumptuous tomb near that of Aḥmad Shāh Walī, not far from the town of Bidar.²⁹ All three of Khalilullāh's sons married into the Indian royal family.³⁰ Ḥabibullāh was more inclined to the military than the religious life, and was given the title ghāzī (protector of the Faith), and some land, for his prowess in battle against the unbelievers. Muḥibullāh, the Quṭb after Shāh Khaḥilullāh, lived a quiet life in a khāniqāh near Bidar, and survived to take part in the coronation ceremonies of Maḥmūd Shāh Bahmanī in 887/1482.³¹ He died at the age of 78 and was succeeded by his son.

It would be tedious to trace here what little we know of the succession of Quṭbs after this (see Appendix II), and their travels between India and Persia – a task which we have carried out in our article, published in the Deccan, 'The Descendants of Shāh Nī'matullāh Walī'.³² A thorough search of libraries in India may succeed in turning up some information about these men, but for the time being we must simply assume that they kept the Nī'matullāhī flame burning; for although they apparently did not proselytize or try to spread the influence of the Order, they remained in themselves a potent source of spirituality. Unlike many Indian Sufis they never allowed the Order to degenerate into a family hegemony, with property and ritual 'barakah' passed down from father to son. This is proved by the fact that, although the Nī'matullāhī family lives in Bidar to this day, the position of Quṭb passed out of its hands in the 18th century into the keeping of a remarkable man, about whom we shall have something to say in the next chapter.

Notes

1. See the *Dīwān-i Shāh Dā'i*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāql, introduction by 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran, 1339 S.), two volumes.

2. See Part I, Chap. 1, note 24 (page 33).

3. Razzāq, p. 82.

4. Bāyazīd and Ibn Adham were two of the most famous Sufis of the 3rd/9th century.

5. *Dīwān-i Shāh Dā'i*, Vol. II, p. 87.

6. *Ibid.*, intro., p. 'LB'. At the time the *Dīwān* was first collected, Dā'i was 55 years old. (Herman Ethé, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*; Oxford, 1903; No. 1099)

7. This was Dā'i al-Ṣaghīr, the last 'Alawī ruler of Tabaristān and Gīlān, who was killed in 316/928. (*Dā'irat al-ma'ārif-i Fārsī*, ed. Gh. Muṣāhib; Tehran, 1345 S.; Vol. I, p. 943)

8. *Dīwān-i Shāh Dā'i*, Vol. II, p. 755. There are several stories about Shāh Ni'matullāh, reported by Shāh Dā'i, to be found in Razzāq's *Manāqib-i Ḥaḍrat-i Shāh Ni'matullāh*. One autumn, Shāh Ni'matullāh was making a retreat in a cave in the mountains near Samarqand when it began to snow heavily. All winter and part of the spring had gone by, when a party of hunters, caught in a rainstorm, dug away the snow from the mouth of the cave. Inside, they saw a fire and found Shāh Ni'matullāh sitting on his prayer mat facing Mecca, still 'utterly absorbed in God' (p. 40).

Shāh Dā'i also reports that his own Shaykh Bahrāmī told him of a group of Indians who believe that every 3000 years, God 'The Absolute Bestower' (presumably Vishnu) appears in the form of a man; if this story were true, says Bahrāmī, Shāh Ni'matullāh would have been one of these manifestations (p. 81).

9. *Shānzdah risālah az Shāh Dā'i Shīrāzī* (Sixteen Treatises), ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī (Tehran, 1340 S.), pp. 79–87.

10. 'Al-Taṣawwuf tark al-takalluf'. 'Sufism is the giving up of forced and artificial formality'. This does not mean that Sufism is without Courtesy, adab, which in fact is one of the most important, indeed essential, qualities a dervish can possess: 'Love – all of it! – is adab'. The difference between takalluf and adab is precisely the difference between profane and sacred.

11. From the 'mathnawī-i ganj-i rawān' (Treasure of Soul – with pun on 'running water'), Vol. I, pp. 42–44. Dā'i's *Dīwān* contains in the first volume, a 'Sextet of Mathnawīs' of which the *Ganj-i rawān* is the second. (This poem, 'The Tale of The Fish', was also published in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Spring 1976, pp. 98–105.)

12. T. Izutsu, *A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism – Ibn 'Arabī and Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu* (Tokyo, 1966), Vol. I, p. 19.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 141–142. The materialistic interpretation of Thales claims that his question (What is the basic element of Nature?) is more important than his answer (Water); but if this answer be seen in the light of the sacred traditions, such as Sufism, Thales may have to be reconsidered in a more spiritual sense.

16. *Dīwān-i Shāh Dā'ī*, Vol. II, pp. 312–15.

Shāh Dā'ī gives the date of Bushāq's death in this poem as the numerological equivalent of the word 'khurdam' (I ate); that is, 850/1446. This is undoubtedly correct, rather than 814/1416 (given by E.G. Browne, Vol. III, p. 211) or 828/1424–831/1427 (given by A.J. Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature*, p. 410), or any of the three possibilities – 827/1424, 830/1427 or 860/1456 – offered by Jan Rypka in his *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht, Holland, 1968), p. 273. Our version of his life is based on the assumption that he lived from somewhere between 800 and 810 to 850, and therefore differs somewhat from the versions given by such occasionally inaccurate chroniclers as Daulatshāh Samarqandi (in his *Tadhkirat al-shu'arā'*, Tehran, 1338 S.) and 'Abd al-Razzāq (in his *Manāqib-i Haqrat-i Shāh Ni'matullāh*), and later writers who have depended on them. See N. Pourjavady, 'Bushāq-i Aṭ'imah rā bihtar bishināsm', *Yaghmā*, number 320, Urdūbihisht 1354 S. pp. 109–113.

17. If this story has any truth at all to it, this cannot be Iskandar ibn 'Umar Shaykh Mirzā, the grandson of Timur, as Daulatshāh claims (*op. cit.*, p. 276), but possibly may be his successor, or another high official. Iskandar was thrown out of Shiraz by Shāh Rukh about 817, when Bushāq was no more than 15 or so.

18. E.G. Browne, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 347–9.

19. *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq (T-a-H)*, by Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh (Muhammad Ma'sūm Shīrāzī) ed. M. Ja'far Mahjūb, three volumes (Tehran 1339 S.) Vol. III, p. 56. (Variation of a line in *Dīwān-i Bushāq*; Shiraz, n.d.; p. 96.)

20. *Dīwān-i Shāh Ni'matullāh*, p. 266.

21. *Dīwān-i Bushāq*, pp. 62–3.

22. *Dīwān-i Shāh Ni'matullāh*, pp. 553–4.

23. *Dīwān-i Bushāq*, p. 86.

24. The first half of this story, according to 'Abd al-Razzāq (*op. cit.*, p. 88), occurred in Shiraz; but, as we have seen, this is chronologically impossible. Therefore we have taken the liberty, not of debunking the story, but of transposing the incident to Māhān, where Razzāq placed the second half of the tale.

25. *Dīwān-i Bushāq*, p. 69.

26. Daulatshāh, in enumerating the poets who were attached to the court of Shāh Rukh, mentions one Shaykh Ādhari of Isfarā' in (d. 866/1461-2) who 'visited Shāh Ni'matullāh, became a mystic, renounced the flattery of kings, and made a journey to India' (see Browne, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 497-8).

A certain Nizām al-Dīn Qārī of Yazd, also mentioned by Browne (*op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 351-3), seems to have been a literary disciple of Bushāq; he parodied many of the same authors, including Shāh Ni'matullāh, but in terms of clothes rather than food.

27. From the 'Anwār al-ḥaqā'iq', in *Āthār-i Darvish Muḥammad Ṭabasī*, p. 233.

28. *Jāmi'-i Muftīdī*, pp. 200-1.

29. Both of these tombs, and others belonging to members of the Ni'matul-lāhī family, are described at great length in the excellent survey *Bidar, its History and Monuments* (Oxford, 1947) by G. Yazdani. Aḥmad Walī's tomb is virtually a monument to Shāh Ni'matullāh – its walls are encrusted with golden verses from his *Dīwān*. Khalilullāh's tomb is surrounded by the graves of his sons, grandsons and descendants, some of whom, according to Yazdani (p. 143) still live in Bidar. There is some doubt that this tomb is in fact really Khalilullāh's, since there is another one claimed to be his in Māhān, next to Shāh Ni'matullāh's. W. Haig, in 'The Religion of Ahmad Shah Bahmani' p. 77, denies that Khalilullāh is buried in Bidar, but supplies no evidence to support his case.

In connection with Aḥmad Shāh's tomb, it is of great interest to note that his 'urs, or death anniversary, is celebrated by Hindu Lingayats as well as Muslims. 'The Jangam or the head of the Lingayats of Madhyal in the Gulbarga district . . . comes to Bidar with a train of about 300 men and a number of camels and horses. It is this Jangam who enters the sepulchre every day of the 'urs with orchestra and all emblems of royalty, blows the conch, crushes open the coconuts according to the accepted Hindu fashion, makes an offering of flowers to the sepulchre. But mark! This Jangam is dressed as an orthodox Muslim with the cap of Dervishes on his head and a staff in his hand, and is clothed in the flowing robes of a Muslim divine' (H.K. Sherwani, 'Cultural Influences under Aḥmad Shāh Walī Bahmanī', *Islamic Culture*, Oct. 1944; p. 375). A marvellous photograph of the Jangam and his followers at the tomb is to be seen as Plate LXXV of Yazdani's *Bidar*. For the tenets of the Lingayat sect, and some of their mystical love poetry, see *Speaking of Siva*, translated with an introduction by A.K. Ramanujan (Middlesex, England, 1963), a Penguin classic.

30. Nūrullāh married one of Aḥmad Shāh's daughters, Ḥabibullāh another, while Muḥibbullāh, the youngest son, married one of his granddaughters.

31. As Yazdani points out (*op. cit.*, p. 212), Muḥibbullāh would then have been quite advanced in years. 'According to Firishta two chairs of silver were placed, one on either side of the Turquoise Throne, and Shāh Muḥibb-ullāh and Sayyid Ḥabīb, who were the two most saintly personages of the time, placed the royal crown of the Baihmani kings on Maḥmūd Shāh's head, and then, each of them holding one of the kings's arms, helped him to ascend the royal throne, and they themselves sat on the silver chairs placed for them on either side of the throne' (Yazdani, p. 144). 'Sayyid Ḥabīb', whom we considered to have been Muḥibbullāh's brother Ḥabibullāh when we wrote 'The Descendants of Shāh Nūrmatullāh', would have had to have been well over 100 years old; it is more likely that he was another member of the family.

32. Their names:

Mir Shāh Kamāl al-Dīn 'Aṭīyyatullāh al-Ḥusaynī (the son of Muḥibbullāh)

Mir Shāh Burhān al-Dīn Khaḥlullāh II

Mir Shāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad

Mir Shāh Ḥabīb al-Dīn Muḥibbullāh II

Mir Shāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad II

Mir Shāh Kamāl al-Dīn 'Aṭīyyatullāh II

Mir Shāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad III

For the little information available on these figures, as well as on some little-known descendants of Shāh Nūrmatullāh in Iran, see our 'The Descendants of Shāh Nūrmatullāh Wafī' in *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, India, Jan. 1974.

IV The Vision of Riḍā 'Alī Deccani

In the Sufi view of history, events of spiritual significance do not arise from merely human intentions. The chain of occurrences we are about to describe, and which we may call 'the Nī'matullāhī renaissance', originated in an act which penetrated 'the Two Worlds', a Vision of the eighth Shī'ite Imām, 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā,¹ vouchsafed to his namesake, the 34th Quṭb of the Nī'matullāhī Order, Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Deccani.

Unlike certain other Sufi orders of Persian origin, the Nī'matullāhīs never spread widely over the Indian subcontinent. However, the order never became a family hegemony, nor the static guardian of the barakah of the tombs of its founders; it remained, in the Sufi sense of the word, a 'traveling' order, one whose Masters were capable of guiding seekers to the end of the Path. It was popular in the Deccan; it retained a few adherents in Persia; it was small, quiet, but potent.

The Quṭb of the time, Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Deccani, was an Indian, though he had Persian blood. He was extraordinarily long-lived, dying, according to one source, at the age of 120, which would make the date of his birth 1094/1683.² At the time of his Vision, he must have been in his 70's or 80's. He was an ardent Shī'ite, but even so was revered by Sunnis as well as non-Muslims.

Riḍā 'Alī Shāh was Quṭb for 60 years (i.e., from 1154/1741) and trained numerous disciples; he lived on through all the years of the Order's revival in Persia,³ sometimes receiving dervishes who came to visit him from abroad. 'What do you want with me?' he would ask them. 'My disciples are in Persia – go back to them!'

Undoubtedly the most important of his disciples was Sayyid Mīr 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, born of a wealthy and aristocratic

Deccani family around 1151/1738. Like all the dervishes, he received a new name in the *ṭarīqah*: Ma'sūm (Pure, or Iner-rant, Sinless) 'Alī (after 'Alī, the son-in-law of the Prophet, the first Shī'ite Imām) Shāh ('King', or 'Master', after Shāh Nī'matullāh himself, the King of Saints). 'It is said that when Sayyid Ma'sūm rode on a horse eighty people would walk after him with gold and silver staves, as was the custom in India.' When, having become desirous of the Way, he arrived at the khāniqāh of Riḍā 'Alī Shāh with all this pomp, he was refused admission and told to come back the next day.

He said to himself, 'The King has told me
If you want admission you must come alone;
Truly, I am accompanied by much worldly wealth –
How can I be alone with all these possessions?' ...
So all that our hero owned
He gave away amongst his friends
And of all his wealth kept not even enough
To carry a gift to his sovereign lord ...
Along the road, on his way to the khāniqāh,
He found some camel dung (useful for fuel),
And, having nothing else, took it with him
As an offering to that incomparable one.⁴

Sayyid Ma'sūm was short, rather thin and dark, with a graceful countenance. He carried the accoutrements and wore the dress of a dervish,⁵ and spoke very little. Everything he received he distributed among the dervishes, keeping nothing for himself.

Persians who had become attracted to Sufism had recently been travelling to India to seek for a Master; some of them asked Riḍā 'Alī Shāh to send a representative to Persia, just as the Indians themselves had once asked Shāh Nī'matullāh to send one of his sons to the Deccan. As if in answer to these pleas, the Master experienced his Vision of Imām Riḍā, who ordered him to send his disciple, Sayyid Ma'sūm, to Persia.⁶ It is also said that Riḍā 'Alī Shāh learned, during his visionary experience, that Ma'sūm would suffer and die in Persia if he went; but when he revealed this, Ma'sūm nevertheless agreed to go. He set out by ship across the Persian Gulf, arrived in Fars around 1184/1770,⁷ and proceeded towards Shiraz.

Zen Buddhist Masters have a *koan* (a riddle, or more exactly a paradox, given to disciples for meditation) which

asks, 'Why did Bodhidharma (the Fifth Patriarch, who introduced the teachings of Zen to the Far East) leave India and go to China?' Like all such riddles, this one defies mere rational solutions: the answer must be found in the heart. Why did Sayyid Ma'sūm leave India and come to Persia? If a reply be made in symbolic language, it might be said that Ma'sūm was a living fire, destined to meet and join with the fire in the hearts of those destined to be his disciples. And while Sayyid Ma'sūm was making his way towards Shiraz, those who yearned for him without knowing it were also moving towards him.

Meetings in Shiraz

Of these, the first were Mīrzā 'Abd al-Ḥusayn ibn Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Ṭabasī and his young son Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī. The father was to become one of Ma'sūm's most important shaykhs, and the son was to succeed Ma'sūm as Quṭb. Their Sufi names were Fayḍ ('Effusion') 'Alī Shāh, and Nūr ('Light') 'Alī Shāh.

The family of Fayḍ 'Alī Shāh was from Tūn and Ṭabas, villages to the east of Isfahan, in the hottest and most remote reaches of the desert. It is said that in his youth Fayḍ was sent to Isfahan to study (he may even have been born there). But his father, Mullā Muḥammad 'Alī Ṭabasī, was Imam Jum'ah of Ṭabas; and when he died, Fayḍ took over the job, which consisted of leading prayers in the congregational mosque and providing responsible religious leadership for the community.

One day, as Fayḍ was going over the books in his late father's library, he found stuck in the back of one of them, between two pages, a note in his father's hand. It seemed to be a letter of advice. It read:

Since the Truth of Religion ought to be sought out,
That the Dust of Doubt might not cover it,
Beware of making your Faith mere Imitation;
Subject Religion to the Scrutiny of your Intelligence.
All this Knowledge is laid before you
Only to bring the World into Harmony.
My Son, you have read in the Book the Saying
'Take Knowledge from the mouths of Men'.
Men removed from all Imperfection and free of Fault.

Wherever you find such Men
 Make them a Lamp for your Path.
 Offer your Religion to them
 That your Tree of Faith may grow green.

This parental message, coming as it seemed from beyond the grave, affected him profoundly and caused a transformation in his personality. Realizing that his search for the Perfect Man described by his father would be impossible for him as long as he remained a respectable mullā, he decided to render himself infamous amongst the townsfolk and thus rid himself of his followers and responsibilities.

Changing into some old clothes he went to the mosque; instead of taking the place of honour, as usual, he went instead to an obscure corner, sat down without spreading out his prayer rug, and began to sew patches onto his robe. 'What are you doing?' asked one of the villagers.

'Making something to serve me as both carpet and robe', he answered.

'But you have clothes, you have carpets . . . !'

'Never mind, it's all the same.'

'Your followers are gathered and waiting for you', they told him.

'Why, I myself am a follower', Fayḍ answered.

'So-and-so and I are having a quarrel,' one of them said. 'Stop acting like this and come and tend to the problem!'

'I have already made peace with all creatures. Go away and let me patch this robe.'

When he had got rid of them he left the city at once, accompanied by only one disciple, and set out wandering from place to place, searching for a Master. His disciple later said that he hurried on the way so energetically that his sandals wore through and blood flowed from his feet, but he pushed on unaware of it. One night he saw the Prophet of God in a dream, who told him, 'Enter a castle and become a chain, that the Light of Truth may shine upon you.' But however much he searched he found no castle, and the more he searched the less trace of it did he find. Not until he reached Shiraz and found Ma'sūm, and was initiated, did he realize the interpretation of the dream: the Order, or silsilah (chain of initiation), was to become the chain of his soul – the castle was the spiritual domination of the Master.⁸

In 1190/1775–6 Sayyid Ma'šūm and his wife (about whom we unfortunately hear no more) arrived in Shiraz. Around the same time Fayḍ and his son Nūr 'Alī (the wife had died some years before) also arrived in the city and took up residence, after a fashion. Though Nūr 'Alī Shāh was young (perhaps no more than 15 or 16), he had already learned the principal religious sciences from his father, and shared his desire for enlightenment. He was reputed to be, and is traditionally represented as, a beautiful youth. It is significant that his biographer (in *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥah*) compares him to 'Irāqī and Awhād al-Dīn Marāghahī, as well as to Aḥmad Ghazālī, in order to describe his character. In the same way, his reputed physical beauty is also meaningful, for these statements about him and these qualities establish his reputation and position as one of the great masters of the Way of Love.⁹ Portraits of Nūr 'Alī are as standardized as icons: the same lovely, almost girlish face, framed by long tresses, the same graceful pose (leaning on his dervish axe, his begging bowl before him). They can be seen everywhere in Iran today, woven into rugs, engraved on brass trays, painted on coffee-house walls and on the sides of old horse-drawn carts in south Tehran. For Persians, Nūr 'Alī has in a certain sense become one of the archetypes of devotional consciousness.

Some insight into the spiritual character of Nūr 'Alī can immediately be gained by reading his own account of his first meeting with Sayyid Ma'šūm. It is part of his treatise *Uṣūl wa furū'*,¹⁰ a 'spiritual recital' or tale somewhat in the style of Suhrawardī's *Risālah fī ḥālat al-ṭufūliyyah*.¹¹ Part of the story is quite obviously allegorical, but there is no reason to question the basic facts presented in it.

One day, in the neighbourhood of the Dār al-'Ilm ('City of Knowledge', a name for Shiraz), I was walking, heart laden with pain and soul revelling in sorrow, helpless and obsessed with supplication, mixing the dust of the way with my tears; I was passing an alley when I noticed a man dressed in rags, clad in the cape of nakedness and the cap of signlessness. The Light of Lordship shone from his brow like a star of fortune, and he appeared quite clearly to have abandoned the thread of foresight and contrivance into the hand of Fate and bowed his head in renunciation, satisfied with his lot. A little mob of bewildered children had gathered around him, ignorant, as it

were, of both the state of the moth and of the candle, throwing rocks helter-skelter at his graceful head; while he, bright star of Wisdom's Zodiac, brilliant pearl of the Jewelbox of Unity, opened his petal-lips in the smile of an unfolding rose and sang in the tones of a nightingale

'The children's stones
Have made my head a tulip garden.
It is spring-time;
The madness has begun.'

Seeing this stranger in such a state, my pain increased a thousand-fold; the reins of my will slipped from my grasp and my sober mind reeled drunkenly. I wanted so badly to ask him what it all meant, but dared not. Dazzled with wonder I returned home and passed the night not in sleep, but tossing in a bed of wide-eyed restlessness. With dawn and the appearance of the world-illuminating sun I rose and left the house, and began to search for him. I ran from street to street, inquired from house to house, but in all the city found no trace of him. At length, distraught, I hurried out into the desert. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, I heard a voice say, 'You with the head-full of lunacy, you, my sober drunkard – I perceive some disturbance in your heart. Out with it: what do you desire?' I kissed the dust before him and approached, grasped the edge of his pure robe with both hands and whispered, 'You are aware of what I seek – I want consciousness of your State.'

With boundless kindness he spoke, as if Heaven were raining pearls, and said, 'So long as you have not freed yourself from worldly entanglements and come into the gathering of those who renounce this earth and find the realm of the Heart, you will never be fit to deserve my state.' I asked him how I might find this realm and he answered, 'Travel about inside yourself.'

'I am ignorant of what lies within' I said again. 'You must guide me.'

'O Dervish' (Nūr 'Alī Shāh addresses the reader), 'by the grace of God I was successful. He took my hand and stripped from me the garment of sin; he washed me three times in the water of repentance. He taught me a Name and offered me a Tablet¹² (i.e. showed me where to engrave the Name); to his left, he pointed out the right way and said, 'On this Path you will find innumerable cities; as you reach the gate of each city, recite the Name and enter. Many strange things and countless marvels will you behold – but gaze upon the Tablet and pass

from each of the cities, until, when you have seen them all and reached the entrance to the city of the Heart, there will you find a pure-hearted shaykh. From him you may enquire about whatever you wish.' I fell in the dust and kissed his feet. I rose and set out on the Path.

Here the story passes entirely into the spiritual realm: Nūr 'Alī Shāh visits each of the cities, symbolizing stations of gnosis, till he reaches the city of Heart and sees the shaykh, who represents the inner aspect or divine face of the spiritual preceptor, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh himself.

According to some accounts, it was Fayḍ who first met Ma'sūm and took Nūr 'Alī to him, but, in either case, Nūr 'Alī's account has an authority which overrides mere facts. One might call both Nūr 'Alī's and Suhrawardī's tales allegorical, but allegory does not necessarily exclude symbolism – or material history. Such stories stem from visions (sayr) seen with the eye of the heart, whether of purely inner experiences, or of the 'outside' world transfigured.

The Minstrel

After Nūr 'Alī Shāh, undoubtedly the most important disciple Sayyid Ma'sūm gained in Shiraz was a young musician from Isfahan, Mīrzā Muḥammad Turbatī Khurāsānī ibn Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī, called by the Sufis Mushtāq ('Eager') 'Alī Shāh. His short life was very thoroughly documented by those dervishes who were drawn to the spiritual Path through him, and by the 'official historians' of the Order, for there was an almost artistic wholeness about his life, and an overpowering fascination in his character, which seem to connect him, even more than Nūr 'Alī, with the archetypes. He is a figure from myth, orphic and ecstatic, who nevertheless lived a real life and was observed by men. Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh himself wrote nothing and died young – yet his life is surrounded by rich legend, and even the indisputable facts of his existence have about them an air of the mysterious and unusual.¹³

'My childhood was different from that of others. Soon after I was born', Mushtāq relates, 'they were trying to wash me in a copper basin. My head struck the edge and I fell unconscious. I interpret this as a message, the meaning of which was 'Be silent even if you are harmed'. Since my father's name

was Mahdī, I was given the name Muḥammad by an unseen voice'.¹⁴

He was an infant, lips still sweet with milk, when his father died and his life fell into the hands of his older brothers; like Joseph, he tumbled into the well of their malicious intentions. Although his father had commanded them to care for the child, they began to neglect and then mistreat him, constantly looking for excuses to beat and whip him. He used to run away to ruined places, hide himself and lie idly pondering about the heavens. 'Where do the Sun and Moon and all the stars get their light? These rotations of Heaven and the celestial bodies, why are they sometimes obvious and sometimes obscured? Why is dreaming the same as being awake, that the drunkenness of slumber should so resemble the state of wakefulness?' Thus the young child began to pry at the door of gnosis, though as yet he knew nothing of Truth.

Perceiving his intelligence, that he was 'open to the light of training', his family sent him to school at the early age of five. But there, for some reason, he felt ill at ease. On the first day of school, the teacher tried to instruct him in the alphabet. He was shown the first letter of the twenty-eight, alif. 'What does "alif" mean?' the child asked. 'This is the alphabet!' the mullā replied in surprise.

'I know, but please, for God's sake tell me the meaning of "alif" – why it has no dot – and why does "B" have a dot – and why does "T" have two dots. . . ?'

The teacher was amazed and dumbfounded. The child begged and cried, 'Why don't you tell me what it means?!' Finally the mullā snapped, 'I told you once: this is the alphabet! If you ask me again, I shall beat you.' In his wisdom the child fell silent before the foolishness of the old man, and having noticed that school was no place for meaning, he soon escaped from school.¹⁵

He was taken to a poet, perhaps on the theory that he would have more in common with a supposedly creative master than with the mullā, but he saw through the man's hypocrisy and insincerity, and was disappointed again. Since he had a faculty of mimicry, and since he was such a sweet-tempered child, adults used to encourage him to imitate all sorts of people, and he used to put on regular shows, gently mocking all the characters of the neighbourhood. But when

he came to try to imitate singers, he suddenly realized he had found something beyond him, that music was a boundless sea. One of the musicians told him, 'The waves of this sea are devastating – you need a ship and a captain. The captain is the master, his teaching the ship.'

So he found a master, who instructed him in voice and the *sihtar*, a small three-stringed, almost primordial instrument, used generally to play solos or accompany a single singer. With astonishing rapidity he learned everything the instructor knew, mastered all the modes and established melodic structures, and acquired great proficiency in their performance. Those who heard were utterly enchanted; grown-ups and children alike would beg him to sing for them, but he performed only for his friends.

And yet, he had no real friends, no boon companions. The world seemed to sense his differentness and avoided real contact with him. He was utterly alone, in effect, and unable to talk to anyone of the ideas and questions which mattered most to him. In fact, some people hated him for his talent and perfection, and it is even said that several attempts were made by his enemies to poison him. Depressed by his loneliness and put off by the animosity of the world, the boy fell into a decline and grew weaker and weaker every day. Eventually, a well-meaning friend suggested that he take up going to the *zūrkhānah*, Persia's traditional gymnasium, to regain his health.

The origin of the *zūrkhānah* must be sought in the close connection between esoteric Islam and the concept of heroic unselfishness or chivalry. Chivalry, which was strong in the early days of Islam, and was institutionalized in its final form, developed several off-shoots or descendants: the *futuwwah* or chivalric orders themselves, the guilds, the 'ayyārān or neighbourhood protection societies, and the *zūrkhānah*.

Sufis are, in one very real sense, simply the most pious Muslims, and in early Islam they were (like Uways al-Qaranī) as active in *jihād* as in devotion. As the chivalric orders evolved into subsequent forms, these new forms retained Sufi influences and took on parallel styles of organization and conception. Even the structure of the *zūrkhānah*, for example, is similar to that of the *khāniqāh*. In Safavid times the connection between chivalry and Sufism received renewed

impetus, and the zürkhānah in the form it maintains today dates from that era. The zürkhānah leader was not merely a coach, but a master over disciples (in fact, he was called the murshid, or 'guide'). He taught not only exercises and wrestling but also how to be a good and moral man, the principles of chivalry. Like the Sufi master he wore a tāj or dervish 'crown', and his place in the zürkhānah was called sardam, just as is the place of the murshid in the khāniqāh.

One condition for entering a zürkhānah was that the applicant be past the age of puberty. Those without beards long enough to comb were not eligible.¹⁶ Thus we can assume that Mushtāq was about sixteen or seventeen, possibly older, when he went to the zürkhānah in Isfahan to take up sport. The master, Āqā Šādiq Muḥiṭ Thānī, was famous, and Mushtāq dived into his new activity with his usual intensity and heroic will, taking seriously the zürkhānah rule 'to keep the eye cleansed and the heart pure, and to fear nothing under heaven'. His sincerity gained him the special attention of the master, who took him under his wing and transmitted to him 360 techniques of wrestling, all of which he mastered. Whenever he was not in the zürkhānah he was singing and playing the sihtar, and, according to the account, his beautiful voice and good looks, together with his sinlessness, made him amazing and overwhelming to those who saw and heard him. As Dr Nurbakhsh has recounted in his introduction to the *Mushtāqiyyah*, 'When he sang divine verses in his celestial voice the angels spread their wings above his head, the tree-leaves rustled and fell, and all creatures were seized with restlessness'.¹⁷

Rawnaq emphasizes Mushtāq's 'sinlessness'¹⁸ – 'although he was an adolescent, he remained sinless'. Islam has never emphasized chastity *per se* (and certainly neither the Prophet nor any of the Shi'ite Imams remained unmarried, except the last), but it has always been recognized that someone might be so wrapped in love of God that all other forms of love must be excluded. As we shall see, this describes Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh, and his way was shaped by sublimation in the true sense of the word.¹⁹ Mushtāq was by no means considered superior because of his chastity to the other dervishes who did marry and love – but his sinlessness was his unique sign, or one of them, and helps explain his supreme power over the forces of

love, both through his art and his personality. This perspective is perhaps difficult for the modern mind – yet Mushtāq's story needs no apology. It elicits, rather than tries, our understanding, sympathy and admiration.

The Love Story of Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh

Though he 'remained sinless' he did not remain loveless. A married woman who overheard his voice fell passionately in love with him. They met several times, but Mushtāq steadfastly refused to consider the relationship as anything other than 'platonic'. Nevertheless, he did not remain unscarred by the experience (which in good romantic style is supposed to have ended with the lady's death from a broken heart). His innocence and musical genius were now mixed with a little sorrow or 'pain' (dard), a term of aesthetic value in Iran as also in Japan.

The second love story of Mushtāq deserves to be recounted in full, for its chronicler has given it a density akin to that of a romance. Much of it may indeed be fiction of a sort, but the picture it gives of Persian life in the period is valuable for its clarity and detail.

By this time, Mushtāq had become a master musician, famous throughout Isfahan; and Isfahan, according to the Isfahanis, 'is half the world'. Now it happened that there was a young girl, not quite fourteen, named Ma'sūmah, who showed a great deal of talent for singing; and, because she was very beautiful, many important people began to take an interest in her career. They believed that Mushtāq would be the best teacher for her. For a year they thought of and tried every possible inducement, but Mushtāq refused to take the job.

One summer night Mushtāq and his friends and his brothers went to a moonlight party. Many congenial people had gathered, and they called for music and dance. During the merriment, one of the company got up to leave, tripped in the darkness, fell, broke his neck, and died. When the guests discovered him they began shrieking and weeping, and the party turned into a wake. The night-watchman heard the commotion inside the garden and ran to alert his chief, who called his men and hurried at once to the house. There he counted all the guests and ordered the host not to let any of them go. Thinking they were suspected of murder, the guests

grew very nervous, and their dismay increased when the dead man's family arrived and began screeching accusations left and right.

Since the mayor, a cruel and oppressive man, had gone away and was not expected back for about three months, all the guests were dragged off to jail to wait for his return. The jailor, who was one of those interested in young Ma'sūmah's career, had a sudden inspiration: he visited Mushtāq secretly in his cell and told him, in so many words, 'If you want to escape from this trouble, teach Ma'sūmah your skills; otherwise, I fear for your life.' Mushtāq felt that he had no alternative but to accept the jailor's offer, and agreed. At once a 'pardon' for Mushtāq arrived 'from the mayor', he was removed from prison, and the girl was brought to him for her first lesson.

He found her eager and able, and soon she could sing so beautifully that even the nightingales would listen, mute as roses. When she took up the harp, she very quickly became so adept that her fame spread and people began to speak of a possible appearance before the King. Mushtāq, of course, was not only teaching her music but also, secretly, virtue, purity and righteousness. Soon, naturally enough, she fell in love with him.

They were often invited to parties by the upper classes, to sing and entertain. But Ma'sūmah had become a lover, and as she sang tears would fill her eyes. If ever she had to go to some event by herself, she would perform such sad songs and weep so much that even weddings seemed to be funerals. But even this failed to lessen her popularity; she was so beautiful that every man who saw her dreamed of marrying her. And, since her clever brothers chaperoned her wherever she went, all the young swains used to come to Mushtāq and beg him to make her sing for them. At last he became sick of all the noise, and publicly announced that he had made a vow to retreat for ten days in a mosque.

For the first four nights Ma'sūmah stayed home. But then her admirers begged and pleaded with her until they persuaded her to come to another party, and she went, hoping that Mushtāq might show up. But he did not. And she became progressively sadder, and her singing got sadder and sadder, until her melancholy behaviour so dampened the revellers'

spirits that they decided to go to the mosque and fetch away the missing minstrel, to come and cheer her up. But he refused to break his retreat.

On the seventh day, they thought of a trick – they took Ma'ṣūmah to the mosque. She pleaded and entreated, but still he refused to break his vow. She started to leave, and began playfully to pull him along after her by the hand, still begging – he repeating 'No, no!', she repeating 'Yes, please, for God's sake!', till suddenly he found himself at her house. He laughed at himself and began to sing.

All that winter they were together, and they attended 72 parties, according to the account. The frivolous aristocrats demanded so much of them that they were thoroughly exhausted, and slept almost never. Spring was at hand; Mush-tāq thought, if winter was hard, spring will be worse. He began to consider the possibility of escaping from Isfahan. One night he reached the limit of his patience, and, in the middle of a party, got up, excused himself and walked out. He went home and began at once to pack his bags, preparing to leave for Shiraz.

Ma'ṣūmah meanwhile became worried and restless. 'The moth will return to the candle', the guests assured her, trying to soothe her; but she grew still more listless. At last, someone ran in and announced that Mushtāq was riding by the house along the road to Shiraz. At once Ma'ṣūmah leapt up and ran outside. She caught up with Mushtāq in the Chārsūq Maydān. He dismounted and they began to sing and play together – people gathered round to listen.

'Please don't leave me', she begged. But Mushtāq replied, 'Shiraz is a beautiful city, and we'll see each other there.' He mounted his horse and rode off, and Ma'ṣūmah fell to the pavement like a wounded bird.

Mushtāq had been in Shiraz but three days when someone approached the ruler, Karīm Khān Zand, and told him, 'There is a girl in Isfahan named Ma'ṣūmah, unique in beauty as she is famous for her art. She, truly, would be an ornament for your court.' Thus Mushtāq's prophecy came true at once: Karīm Khān requested her presence at Court, and she was brought to Shiraz with great honour. As soon as she arrived, she sent a message to Mushtāq in secret, asking him to come to her rescue.

Had she something to fear from the monarch himself? We read that 'Karīm Khān was naturally disposed to merry-making and enjoying himself; especially in later life he came to appreciate the comfortable existence, and forgot his world-conquering, being busy with pleasure. He hated hunting, but preferred the company of beautiful girls and, for surroundings, a garden. At night he would retire to his palace, drinking and eating with his girls. He was weak, being past sixty years in age, but still kept up his lusty enjoyment of wine, women and song'.²⁰

Upset by Ma'şūmah's message, Mushtāq sought advice. One of the circle into which he had entered in Shiraz was a famous physician whom our account calls 'the Jesus of his time'²¹ and the Plato of his era. His name was Naşīr'.²² When this doctor noticed Mushtāq's perturbation, he asked the musician what ailed him. Mushtāq replied by singing a ghazal, asking poetically for aid and advice. 'The solution to your problem is simple', the physician told him. 'Send a message to your beloved and tell her that when she is taken to Court and is asked to sing, she should tell the King she has a sore throat. Then leave the rest to me.'

So, when the invitation to appear in Court arrived, she went, secretly praying that the King would not keep her there, for, although she had sung and danced, she had not lost her purity. So lovely did she appear in Court, like a sun amongst stars, that Karīm Khān was amazed, and called for rich jewels to be added to her ornaments. Then he asked her to sing.

When she told him she had a sore throat, Karīm solicitously sent for the physician, Naşīr, who put on a good show of giving a medical examination, and diagnosed syphilis. Karīm hated and feared even the mention of that word, so he at once ordered her to be sent away – but he allowed her to keep the jewels, and included sixty tumans and some horses. She went fearlessly to Mushtāq, told him what had happened, and asked him what to do next.

Relieved and glad, Mushtāq sang:

It is the season of spring for lovers
 Ravishing autumn's sorrow from their hearts;
 Is it any wonder now that the attraction
 Of love should unite soul to body?
 O God, O God, for the sake of Thy lovers

Free me from the chains of this human love
Which is a bridge for the caravan of souls,
Receive me in the ocean of divine love,
Put that hidden pearl in my hand.

'Now', he went on, 'keep your vow of love and listen to my words.'

'I'll listen to anything', she answered. 'Only don't separate me from you.'

'Do you want to be with me for ever, Ma'sūmah, or for just a few days, followed by eternal separation?'

'I wish to take no breath without you', she answered, 'in this life or the next.'

'Then listen to me. Go, leave for Isfahan. When you get there, someone will ask to marry you. Be content with your fate, and be happy in married life.'

'But', she protested, 'you said I could be with you in this world and the next!'

'That's right. But only under the condition of obedience, the first rule of irādah (obedience in love of the disciple for Master, or lover for beloved).'

So Ma'sūmah left for Isfahan, where the mayor married her off to his favourite nephew, whom he loved like a son. Everyone was surprised to find that she was still a virgin.

Now Mushtāq, the drunken and careless lover, had lost his Ma'sūmah, but was soon to find his Ma'sūm. He had prayed to God to let him transcend metaphoric love ('ishq-i majāzī)²³ and reach Divine Love, and his prayer was soon to be answered.

At first, in the sorrow of losing her, Mushtāq set off into the mountains. As he passed under the city gate on his way out to the desert road he saw a man dressed in rags, apparently unconscious and unaware – though, as it happened, he was Awareness itself. Though he was hiding behind rags, he was like the sun behind a cloud; when Mushtāq glanced at his inner beauty he fell in love with him, and stood there thunder-struck and staring.

Noticing him at length, the man asked, 'Who are you? Where are you from? What are you wondering?'

'Wondering is our duty', said Mushtāq. 'I am looking for the Beloved.'

'Who is your friend?' asked the man.

'If I see him, I will recognize him.'

'My clothes are ragged.'

'A ruined place', Mushtāq replied, 'is said to hide treasure.'

'With the treasure comes great hardship', the man answered.

'How can one find treasure without a struggle? Reveal to me your true spiritual Station (maqām).'

'Our place', he answered, 'is in the tavern where all minds are checkmated.'

'My reason, I feel, is escaping me – I sense an internal restlessness . . .'

'If your reason is not with you on this Path you will find only madness.'

'But I am the madman, the Majnūn of my time', Mushtāq told him. 'My religion and faith is madness.'

'For whom are you mad (majnūn)?'

'I am Majnūn for Him from Whom Laylā has her theophany.'²⁴

'The Laylās of the world are naughted in the revelation of my beauty', said the ragged man; so saying, he got up and made to leave. But Mushtāq fell before him and clutched his feet. 'O you whose face is the light of my soul's eye', he cried. 'Do not leave me in the darkness of error.'

'If you listen to my words and obey me, perhaps you will find a cup, awake, and sleep well in the seclusion of the Friend, free from strangers – yes, even if they take you to the gallows, like Ḥallāj.'

'I beg for your aid,' said Mushtāq. 'I will obey you.'

'Then I will guide you, so let us walk for a while.'

They set out into the desert together. Soon they came to a mountain, and climbed to the top, where they found themselves standing on the edge of a cliff. 'If you were truly obedient', said the Master, 'you would jump head-long from this precipice.' At once Mushtāq started to do so, but the Master, amazed, stopped him at the last moment and made him sit down in the place where he himself had been sitting. After a while they returned to Shiraz, where Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh took Mushtāq to Fayḍ for further instruction, and to introduce him to Fayḍ's son, Nūr 'Alī Shāh.²⁵

The Trouble with Karīm Khān

Sayyid Ma'sūm hād arrived in Shiraz around 1190/1775-6. He met Fayḍ 'Alī Shāh, Nūr 'Alī Shāh and presumably Mush-tāq 'Alī Shāh in the same year.²⁶ For the next two years they stayed there, living the life of the dervish and acquiring a certain renown for their appearance, startling ideas and expressions. According to Malcolm,²⁷ their adherents even then numbered some 30,000, but this seems unlikely. Sayyid Ma'sūm's 'mission' was still in a germinal state, and really came to fruition later in Isfahan, Herat and Kirman.

Among those who became attracted to Ma'sūm was a certain Jānī Hindī, who came to him and asked him for instruction in alchemy. Ma'sūm perceived that the man was not suited for the Path, and, realizing his insincerity, refused him. Nūr 'Alī has described the dramatic result of this refusal:²⁸ 'There was a king in Fars by the name of Karīm Khān Zand, who lived a good and easy life. Everything went right for him, and he was both rich and brave. But there was also a man named Jānī Hindī, an Indian by birth, in appearance a human being but inwardly a devil. He wanted to be intimate with the king; he desired to mislead him, and thereby mislead everyone else as well – but he could not succeed in this design.

'At last he bribed some of the King's associates, and one day in the spring, as the king was riding forth from the city, he gained audience with him in the following way: rushing in front of Karīm's horse, he wept ostentatiously, fell to the ground and kissed the dust at his feet. Proclaiming himself the king's most loyal subject he said, "I feel it is my duty to tell you of certain enemies of yours in the city: there is a Sayyid who is a dervish and a fire worshipper (i.e. Zoroastrian), now residing in Shiraz, who claims sometimes to be God, sometimes a king and sometimes a beggar. He performs magic to allure the people and puts spells on their hearts."²⁹ Many people have gathered around him – if you allow him to stay, he will end by seizing your throne and your crown. If you desire not to be destroyed, you had best banish him from the city." Karīm Khan believed these words and banished Ma'sūm and his followers, thus sentencing his own spirit to torture. Soon the king fell ill, terribly ill, and all the remedies of the physicians were of no avail. For three months he lingered in pain and restlessness, and finally died

(1192/1778). By his own action the king had not only killed himself but destroyed his own dynasty as well – one by one, all his family and children were murdered or died.'

Again we see the theme repeated, that a ruler's success depends on his treatment of the Sufis. Historians may call it coincidence, but, as will be demonstrated, the dervishes themselves have a different explanation.

Sayyid Ma'sûm, Fayḍ 'Alī Shāh, Nûr 'Alī Shāh, Mushtâq, and another dervish named Naẓar 'Alī Shāh left Shiraz for Isfahan,³⁰ hoping to find a climate more agreeable to their needs and expectations.

Notes

1. Imâm 'Alī Riḍā ibn Mūsā (148/765 – 203/817), the eighth Shī'ite Imâm, was the first and only Imâm to set foot on Persian soil. He died (poisoned by Harûn al-Rashîd, according to the Shī'ites) and was buried in Mashhad, where his shrine is the most important centre of pilgrimage in Iran. Imâm Riḍā's disciple Ma'rûf-i Karkhî was one of the shaykhs in the silsilah of the Nî'matullâhî Order, as well as in those of many other orders (see Appendix I). A Shī'ite in search of a spiritual master often makes a wish at the tomb of Imâm Riḍā's, who is called 'the Imâm of Initiation'.

2. *T-a-H* (Vol. III, p. 167) and Ḥaqā'iq al-siyāḥah (*H-a-S*) (p. 197) say he died at the age of 104. Both sources agree on the date of his death, 1241/1799.

3. In fact, he outlived Ma'sûm 'Alī Shāh by three years. Since the Nî'matullâhîs consider both Riḍā 'Alī and Ma'sûm 'Alī to have been Quṭbs (and since Nûr 'Alī Shāh, the next Quṭb after Ma'sûm, died in 1212), obviously we must consider it possible to have more than one Quṭb at the same time.

4. *Jannât al-wiṣâl* (*J-a-W*) (Nizâm 'Alī Shāh), pp. 861–62. It was and is a custom in the East, and especially India, that one must not receive teaching without 'paying' for it. A master must be given a gift, symbolic of the sacrifice the disciple intends to make, in return for the wisdom the master intends to bestow. 'To come empty-handed to the door of friends is like going without wheat to the mill' (Rûmî, *Mathnawî*, I, 3171).

5. The costume, naturally, is symbolic. The dervish carries an axe (tabarzîn) and begging bowl (kashkûl) which are not only useful for self-protection and for collecting alms, food and water, but also symbolic of the eternal dualities: male and female, active and passive, the crystallization and melting of the heart, the Jalâl (majestic) and Jamâl (beautiful) qualities of God, the exoteric and esoteric, etc. The standard of the Order, consisting of

two crossed axes over a begging bowl, symbolizes the Perfect Man, insān al-kāmil. The significance of the khīrqah (patched cloak) has already been explained. Dervish caps have different designs in different Orders – the Nī'matullāhīs sometimes wear conical felt hats sewn with significant verses and symbols, of which many beautiful examples can be seen today in the 'museum' at the khānīqāh in Tehran. (Dr. Nurbakhsh has written a treatise on the dervish cap, 'Tāj-i darvīsh', in *Mardum shināsi*, number 3, pp. 47–52)

6. Riḍā Qulī Hidāyat, *Riyāḍ al-'arīfīn* (Tehran, 1316 S.), p. 451.

7. *T-a-H* (III, 171) says 1190, which could be possible.

Khān Hidāyat (MS 2103, Majlis Library, Tehran; no pagination) says 'around 1184'. *Bustān al-siyāḥah* (B-a-S) says he reached Shiraz in 1190 – he may have spent some time on the coast.

8. *J-a-W*, pp. 864–67. According to Sir John Malcolm (*History of Persia* The *Uṣūl al-fuṣūl fī ḥuṣūl al-wuṣūl* by the Nī'matullāhī dervish Riḍā Qulī of the Nūrbakhshī Order before the arrival in Persia of Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, 'when he instantly bowed to his superior in knowledge'. None of the Persian sources mention this, however.

9. For an exposition of the 'Way of Love', and some details about 'Irāqī, Awḥad al-Dīn and others, see Dr Mir Valiuddin, *Love of God, the Sufi Approach* (Hyderabad, India, 1968).

10. Nūr 'Alī Shāh, *Majmū'ah-i az āthār-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh-i Isfahānī*, ed. J. Nurbakhsh (Tehran, 1350 S.), pp. 56–60.

11. See Shihabuddin Yahya Sohrawardi, 'Epistle on the State of Childhood', in *Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques Vol. III: Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, ed. S.H. Nasr (Tehran, 1977), esp. pp. 242–3.

12. See F. Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam* (London, 1970), 'An-Nur', p. 102 ff.

13. The following stories, including that of Mushtāq's initiation, are taken from the *Gharā'ib* of Rawnaq 'Alī Shāh (Tehran, 1352 S.). Rawnaq joined the Order in Kirman, where he met Mushtāq, who 'was aware of all secrets, and of all the manners and means of the Path. He was my guide to the King. I served him for a year and during that time he used to tell me about his inward journeys and outward adventures, and of his love affairs, both worldly and spiritual. He told me the story and explained it to me over this period of time, and it was in truth such a good story that I pleaded with him to let me versify and record it, and he consented.' The *Gharā'ib* takes the form of a mathnawī interspersed with ghazals, digressions, commentaries on Quranic verses and ḥadīth, and expositions of the Sufi doctrine of Love. Pages 99–108 of our text correspond roughly to pp. 20–126 of the *Gharā'ib*.

14. Muḥammad al-Mahdī is the name of the twelfth and Hidden Imām, the Mahdī.

15. This tale is a reference to the Sufi idea of the symbolism of letters. The mullā, representing exoterism, sees only the outward forms of the letters, the but Mushtāq senses their hidden essences intuitively, though he still cannot arrive at their 'meanings' by himself. The 'meaning of "B" (ب) has already been discussed. The meaning of "A", alif (ا) is preeminently that of tawḥīd, unity, Allah (الله).

16. Ḥusayn Partaw Baydā'i, *Tārīkh-i warzish-i bāstānī-i Īrān* ('History of Ancient Sports in Iran'), (Tehran, 1336 S.), p. 33.

17. Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, *Dīwān-i Mushtāqīyyah* (Tehran, 1347 S.), introduction, p. 11.

18. *Gharā'ib*, p. 33.

19. The original meaning of 'sublimation': to purify, refine (in an alchemical sense), to raise up the fine elements from the crude. Something of this meaning survives in our use of the word 'sublime'.

20. 'Abd al-Razzāq Bayg Dunbālī, *Tajribat al-aḥrār wa tasliyat al-abrār* (Tabriz, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 42-61 passim.

21. Jesus is known in Islam especially for his miraculous power to revive the dead.

22. This is undoubtedly Mīrzā Muḥammad Naṣīr Ṭabīb Iṣfahānī, who is called in another source (Dunbālī, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 161-170) 'the Jesus, Plato and Ptolemy of his time'. He was a famous physician, and knew astronomy as well as physical and spiritual medicine.

23. 'Ishq-i majāzī might be translated as 'bridge love', since 'majāzī' is derived from the noun meaning 'place of crossing'. The usual translation of this phrase as 'unreal love' is limited, misleading and arguably incorrect, since it implies a total rejection of 'worldly' love which many mystics would not accept. Granted, nothing is real except the Real, but that which the Hindus call Māya has not only a 'relative' reality, but also a saving Grace, a transparency through which the light of the highest Love can shine. By translating 'ishq-i majāzī as 'symbolic love', 'phenomenal love' or 'bridge love', we want to define its liberating rather than limiting function, and suggest that Mushtāq needed the experience of such love before he could experience the totally real love revealed to him by his Master. For some Sufis the love of another human being can be the direct door to divine love. The love for one's spiritual master, the love of a beautiful woman or youth, if experienced on a pure and spiritual level, makes the 'other' a tajallī (lit. 'shining forth or through'), a theophany.

For this, one of the subtlest and most difficult of all Sufi doctrines (which

was perhaps foreshadowed by certain writings of Plato and the Neoplatonists), the best source for attempting an understanding might be Rūmī's *Dīwān-i Shams*; the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfiẓ; Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*, and the last chapter of his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. But in truth it might be said that nearly every Islamic mystic who ever wrote (and particularly the poets) has dealt with this subject on one level or another.

24. Mushtāq refers to a famous story of ultimate love between man and woman, frequently given symbolic interpretation by Sufi authors. See for example, *Laylā wa Majnūn*, Ḥakīm Nizāmī, ed. Waḥīd Dastgirdī (Tehran, 1313 S.)

25. This is the version of Mushtāq's initiation given by Rawnaq 'Alī Shāh; another version outlined by Dr Nurbakhsh in his introduction to the *Mushtāqiyyah* simply states, 'One day he became tired of 'ishq-i majāzī and went into the wilderness where he met Nūr 'Alī Shāh, who took him to his father Fayḍ to be initiated.' He meets Ma'sūm later. Tradition also avers that Mushtāq and Nūr 'Alī were childhood friends in Isfahan. This is not chronologically impossible, but is not supported by any written source. It would seem that the version given by Rawnaq 'Alī Shāh is likely to be authentic as far as sequence of events – the dialogue may be less so. But despite its versified flavour, it too may have a basis in fact, if indeed the work represents what the author claims: a poetic version of stories heard first hand and 'repeated several times.'

26. For a description and history of the city, see *Shiraz, Persian City of Saints and Poets* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1960) by A.J. Arberry. Many features of Shiraz as it now stands date from the time of Karīm Khān, who was a great builder, and, despite his faults, a reasonably good and popular ruler.

27. Vol. II, p. 417.

28. *J-a-W*, p. 107. Also in *Makhzan al-asrār (M-a-N)*, pp. 131–36.

29. If the satirical account given of dervishes at that time in James Morier's *Hajji Baba of Esfahan* (first published in 1824; also London, 1963) has any substance, Karīm Khān would have had no hesitation in believing these charges. Also, since the previous dynasty, the Safavids, had begun as a Sufi order, it was also reasonable to suspect dervishes of political ambitions. The fact that the Ni'matullāhīs (like other Sufis) called themselves 'Shāh' sometimes gave rise to such confusion.

30. *B-a-S*, p. 232.

V Wandering and Death

Isfahan

The journey from Shiraz to Isfahan took some time, and was more than usually full of danger and hardship. Wherever the dervishes went, their reputation preceded them. 'If you are honest and moral men, why were you thrown out of Shiraz?' they were asked, and at every town and village they visited they were refused entry; everywhere people feared and hated them as magicians and rebels. Like strangers or escaped convicts, as Nūr 'Alī Shāh put it, they wandered from mountain to valley to mountain, hungry and thirsty in the wilderness, but inwardly drunk on the wine of Unity, enjoying a festival of soul in the presence of the Beloved, their eyes filled with the light of God and their hearts revelling in the secrets of existence. 'The more danger and hardship we encountered the more my knowledge was increased . . . Comfort and distress lost their meaning for us, for we had become indifferent to them'.¹

In a sense, this voyage was Sayyid Ma'šūm's way of submitting his disciples to a test of sincerity – or, at least, Nūr 'Alī Shāh viewed it as such. He was closest of all the disciples to Ma'šūm at this time, and in his opinion, though outwardly the Master tried to avoid these terrible difficulties, inwardly he had in fact arranged them as a trial of faith and strength.

The ruler of Isfahan at that time, 'Alī Murād Khān Zand, although a relative of Karīm Khān, was apparently on bad enough terms with him to welcome Sayyid Ma'šūm and his disciples on their arrival in his realm. He built a takyah² for them and bestowed on them a daily stipend of 10,000 dinars. 'Alī Murād was particularly interested in Fayḍ, who was well-versed in the science of numerology. Fayḍ set up a screen on which to manipulate numbers and read 'Alī Murād's fortune'.³

During the stay in Isfahan, Nūr 'Alī wrote several books, including his *Dīwān-i Nūr 'Alī*.⁴ In this book he poured forth the fresh and overwhelming experiences he had undergone in the last two or three years in a torrent of lyric poetry. Although he was later to write extensively, both in prose and verse, he never excelled this first collection for sheer intoxication and power of expression. It is on the *Dīwān* (besides the legends of his beauty) that his reputation as the archetypal and perfect 'qalandar' survives to this day, even outside the Order (which is sometimes called the Nī'matullāhī-Nūr 'Alī Shāhī, in his honour).

Eventually the Isfahani ruler turned against the dervishes, probably persuaded by the mullās of the city. Fayd 'Alī Shāh died around 1195 or 1196 (ca. 1780–1), and soon afterwards we find the Sufis on the road again. They set out for Kashan, and stopped at a village called Mūrchakhurt, about halfway between the two cities. There they set up camp beside a river, under a large tree.

After some time, Ma'sūm approached Nūr 'Alī and told him he had experienced a precognitive vision. 'Two soldiers are coming here by the command of two brothers from Isfahan. They will cut off our ears. I will bear patiently whatever comes, as I am in accord with the wishes of the Friend. But you are a young man – you should escape.' 'Where should I go?' asked Nūr 'Alī; and Ma'sūm, seeing that he meant to stay (although some others did, in fact, leave) went on: 'The heads of these two brothers will be cut off three years later in this very same place.' He turned to the villagers who were near by and said, 'You will remain here to see what happens'; and the villagers began to weep. According to the Sufis, all these prophecies were to be realized.

In fact, 'Alī Murād's police chief had sent some soldiers under orders to cut off the ears of Ma'sūm and his followers. He did this on his own initiative, without orders from 'Alī Murād himself, but presumably the ruler did nothing to stop them. The soldiers arrived in Mūrchakhurt and carried out the sentence on Ma'sūm and Nūr 'Alī. One soldier returned to Isfahan with their cropped ears, the others escorted the dervishes through Kashan to the boundary of the Tehran district, where they left them with warnings never to return.⁵

Mashhad and Herat

The dervishes did not remain long in Tehran, but set out at once towards the East. In Mashhad the party made a pilgrimage to the holiest shrine in Persia, the tomb of Imām Riḍā; the spiritual direction of the Imām had brought Sayyid Ma'sūm from India, and he had gathered around himself a group of exceptional and spiritually gifted men. Now, after a visit to Imām Riḍā's tomb, the most moving and dramatic episodes of their career were soon to begin: the persecutions which led to the death of all the leaders of the Order, and, paradoxically, to the firm establishment of their silsilah in Persia.

In Herat, where neither Zand nor Qājār influence had yet been felt, and which had always been a popular haven for the Sufis, they received a warm welcome, and a number of local noblemen joined the Order. After some time there, Ma'sūm decided to return to the Deccan for a visit.

Undoubtedly the most remarkable convert in Herat was Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Harātī, a native of the town. This is how he came to Sufism. It seems that one day Nūr 'Alī had a slightly conceited thought. 'I had the ability to reach this exalted state, and by the grace and attention of my Master it has been activated.' But, as the ḥadīth says, 'Beware the insight (or psychic penetration) of the true believer, for he sees with the light of God.' Ma'sūm read this thought in Nūr 'Alī's mind, and decided to take him down a peg. Accordingly he went out into the streets of Herat, where he noticed Riḍā 'Alī (a complete stranger) walking by, and discerned in him a great spiritual potential. He exerted a strong attraction over him, and in a very short time Riḍā 'Alī had reached an extremely advanced station. Thus Nūr 'Alī was gently informed that he was not unique in his potential, and that everything in fact depends on the Master.⁶

Although Riḍā 'Alī had never attended school, he demonstrated his spiritual attainment in a small but exceedingly lovely *Dīwān* of poetry, in which are to be found some of the most delightful of all the Ni'matullāhī ghazals: rhythmic, intense, imagistic, warm and full of light. After visiting India with Sayyid Ma'sūm, he returned with him to Iran and the 'Atabāt, the holy cities of Iraq. The fierce mujtahid who was later to be responsible for the murder of Sayyid Ma'sūm, Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Bihbahānī, mistook Riḍā 'Alī Harātī for

Riḍā 'Alī the Quṭb in the Deccan, and in his risālah attacking the Sufis, mentions him as 'Ma'sūm's master'. Nevertheless he escaped death at the hands of the mullās, and died in Kazimayn (where the seventh and ninth Shī'ite Imams are buried) in 1211/1796.

The dervishes had left Tehran and arrived in Herat from Mashhad by 1198/1782. In that same year, Ma'sūm ordered Nūr 'Alī and Mushtāq back to central Persia. The purpose of this trip, according to an unpublished letter of Nūr 'Alī, was to deliver a final warning to 'Alī Murād Khān of Isfahan, who was still alive at that time, to abandon his pride and sinfulness before it was too late; that if he did not cease his disregard for true religion, he would suffer for it. Nūr 'Alī writes: 'Who would dare to visit Isfahan, and a man who had tried to kill me (indeed, was sorry that he had not killed me)? I did so only because the Quṭb ordered me to, and because it was in accordance with the wishes of the Hidden Imām'.⁷

This letter, called the *Hidāyat-nāmah* ('Essay of Guidance'), has been neither published nor catalogued, but it is of great importance because it reveals very openly the Sufis' view of the relation between themselves and the state, or worldly authority. The power of the Quṭb (or any saint), according to Nūr 'Alī, is obviously greater than that of any ruler. In fact, he maintains quite clearly that salvation in this world and the next depends on obedience to the Quṭb of the time, 'who, in our era, is Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh'. If a ruler attacks the Quṭb, he must come to ruin, not only because the cosmic balance has been threatened, but because the dervishes themselves *will* his ruin. This, according to the letter, is precisely the fate that overtook Karīm Khān, Zakī Khān (Karīm's successor in Shiraz) and 'Alī Murād.

These remarkable assertions need to be explained; Nūr 'Alī did not bother to do so, since he was talking to men of spiritual discernment. Again it must be pointed out that the number of occasions on which death quickly overtook those who persecuted the followers of Sayyid Ma'sūm are very numerous, and although we do not know that such a fate occurred every time or to every enemy of Sufism, the evidence is perhaps sufficient to persuade us to give up the idea of 'coincidence'. No doubt it is difficult for modern man, weaned on notions of historical materialism, to accept that

'mystics' who are neither politicians nor generals could assert such powerful and secret influence on the course of events. But if we accept, as the Sufis do, that the spiritual quest is the only important 'event' for man, and remember that Ma'sûm had been sent to revive the ardour of this quest in Persia on the orders of Imâm Riḍā, then we shall have to admit that certain eras demand powerful penetration of the material by the spiritual realm. Ma'sûm recapitulated in lesser degree and on an esoteric level the mission of the Prophet. Thus, like the Prophet, he must have had power over the world – although unlike the Prophet he could not exercise it openly, as a 'worldly' as well as spiritual king. Those who could have ruined Ma'sûm's mission had to be stopped, and were stopped. And those dervishes who had to die violent deaths, were martyred in order that the intensity of the quest might grow. This is the meaning behind Nûr 'Alī's letter, and this is the Sufi view of history.

The Years in Kirman

Nûr 'Alī speaks about Mushtâq: 'There was a friend of God drunk with the wine of divine secrets, whose Imâm in the Sharī'ah was the Prophet and whose guide on the path was 'Alī; one who drank from the fountain of "Poverty is my pride"⁸ – so eager for the faces of the lovers that they named him Mushtâq ("eager"). At every stage of the journey he was my friend – truly, he was my companion and shared with me in the Secret. Day and night we were together, in the house and on the road, and many were the spiritual stations we reached together, intoxicated with the cup of "Am I not your Lord?"⁹ outwardly and inwardly drunk with the One Who is desired. Although I was in name his guide on the Path of the seekers, in fact he was my equal in everything.

'When Shâh Ni'matullâh Walī attracted us from Isfahan to Mâhân we both received limitless grace from his call. All we desired was to live there as hermits inside his shrine, removed from the noise and confusion of the world. But, as the freedom of genuine peace is given to no one, various friends and seekers and travellers began to gather about us; through us they became aware of the Straight Path, and by us were entered upon it. They made a vow, and in return we taught them how to think and remember (i.e. to meditate and

invoke). They passed through various spiritual realms and joined in the drunkenness of our festivity – whoever came to us sober, soon became intoxicated. When the ocean of their drunkenness started to foam up and stream to every side, one of the streams flowed down to Kirman and started a disturbance there. And, when some others began to smell this smell, they would set out for Māhān.¹⁰ Finally the number of the crowd had become so swollen that, for actual lack of sustenance, we had to leave and go to Kirman; besides which, many devotees urged us to move. And so, slowly and slowly, we did.’¹¹

At that period it was Mushtāq, equally with Nūr ‘Alī, to whom the majority of new disciples were attracted, for his very presence was so powerful that, apparently, anyone with the slightest inclination to the spiritual life who met him failed to resist him. By then, Mushtāq had reached the station of *jadhbah*, ‘divine attraction’, by which the Sufis mean that God has drawn the worshipper to Him, rather than the worshipper drawing near to God by his own efforts. Of course, for any true seeker, the process is bound to consist of both, but in some cases the ‘attraction’ is so strong that, in effect, the Sufi is in a constant state of *fanā*. In such a condition, it is felt that the Sufi is not to be held responsible for what he says or does, since God speaks or acts, in a sense, through him. Thus Ḥallāj or Bāyazīd, although strictly speaking their utterances might be (and were) considered blasphemous, are thought by the Sufis to have been among the greatest of saints, whose sayings are the closest to direct inspiration that a man can achieve, short of prophecy. The *majdhūb* (attracted one) is still a relatively common phenomenon in the East, and in some men the attraction is so overwhelming that he who is affected can neither speak nor communicate in any way, nor even adhere to the basics of the Shari‘ah; being so intoxicated with inward prayer, he can no longer turn his attention to the outward.

When Nūr ‘Alī and Mushtāq arrived in Kirman, they would have found it a prosperous city, not as important as Shiraz or Isfahan but equally ancient – a city traditionally not ill-disposed towards thinkers and systems of thought considered unacceptable elsewhere in Persia.

There were many new initiates among the leading citizens of Kirman. Among the most important of the disciples were a

brother and sister from the ancient city of Bam, southeast of Kirman: Muḥammad Ḥusayn, who came to be called Rawnaq 'Alī Shāh (the author of Mushtāq's 'biography' quoted earlier), and the girl Ḥayātī. Rawnaq had lived in Kirman for some years already and was generally considered an outstanding gnostic – that is, he had mastered all the traditional sciences, and had become particularly learned in esoteric philosophy. Like many of those converted to the Sufi path (notably Fayḍ 'Alī Shāh, Nūr 'Alī's father), he was a mullā. Initiated by Nūr 'Alī, Rawnaq became famous for his mildness and generosity, and many miracles were attributed to him. He travelled extensively in Fars and Khorasan, meeting many of the learned scholars and mystics of the time. He was often persecuted by the authorities: once the governor of Kirman ordered him bastinadoed in public unless he could pay a heavy fine; since he had no money, the police beat his feet with sticks in the bazaar. But the people who witnessed this were shocked, and out of pity for Rawnaq and love of God, they raised the money for his fine, and condemned the governor's cruelty.¹²

Rawnaq's writings include the *Gharā'ib*, on the life of Mushtāq; a *Dīwān*; the *Mir'āt al-muḥaqqiqīn*; and a part of the monumental work begun by Nūr 'Alī Shāh and finished eventually by Rawnaq's own disciple Nizām 'Alī Shāh, the *Jannāt al-wiṣāl*. Rawnaq died in 1230/1815 and was buried in the Mushtāqiyyah in Kirman.¹³

Rawnaq's sister, Ḥayātī, is one of the most remarkable figures in Persian Sufism, which has not been known for many women saints. She was a different sort of saint than the more famous Rābi'ah of Baṣrah, who never married; Ḥayātī was drawn to the heights of Sufism through love of her husband. Having been brought up with a desire for enlightenment by her brother, she was taken to a gathering presided over by Nūr 'Alī Shāh, who moved her very deeply with spiritual love, and initiated her. Gradually the love between master and disciple became mixed with love between man and woman, and they married. Although she was a good dervish and a good housewife (which must not have been easy, considering Nūr 'Alī's unconventional way of life), she also possessed an unusual poetic gift, so much so that Nūr 'Alī urged her to write a *Dīwān*. Feeling that it was perhaps improper for a

woman to attempt to compete in a field dominated by men, she hesitated. But Nūr 'Alī pointed out that 'the seeker after the Lord is (inwardly) masculine', whatever the outward sex, and she was persuaded to try. Her short *Dīwān* was composed very quickly, and turned out to be among the most charming poetry produced by any Ni'matullāhī master. It is certainly some of the most approachable poetry of the Order, notwithstanding the fact that many of her poems reveal not only spiritual depth, but intellectual subtlety and profundity as well. At the same time it is unreservedly feminine, imbued with love, as complete an expression of the 'bhaktic' point of view as Sufism has produced. Especially interesting is the way she combines love for her husband with devotion to 'Alī and union with God. This is particularly evident in her *Qaṣīdah* (a tour de force in which every line ends with the word *girah*, 'knot'), which deals with the liberating possibilities of 'ishq-i majāzī, and clearly reveals how incorrect it is to translate this phrase as 'unreal love' – nothing could be more real for Ḥayātī than her 'beneficial confusion' between love for Nūr 'Alī and love for the divine.¹⁴

Ḥayātī and Nūr 'Alī had a daughter whom they named Ṭūfī ('Parrot'); she married one of Nūr 'Alī's disciples, Surkh 'Alī Shāh Hamadānī.¹⁵ Ṭūfī died about 1270/1853; her great-grandchildren are alive today, members of the Ni'matullāhī Order in Tehran.

Living in Kirman in those days when Nūr 'Alī and Mushtāq were causing their 'disturbance' was an eminent physician named Mīrzā Muḥammad Taqī ibn Mīrzā Muḥammad Kāzīm. He came from a long line of doctors and belonged to a respectable and well-to-do family. He was also a mullā, learned in all the sciences, and was consulted by people on many matters besides medicine. But he was dissatisfied with his attainments, and when he met Mushtāq his life changed entirely. Like Rūmī, who fell in love with the 'uneducated' Shams-i Tabriz, the physician fell under the spell of the 'mad' Mushtāq.

It is said that in the days before he was initiated, he refused to sit or associate with the Sufis. One day, a merchant held his annual *rawḍah khānī* (a gathering to mourn the death of Imām Ḥusayn at Karbalā) in a mosque, and gave a meal for the participants. As was the custom, he had invited the 'ula-

mā' of the city. Mushtāq wandered in uninvited and sat down facing the physician. When they laid out the food, Muḥammad Taqī refused to eat. The host was surprised and insisted that all the food was perfectly ḥalāl, not acquired through unlawful means or cooked with unclean substances. The physician replied that he was offended by the presence of a dervish. Mushtāq overheard him, and gave him a strangely penetrating look. 'If this table belongs, as they say, to the Lord', he asked, 'what difference does it make whether a friend or enemy sits down? A dervish or a non-dervish, what difference?' Whereupon he got up and left. Everyone was upset and lost their appetites. Muḥammad Taqī ran out after the dervish, finally caught up with him, and found him squatting in the street in a state of meditation. He begged Mushtāq to come back to the dinner, but he refused. From that day on Muḥammad Taqī began to change, and became a lover.¹⁶ He went to Nūr 'Alī, who sent him to Rawnaq (whom Nūr 'Alī had appointed his representative in Kirman) for initiation. After attaining to certain exalted stations, he was given the name Muẓaffar ('Victorious') 'Alī Shāh. Despite the fact that Mushtāq was not his initiator (since as a majdhūb he could not initiate), Muẓaffar was 'at the service' of the musician. It was through this service that he made rapid progress on the Path, and very soon became himself a representative (khalīfah) of Nūr 'Alī. He was still respected as a learned physician, and gained even more respect for his new-found wisdom; although the enemies of the dervishes no doubt hated him, they did not for the time being dare to harm him.

A large and interesting group attached to Mushtāq and the Order in general at that time consisted of Ismā'īlīs,¹⁷ chief among whom was the governor of Kirman, Abūl Ḥasan Bīglirbaygī. He was the 42nd Imām of this branch of Shī'ism. It is not certain that he was an initiate of the Order, but it is quite clear that he was very sympathetic. It was his grandfather, the 40th Imām, Shāh Nizār, who first during Safavid times established an Ismā'īlī connection with the Order (though contact between the groups may go back to the time of Shāh Nī'matullāh himself), and Bīglirbaygī continued it with sincerity. His popularity with the people of Kirman (liberally enhanced by the huge amount of khums – religious tax – which he received from the faithful in India and distri-

buted generously among the poor of Kirman) undoubtedly helped shield the dervishes from their enemies while he lived. Biglirbaygī's cousin and successor as governor, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ṣādiq, was definitely a member of the Order. He was trained by Muẓaffar (who wrote *Kibrīt-i aḥmar* – 'Red Sulphur' – at his request) and was particularly attached to Mushtāq.

The Death of Mushtāq

Mushtāq had by this time reached such a pitch of excellence in music that, by all accounts, there was something supernatural about his art. He played 'in so harmonious and touching a manner, as to melt into tears all who heard him . . . It was alleged that he had, with unpardonable blasphemy, called his sihtar a divine instrument!'¹⁸ When a man hears the voice of the spiritual world, he becomes like a caged bird who, listening to the songs of his free companions, opens his wings and flies against the bars, just as the soul moves within the body when it hears divine music, and causes the listener to move in rhythm to the samā'.¹⁹ Such was the effect of Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh's playing. It was in Kirman that Mushtāq was inspired to add an extra string to the sihtar, which is why the 'three-string' now has four strings; and the extra one is named after him.²⁰

Nūr 'Alī Shāh, despite his own ecstasies, was more aware of 'plain reality' than Mushtāq, and worried about the increasing envy and fear of the exoteric 'ulamā', who had strong support in the city. One in particular, Mullā 'Abdullāh Mujtahid, the Imām Jum'ah, became particularly outspoken against the Sufis. Mullā 'Abdullāh's followers whispered to him that Nūr 'Alī and Mushtāq were causing the Sharī'ah to become extinct in Kirman,²¹ that they were taking over the city; and the Mullā in turn told his followers that the dervishes were guilty of religious innovation, and that they desired to wipe out orthodox believers from the region²² – in short, a campaign of hate and slander, dignified by the name 'jihād', was launched against the Ni'matullāhīs.

It is not known exactly how long Nūr 'Alī remained in Kirman.²³ They had arrived in Māhān in 1199 or 1200 (between 1783 and 1785); it was now 1205 or 1206 (1790–91). It was probably around this time that Nūr 'Alī and Mushtāq were separated by 'the cruel wheel of Fate'. Nūr 'Alī writes,

'Each one of us fell into calamity, he in Kirman and I in Karbalā'.²⁴ Impelled again to his wanderings, Nūr 'Alī with some misgivings begged Rawnaq and Muẓaffar to keep a close watch on Mushtāq, to see that he came to no harm.

Mullā 'Abdullāh was preaching from his pulpit in the Jum'ah Masjid on 27th Ramaḍan in 1206 (19 May, 1792), when Mushtāq quietly entered the mosque, said his prayers in a corner, and sat for a while in meditation, oblivious to the rising tones of the Mullā's sermon. The very sight of him made 'Abdullāh furious, and he began to exhort the people to stone Mushtāq as an infidel. According to legend, the final straw was Mushtāq's singing the call to prayer and accompanying himself on the sihtar. There are places in the Islamic world today where a man might be stoned to death for less. Mullā 'Abdullāh issued a fatwā²⁵ there and then making Mushtāq's death legal, and the congregation, roused to a pitch of hatred, attacked him with stones and clubs.

One of Mushtāq's disciples was outside the mosque at the time. His name was Ja'far. He was also a majdhūb, and had spent many years alone in the desert; finally he had given up talking and remained silent for so long that people believed him to be a mute. When he heard the commotion he rushed in, and seeing Mushtāq lying bleeding in the dust, cried out and ran to him. He tried to protect Mushtāq with his own body, and his robe became stained with his friend's blood, but the mob continued the stoning, until the blood of both flowed together, and the dervishes died. By the time the other Sufis heard of the murder, and hurried to the mosque, it was already too late.

Mushtāq was about 35 or 40 when he died.²⁶ He and Ja'far were buried in the same tomb of clay in the midst of a peaceful garden across the square from the mosque where they had been stoned.²⁷ The garden became a crowded graveyard, and Mushtāq's sepulchre can be seen there today under one of the mud domes. On it is written: 'We have not seen one so intoxicated as he.' There is also a quatrain, attributed to Mushtāq (illiteracy being no drawback to composing poetry):

He who dwells in dust sprouts branches, leaves;
The seed is planted. It will find its head.
Escape this world or you will miss your goal:
The egg which breaks and sheds its shell grows wings.

The year after Mushtāq's death, a train of events began which led to the famous siege and sack of Kirman by the fierce founder of the Qājār dynasty, Āghā Muḥammad Khān. The city was ravaged, and a pyramid of eyeballs, plucked from thousands of men, women and children, was raised in the public square. The only major Ni'matullāhī figure remaining in the city at the time was Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh. Some of his disciples were Qājār supporters, and as a result of their influence he was allowed to leave unharmed.

The Sufis are inclined to view this holocaust in Kirman as a form of divine retribution for the death of Mushtāq.

Exile and Persecution

Nūr 'Alī Shāh had left Kirman before Mushtāq's death. After staying for some time in Shiraz he set out towards the 'Atabāt, where he arrived (in Karbalā) on 22 Muharram 1207/9 September, 1792.²⁸ Everywhere he went in those days people gathered around him, either mystified by his spiritual power, or frightened by his seemingly wild words. We have become familiar enough with those who supported the persecution aimed against the dervishes by the 'ulamā'. But we should not ignore the fact that Nūr 'Alī and his followers also found support amongst the people, both the poor and well-to-do, as they wandered around Persia. With a few exceptions, the qalandars of this period, like the maulangs and saddhus of present-day India, either 'depended on God's mercy' for a living or were supported by admirers or wealthy adherents. If every hand had been turned against them, they would literally have starved to death. Ridā 'Alī Harātī says in one of his poems

My idleness is busyness and all my business is idle;
I have no work – I am unemployed – and I dance.

On one level the poet is expressing the traditional doctrine of the supremacy of contemplation over action, and that in fact the seeker may at times have to retire from outward activity in order to cultivate *real* and inward activity. He implies, too, the vanity of most worldly actions, of the petty 'job'-oriented society of the profane world which he and his companions had rejected. Finally, there is an assertion of the interconnectedness of contemplation and action: 'No Activity

Without Truth'.²⁹ There is here, of course, a remarkable philosophic parallel with the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which Krishna says, 'The man who sees worklessness in work [itself], and work in worklessness, is wise among his fellows, integrated, performing every work . . . When he has cast off [all] attachment to the fruits of works, ever content, on none dependent, though he embarks on work [himself], in fact he does no work at all . . . Attachment gone, deliverance won, his thoughts are fixed on wisdom: he works for sacrifice [alone], and all the work [he ever did] entirely melts away.'³⁰

But on another level, Riḍā 'Alī was speaking quite literally: he *was* unemployed! Such poetic assertions of independence from social convention never failed to annoy the enemies of Sufism; as for Nūr 'Alī (to return from our digression), it was particularly his Tarjī'-band, which he recited often, and his ghazal beginning 'We are the rainclouds' (see p. 204 and p. 203) which caused great stir, and it was not long before people were openly cursing him and accusing him of unbelief.

Eventually the animosity of the people of Karbalā drove Nūr 'Alī away. He set out for Mecca. 'I wanted to make a retreat, that I might offer to the seekers the roses of knowledge which I have raised in the garden of my heart. I thought I could find peace in Karbalā, but I was hurt there, and put in such a state that I had to leave. I began wandering again, seeking seclusion, when suddenly I heard a voice from the unseen telling me that security was to be found in Baghdad.' Aḥmad Pāshā, the governor of Baghdad, welcomed Nūr 'Alī openly, provided him with sustenance and built a takyah for him. He began writing the *Jannāt al-wiṣāl* ('Gardens of Union') there; tranquil and undisturbed for the first time in a long while, he wanted to compose a major prose work on Sufi doctrine. (He finished only two 'gardens' – 258 pages in the printed edition – and the book was later completed by Rawnaq 'Alī and Niẓām 'Alī Shāh.)

The sections finished by Nūr 'Alī Shāh deal with most of the basic subjects of Sufism, and to discuss them here at length would be only to repeat material we have already covered in other parts of the book. What distinguishes *Jannāt al-wiṣāl* however, and what makes it such a central and important work, is the directness and originality with which Nūr 'Alī Shāh discusses these subjects. There are very few quotations

from other works; as M. de Miras points out in his excellent study of the *Jannāt al-wiṣāl*,³¹ Nūr 'Alī Shāh relies primarily on his own spiritual experience, and illustrates his points with examples drawn from his own life and the lives of his contemporaries, such as Mushtāq. He uses primarily not an intellectual but an existential approach. With reference to a verse on Rūmī, he says:

First I sold my donkey's ears
and acquired other, more human organs
so that every moment now I hear
from doors, from walls, the voice of Surūsh³²
and as his songs ring in my ears
so secrets sing in my heart.
Where is your heart? where is your ear
that I may sing these secret songs to you?
Secrets boil in my heart but to whom
can I reveal them, since there is no man of heart?
I used to speak in parables of these things
but now, O artful one, I have unveiled them for you.³³

In keeping with this experiential approach, the design of *Jannāt al-wiṣāl* is rather loose. Nūr 'Alī Shāh begins in the first jannah with a discussion of creation, and constructs a Sufi ontology based on the Quran and Ḥadīth. He covers such subjects as the ultimate goal of creation; man's place in the universe; spiritual realization as man's ultimate end; the esoteric significance of Satan, and of heaven and hell; the relations between Sharī'ah, Ṭarīqah and Ḥaqīqah; the spiritual journey; the acts of worship and their inner significance; knowledge of the self; the esoteric meanings of such theological concepts as freedom and pre-determination; Sufi practice such as fīkr and dhikr; etc.

Besides its importance as a Sufi tract, *Jannāt al-wiṣāl* (like Nūr 'Alī Shāh's prose works) is also worthy of note as an early example of a 'revolution' in style which began in the Qājār period and in a sense continues today. Safavid literary style is marked by a certain turgid and overwritten tendency towards rigid adherence to Arabic models, values set by the class of 'ulamā' who were primarily concerned with theology, jurisprudence and the like. Nūr 'Alī Shāh was one of the first to break out of this mould, and return to Persian something of its natural fluency, clarity and grace. After him, Ni'matullāhī

writing in general fell back into Safavid modes under the influence of Sufi authors who were themselves mullās, but it is probably correct to say that Nūr ‘Alī Shāh made his mark on the development of literature in Iran through the poetic transparency of both his verse and prose. But because his works remained unpublished until recently, this influence is difficult to trace and has largely been ignored by those few literary historians (such as Browne) who dealt with these developments in 18th and 19th century Persian writing.

* * *

After some time in Baghdad, in 1211/1795 Nūr ‘Alī left and went to Pul-i Zahāb, a village west of Kermanshah near the present Iran-Iraq border. During his short stay there he named Ḥusayn ‘Alī Shāh his chief representative and successor. (There is a Ni‘matullāhī khāniqāh in Pul-i Zahāb to this day.)

Bihbahānī the Sufi-killer

At this point, Nūr ‘Alī Shāh and Sayyid Ma‘šūm (who had returned from India) both made another move – Ma‘šūm wanted, apparently, to make another pilgrimage to Mashhad, and ended up en route in the city of Kirmanshah, where Nūr ‘Alī had already come. At this time, according to Malcolm, their followers numbered more than 60,000 (including many secret adherents), and this figure is probably not very exaggerated. Hatred of Sufism, also, had reached fever pitch among certain circles of the ‘ulamā’, and the mujtahid of Kirmanshah, Āqā Muḥammad ‘Alī Bihbahānī, was a leader in these circles.

Born in Karbalā in 1144/1732, Bihbahānī had spent two years in Mecca studying law. ‘After his return fear of the plague drove him from Karbalā to Kirmanshah, where he spent most of his remaining years in the enjoyment of undisputed spiritual sway’.³⁴

Bihbahānī no doubt felt that the presence in Kirmanshah of two such notorious Sufis as Sayyid Ma‘šūm and Nūr ‘Alī constituted a direct threat to his authority; there is also no doubt that he sincerely believed Sufism dangerous, subversive and heretical, but the way in which he set about combatting its

influence would have done justice to the most Machiavellian schemer. From parody³⁵ to murder, he eschewed no weapon which came to his hand, nor was he adverse to achieving his ends through the manipulation of political power.

Soon after the Sufis' arrival in Kirmanshah, Bihbahānī arrested Sayyid Ma'sūm and threw him in prison. He then set about raising support from religious and political figures for his persecution. He even corresponded with the Prime Minister and the King, who seem, like Pilate, to have washed their hands of the affair.

Bihbahānī visited Ma'sūm in prison several times, asking him to 'repent', but he steadfastly refused to do so. Finally, Bihbahānī decided to have him killed. There are several versions of Ma'sūm's death: that he was poisoned in prison, that he was cut down by assassins while praying, that he was drowned in the Qarasū River, or that he was executed in prison and his corpse thrown in the river, in order that it might not receive proper burial, and that no tomb should exist for the Sufis to visit and venerate.³⁶ The last version is that given by Bihbahānī's biographer, and since it seems in keeping with his character, we are inclined to accept it as the true one.

Thus died the Pole of the Age, perhaps the most singular spiritual force to have appeared in Persia during the century, a great saint and mover of hearts, a man who almost alone had reawakened the spirit of Sufism among an entire nation, the king in rags, Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh.

It would be appropriate to end the account of Sayyid Ma'sūm's life by quoting a few of his aphorisms from a collection called 'Lights of Wisdom'. It is believed that, since Ma'sūm could not write Persian, these sayings were probably collected and recorded by Nūr 'Alī Shāh.³⁷

Man in this world is like a horseman in summertime, who rests for a few hours under the shade of a tree, then mounts and rides on.

If you made the entire world into a single morsel and put it in the mouth of a dervish, it would not be wasted; but to spend a single atom without God's satisfaction – that is wastefulness!

Man is made of three things: his heart, his tongue and his limbs. The heart is for Unity, the tongue for the Profession of Faith, and the limbs for rendering service unto God.

The dervish is like dust which has been made smooth by

sprinkling water on it: as you walk, no dust will rise and stain your feet, nor will the roughness of the path cause you pain.

Chivalry: when someone deserves to be offended, not to offend him; and when someone tries to offend you, not to be hurt.³⁸

Nūr 'Alī, for some reason, had temporarily escaped Bihbahānī's pogrom, and been banished. Some of the disciples begged him to allow them to kill Bihbahānī, but, as Malcolm puts it, 'the mild spirit of Noor Aly Shah is said to have revolted from this extreme.' He returned to Karbalā and made his way to Mosul, where he arrived in 1211 or early 1212. Here, as usual, he was surrounded by ardent followers, who flocked to him by the thousands. And it was in Mosul that 'two inhabitants of Kirmanshah, who were distinguished by an extraordinary appearance of zeal, dressed the dinner of Noor Aly Shah on the day that he was suddenly attacked by those violent spasms, which, in a few hours, terminated his existence. Their flight led all to suspect them of having poisoned him . . . He expired close to the grave of the Prophet Jonas, within a league of the city of Moossul, and was entombed there.'³⁹

Bihbahānī was, naturally enough, accused of having inspired the poisoners. He denied it, and even went so far as to assert, in the postscript of his risālah, that Nūr 'Alī had died of plague. The dervishes may be forgiven for not believing him.

Bihbahānī's attention turned finally to Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, whose fame had become widespread through his writing, teaching and healing. Bihbahānī had discovered a letter from Muẓaffar to Nūr 'Alī which he mentions in his risālah, containing a poem which no doubt shocked his sensibilities.⁴⁰ At his insistence, Muẓaffar was brought to Tehran and interviewed by Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, the king himself. It was then the beginning of his reign, and whatever he may have thought of Muẓaffar or of Sufism, he did not care to challenge the power of the 'ulamā' or the influence of Bihbahānī. The king allowed himself to be persuaded by his Prime Minister to send Muẓaffar to Kirmanshah into the keeping of Bihbahānī.

It is said that Bihbahānī's son was terribly ill at the time; that Muẓaffar, who was a physician of both soul and body, cured him and saved his life. The boy became attracted to Muẓaffar, and to Sufism. We cannot vouch for the authentic-

ity of this story, but in any case, Bihbahānī soon arranged for Muẓaffar to be poisoned. The Sufi escaped the massacre at Kirman, but not the 'Sufi-killer'. He died in 1215/1800 and was buried outside the city of Kirmanshah, where a shrine was later built.⁴¹

Having wiped out the leaders of the Order, Bihbahānī now turned his attention to the rank and file. In 1216/1801, according to oral tradition, a dervish named Budalā fell into his hands. Bihbahānī sat in judgment on him and condemned him to death.

'Don't kill me', Budalā said, 'or I'll kill you!'

Bihbahānī roared with laughter. 'This dervish has smoked too much hashish! I have killed your masters, and nothing happened to me.'

'The reason is not that my masters lacked the power to kill you', Budalā replied, 'but rather that they were perfect and could forgive you. I however am not perfect, and that is why I will use my power to revenge myself. I can even tell you how I shall accomplish this. After my death you will fall ill of stomach cramps. Nothing will cure you – you will die. As they carry your coffin through the bazaar the roof will collapse and cover your corpse in rubble. In the end, you will be buried beneath my feet.'

Bihbahānī was not frightened, but in the end all occurred exactly as the dervish had predicted. Bihbahānī died in 1216 A.H. Never again in the history of Persian Sufism was there to occur another persecution such as the one he had instigated. The enemies of Sufism had done their worst, and failed.

Notes

1. *J-a-W*, pp. 111–15.

2. In Persia usually a building for ritual mourning during the month of muḥarram, although in Turkey the Sufi meeting halls are called takyahs.

3. Riḍā Qulī Hidāyat, *Uṣūl al-fuṣūl fī ḥuṣūl al-wuṣūl* (U-a-F); (MS 2103, Majlis Library, Tehran).

4. There is a manuscript of this work, a page of which is reproduced in the printed edition of the *Dīwān-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh* (Tehran, 1349 S.) which calls

it 'the Dīwān of my son, Nūr 'Alī', presumably in the handwriting of Fayd 'Alī Shāh.

5. The same account is given in *T-a-H*, pp. 172-3. Sir John Malcolm, in *The History of Persia*, says that 'Alī Murād had set sldiers to cut off the ears and noses and beards of the dervishes. 'The ignorant sldiers entrusted with the execution of this mandate, were not very capable of distinguishing between true believers and infidels; and we are assured by a contemporary writer, that many orthodox Mohammedans had their noses and ears cut off, and their bears shaved, on this memorable occasion' (p. 419).

6. *Riyāḍ al-'arīfīn*, pp. 439-40.

7. This might imply that Ma'sūm had been directed by a vision of the Twelfth Imam, al-Mahdī.

8. A ḥadīth of the Prophet.

9. Quran VII, 172.

10. At one point during the last part of their sojourn in Māhān, according to an oral source, 6,000 people would walk or ride every Thursday morning from Kirman to the shrine in order to be there in time for the evening majlis of Nūr 'Alī and Mushtāq.

11. Nūr 'Alī Shāh *et al.*, *Jannāt al-wiṣāl (J-a-W)*, (Tehran 1348 S.), pp. 161-3.

12. Mast 'Alī Shāh (Zayn al-'Ābidīn Shirwānī), *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāḥah*, (*H-a-S*), ed. Tābandih (Tehran 1348 S.), p. 405.

13. J. Nurbakhsh, introductions to *J-a-W* and the *Gharā'ib* of Rawnaq 'alī Shāh (Tehran 1352 S.).

14. See Laleh Bakhtiar, 'La parte del principio femminile nella reintegrazione spirituale' in *Conoscenza Religiosa*, 1975, number 3, pp. 309-22.

15. Surkh 'Alī was eventually arrested in Hamadān, and was offered his freedom if he would curse Nūr 'Alī Shāh. He asked, 'But what shall I curse? He has three names. Shall I curse Nūr ('Light', a name of God), 'Alī, or the Shāh?' (*T-a-H*, III., 203.)

16. I. Bāstānī Pārīzī, *Āsiyā-yi haft sang* (Tehran 1346 S.), pp. 206-7.

17. See N. Pourjavady and P.L. Wilson, 'Ismā'ilīs and Ni'matullāhīs', *Studia Islamica*, XLI, 1975, pp. 113-35.

18. Malcolm, p. 420.

19. 'The soul intends to go upward like a bird, who desires to throw himself out of his cage – just so the cage of the body is an obstacle, such that the bird of the soul gathers together his force and thrusts against the bars, thus moving the cage. If his force or energy is great enough he will break through and leave – but without such power he only makes his head spin and drags the cage along with him.' (*Risālah fi ḥālāt al-ʿuṣūlīyyah*, 'Epistle on the State of childhood', from Shihabaddin Yahya Sohrawardi, *Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques*, p. 264).

20. R. Khāliqī, *Sargudhasht-i mūsīqī-yi Īrān* (Tehran, 1353 S.), p. 146.

21. Aḥmad 'Alī Khān Wazīrī, *Tārīkh-i Kirmān* (*History of Kirman*) known as *Sālārīyyah*, ed. by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Bāstānī-yi Pārīzī (Tehran 1340 S.), p. 555.

22. *J-a-W*, pp. 163–4.

23. *Tārīkh-i Kirmān* (p. 558) says Nūr 'Alī stayed only four months, but this seems very unlikely.

24. *J-a-W*, p. 164. According to *Gharā'ib* (p. 125), this eventual separation had been their original plan when they left Herat.

25. A legal ruling or expression of opinion by one of the 'ulamā' on a point of religious law or legal case.

26. Not, as some legends have it, 18 or 23. Since he entered the zūrkhānah when he was old enough to grow a beard, say 16 or 17 at the youngest, and counting a few years at least to become a champion and have his two love affairs, he must have been about 20 to 23 when he came to Shiraz sometime between 1184/1770 and 1190/1776. Since he died in 1206, the picture of him as a mature man (supposed to be a portrait from memory, from a manuscript of *J-a-W*) must be more or less accurate.

27. *Gharā'ib*, p. 126. This was the tomb that Muḥammad 'Alī Khān, one of the leading dervishes and a wealthy citizen of Kirman, had built for his father Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān. Members of the Order were buried there for some time afterwards until, in 1245/1829, at the death of Kawthar 'Alī Shāh, a shaykh of the Order, one of his disciples, a woman named Ḥāj-jiyyah, interred him there and built the present building, the 'Mushtā-qīyyah', at a cost of 5,000 tumans. It was used by the dervishes as a khāniqāh for some years, and is still a popular place of pilgrimage.

28. *Majmū'ah-i az āthār-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh* (*M-a-N*), (Tehran 1350 S.), p. 84.

29. See F. Schuon, 'No Activity Without Truth' in J. Needleman (ed.), *The Sword of Gnosis*, pp. 27–39.

30. *The Bagavad-Gītā*, trans. R.C. Zaehner (Oxford, 1973), IV, 18, 20 and 23.

31. *La Méthode spirituelle d'un maître du Soufisme iranien: Nur Ali-Shah* (Paris, 1974), p. 46.

32. The angel who brings messages to mankind.

33. *J-a-W*, p. 25.

34. Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London 1879; photolith reprint 1966), Vol. I, p. 33. Sir John Malcolm was 'well acquainted with (Bihbahānī) this learned Persian, who enjoyed, when I was in Persia in 1800, the highest respect and confidence of the king. He was a man of considerable information; and there was nothing in his appearance or manners which indicated that violence and relentless zeal with which he, some years afterwards, persecuted the Soofees.' (*op. cit.*, p. 388.)

35. He produced parodies of Nūr 'Alī Shāh and others, and of a poem by Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Harāfī on the silsilah of the Order (which, incidentally, is remarkable for its mention, along with Persian Sufis, of figures from the Western world of Islam such as Abū Madyan, Abū'l Barakat and Abū Mas'ūd Andalūsī); here Bihbahānī rages against the great figures of Sufism, calling Abū'l-Qāsim Gurgānī, for example, a 'dog'. See 'Alī Dawānī, *Wahīd Bihbahānī* (Qum, 1378 A.H., 1337 S.), pp. 425-6.

36. *B-a-S*, p. 224. *T-a-H* (III, 175) gives the date of death as 1211/1796, but *B-a-S* is to be preferred (1212/1797). An interesting story is told among the dervishes today about the burial place of Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh. During the time of Mūnis 'Alī (Quṭb of the Order before Dr Nurbakhsh), one of the dervishes in Kirmanshah had a dream about the house of a certain Jew, in which he seemed to see a light emanating from the cellar. Mūnis interpreted this dream as revealing the grave of Ma'sūm (which was 'in the garden of 'Arsh-i Barīn', according to *B-a-S*, p. 224) and at once tried to buy the house. The Jew refused to sell. After Mūnis' death, the Jew decided to donate the cellar to the Order free of charge, but a certain mujtahid dissuaded him, telling him he would be 'cursed'. The site remains unmarked, but known to the dervishes.

37. *M-a-N*, pp. 68-85. These sayings represent basic ideas of Islam and Sufism, and in fact some of them are actually paraphrases of Prophetic Traditions.

38. 'We practise fidelity and endure reproach, and are happy,

For it is infidelity in our Path to be offended.'

- Ḥāfiẓ (*Diwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. M. Qazwinī and Q. Ghanī, Tehran, 1320 S.), p. 271.

39. Malcolm, pp. 421-2. In *J-a-W*, p. 332, we read that Rawnaq 'Alī Shāh gives Nūr 'Alī Shāh's death date as 1212 through abjad (gematria; using a word or phrase which is the numerical equivalent of a date). 'Someone else'

gives 1213 as the date. We prefer 1212 or 1213 (1797 or 1798) rather than Malcolm's 'nine o'clock on the morning of the tenth of Muhurram A.H. 1215', despite its curious exactness.

40. Published in the preface to the *Diwān-i Mushtāqiyyah* by Muzaffar 'Alī Shāh (Tehran 1347 S.).

41. Bihbahānī had thrown Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh's corpse in the river precisely in order to keep Kirmanshah from attracting dervishes to Sufi shrines. Despite this effort, the grave of Muẓaffar was remembered, and Dr Nurbakhsh has restored the building and turned it into a khāniqāh. He added 5,000 metres of land and built a mausoleum over Muẓaffar's grave. (Dr Nurbakhsh's own Master, Mūnis 'Alī Shāh, was also buried in Kirmanshah in 1332 S., much to the annoyance of certain mullās.)

Muẓaffar had two sons and three daughters; one of the sons, Mīrzā Kāẓim (Zafar 'Alī Shāh), was also a famous physician, and a Sufi.

VI Mullās and Kings

The Heritage of the Qalandars

The vision of 'Alī Riḍā Deccani had been fulfilled: not only had the Nī'matullāhī Order been re-introduced to Persia, but Sufism in general was to thrive. In the decades after the death of Nūr 'Alī Shāh the Order itself grew, sprouted branches, some of which flourished while others disappeared, and helped as well to inspire the growth of several other major Sufi orders. After the eclipse of the late Safavid, Afghan and Afsharid periods, Sufism had regained its position as a central factor, indeed the very heart of Persian religious life. This re-birth has for the most part gone unrecognized by scholars and orientalists, who generally prefer their subject well-embalmed, and who have turned out numerous tomes depicting the death of Sufism under the onslaught of the modern world. It has also been ignored by certain oriental modernists who wish Sufism to disappear along with all other 'mediaeval superstitions'. But the rise of the orders in 18th and 19th century Persia was not only paralleled in other Islamic countries; it has also continued into the 20th.¹

Different times have different spiritual needs – or rather, different tactics are needed to bring the same spirit to each age. Sayyid Ma'sūm and Nūr 'Alī Shāh were faced with the task of a 're-volution', a turning back to the eternal Source against violent opposition. Their methods were extreme – the seed they planted was watered with their own blood. They and their first followers formed a spiritual élite of men totally dedicated to the Path. With their success, however, the Order was destined to broaden its appeal and influence to include a wide range of social and cultural spheres. Shāh Nī'matullāh had believed that although only a few seekers in every age are destined to a full commitment to the Way, Sufism can and

should play a part in the general life of the Islamic people; it was for this reason that he never refused initiation to anyone. These ideals have never been far from the hearts of his followers.

Those few orientalist who have noticed the Ni'matullāhī Order have usually called it an 'aristocratic' ṭarīqah.² If one allows for numerous exceptions within each order, it may be useful to admit a distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' orders, or to speak of orders which are more or less 'aristocratic' or 'folk'-oriented; or even to borrow a term from Hinduism and admit the existence of 'bhaktic' and 'jñanic' fraternities. The Mevlevī, Shādhilī and Ni'matullāhīs, for example, are generally urban; the Bektashī, Khāksārī and Tījānī rural. Other orders, notably the Qādiriyyah, are so widespread that no such generalizations can be made without distortion.

As for the Ni'matullāhī Order, it was (and is) by no means a group of aristocrats or professionals or the wealthy, for it included aspirants from every walk of life: beggars, merchants, peasants, craftsmen, soldiers, officials, princes and kings. If the word 'aristocratic' be given a political or 'class' meaning, it cannot be used at all. Although the Order had members in the upper classes, it never identified with any class; above all, the Quṭb himself never engaged in politics (unless it be considered that to warn rulers of their misdeeds is a kind of politicizing). Every attempt to politicize the Order or involve it with interests outside Sufism ended in a split, in which the social-minded minority went their way. If however we may use the word 'aristocrat' in the sense of 'sharīf' or noble,³ then we may admit that it describes the Ni'matullāhī point of view. Sufism is a spiritual aristocracy, a lineage not of blood but of initiation. This has nothing to do with worldly position; the 'ways of the world' are neither perpetuated nor abolished in Sufism – they are transcended. Inwardly, the beggar may be a king, the king a beggar.

I boast of the festivity of Love, for there
 Beggary and kingship sit face to face.⁴

The so-called 'democracy' of Islam does not consist of a confusion of the 'castes', if we may use this word to refer to the natural divisions of ability, aptitude and responsibility

which characterize any normal society, but rather of an inward freedom to achieve nobility (which can be seen reflected in the faces of even – or nowadays especially – the poorest people of the East). This freedom is exemplified for Islam in Sufism; it is not a 'liberty' which would reduce everything to a quantitative lowest common denominator, but a true freedom which leaves open the Path to the highest. Outwardly the dervish may remain in his 'place' – (though there are always exceptions, such as Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, whose renunciation of a kingdom mirrors that of Gautama; or the Iberian Murīdīn, who combined Sufism with a jihād). But, remaining in his place, the dervish journeys inwardly; he is 'in the world but not of it'. In some senses this may be considered the highest or at least the most difficult of all spiritual paths, one which is found not only in Sufism but, for example, in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The followers of Sayyid Ma'sūm were strong, explicit and open in their esoterism, fearless to the point of greeting death. They embraced martyrdom with the ardour of lovers. Although Ni'matullāhīs have always written poetry, they seemed to embody poetry, like the magic bards of the Golden Age who changed reality with their words, their music, their sacred art. The directness and even simplicity of their approach had a great appeal, and provided the elixir with which the spiritual life of Iran was transformed. The literary style of Nūr 'Alī Shāh, for example, is clear, outspoken and fluent; it utilizes a very pure Persian vocabulary, almost devoid of the elaborate phraseology of the theologians and legalists; it very often achieves an incandescent beauty of expression which acts directly on the heart.

At the same time, the way of the Qalandars was not the way for every aspirant to Sufism. The disadvantages of their heroic style were only too apparent to their contemporaries who watched them die early and unpleasant deaths. Like a tidal wave, such a movement could not, by its very nature, last for long. It needed to be followed by the depth and serenity of a calm sea which hides and safeguards its pearls. A new breed of leaders was called for to consolidate and nurture the Sufism which Sayyid Ma'sūm had so explosively introduced. The aspect of 'sobriety', which had been present all along, but somewhat overshadowed by 'intoxication', needed to be

emphasized. Above all there was need for a reconciliation, or at least a pacification of the 'ulamā' and the forces of exoterism which had so nearly succeeded in destroying the rise of the Order.

To the Sufis there is ultimately no such thing as history as it is usually understood. There is only divine history, the eternal re-appearance of the divine in forms. God reveals himself in each man,⁵ but most completely in the Pole, the Universal or Perfect Man, the Quṭb, the man who has realized the divine essence within himself. In each spiritual age, the divine puts on new garments and appears as different creatures – but it is always the same essence and always the same motive behind the new costume.

Thus there can be no change, no evolution or progress, in the aim of the Sufis, who by definition are doing the work of the divine. The fact that, after the death of Nūr 'Alī Shāh, the Order seemed to undergo a certain change of emphasis, must be understood as simple strategy, destined by divine will to complement and fulfill the specific spiritual needs of the times.

Nūr 'Alī's father Fayḍ, Rawnaq, and Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, had been mullās before their enlightenment; thus, in essence they had acted as 'bridges' between the Law and the Way. It was now necessary, however, for this 'bridge' to appear in the person of the Quṭb himself. Only in this way could the intensity and fervour of the movement be consolidated and absorbed into the mainstream of Persian culture, into 'history'. From this point on for several decades, all the Quṭbs of the Order appear as mullās, in the turbans and robes of the 'ulamā'.

Needless to say, the Quṭbs were not hiding anything by appearing as mullās; to think of them as going 'underground' or simply disguising themselves would be a drastic error. Nevertheless, it must also be pointed out that this compromise or adjustment in the matter of external appearances was dictated in part by virtual necessity. Too many good men had died. If the Order was to grow and survive, the persecution must end.

The period with which we now deal certainly did not lack for excitement or remarkable men. Poetry was still produced; Sufi alchemy flourished; colourful characters, such as the

dervish king Muḥammad Shāh Qājār, abounded. But above all, it must be seen as a period in which Sufism was established, or rather re-established, as a firm foundation of Persian life and thought, with a powerful influence on social custom and cultural achievement.

There was a need, as in the time of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, to re-assert the position of Sufism within the whole world-view of Islam. Where Nūr 'Alī Shāh had sung of love, his successors were more apt to produce apologiae for Sufism, couched in the learned vocabulary and expression of the theologians and legalists of the Safavid period, such as Majlisī.⁶ The khāniqāh became more like a mosque; canonical prayers and religious observances such as rawḍah-khwānī (ceremonies of mourning for the Shi'ite Imāms) were integrated into the life of the khāniqāh, instead of being left to the individual dervishes to perform on their own. Of course, the spirit of Sufism suffered no loss; the great legacy of Shāh Ni'matullāh, the poetry of Ḥāfiẓ and Rūmī, the teachings of Sayyid Ma'sūm and Nūr 'Alī Shāh, were not neglected. But a definite attempt was made to bridge the gap between the exoteric and esoteric aspects of Islam, which attained its symbolic expression not only in literary and ritual practice, but in clothing: the Quṭb dressed as a mullā.

Husayn 'Alī Shāh

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Zayn al-Ābidīn, whose dervish name was Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, was the man destined to accomplish this new direction. He came from a distinguished family of Tabriz;⁷ his grandfather, Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn, was a learned mullā and Imām jum'ah of the city. This grandfather arranged for Ḥusayn's early education in Isfahan, and after having mastered what was necessary, the youth began his search for true awakening. He travelled through Iran and Arabia, meeting many of the well-known 'ulamā' and shaykhs of the period. Eventually (sometime before 1198/1784) he met Sayyid Ma'sūm in Isfahan, and at his command became a disciple of Nūr 'Alī Shāh. He travelled with them to Herat, but was ordered back to Isfahan by Nūr 'Alī, who commanded him to preach, teach and 'pray in the mosque', that is, to demonstrate his orthodoxy to the public. In 1212/1797, when Nūr 'Alī came from Iraq to Kurdistan, he summoned

Ḥusayn to the village of Pul-i Zahāb where, in the presence of others, he named Ḥusayn as the next Quṭb. When, shortly thereafter, Nūr 'Alī died in Mosul, Ḥusayn (who had returned once again to Isfahan) began to propagate the inner and outer aspects of Islam. After a trip to Shiraz and Mecca, he became known to the people of Isfahan as Ḥajjī Ḥusayn.

'Even though I paid so much attention to dhikr and concentration for seven years', he relates, 'few knew me as a dervish. If anyone questioned me about it, I always answered that I had "received some prayers and been permitted to repeat certain names by association with a certain group of people".' Ḥusayn was as careful about his outward appearance as he was about his inner state, so that those who cared for the former knew nothing of the latter, while those who cared for the bāṭin (esoteric) never considered him merely a man of appearances (ẓāhir, or the exoteric). As for the quasi-dervishes, the frauds whose business was simply to make trouble for real Sufis, he did not allow them even to approach him.⁸ Once, in Tehran, someone came to Ḥusayn to complain about a certain dervish, whom he accused of some illicit act or another. Ḥusayn repudiated the false dervish, but even more so the tattle-tale, by saying: 'A person who commits an ugly deed and confesses to his sin is a thousand times better than one who appears in the clothing of deception and two-facedness, showing himself off as a righteous man and deceiving the creatures of God.'⁹ 'A hundred thousand people have come to me', he was once to complain, 'and among them I have found only five who were sincere, and pleaded for nothing but God.'

Like many wise men, from Socrates to the present, Ḥusayn was cursed with an ill-tempered wife – as well as an equally ill-tempered mother. The two were always at each other's throats, and one imagines that Ḥusayn's home-life was good training in saintly patience. His friends asked why he could not at least divorce the wife; he replied, 'Nobody would put up with her if I got rid of her. I'm afraid she might fall into sin, and I should be responsible!'

Eventually, however, Ḥusayn moved from his home to a madrasah, where he lived and taught. He survived on a small inheritance and sent the money his admirers gave him to

the wife and mother, or distributed it to charity. He managed his own life very simply, and subsisted on bread and yoghurt.

The usual insidious rumours about the Sufis (that they wanted to be 'shāhs' for example) had reached the ears of the king of kings, Fath 'Alī Shāh Qājār, in Tehran. In 1229/1814 Ḥusayn was carried in chains to the capital at the monarch's command.

But somehow the incident did not end as the Sufi's enemies had planned and expected. The king treated him kindly, and seemed persuaded that the rumours about him were the product of sheer jealousy. 'You seem quite good-natured and respectable', he told Ḥusayn. 'Why then have you been so infamously accused? Why have you joined with these accursed dervishes?'

'Your Majesty', the Quṭb replied, 'I found them able to give permission and instruction in prayer and dhikr, so I got the permission and found nothing blameworthy about it. I accuse no one, but for some reason I have been slandered.'

'Go then to the mosque, and pray and preach, that the people may realize you are not one of the Opposers', Fath 'Alī commanded, and gave Ḥusayn leave to return to Isfahan at once.

Obviously the situation had changed since the days when Fath 'Alī bowed to Bihbahānī's murderous zeal. Bihbahānī was dead; the climate had cooled to a degree; Fath 'Alī was firmly ensconced, and felt no urgent need to appease the 'ulamā' – in fact, may not have minded indicating that he was not at their beck and call; and finally, as is apparent from Ḥusayn's attitudes, the Sufis themselves had moderated their approach.

But equally obviously, the danger of oppression was still real, and it cannot be denied that there were cautionary elements in Ḥusayn's teaching. He tried as much as possible to avoid attracting attention to the practice of Sufism. Self-advertisement, public confession of inner states, the wearing of 'qalandarī' costumes – all these were discouraged. If he found a beginner sitting in meditation, eyes closed, occupying himself with the dhikr in such a way that people might notice, Ḥusayn would reprimand him: 'no one should discover that you are one of the People of Invocation:

Have you ever heard of someone here
 And not here, all at the same time?
 I move in the midst of the crowd,
 But my heart is elsewhere.'¹⁰

Once Ḥusayn was sitting on a carpet by the riverside with one of his disciples, who happened to be a tribal chieftain. Another disciple, a simple gardener (who had however attained to high stages in the Path) approached them. The chieftain rose and greeted the gardener with great deference, offering him his own place on the carpet. But Ḥusayn ordered the gardener to sit in the dust, and he obeyed politely. 'Observe the *ẓāhir* in matters of outward appearance', Ḥusayn told the chieftain. 'This is infinitely more important than the outward observance of the *bāṭin*, because the *ẓāhir* is always prior to the *bāṭin* and takes precedence over it in worldly affairs. Justice consists of combining the two according to the needs of the situation.'¹¹

Ḥusayn once wrote to one of his companions: 'Tell the friends that just as they observe and obey God, they must also observe and obey the Prophet, his Law and Traditions, and walk with their eyes open, in a clever (*rindī*) manner.

O heart, learn from the *muḥtasib*¹² how to be clever:
 He is drunk himself, yet no one suspects him of it!¹³

By this rather startling combination of images Ḥusayn implies that the Prophet (as the first Sufi), though inwardly in union with God, acted outwardly as other men (as he is made to say in the Quran, 'I am only a man like you'; XLI, 6). 'Rindī', a central term in Nī'matullāhī thinking, possesses a double meaning: 'clever', 'subtle' or 'astute', and also 'in the fashion of a reveller; intoxicated'. This hiding of one's spiritual state is by no means simply a matter of protecting oneself from persecution; just as water needs to be dammed up in order to acquire power, so spiritual states must be interiorized if they are to be transmuted into permanent 'stations'.

* * *

Ḥusayn had been made Quṭb by Nūr 'Alī Shāh with the permission of Sayyid Ma'sūm. After their deaths, 'Alī Ridā Deccani was still alive, and it seems that there were two Quṭbs of the Order at the same time (as in fact there were three

while Nūr 'Alī and Ma'sūm still survived). How this was possible, considering that Sufi doctrine usually assumes only one Pole to an Age, is difficult to say. Even if we take 'quṭb' as referring simply to the head of the Order, it is still unusual to think of an order having three heads. It must of necessity be maintained that a certain identity existed among them; it is not a question of logical and sequential succession, as with worldly kings ('Two kings cannot share the same kingdom but forty dervishes can sleep on one rug'); the Quṭbs, being realized men, have no ego to consider: 'The souls of wolves and dogs are separate, every one; the souls of the lions of God are united.'¹⁴ In any case, after Deccanī's death, all the responsibilities of the Order, including the Indian section, fell on Ḥusayn. Since very little is said in Persian sources about the Ni'matullāhīs in the Deccan, we must assume that regular communication between the Indian and Persian branches suffered some measure of breakdown after the transferral of authority.

In 1233/1817-18, Ḥusayn left Isfahan for a pilgrimage to the shrines of the 'Atabāt. In Karbalā, he sent for his chief disciple Ḥājī Muḥammad Ja'far Hamadānī (Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh), who found the Master very ill when he arrived. Ḥusayn named him successor, and gave him certain instructions about washing his corpse and leading the prayers after his death, which he knew was approaching. In Muḥarram of 1234/Nov. 1818, while praying the evening prayer, Ḥusayn passed away. He was buried according to his orders in Najaf.

Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh

Majdhūb's chief disciple and successor, Mast 'Alī Shāh, described him thus: 'I know him to have been Shāh Ni'matullāh and Šadr al-Dīn Qūnyawī;¹⁵ that is, in a revelatory dream, I saw him as the embodied essence of Shāh Ni'matullāh.'¹⁶

Majdhūb's ancestors were headmen of the Turkic tribe of Qarah Guzlū. His grandfather had been governor of Hamadan in the time of Karīm Khān Zand, and was remembered as a just and generous administrator. His father was known for his piety, and at his insistence, young Majdhūb studied with the leading 'ulamā' of Hamadan until the age of seventeen. At first he concentrated on literature and logic; then, moving to Isfahan, he studied five years more in the fields of mathema-

tics, theology and the natural sciences. Five years more were spent in Kashan studying the practice and theory of jurisprudence with leading masters; it was then, too, that he first began to become interested in *ḥikmat-i ilāhī*, or 'theosophy' in the original sense of that much-abused word. Although he met the most learned men of the time, neither their knowledge nor they themselves satisfied his yearning for the divine truth. Abandoning his formal studies, he set out wandering and searching.

After meeting some Sufi travellers along his way, he became a disciple of Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, and made rapid advances in the stages of the Path under his guidance. He met both Sayyid Ma'sūm and Nūr 'Alī Shāh, and in 1207/1792 received an appointment from Nūr 'Alī as one of the shaykhs of the Order. In 1234/1818, as mentioned above, Ḥusayn made him 'Shaykh of the shaykhs' – in other words, his successor. After Ḥusayn's death he returned to Iran from Karbalā and began to act as Quṭb. Known for his piety, Majdhūb was called by his admirers the Salmān of the Age in respect of his deeds, and for his truthfulness, the Abū Dharr.¹⁷

Mast 'Alī Shāh, the author we have already quoted, lists three characteristics of his master Majdhūb which, he says, can rarely be found in a single person: first, he was from a noble family on both his father's and mother's side. Mast 'Alī thus mentions a quality no longer understood or appreciated in the West, or even in the modernized East. But if nobility were not important, he says, the prophets would not have been born in noble families. Even in the animal world this principle holds true: there is certainly a very real difference between a thoroughbred Arabic horse and a plowhorse from Uzbekistan, or a mule. It is interesting, and definitely a sign of the times, that Mast 'Alī even bothers to offer these explanations of his first point. Second, he continues, Majdhūb had mastered all the sciences of his time; he was both a philosopher and a mujtahid.¹⁸ Third, he had gone through all the stages of gnosis. Finally, Mast 'Alī points out that many of the 'ulamā' of the day were of low birth; being a mullā was their only chance for 'upward social mobility'. Obviously, since Majdhūb had possessed all the social advantages, his quest for knowledge must have been sincere and disinterested.

'Once', Mast 'Alī Shāh relates, 'I received a letter from him ordering me to repeat a certain litany; as I pondered on the significance of the words I became more and more worried and anxious for him, and at once set off to see him. When I arrived he told me his end was approaching, and that it would fall upon me to look after the dervishes. I answered, "I want nothing in this world but you. If you would favour me, grant me leave to accompany you from this world to the next."

"No", he replied, "you will stay and I will depart. Do not forget me." Then he repeated several times, "I will not return from Azerbaijan".¹⁹

Majdhūb's uncle, Hājī Muḥammad Khān, tells the full story of the Quṭb's departure from this world in a little treatise.²⁰ According to him, Majdhūb first began to predict his own death when he was about 63 years old. Once, on the way to Qum, Majdhūb asked the uncle to stay with him, as he felt death approaching.

From Qum they went on together to Tabriz. 'When we got there, we discovered a cholera epidemic raging in the city', the uncle writes. (According to oral tradition, Majdhūb announced, 'I will eat the sickness and put an end to the whole affair', meaning that he would save the city by accepting the full burden of the plague himself.) Several dervishes who had come to see Majdhūb fled the city when they heard of the epidemic; among them was Hājī Mullā Riḍā Hamadānī (Kawthar 'Alī Shāh).²¹ In the end, no one stayed with Majdhūb in Tabriz except Mīrzā Naṣrullāh Ṣadr al-Mamālik,²² the tutor of young prince Muḥammad (later Muḥammad Shāh, the dervish king).

That night, Majdhūb stayed up till dawn talking with Ṣadr al-Mamālik. In the morning he noticed he had fallen ill, and he said, 'I have cholera and will die of it. There is a piece of white cloth in my luggage; cover me with that and bury me in the tomb of Sayyid Ḥamzah [a local shrine].' He instructed Ṣadr al-Mamālik to wash the corpse and say the funeral prayer.

Next morning, near death, Majdhūb roused himself to ask how long remained till the noon prayer. He was then silent for about an hour, when suddenly he sat up. 'He looked around in wonder, then took the final breath.' It was the 22nd of Dhu'l-qa'dah, the 11th lunar month, in 1238 (31 July, 1823).²³

He left behind him three sons by the daughter of the uncle who wrote the account of his death, plus two more sons and three daughters by another wife. He was the author of several treatises. The *Mir'āt al-ḥaqq* (Tehran, 1351 S.) is a kind of apologia; the greater part of it consists of quotations from other works, with which he defends Sufism against its attackers, using ḥadīth and sayings of the great 'ulamā' (such as Majlisī). But aside from this, in other sections which owe more to Majdhūb's own ability, the book is quite valuable to those interested in Sufi doctrine and practice.

The *Marāḥil al-sālikīn* (Tehran, 1351 S.), as its title ('The Stages of the Seekers') indicates, is a more straightforward Sufi treatise, although Majdhūb makes use of his knowledge of Sharī'ah and orthodox opinion somewhat in the manner of Muḥammad Ghazālī. It is modelled on and copied extensively from the well-known *Mirṣād al-'ibād* of the 7/13th century Sufi Najm al-Dīn Rāzī.

Both of these books represent a tremendous erudition, a familiarity with the entire literary output of the Persian cultural world, but not a great degree of originality. Daring expositions, however, were not what the age demanded. The writings of Majdhūb, like his practice, served its purpose.

Mast 'Alī Shāh

After Majdhūb's death a number of unpleasant altercations broke out among the dervishes over the question of succession. The man now accepted by the main body of the Order as Majdhūb's true successor was Zayn al-'Ābidīn Shirwānī, known as Mast 'Alī Shāh.

This remarkable man was, according to his own account, born in the middle of Sha'bān in 1190/1776,²⁴ in the town of Shamākhī in Shirwān (now part of the Soviet Union, north-west of Baku). When he was five his father moved to the 'Atabāt, and Mast 'Alī remained there studying for some twelve years. Although he met several outstanding 'ulamā', he (like the other educated men we have studied) soon became disappointed with their brand of learning, and began to ponder upon the saying 'He who knows himself knows God'. Desire for knowledge, the search for which is incumbent upon all Muslims, according to the Prophet, began to obsess the youth, and he decided if necessary to take

quite literally Muḥammad's advice to 'seek it even in China'.

Methodically he began to visit as many mullās as possible; then, as he says, he found the *real* 'ulamā'; and finally he met Sayyid Ma'sūm and Nūr 'Alī Shāh, and joined the Order. Almost immediately after his initiation he began to travel, to wander the face of the earth as only those men could do who were lucky enough to have been born before the age of passports and border controls. The story of his travels takes up three large books: *Ḥadā'iq al-siyāḥah*, *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥah* and *Bustān al-siyāḥah* (each title translates roughly as 'Gardens of Travel'). Although Mast 'Alī was no doubt a great Sufi Master, it is his propensity for wandering which characterizes him as an historical figure, and his talent for delightful travel writing which characterises him as an author.

He began with Iran, then proceeded to Kabul. He moved on to India, where he visited Delhi, Allahabad, Bengal, Gujarat and the Deccan. Mast 'Alī's major interest as a 'tourist' was to meet and talk with all the holy men and religious leaders he could find; his works are undoubtedly of value to the historian of religions. He lists a bewildering number of different sects, orders and faiths. After visiting the islands of India, he toured Kashmir, then returned to Afghanistan and went on to Turan, Turkestan and the remote mountains of Badakhshan. From Khorasan he made his way to Shiraz, then passed through southern Persia and arrived in Arabia, where he travelled across the Hejaz to Yethreb and on to Yemen. After performing the Ḥajj he visited Egypt, toured Damascus and Mt. Sinai, headed north to Armenia, west to Constantinople, finally to Macedonia; although he writes engagingly of the geography and people of Europe, this was as far west as he actually went himself. He returned through Azerbaijan to Tehran, where he met Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh, Majdhūb and Kawthar 'Alī Shāh.

From Tehran he moved on to Kirman, to make the pilgrimage to Māhān; but the governor of the province treated him badly, and earned from the tolerant Sufi the accusation of 'cruelty'. He fled to Shiraz where in 1236/1820-1, at the command of Majdhūb, he married. But his happiness was to be short-lived, for the mullās of Fars began to make trouble for him. Their denunciations brought Mast 'Alī the unwel-

come attention of the local governor, who banished him. He tried Kirman again, then Yazd and Isfahan. When he heard that a cholera epidemic was ravaging Shiraz, he returned there to remove his family from danger, and settled for the time being in Qumshah, a village on the road between Shiraz and Isfahan which is now known as Shahreza. Here he began to compose an account of his wanderings up to that point in his career, the *Riyāḍ al-siyāḥah* (Small Garden of Travels'). He dedicated it to the Sufi prince and governor of Gīlān, Muḥammad Riḍā (who was later deposed by Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh). In this work he mentions that he spent the year 1237 in its composition.²⁵

According to the now-familiar pattern, someone denounced Mast 'Alī to the king, Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh. Nothing came of it except an interview with the monarch, of which our author left us this account:

Faṭḥ 'Alī became king by the will of his uncle (Āghā Muḥammad), and the people of Iran rejoiced in the hope of his royal kindness. He is unique in respect of his innumerable children, the size of his household and his love of jewelry. His children have been made governors of the cities of Iran, and the roads have become as safe as the provinces. Business is good. Europe, India, Egypt, Kashmir and Kabul send their goods and purchase Persian products in return. The country is prosperous and everyone is happy – except the dervishes! I have met the king personally on two occasions, and he himself told me that everyone in his kingdom was secure, happy and prosperous – with the exception of the Sufis. We had a long conversation, in which he admitted that the general prejudice against us was caused in part by his own lack of concern. We have suffered during his reign, and I can only pray that he may eventually come to look on us more kindly.²⁶

Mast 'Alī wrote prose for the most part, but scattered throughout his work are a number of poems, mostly quatrains, composed under the pen-name Tamkin.²⁷ Many of them deal with his travels. Some examples:

If I have gained nothing else from all my voyages
Is this not enough: that my feet are not stuck anywhere?

I travelled throughout the world, searching for Man;
 I found many things, missed many more.
 Tamkīn, to whom shall I report my heart's sorrow: that in all
 the world
 I found no one but the Friend – yet never saw the Friend
 Himself?

* * *

These folk, in friendship, have given us the world,
 While those, in hatred of us, moan and curse and deny.
 We are the mirror for black faces and white alike:
 Each person who looks herein sees only himself.

* * *

Hermit, what's this nasty quarrel with me about renouncing
 love?
 Rise and begone, for I quarrel with no one.
 So many ways, so many roads I have travelled, so many
 perfections seen
 And yet in all the world found nothing perfect but Love.

* * *

Tamkīn, though you were born in Shirwān,
 You gaze on the soul, and know you came from the Spiritual
 World.
 Everyone talks about you, each with his own opinion,
 But these are only words – you are what you are.

* * *

Many lands travelled, many places seen,
 Bit by bit I found Thy hidden path.
 The world is like a name, its creatures like a body,
 And Thou art like the Soul of All.
 Many wonders of the world have I discovered,
 Yet what have I found more strange than myself?

* * *

The One I sought in this world and the next,
 I realize now, has been with me since pre-Eternity.
 When the sun shines the atom becomes a wanderer;

I am that particle, travelling in search of that Sun.
 I put no stock in my own piety in God's Way,
 But I hope for much from the kindness of the Ancient of Days.

* * *

We can see kingship in poverty
 And in the sorrow of love find awareness of the Path.
 We have investigated every way and every silsilah
 But chosen at last the School of Ni'matullāh.

Though many kings have respected Sufism and the Sufis, there have only been a small number of actual dervish kings in Islamic history. The Ni'matullāhī Order claims two of them. The first was Aḥmad Shāh Bahmanī, king of the Deccan, who called himself 'the meanest of Shāh Ni'matullāh's disciples'. The second was Muḥammad Shāh Qājār, who succeeded Fath 'Alī Shāh in 1249/1833.

Initiated into the Order by Mast 'Alī Shāh as a young prince, he was established firmly on the throne following his father's death with the help of the Ismā'īlī Imām Āqā Khān I, another devotee of the Order. At once the administration was packed with dervishes. The new Shah held invocation sessions in the throne room, with himself seated on the throne. His vazir, Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī, was also a Sufi, though a rather eccentric one; some English travellers who met him thought his behaviour 'strongly tintured with real or affected insanity'.²⁸ Under his administration a reign of peace came about for the Order at last.

But Āqāsī soon decided to assert himself as Quṭb of the Order. This claim may have had something to do with the very complex events of the Āqā Khān's revolt, which ended with the Ismā'īlī ruler's flight to Bombay.²⁹ In any case, most of the dervishes of the main branch of the Order removed themselves from politics.

In 1253/1837, Mast 'Alī Shāh, who had retired to Shiraz, went on the Ḥajj with his wife. It is said that he became ill near Jeddah and passed away. He is buried there. His wife returned to Shiraz, where his two infant sons survived him.

The author of *Uṣūl al-fuṣūl*³⁰ says,

I have seen many shaykhs of many different orders, but I have seen few indeed of the high moral character of Mast 'Alī Shāh.

He was satisfied with almost no food and clothing, and though he was poor, his generosity was of the highest level. He never cared for the court, or the company of noble and minister, or even of worldly people in general. Whatever he possessed he offered, indifferent whether to a rich man or poor. He always sat facing the qiblah; he always got up before sunrise and prayed till morning, and he always recited the Quran after his prayers.

Notes

1. This was particularly true of North Africa. See for example E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (London, 1949), a generally very sympathetic account; J. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya* (London, 1965), a useful study marred by certain anti-Sufi prejudices; Michael Gilson, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt, An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford, 1973); and, most important, Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, which deals with the rise of an order dedicated, like the Nîmatul-lāhiyyah, more to the purely spiritual than to the secondary political and social aspects of Sufism.
2. For example, Trimmingham's *Sufi Orders in Islam*, which is simply following the opinion of W. Ivanow.
3. 'Lo! The noblest of you in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct (or "most God-fearing")' Quran XLIX, 13.
4. *Dīwān-i Ṭabīb-i Isfāhānī*, ed. and handwritten by Ḥusayn Maẓlūm (Kayfar) (Tehran, 1347 S.), p. 29.
5. 'God created man in His own form.' (ḥadīth)
6. See for example the *Mir'āt al-ḥaqq* of Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, (Tehran 1353 S.), or the *Kashf al-ma'ārif* of Mast 'Alī Shāh (Tehran 1350 S.).
7. According to *Uṣūl al-fuṣūl* he himself was from Tabriz. *B-a-S* (p. 82) says he was born in Khwānsār. *H-a-S* (p. 20) says that the family had originally come from Tabriz, but had migrated to Isfahan under Shāh 'Abbās.
8. *T-a-H*, III, p. 222.
9. *B-a-S*, p. 83.
10. *T-a-H*, III, p. 226. The poem is quoted from Sa'dī.
11. Today, when governors and generals as well as workers and peasants

are members of the Order, in the khāniqāh all are treated according to the sequence in which they joined the ṭarīqah; that is, a porter who has been a dervish twenty years takes precedence over a general who has been a member for nineteen, for their spiritual ranks are known in theory only to the Master. In outside society, however, outward rank is observed and matters of the ṭarīqah are never allowed to intrude.

12. The 'police officer' responsible for enforcing the Sharī'ah, e.g., laws against drinking wine.

13. Ḥāfiẓ (Qazwīnī edition), p. 86.

14. Rūmī, *Mathnawī* (Nicholson's translation), IV, 414.

The Gunābādī dervish Muḥammad Bāqir Sulṭānī, in his biographical work on the quṭbs of the Order (*Rahbarān-i ṭarīqat wa 'irfān*, Tehran 1348 S.), simply refuses to treat Ma'sūm and Nūr 'Alī as quṭbs; Nūr 'Alī, however, in his unpublished letter, the *Hidāyat nāmah* (see p. 198), definitely refers to Ma'sūm as quṭb; and since Nūr 'Alī appointed a successor, obviously he regarded himself as one as well.

15. Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnyawī was a relative and disciple of Ibn 'Arabī, commentator on his works, a friend of Rūmī, correspondent of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, and teacher of Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (the famous Ishrāqī philosopher) and of Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, the great poet. Qūnyawī was responsible not only for the spread of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrines in the East, but was also a great figure of intellectual and initiatic Sufism in his own right. (See Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, pp. 118-19; and *Sufi Essays*, pp. 97-9).

16. *H-a-S*, p. 380.

17. Two companions of the Prophet who supported the claims of 'Alī and thus are much beloved by the Shī'ites; at the same time, they are considered to have belonged to that 'inner circle' around 'Alī out of which Sufism originated.

18. Regarding this statement it must be pointed out that one of the chief complaints of the 'ulamā' against the Sufis is that they accept ijtihād (decisions of principle in religious matters) from their murshids rather than from generally accepted mujtahids. Certainly, the average mujtahid has never had an excommunication pronounced against him!

19. *H-a-S*, p. 384.

20. Quoted in *T-a-H*, pp. 260-1.

21. Once again according to an oral tradition, it is related that Kawthar 'Alī Shāh was supposed to have succeeded Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh as Quṭb, but that as a result of his flight from Tabriz he was 'disinherited' for his cowardly behaviour. This story seems unlikely for two reasons: first, Majdhūb would

not have made an error in character judgement by choosing a successor capable of disappointing him; second, as noted above, Mast 'Alī Shāh had been appointed successor before Majdhūb's visit to Tabriz. There is, however, a branch of the Order claiming descent from Kawthar 'Alī Shāh still in existence today (see Appendix II).

22. See pages 221–23.

23. An alternative date of death is 1239/1823 (*H-a-S*, p. 384).

24. *R-a-S*, p. 129; or Sha'bān, 1194/Aug. 1780, according to *H-a-S*, p. 275. Oddly enough, both books are by the same author, Mast 'Alī Shāh himself – who ought to have known the date of his own birth! It is interesting to note that Sha'bān 15 is the birth anniversary of the Hidden Imām.

25. *R-a-S*, p. 133.

26. *H-a-S*, pp. 324–5. This was in 1242/1826, the thirty-first year of Fath 'Alī Shāh's reign.

27. 'Tamkīn (Rest) signifyeth: – perpetuity of manifestation of *haḳīkat* by reason of the tranquillity of the heart in the place of nearness (to God) . . . The Lords of Revelations of *zāt* (Essence) have passed the limit of *talwīn* (change) and reached to the stage of *tamkīn*; because in *zāt* by reason of His Unity change appeareth not'. (*The 'Awārif-i-Ma'ārif, written in the Thirteenth Century by Shaikh Shahābu-d-Dīn 'Umar bin Muḥammad-i-Sahrawardī*, translated by H. Wilberforce Clarke (Calcutta, 1891) pp. 88–9.

28. R. Wilbraham, *Travels in the Transcaucasian Provinces of Russia* (London, 1839), p. 19.

29. Hamid Algar, 'The Revolt of the Āghā Khān Maḥallāfi and the Transference of the Ismā'īlī Imamate to India', *Studia Islamica* (ex fasciculo XXIXo), 1969; p. 74. We are greatly indebted to this excellent article, both for the present work and our own article, 'Ismā'īlīs and Nī'matullāhīs'.

30. This was Mīrzā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, who received his very name from Mast 'Alī Shāh: One night he dreamed that the Quṭb showed him 'a letter, a name, and the imprint of a seal' and ordered him to accept them. Next morning, Mast 'Alī Shāh told him that he himself had dreamed a dream 'in which I ordered you to change your pen-name to Hidāyat'. Mīrzā Qulī Khān, impressed by the coincidence, obeyed at once. (This story is also related in *T-a-H*, III, p. 285.)

VII The Family of the Poles

*Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh*¹

We must now go back a few years, to 1234/1818, when Mast 'Alī Shāh had come to Shiraz, and was staying outside the city walls in a delightful retreat on the slope of a steep hill, the garden of Bābā Kūhī (the shrine of a Sufi shaykh, which still stands today). One pleasant day some theological students were taking a walk near Bābā Kūhī, when they noticed a crowd gathered around someone speaking. One of the students, without hesitating and seemingly without volition, broke away from his friends and approached the speaker. Knowing that the man, Mast 'Alī Shāh, was a notorious Sufi, the young mullās tried to restrain their friend, but in vain.

As soon as Mast 'Alī saw the young man, he greeted him with this verse from Ḥāfiẓ:

Run away from the revellers' circle safely, O pious one,
That the conversation of these infamous reprobates may not
ruin you!

The young mullā answered at once (quoting from Ḥāfiẓ 'Alī Ghūryānī):

The sanctuary of your neighbourhood is the paradise of the
Innocent and Pious,
And the perfumed breeze through your sweet hair is the
comfort of the Free.

The young man who answered so strangely was called Mīrzā Zayn al-'Ābidīn ibn Ḥājjī Ma'sūm; his dervish name was to be Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh. His ancestors were from Qazvin, but had moved to Kazemayn in Iraq, then in 1217/1802 to Shiraz, when Raḥmat was nine. As usual with our dervishes, conventional education failed to satisfy his inner yearning,

and he had already begun trying to discover the way to gnosis and divine knowledge when he met Mast 'Alī; for some time, in fact, he had been in the habit of going to see anyone he heard of with spiritual claims.

After the incident at Bābā Kūhī, Raḥmat begged Mast 'Alī to stay in Shiraz. He agreed, accepted Raḥmat as his disciple, and (as mentioned above) married in Shiraz soon afterwards. But the youth's association with the dervish soon gave him a bad reputation, and his father, a mullā, objected strongly. One day the father summoned his son and said, 'You are knowledgeable, you have attained to the truth of all sciences. Do you not consider this knowledge worth more than the word of a vagabond? You must stop seeing this man!'

Raḥmat replied, 'But from the teaching of the schools I have gained nothing but argument and opinion; and, as you yourself have taught me, quite reasonably and demonstrably and according to the principles of religion, to accept mere opinion when you could have certainty is utterly forbidden. Through my association with this "vagabond", by observing his states and listening to his enlightened words, I have gained that certainty.'

When his father realized that Raḥmat could not be dissuaded by words, he locked him in the basement for forty days; but, as might be expected, this punishment only increased his determination and devotion to Mast 'Alī. When the enforced forty-day retreat was over, the father released him but cut off his allowance.

Now, Raḥmat had a wife who was loyal and loving, named Bibī Ruqayyah Baygum. She tells the story of what befell the young couple after these incidents:

When my father and my father-in-law realized finally that we would never give up Sufism, they took away all our furniture, so that my husband, my little daughter and I were left with nothing to live on but a straw mat, and nothing to eat but hunger itself. But Raḥmat never complained, and only kept up with his devotions. Occasionally some sincere friend would give us a loaf of bread, so that we had enough to keep us from starvation.

But then there came to us a command from the Unseen World, telling us to go to Hamadan and see the Quṭb, Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh. We left Shiraz. When our neighbours heard of this they grew angry and went to complain to the governor of

Fars, saying 'Mast 'Alī Shāh, a traveller from Shirwān, a deviate and misled person, has settled in Shiraz and caused a number of people to stray from the Straight Path. He has deceived the well-known and worshipful ascetic and scholar Zayn al-'Ābidīn ibn Ḥājī Ma'sūm'. And this was the reason why Mast 'Alī Shāh was banished from Shiraz.

After Raḥmat and his wife had been in Hamadān for some time, Majdhūb told the young man, 'My son, thanks to God your striving and mortification have been accepted, and you have reached the treasure you sought. Its key is this letter, which you must deliver to Mast 'Alī Shāh. Accompany him inwardly wherever he goes; never leave him for an instant. As for me, I am headed for Tabriz, and soon shall depart from this world forever.'

Raḥmat kissed the Master's hand, and at once set out towards Shiraz. After seven days on the road he arrived in Qumshah (about 50 miles south of Isfahan) where, in the caravanserai, he met Mast 'Alī Shāh, who had just been expelled from Shiraz. Raḥmat gave him the letter and he read it at once. 'Majdhūb has entrusted me with everything!' he cried, and at once left the caravanserai.

All of a sudden, from another direction, horsemen galloped up to the door. They had been sent to arrest Mast 'Alī Shāh, but since they could not find him, they arrested Raḥmat instead, assuming that he knew where Mast 'Alī was to be found, and put him in chains. With the greatest cruelty they dragged him to Isfahan and brought him before the governor of the province.

For once, help came from the 'ulamā'. The Imām Jum'ah of Isfahan heard of Raḥmat's capture and torture, and gathering a crowd of his followers he marched to the governor's house and demanded, 'Do you know this man whom you are torturing?'

'No', the governor replied, 'but I do know this: he is a dervish, his name is Zayn al-'Ābidīn, and he knows where Mast 'Alī Shāh is hiding.'

But the Imām Jum'ah and his adherents demanded that Raḥmat be set free. When the crowd saw how badly he had been beaten, they wept. He stayed at the Imām's house for a few days recuperating, then left for Shiraz.

In 1249/1833, after the death of his uncle and grandfather, Raḥmat again left Shiraz and went to join Mast 'Alī Shāh in Maḥallāt, where he was living with the Aqā Khān. When Fath 'Alī Shāh died, Raḥmat went to Tabriz to congratulate Muḥammad Shāh, and accompanied the new dervish-king to Tehran. In 1251/1835 a decree was passed making him Nā'ib al-Ṣadr, or vice-premier of Fars. He took up the new position at once. As the accounts put it, all the mullās and sayyids of the province promptly began to 'play the hypocrite'. His former persecutors began to vie with each other in touching the hose of his hooka or the rim of his tea-cup, and finally sank to the level of begging to drink the cold dregs of tea from his glass, swearing it was 'blessed'! Nevertheless, Raḥmat did what his position demanded, and more. He distributed what charity and largesse the law demanded, which was rare enough – and he also gave away his own salary as well. He treated his old father leniently, despite the fact that he had disinherited Raḥmat, and bestowed on him an income of 500 tumans a year. The father was so utterly shamed and moved by this kindness that he accepted his own son as a 'spiritual father' and became his disciple. In 1263 or 1264 (1846–7), they travelled together to the 'Atabāt and then to Mashhad, where the father died and was buried by Raḥmat.

On his return to Tehran, Raḥmat was greeted by the new emperor, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, who personally took Raḥmat's mourning weeds from him.² In 1253/1837, on the death of Mast 'Alī Shāh, Raḥmat had been appointed Qutb of the Order, and in the following years had sent representatives and shaykhs to many places, not only throughout Iran but to Arabia and India. In 1278/1861, he was 70 years old. As was his custom, during Muḥarram of that year, he organized a ceremony of mourning for Imām Husayn (rawḍah-khwānī) in his house. Afterwards he asked his boon companions and disciples to stay and enjoy a hooka with him. For, he said, we may never have another chance to smoke together again. He remained with them for an hour, relaying advice and orders to his followers, then retired to bed.

The author of *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, the author of this account and Raḥmat's son, was an eight-year old boy when the Qutb 'vacated his khirqah'. 'It was not more than an hour later', he relates,³ 'that they woke me and told me I had lost my father.'

Raḥmat was buried in Shiraz in the same graveyard as his mother – the grave can still be seen today in what is known as ‘The Old Cemetery’.

Raḥmat wrote very little: a *Risālah* on the Transcendent Unity of Being, and some poetry, of which only two fragments survive:

Until I can see the Truth at every moment with my own two
eyes
I will never stop searching for it, at every moment.
Some say the truth cannot be perceived with the eyes of the
head,
But that’s their business. Mine is another Way.

* * *

I painted Thy beautiful face on the wall of the house of my
heart;
The house collapsed and yet the image on the wall remained.

Munawwar ‘Alī Shāh

He was absolutely unique in his grasp of the wisdom of the Path, his understanding of the Prophetic Traditions, and his insight into the Quran. In his way, he exemplified the Perfect Man. When he preached during Ramaḍān, it was said that no one spoke about Prophecy and Sainthood better than he. Furthermore, he was known from Shiraz to Mashhad as an expert in astronomy and astrology.

Thus did the author of *Tarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq* describe his great-uncle, the next Quṭb of the Order, Munawwar (‘Enlightened’) ‘Alī Shāh (Āqā Muḥammad ibn Ḥājī Muḥammad Ḥasan Mujtahid). Munawwar was the uncle of Raḥmat ‘Alī Shāh; their remarkable family eventually supplied the Order with four Quṭbs in all. Born in 1224/1809 in Shiraz, Munawwar was appointed successor in 1272/1855 in a letter Raḥmat sent him from Kirman, where he was visiting at the time. In 1277/1860, a year before his death, the aging Raḥmat in effect turned over all the affairs of the Order to Munawwar. Raḥmat’s son recorded Munawwar’s reminiscences of his youth and spiritual training. Once:

I had been ordered by Raḥmat to make a forty-day retreat, during which time I was not to leave the house except for

prayers, and not to speak to anyone unless absolutely necessary. Then, during my meditation, I had a vision of the Resurrection. When the hour of prayer came, I left my house and set out for the mosque. But when I walked out into the street, I found myself suddenly able to see the true 'psychic' form of every person, as they appear in the World of the Borderland (*barzakh*). Everyone looked so weird and horrifying, and I was so terrified, that I ran to the mosque, hoping to escape these wild beasts. But even there I still saw the same faces, and at last I fainted.

I came to, feeling someone gently stroking my cheek; it was Raḥmat. He told me, 'It is a miracle of the Prophet himself, that one should see at all moments the resurrected forms of all beings, and yet ignore them. Do not be horrified, do not neglect your life – even if these animals harm you'.⁴

Munawwar passed away in 1301/1883–4, aged 76. His body was taken for burial to the 'Atabāt. He was survived by two sons, Āqā 'Alī and Ḥājī Āqā Muḥammad.

Wafā' 'Alī Shāh

Leadership of the Order continued in the family of Raḥmat with Munawwar's son Ḥājī 'Alī Āqā Dhū al-riyāsatayn (meaning 'one who possesses two leaderships', i.e. both a mujtahid in the sharī'ah and a murshid in the ṭarīqah). His dervish name was Wafā' ('Loyalty') 'Alī Shāh. Born in 1264/1847–8 in Shiraz, he was given spiritual guidance by his father, just as Shāh Khaliḷullāh was trained by Shāh Ni'matul-lāh. He achieved a high spiritual station, and was appointed by his father as successor; when Munawwar died in 1301/1883–4, he became Qutb at the age of 37.

With Wafā' 'Alī, a new stage of spiritual 'development' begins to emerge in the Order. Just as Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh the 'mullā' had followed Nūr 'Alī Shāh the 'qalandar', another element was introduced. Although Wafā' 'Alī was of the 'ulamā' as well as the Sufis, he also made an attempt to begin to find Sufism a suitable garment for the 'modern age' which was beginning to infiltrate Iran. In 1322/1904, just before the Constitutional Revolution, he tried unsuccessfully to start the first modern school in Shiraz. He supported the Constitution actively, and in 1324 finally succeeded in his school project, which he kept going for the next three years.

We have not attempted in the present work to offer anything like a full account of the course of Persian history, except inasmuch as it has affected the Ni'matullāhī Order; but it is necessary now to point out what may not have become apparent to the reader: that the traditional world which gave rise to the ṭarīqah of Shāh Ni'matullāh was by now crumbling, and had been crumbling for some time. Having cut themselves off from the Qājār court, which was one of the major sources of the decadence, the Qutbs had perhaps been living for some time in a rather hermetic, closed world of their own, which was being threatened from both within and without by forces not entirely evident to the Sufis. Iran had never been colonized in the sense that Egypt and India were, totally controlled by an alien government and economic system. As a result, it occupied a rather paradoxical position in the East: it had retained much of its traditional world, but was at the same time accessible to a certain naive enthusiasm for all things foreign. This tendency, coupled with the undoubted corruption of the Qājār nobility (who by this time were much more interested in the latest gadgets and trinkets from France or England than in governing Persia), led to the rise of the Constitutional Movement, in which European political ideals were seen as the vehicle of salvation for an Iran which had long ago lost hold of the glories and harmonies of the Timurid or Safavid periods.

Apart from a few 'reformers' who secretly or openly despised Islam and all things oriental, the vast majority of Persians who supported the Constitution had very little idea that a change of government might entail damage to their traditional values. There is no clearer proof of this than the fact that the Sufis, and even more so the 'ulamā', were among the most ardent advocates of reform. Indeed, aside from the secret societies such as the Freemasons, the 'ulamā' were the major intellectual force, indeed the initiating force behind the Constitution. The reasons for this are complex and cannot adequately be discussed here, but certainly one of the reasons has to do with a traditional hostility between court and 'ulamā' over the question of legitimacy of rule. The 'ulamā' believed that they, as representatives of the Hidden Imām (the only rightful ruler of the world) were entitled to the direction of the state, with the government as their instrument

of policy. Under the influence of various modernists and liberal reformers who spoke in the name of Islam, such as Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, they were led to believe that this situation could in effect be brought about by curtailing the absolute power of the Shāh, by the un-Islamic means of a European-style Constitution. Those few 'ulamā' who saw the intellectual illogic of this position, and who correctly intuited the real result of such a 'mixing of forms', were unfortunately unable to answer the arguments of the modernists. Like the traditional 'ulamā' of today, they met the modern world with the Qurān and ḥadīth, and arguments highly convincing to believers but virtually ineffective against either 'scientific' materialists or those who, having lost their faith but failed to acquire another, were simply confused.

In retrospect the result was easy to predict: *both* the powers of the king *and* the power of the sharī'ah were broken by the Constitution, and something very like chaos reigned until the rise of a new dynasty under Reza Shah Pahlavi brought with it a restoration of monarchical power, albeit still under the aegis of a Constitution.

Now the logical consequences of modernism emerged more fully, with a frontal attack on the 'ulamā', the banning of the veil and of traditional clothes, the rise of a Western-style army and bureaucracy with its attendant middle-class, etc., etc. Unlike Atatürk, however, Reza Shah did not persecute Sufism, and in fact may have harboured some sympathy for the dervishes. The 'ulamā' and the Qājār landed gentry were the bastion of the values Reza Shah most wanted to destroy. The Sufis were thought to be against the 'ulamā'; they were not as much a part of the traditional 'power structure', as were the Turkish orders. In effect, Reza Shah was able to ignore them. Finally, some Sufis themselves may have seen the assault on the sharī'ah in terms of their own historical antagonisms, and believed sincerely that any lessening of the power of the representatives of the sharī'ah would automatically result in a strengthening of the ṭarīqah. In the end, this view has proved as short-sighted as that of the Constitutionalist 'ulamā', for modernism has been no healthier for the Path than for the Law. The enemies of Sufism are no longer the exoteric mullās, but rather the intangible though very real forces of secularization and modernization which

threaten tradition, *the Tradition*, everywhere in the world. In some respects (perhaps largely for political reasons) the 'ulamā' may have felt this threat more clearly than many of the Sufis. But if an answer to the questions posed by modernism in the East is to arise, it will come primarily from Sufism, not from the Doctors of the Law. The Sufis are the guardians of the heart of Islam, just as the saints in any religion contain the essence of that religion. The sharī'ah is of course an integral part of Islam, and must be seen as such. But it is the Truth, ḥaqīqah, which lies at the centre, and only from the centre does real renewal flow. The very disappointments of modernization and westernization in Iran have not by any means destroyed Sufism, as some orientalists would perhaps like to believe, but have in fact strengthened it in some ways. If statistics might show a decline in the number of dervishes (and in any case such figures are unavailable), statistics do not tell the whole story; for it is always quality and not quantity as such which counts for esoterism – by definition.

There is no reason to try to speculate on the full range of Wafā' 'Alī's motivations for his political and educational activity, which was at least superficially opposed to the 'conservative' approach of various Sufis in the West around this time.⁵ Different situations require different spiritual approaches. But there can be no doubt that the involvement of Wafā' 'Alī and his successors with certain aspects of Western and modern influence in Iran has not been in the nature of a 'slavery'. Once again we insist that this is a matter of garments, not fundamental interior change. Sufism ought, after all, to speak to the conditions of the times, not let the times dictate conditions to Sufism.

Wafā' 'Alī fell ill and, a year later in 1336/1918, vacated his body. His corpse was taken (at his request) to Iraq and buried on a portico in Karbalā, near the tombs of the 72 martyrs.

*Ṣādiq 'Alī Shāh*⁶

That the spiritual hegemony of Raḥmat's family had nothing to do with favouritism is borne out by the fact that the next Quṭb was not even a relative. Sayyid Ismā'il Ujāq Kirmānshāhī ibn Sayyid Maḥmūd was born in Kirmanshah in about 1250/1834. As a youth he felt a fascination for the occult, and studied the sciences of numbers, letters and talismans. His

spiritual aspirations caused him much pain and hardship; among other ascetic practices, he made several 40-day retreats in Najaf. At last, Ḥājj Āqā Buzurg, the shaykh of the Order in Kirmanshah, introduced him to 'Abd 'Alī Shāh, who initiated him and later introduced him to the Quṭb, Munawwar himself. Given the name Ṣādiq 'Alī Shāh, he made rapid advancement on the Path and was appointed assistant to Āqā Buzurg, after whose death he succeeded to the position of shaykh of Kirmanshah. For a time he used the house of the late Āqā Buzurg as his khāniqāh, but when he became Quṭb himself after the death of Wafā' 'Alī, he adapted his own house to that purpose. His meetings were remarkable for their silence: no one preached, talked or even sang; instead the dervishes practised meditation and silent dhikr. Ṣādiq was, like Wafā' 'Alī, a supporter of the Constitution, and during the troubles a number of rebel leaders took refuge in his house, where the respect in which he was held ensured their safety.

On the Thursday night before his death, Ṣādiq told the dervishes to meditate for an hour, 'for you will not see such an hour as this again'. A certain spiritual opportunity had been opened to the gathering, as the dervishes discovered in their ecstasy. Ṣādiq had asked that the shaykh of Kirmanshah, Sayyid Muḥammad Khushchashm ('Beautiful Eyes'), the grandson of Nūr 'Alī Shah's daughter Tūfī, should wash his corpse after his death. But Khushchashm was out of town, in Hamadan, and the disciples wondered how to contact him. Suddenly, however, he simply opened the door and walked in.

Ṣādiq 'Alī Shāh died in 1340/1922, aged ninety, having been Quṭb only four years. His body was taken to Najaf for burial.

*Mūnis 'Alī Shāh*⁷

Modernism and reform did not mean the same thing then as they mean today, as we can see from this description of the young Mūnis 'Alī Shāh (Mīrzā 'Abdul Ḥusayn), who was to be the last of the Quṭbs of the family of Raḥmat, and the last to dress as a mullā: 'This young man excels in spreading knowledge and science, in helping mankind, furthering education and patronizing artists, establishing the science of

modernization and developing the principles of the holy Constitution; for although he is young, he has the wisdom of an old man.⁸ Whatever their eventual outcome, the activities of the Ni'matullāhīs of the time were seen as true re-form and not de-form; they were meant to bring about a re-birth of the scientific and intellectual activity which characterized medieval Islam. There was something of the quality of jihād, holy struggle, in their work.

Born in 1290/1873 on the birthday of the Prophet in Shiraz, the son of Wafā' 'Alī Shāh, Quṭb of the Ni'matullāhī Order, began school at the age of seven. At nine, his father began to intensify his education by hiring tutors. By sixteen he had mastered Arabic, jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence. More tutors were brought for logic and rhetoric, mathematics and algebra, astronomy and theology – all in their traditional forms, of course. He studied Quranic sciences with the leading 'ulamā' of the day, including his own father, and capped his education in the traditional manner by reading the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabī with Shaykh Ḥusayn Sabziwārī, a student of the brilliant 'theosopher' Ḥājj Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī.⁹ He could truly be said to have mastered both sharī'ah and ṭarīqah, and indeed was later given the title Dhū al-riyāsatayn ('He who possesses the two masteries') by the Qājār king Aḥmad Shāh. Even when quite young he delivered sermons at the mosques in Shiraz where his father, Wafā' 'Alī, acted as leader of the congregational prayers.

The spiritual master of Mūnis 'Alī was, of course, his father. When Mūnis was 40, Wafā' 'Alī ordered him to make a 40-day retreat. The doors of all hidden secrets were opened for him 'and being drunk with the revelation of the Divine Lights', he composed a tarjī'band which he named the *Wafā'iyyah*, after his father and murshid:

O thou who art more apparent than
all that which is manifest
O thou who art hidden
from every eye . . .¹⁰

Wafā' 'Alī and Mūnis 'Alī made the pilgrimage to Mecca together in 1317/1899. Mūnis composed a book there, the *Anīs al-muhājirīn* ('Companion to the Migrants').¹¹

After the deaths of Wafā' 'Alī and Ṣādiq 'Alī, Mūnis became Quṭb of the Order in 1340/1922. That year, he made the pilgrimage again, going by ship from Bushire, then returned to Shiraz, where he remained for seven years.

The spiritual personality or character of Mūnis can be judged even today by looking at a photograph of his face: serene, intellectual, silent, humble. One of his dervishes¹² described an incident which occurred during a journey they made together: 'Mūnis was staying in a tent. At midnight every night he would get up to pray and meditate. One night, as I entered his tent, I noticed that a dog [a ritually unclean animal – no Muslim would ordinarily let one into his house or tent] was lying next to his prayer mat. I started to shoo the dog out of the tent, but Mūnis ordered me to leave it alone; "for", he said, "that dog and we have the same Creator, and it may be that the dog is closer to Him than we are. What is important is to get rid of the dog of our ego, not kick this poor fellow out of my tent!"'.

More than half of the twentieth century has passed, and yet we still seem in a sense to be in the age of Raḥmat and Munawwar. Mūnis 'Alī Shāh passed away on 15 June, 1373/1953, and was buried in Kirmanshah. With his death, a new age begins.

Notes

1. The following account is from *B-a-S*, p. 328, and *T-a-H*, III, p. 388.
2. It is the custom in Persia, some time after a funeral, for an important relative of the deceased to give a party to mark the end of the mourning period. For the king to perform this function for Raḥmat was, obviously, a great honour.
3. *T-a-H*, III, p. 393.
4. *T-a-H*, III, pp. 435–6.
5. See for example the writings of the Algerian shaykh Aḥmad al-'Alawī against the modernization of the Ottoman Empire in Lings's *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*.
6. See *Gulistān-i jāvid* (*GJ*), VIII (1342 S.), pp. 2–6.

7. See *GJ*, VI (1339 S.)

8. From the afterword by Taqī Dānish Diyā' Lashgar to the *Khamsah-i Husaynī* by Ḥājī Muḥammad Ḥusayn (the brother of Munawwar 'Alī Shāh, himself an Uwaysī dervish). Three of the five sections of this long poem were edited by Mūnis 'Alī Shāh. The book has two dates: 1324/1906 on the title page; and 1329/1911 with the calligrapher's signature at the end. It was lithographed in Shiraz.

9. See S.H. Nasr, 'Sabziwārī', in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M.M. Sharif (Wiesbaden 1966), Vol. II; and the introduction by T. Izutsu, 'The Fundamental Structure of Sabziwarian Metaphysics', to *Sabziwārī's Sharḥ-i manẓūmah*, ed. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu, (Tehran, 1969).

10. MS in the Ni'matullāhī Khāniqāh Library.

11. See *GJ*, VI, p. 8.

12. Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīm Ilāhī, to whom we are indebted for much of the material in this section.

VIII 'The Outward'

Tehran, modern Tehran, offends against its landscape, turning its misshapen back to the desert, hiding snow-edged mountains behind bland and vulgar sky-scrappers, poisoning the strange clear air of the plateau with the smog of several hundred thousand malfunctioning automobiles. At first it appears to be a city without a past, a recent monument to the worst excesses of that naive enthusiasm for progress which lurches across the ancient Orient.

But Persia has always been the place of the secret, its gardens have always been hidden behind garden walls. Suppose a visitor were searching for Sufism. In Iran, and especially in Tehran, he will find no dervishes begging on street corners, no festivals at the tombs of saints; no gurus will approach him with offers of wisdom, or hang flowers around his neck and lead him to the dance. Few places in the world, perhaps, hold so many dervishes, so much Sufi activity, as this terrible city of Tehran. But he can see nothing, no sign. He does not know which door to knock at, nor whom to ask.

Below Sepah Avenue begins the old Tehran (really no older than the 19th century) or what remains of it. One begins to see a few Qājār buildings between the blocks of concrete, peeps over the walls at cypresses and plane trees. Here are a few mullās in turban and robe, a few Kurdish workmen in baggy trousers amongst the crowds, more women in their chadors, their long black veils. Here is a small and unpretentious mosque, there an old bazaar, its stalls bright with fresh herbs and fruit. These hints or signs penetrate the modern world, the machine shops, plastic goods shops, and always the rushing chaotic traffic. But here is a tea-house, its patrons smoking long-stemmed hookas. There a young man dressed in a shabby suit loudly singing to himself (perhaps a ghazal of

Ḥāfiẓ) walks past unnoticed by the pedestrians. A beggar pleads for alms 'in the Name of God'; a radio filters the soft meditation of a reed-flute into the cacophony of the street.

Turn into a small alley-way. Anywhere else in the world it would be closed to anything larger than a donkey, but in Tehran the automobiles ('machines' the Persians call them, with such precise imprecision) penetrate even here, honking and roaring, trying to avoid the open water conduit which washes oil and garbage along the side of the street. There are children playing under the infrequent street-lamps, men on benches outside small shops gossiping and sipping tea. Here is a *chār-sūq*, where two lanes cross, covered with a mud dome shaped like a sugar loaf. Bakers take long flat loaves from a brick oven; outside a bath-house red towels hang to dry.

A few hundred feet to the left there is a door, with the sign of the begging bowl and crossed axes. Ring the bell, the door opens. Greet the door-keeper with 'Yā 'Alī!', and he leads you into the garden. Suddenly it is almost silent. One can look up and see the moon. The fountain in the long courtyard is playing, even the roses are blooming. At the far end, a new building in an ancient style, its high arches topped with a band of blue and white calligraphy: a poem of Shāh Nī'matullāh, a motto: 'O God, the humble house of the dervishes possesses something found not even in the most magnificent abode; for they have Thee, but thou hast none other like Thyself.'

The guide leads you to an entryway, a hall where you remove your shoes, where an old man supervises a huge samovar, filling scores of little glasses with tea. He leads you through two large rooms, empty except for carpets and hundreds of pieces of calligraphy framed on the walls. In the third room, the largest and longest of all, he finds a place for you to sit, back against the wall,¹ and leaves you. There are a few others there already, sitting quietly drinking tea, eyes closed in meditation, or counting the beads on small rosaries. Except for a few who are wearing odd peaked caps,² they are the same sort of men you might see anywhere in Tehran, dressed in suits (some poor, some fine), some with black moustaches, some clean-shaved, some young, some old. If you had met them in the street you could never have guessed they were dervishes.

Some of them are chatting softly with each other. Some are

saying their evening prayers. Little by little the room fills up, till every place around the walls is taken. The other two rooms are also full. There are perhaps a hundred and fifty or two hundred men here. It is Thursday evening, the night of the majlis, the meeting.

The silence deepens. Suddenly everyone stands up. From a door at the side of the room a man enters, dressed in dervish cap and a robe, and takes his place on a sheepskin at the head of the room. The disciples sit again. At the other end of the room, seated behind a small reading-desk, a man opens a book and begins to chant. As he sings (perhaps a poem from the *Dīwān-i Shāh Ni'matullāh*, or Rūmī's *Dīwān-i Shams*, or something from Nūr 'Alī Shāh, 'Irāqī, Maghribī, Hātif or the *Gulshan-i rāz*), his voice becomes more rich with expression and emotion, till the meaning of the poem begins to affect the circle, and some men cry out, almost as if stunned by a word or line that seems aimed at their own inner state. Some of the ghazals are given a chorus in praise of 'Alī, which is sung by all the dervishes together.

After the chanting of poetry, Dr Nurbakhsh, the Quṭb, the Master, may say a few words on some subject; more often he does not, but simply begins the dhikr-i jalī,³ which is performed in total darkness. The chanting of the invocation, based on the Shahādah, 'Lā ilāha ill' Allāh!', is vigorous and rhythmic, and the effect of so many voices calling on God in unison, in the darkness which hides their fervour and gives it an anonymity which symbolizes the extinction of the self, the effect of their passion for the Absolute is extraordinary, even for an outsider. It is difficult to know how long the invocation lasts, for the purpose of the rhythm is to abolish time.

Dr Nurbakhsh ends the dhikr with a prayer: as the lights are turned on again, he asks, 'O God, guide us on the Straight Path of Unity; grant us outward and inward success; give the shaykhs of the Path the power to see both inwardly and outwardly. Make our friends happy, and change our enemies for the better. The succour of constant remembrance and continuous meditation, the feeling of helplessness, abasement and nothingness – grant us these, out of Thy Mercy!'

Now several servers appear with ewers and basins. Starting with the man sitting on the Master's right, each of the dervishes kisses the hand of the server with a 'Yā 'Alī!' and

receives a splash of water from the ewer with which to wash his hands. The last to be served is Dr Nurbakhsh himself, as befits the humblest of the dervishes. White cloths (*sufrah*) are spread before everyone, who kneel forward and kiss them while Dr Nurbakhsh delivers another prayer. They sit up again. Dr Nurbakhsh kisses the hand of the man on his right, and they greet each other with 'Yā 'Alī!' This kiss and this greeting are passed from dervish to dervish, all around the circle: all negative feeling, all plurality is erased; they are united, as dervishes should be.

After another prostration, the servers bring in salt, then bread. As with the meals of the Prophet himself, all is done in silence – except for the call of 'Yā 'Alī!' which accompanies each act, vibrating through the stillness. Earlier in the day a lamb has been slaughtered at the *khāniqāh*, the meat cooked and ground and mixed with other ingredients to make a sort of *paté*. A huge pot of this is brought in and set before Dr Nurbakhsh, who with the help of several of the older dervishes divides it into portions, each wrapped in a loaf of bread. Each portion is given to the servers with a hand-kiss, and each server gives it in turn to a dervish with the same gesture. So smoothly is the process carried out that the cry 'Yā 'Alī!' is repeated in a perfect rhythm, and the whole gathering is served swiftly and gracefully. When everyone has his portion of the meat, they all prostrate and kiss the *sufrah* again, and another prayer is recited. Dr Nurbakhsh then begins the meal⁵ according to the *sunnah* of the Prophet with a pinch of salt (which, since it penetrates unseen through food and gives it flavour, is said to symbolize *barakah*). Other dishes are brought in: soup made of the water in which the lamb was cooked, fresh herbs, pickles and yoghurt, fruit or sweets. After fifteen or twenty minutes when everyone has eaten, Dr Nurbakhsh orders the servers to clear the *sufrahs*, wrap them up and remove them. (Ideally, this should be done by one person, for although everyone may help spread the *sufrahs* in the first place, as few as possible should take the responsibility for removing 'God's Bounty', just as only one man may take the responsibility of killing the lamb.) With a final 'Yā 'Alī!', Dr Nurbakhsh gets up and leaves the room; the *majlis* is officially ended. Many dervishes remain for a while to drink tea and smoke a cigarette and talk, or continue their *dhikr*;

others see Dr Nurbakhsh in his room for spiritual advice. By about midnight, everyone has gone.

Outside the streets are cool and deserted. Darkness hides the ugliness of the city. For a few hours we have been neither in the past nor the future (where most men spend their lives) but in the eternal present, connected through ritual with the timeless Source of all beauty and grace.

* * *

Dr Nurbakhsh⁶ grew up in Kirman, a city still alive with the memory of Nūr 'Alī and Mushtāq, and was initiated into Sufism there by Āqā Murshidī, one of Mūnis 'Alī Shāh's representatives.

In Tehran, Nurbakhsh quickly became Mūnis' favourite disciple: in the preface to a small pamphlet Nurbakhsh wrote on the esoteric significance of the khāniqāh,⁷ Mūnis introduced the author as a 'sage' and 'my unique spiritual son'. Nurbakhsh was then 22 years old.

Meanwhile his university career continued, and in 1331/1952, having received his M.D. (after which he has always been called 'Doctor' Nurbakhsh), he was sent to the ancient city of Bam as head of the local department of hygiene. He came back to Tehran after Mūnis' death and took over direction of the Ni'matullāhī Order at the age of 26.

Although Dr Nurbakhsh wears traditional garments during the majlis (the robe and 'tāj' which re-capitulate the dress of the Prophet and the mediaeval saints, and which are themselves theomorphic and timeless), he is the first of the Ni'matullāhī Quṭbs to wear modern western dress in the 'outside world'. He is the first to receive a modern education: in 1341/1962-3 he spent a year at the Sorbonne in Paris as an 'assistant étranger' at St. Anne's Hospital, from which he received a diploma in 1963. He is the first Quṭb to have a 'job', and a job which certainly could not be more modern: he was the Head of the Department of Psychiatry at Tehran University and then the Director of the teaching hospital attached to that Department.

It is said that the ideas, like the sins, of the fathers are visited upon the sons to the third or fourth generation. Dr Nurbakhsh's predecessors had dealt in various ways with the

problems of the modern age, but he himself is the first to live a modern life. They were trained in madrasahs, he in high-schools and universities. They dressed as mullās, lived in the khāniqāh; he wears a suit and tie and works from nine to five. They stood outside the modern world and watched its approach; born eighteen years after the Constitution, he has never known any other world. They perhaps failed to understand it; he knows it from the inside.

We have stressed the point that Sufism in essence is changeless and timeless, but that each age brings with it certain problems, questions and situations with which Sufism must cope if it is to continue to fulfill its eternal functions. There are always people who seek initiation; there are even more who seek something without knowing precisely what it is. In an age where 'progress' threatens the gods, where the idols of material well-being and possessions mock the ancient shrines, society itself fails to provide the seekers with any direction; culture and civilization begin to falter in their task of guiding 'those few who are chosen' towards the Truth. The spiritual masters of the 20th century are faced with tasks which would appear bizarre and even grotesque to Shāh Nī'matullāh or Nūr 'Alī Shāh. And yet, 'by their fruits shall ye know them': Sufism has not only survived, it is even beginning to spread again, not only in the East, but in Europe and America.

Thus yet another rebirth of Sufism is occurring, comparable in some ways with that sparked by Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh in the 18th century. We cannot pretend to explain it. But we must at least try to describe it.

* * *

This is easy to do externally; so easy in fact, and so nearly meaningless, that we do not wish to dwell too much on this outer aspect of things. The exact number of Nī'matullāhī dervishes today as compared with the number in, say, 1945, means almost nothing in itself (and is in any case impossible to discover with much accuracy). Not that the increase is totally without significance. Nī'matullāhī Sufism has never either sought or shunned popularity, but the fact that so many people in present-day Iran are drawn to it, says something about the quality of people in present-day Iran as well as the

quality of the Order. What Nī'matullāhī Sufism has done, of course, is to address itself to the Eternal Truth in such a way as to touch those who are destined to seek It, whatever the outward circumstances of the world. In this, it has apparently been quite successful.

One of the ways in which Dr Nurbakhsh has brought Sufism to the attention of educated Iranians is to publish books. This may not seem very significant to a Western reader, but in fact the 'Age of Gutenberg' has only recently begun in Iran. Even Wafā' 'Alī Shāh and Mūnis 'Alī Shāh acquired their learning largely from manuscripts, and even more important, from oral instruction. To copy a religious book by hand is still considered an act of piety by certain very elderly Persians; the making and reading of books was until recently the work of an élite, the class of 'ulamā', of traditional *hommes des lettres*, poets, scribes, philosophers. The introduction of stone-cut lithography in the 19th century did little to change this situation, since the books themselves were still hand-written and published in limited editions. Even government officials – even kings – were sometimes illiterate, and the learning of most Persians was completely oral (although, because of the emphasis of Islam on learning to read as a *religious act*, literacy has always been relatively common in the Islamic world). They heard and memorized thousands of lines of poetry, lives of the saints, anecdotes from history; the *Shāhnāmāh*, Iran's national epic, was recited in coffeehouses and zūrkhānahs; religious history, ethics and morality were transmitted through village mullās and wandering storytellers. This oral tradition was exceedingly rich, and was shared by wealthy and poor, businessman and peasant, savant and labourer alike. Even today one may meet men or women of quite humble origin whose memory, still free of the chains of the printed word, is an instrument of great power and creativity. On the other hand one sees innumerable people who are certainly no longer illiterate, but who know, think and feel very little of any significance or value.⁸

In the age of print however it becomes necessary for those who wish to preserve their heritage (and even more to use it, continue it, add to it) to master print. We recall Wafā' 'Alī's enthusiasm for publishing books. In his time the decline of Persian culture was already well advanced, and he saw the

wide dissemination of books, Sufi books, as one possible remedy. In a former age, Dr Nurbakhsh would have written his *Dīwān*, his essays and treatises (which we shall discuss at some length); his disciples would have made copies for themselves; a few of them would find their way into the libraries of rich men or scholars, to be read by the elect few. Under present-day conditions, however, he has found it necessary to do more: he himself has edited a great number of manuscripts and texts on Sufism and its history, many of which we have used in the course of writing this book. In fact, it is by no means an exaggeration to say that this book is in some degree a result of Nurbakhsh's own scholarship and publishing work in the field of Ni'matullāhī literature, and his tireless collection of manuscripts, which has resulted in the establishment of the Khāniqāh Library which now holds about 4,000 volumes.

Characteristically, Nurbakhsh himself dismisses all praise for this work with a smile. Indeed, valuable as it is, it is probably the least of his contributions to Sufism. Yet one of the paradoxes of the age is that 'the mysteries' must now be published, as a sort of divine compensation for the difficulty of gaining access to traditional oral sources. Ibn 'Arabī was once reserved for those who had struggled through an entire course of Islamic Law, jurisprudence, theology, philosophy and theosophy. He is now available in any good bookstore. *The Conference of the Birds*, the *Mathnawī*, the *Gulshan-i rāz*, the *Kashf al-mahjūb* are no longer passed from hand to hand by initiates, but printed and re-printed, sold even in drug-stores. Even in Iran some people discover Sufism nowadays not from their father or a friend of the family or a wandering mendicant, but from books. In such a situation, scholarship and publishing take on a certain distinct importance which cannot be dismissed by repeating that 'Sufism is not to be learned from books'. Of course it cannot – but without books, many people might never realize there was something to be learned.

Under Dr Nurbakhsh the Order has expanded rapidly and dramatically, and without labouring the point we can be sure that this is no 'accident of history', but must be explained in terms of the powerful appeal of a genuine Master even (and perhaps especially) for an age in which religion has been

expected to wither away. In order to cope with this spiritual expansion a certain amount of purely physical expansion has occurred; to be precise, a large number of khāniqāhs have had to be built. These range in size and grandeur from the still-growing complex in Tehran to tiny one-room affairs in small villages around Iran.

Notes

1. But not leaning against the wall. The dervish who leans against the wall is (a) in danger of dozing off, and (b) depending on something other than God.

2. A four-sided 'tāj', based on traditional models, but designed by Dr. Nurbakhsh.

3. The invocation out loud, as opposed to the dhikr-i khafī, or silent invocation practised by the dervishes before the formal beginning of the majlis, and (at least in theory) at all times, or 'as much as possible'.

4. This ritual is called muṣāfaḥah (greetings) or ṣafā', purification.

5. The whole ritual of the meal is called dīg jūsh, 'hot pot'.

6. Born Āzar 19, 1305 S./25 April, 1926, Javad Nurbakhsh is descended from a Shaykh Kamal al-Dīn Nurbakhsh, contemporary of Shāh 'Abbās and probably related to the founder of the Nurbakhshī Order (which now survives only in remote parts of the Hindu Kush). Kamal al-Dīn built a khāniqāh in Kirman, which was later restored by Dr Nurbakhsh himself. Nurbakhsh's parents are of the merchant class.

7. *Gulzār-i Mūnis II: Khāniqāh*, by J. Nurbakhsh, introduction by Mūnis 'Alī Shāh (Tehran 1327 S./1368 A.H.)

8. See A.K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Bugbear of Literacy' in *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* (New York 1943), pp. 19-35.

IX 'The Inward'¹

One of Dr Nurbakhsh's disciples once asked him whether Sufis should visit mosques. This question prompted a discourse on the relation between sharī'ah and ṭarīqah which we can use to sum up everything we have said about Sufism as an Islamic phenomenon.

The mosque, said Dr Nurbakhsh, 'represents the exoteric aspect of Islam. Quite contrary to what many people think, Sufism does not oppose this aspect of Islam but in fact *protects* it. Wherever Sufism found its way throughout history, there Islam was established and advanced. Even today one notices that Christian missionaries fail to accomplish anything where Sufism retains its strength. Sufism, in general, and the Ni'matullāhī Order in particular, support the sharī'ah and certainly do not prohibit people from going to mosques. There was a time when the sharī'ah exercised more control over society than it does now, and under those conditions it sometimes happened that an unthinking and excessive adherence to the standards of the sharī'ah caused certain dervishes to fall into conceit and self-assertion. Spiritual masters, in order to break these idols of conceit and induce a state of humility before the Divinity, in order to bring the disciple closer to the state of slave-hood before the Lord, occasionally made statements or issued orders which *seemed* to conflict with the sharī'ah.² But today, when Muslims in general have become more indifferent to the Law, we insist on strict obedience to the sharī'ah. There was a time when someone who neglected his prayers would incur blame; nowadays, those who do pray are ridiculed!'

In short, Sufism is something more, much more than outward religion; but it is not *outside* religion. It is interesting to note that the Ni'matullāhī initiation ceremony includes a

ritual acceptance of Islam, not only for non-Muslims but also for Muslims. The first must be brought into the community of the Prophet; the second must be made to see that true Islam is something other than what they have been taught to believe, that it possesses dimensions beyond mere obedience to the Law.

Initiation outwardly is a ceremony whereby the aspirant swears to obey the Master and is received into the *ṭarīqah*. He must bring with him to the *khāniqāh* five objects, and he must have made five ritual ablutions symbolizing five different 'intentions'. At the *khāniqāh* the seeker gives his hand to the *Pir-i dalīl* or 'guiding *pir*', the shaykh's assistant. The *Pir* puts the seeker's hand into the Master's hand and leaves the room. The initiate then makes his vows and agrees to certain conditions, in return for which he receives his private and personal instruction regarding the performance of the *dhikr* and other duties. After this he leaves the shaykh and is taken by the *Pir-i dalīl* to the other dervishes, each of whom he greets with a hand-kissing gesture, followed by other rituals.

So much for appearances. The inward reality of this process of initiation is described by Nurbakhsh thus:³

Having seen the Master with the eye of intuition, having recognized him as a Master, the aspirant will hear from him of the provisions for the journey and the means for its accomplishment. The first of these is aspiration: the capital for the Path is pain. It is pain that guides man on the Way. Pain draws him towards the Origin; the agony of separation draws him towards Union.

When this pain appears in the heart of the aspirant, he should perform the gnostic ablutions of body and soul (in preparation for his initiation). First he washes himself in the water of Repentance. There are three sorts of repentance: that of the *sharī'ah*, that of the Elect, and that of the Elect of the Elect. The last repentance means to die to the world and to everything which is not God, and this is the repentance of the Sufi.

The second ablution consists of washing oneself in the water of Islam. This also has three aspects: the merely verbal or outward Testimony of Faith; the initiation through the heart, which is the principle and root of religion; and the

initiation through the Root of the Root of Islam, which is surrender and resignation and satisfaction with both Union and separation.

The third ablution is the washing with the water of Poverty, the need for the Absolute, the desire for nothing but God. The fourth ablution is the washing with the water of the inner Pilgrimage. The fifth and last is the ablution with the water of the Fulfillment of One's Wish for Eternal Life and the Station of the Perfect Man.

After making these ablutions, if you desire true happiness, walk in the Way of Devotion through the Quarter of Purity and Salvation, in the company of Love. Riding upon the steed⁴ of Love, you will reach the neighbourhood of Devotion; there you will see a marketplace where each Prophet and Saint displays his merchandise; his divine gifts. If you want to enter this Path, bring something to trade in that bazaar, according to your capacity, for it may happen that the Unseen Customer will accept and buy your goods.

Specifically, the aspirant should bring with him: a coin, symbolizing disinterest in worldly wealth; a shroud, symbolizing death to all ornaments of the world; sweets, symbolizing the second birth; a ring, symbolizing respect and humility before the men of God; and finally a nutmeg, symbolizing devotion to the Master. Cut your ties to the realm of water and clay and give your heart as a gift to the Master, who will purify it of all discoloration and rust, that it may reflect the manifestations of the Beloved. To achieve salvation, put your head in his hand like a nutmeg!

Having received initiation, the aspirant now enters the *khāniqāh*. We have spoken of 'entering the *khāniqāh*' not just in body but in spirit; to explain this, we turn again to the writings of Javad Nurbakhsh⁵ for a *ta'wīl*, or hermeneutic interpretation.

In search of Laylā, the lover Majnūn happens to pass through the Lane of the Heart. There he meets an old man (symbolizing the inner or secret nature of the Master) surrounded by many lovers. 'Who are you?', Majnūn inquires of him, 'What are you doing, and who are these people around you: are they creatures of this world or of Paradise?' Thereupon the old man speaks:

'First you should know that this place is the House of Love.

This place has nothing relative about it, so I may use no analogy to explain it; instead, therefore, I shall tell you the history of its foundation.

'When God created Adam he placed him in Eden. After the Fall, Adam spoke to the Lord and exclaimed, "O Beloved, I regret what I have done!" And from the Throne came the response: "I shall show you the Right Path. That which is hidden in the very depth [lit. "the dark secret"] of your heart is in love with you. If you degrade this hidden person, you throw him into the well of delusion; but if you would befriend him, then leave your selfishness and blind the eye of your self-regard."

'Adam asked where he could attain to this state, and He answered, "In the School of the Soul. The guardian of the secret is the khāniqāh. Whoso wishes to come to Our Door must come by this route." Adam cried in despair and wandered in the wilderness here and there, calling upon God by different names with every step, until he was exhausted, and still he had found no trace of the Beloved. Finally when he became a stranger to himself, his being was annihilated in the Beloved. Thus did he complete the circle of his khāniqāh, and he attained Union.

'In the same way Noah sat in his Ark, which was his khāniqāh, and turned his back on the storm of worldly events, and made his journey towards God. This was the first actual khāniqāh, and all the prophets after Noah followed his example. The khāniqāh of Jacob was the house of sorrow for his son. The khāniqāh of Joseph was first the well and then the prison of the Pharaoh. That of Moses was first the Nile, then the house of Shuayb, and finally Mount Sinai. That of Jonah was the belly of the great fish, where he made his forty-day retreat. Job's was first the temple and then the corner of the village. That of Jesus was the monastery.⁶

'Not only the prophets had their khāniqāhs, but also the saints of every age and place. 'Alī was the first link in the chain of walāyah. When the Prophet appeared and desired to perfect religion, to eternalize the School of Morality for all mankind, to unify the people in their dispersion and make straight the path of slavery to God, he turned towards Mecca with 'Alī. He went to the Kaaba and broke the idols with the hand of 'Alī and said, "This is my khāniqāh! It is the Academy

of Annihilation. It has been and shall be forever in this world a reminder of the Love of God. It is not simply water and clay, but the true House of the Heart'.

After explaining to Majnūn the esoteric meanings of the ritual acts of pilgrimage to the Kaaba, the old man goes on to say that the khāniqāh is a place for practising these rituals and this pilgrimage to the House of God, the Muḥammadan khāniqāh. 'With the axe of the remembrance of God, the saints have cut the roots of their mundane existence.' He mentions a number of saints, including 'Alī and the Imāms, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī, Ma'rūf Karkhī and others who mastered the Path, built a khāniqāh and burned themselves in it. Each of them wished to pass on their knowledge, so they wrote and expressed it in words, and each gave the khāniqāh a different name according to the reality of his own spiritual journey: 'a ruined tavern', 'a Magian temple', 'a mosque' or 'a wine cellar'. The travellers called it the kharābāt (ruined place, or tavern, or 'house of ill-repute') because they wanted to preserve the secret from outsiders who might sully it with their banality; for if the enemy hears the secrets of God he will babble and cause quarrels among men.

The khāniqāh is then the place of sincerity, where nothing is discussed except the Beloved. It is the House of Love, without folly, vanity or deceit, where there is no difference between a beggar and a king. All that remains there is the selflessness of the spiritual state, the divine Light in each man. There everyone follows the rituals of the sharī'ah, and has attained various levels of the ṭarīqah. There are always false khāniqāhs where false masters carry out their deceptions, but if the method of the true khāniqāh were ever forgotten the very house of the world itself would be ruined.

Now that he has gained admittance to the khāniqāh, what does the aspirant do? What are the practices of the khāniqāh?

'For inner work as for outer, energy is indeed. We all eat and breathe, but one man turns that energy into passions, another into love of God. What makes the difference?

'A large part of Sufi practice consists in the constant (or as nearly constant as possible) inner repetition of one of the names of God given to the pupil by his spiritual master after they have accepted each other and the pupil has been

initiated. By repeating his dhikr the pupil invokes God so as to acquire God's attributes, so that after annihilation of self all that remains is God. As the pupil settles into the practice of dhikr, it begins to "say itself" instead of him saying it, and the rememberer becomes the Remembered. A more integrated and collected state begins to replace our usual chaotic pattern of scattered thoughts. Single-mindedness results in a saving of energy so there is more to redirect towards the goal. In the remembrance of God, inner agitation and conflicts begin to melt away. The process is accelerated by the untying of psychic knots by the guide's interpretations of his pupil's dreams and (later) visions. But before he can know God, a pupil must become a healthy normal man or woman. From that condition to the state of the perfect man is the way.

'Since the dhikr is a basic technique of Sufism, let us explain a little how it is done. Take the classic dhikr that is the primary affirmation of Islam: *Lā ilāha ill' Allāh* – There is no god but God.' This can be said, aloud or silently, kneeling on one's heels with the right hand on the left thigh, the left hand grasping the wrist of the right. In this position both the body as a whole and the hands and feet bent inwards form the letters "LA" (ل) which mean negation of the self before one's Beloved. Really to "do" the dhikr, the pupil must forget everything, himself included. He has embarked on a process of change which means to die to oneself: "Die before ye die" is one of the deepest formulations of Sufism. The Gospels also speak of the need for a second birth. Only if you die can you live in the state of Unity that is for the pure and perfected alone, for whom all duality including a sense of subject and object – I and Thou – has disappeared.

'To have reached that state is to have finished the school of Sufism, to have no further need of any external guide, to have passed through the way to the Truth. "I" has been annihilated (made naught) and in its place has come a permanent realization of Unity. In this very advanced stage God does not veil the world from the Sufi nor does the world veil God; no sort of separation any longer exists and duality is transformed into Unity.'

In another of his early pamphlets,⁷ Nurbakhsh had more to say about the inner significance of the practices of the Ni'matullāhī Order. Again the teaching is set in the context of a confrontation between Majnūn and the wise old man. (It

might be pointed out that these literary conventions, common to Sufi writing, are more than mere ornamentation, but serve to exalt the material above the level of mere exposition and give it symbolic value. This sort of 'secondary mythopoesis', to coin a phrase, was perfected by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī in his Persian visionary recitals, and we have seen it used, for example, in Nūr 'Alī Shāh's account of his first meeting with Sayyid Ma'sūm.)

The old Master is trying to explain to Majnūn how to go about finding his beloved Laylā: 'Look into your heart, and its radiant beauty will give you a sign of her face'. Majnūn asks how he can accomplish this, and the Master answers that the heart is like a hidden treasure with four locks. The keys to the locks are, first, the *wird* or litany, which destroys all idols and steals away all false thought, makes you disgusted with your petty ego, that you may become the habitué of the Quarter of the Beloved. The second key is *fikr*, meditation: this is not thought about the affairs of the world but rather of your true Origin and the secret of creation; it is the process of coming to realise that this endeavour is not in vain; it is the discovery of the mystery of 'I was a Hidden Treasure'.

The third key is *dhikr*, remembrance or invocation. In order to acquire the virtue of the precious pearl, one must repeat its Name. If you aspire to this Jewel, seek it without your tongue. Become a listening ear, from head to toe; be silent with outsiders. Occupy yourself with the *dhikr* inwardly, in such a way that no one knows but God. The angels hear the litanies of the tongue but are unaware of the invocation of the heart, and this is why man can reach to stages higher than that of the angels.

The fourth key is *murāqabah*, contemplation or 'keeping watch'. Be constantly vigilant of this Precious Jewel; keep watch on your heart, your ear and your eye, like a cat watching for a mouse. You must not be inattentive even for a single moment, lest you miss the Beloved's call.

Majnūn now realized that the search was more difficult than he had imagined. He spent years making a hole in the wall, digging for the treasure. 'But I will stop here', says Nurbakhsh, 'because you will never understand more of these matters without seeing them for yourself.'

Some of Nurbakhsh's writings have dealt with psychology.⁸ He is, as we said, a doctor and a psychiatrist by profession, but he is far from attempting any facile synthesis of psychiatry and Sufism. 'Psychiatry', he once told us, 'has everything to learn from Sufism. Sufism has nothing to learn from psychiatry.' The doctors of the West, working outside Tradition, imagine that certain techniques of 'mysticism' can be broken off, like branches from a tree, and grafted on to their own methods and teachings, which nevertheless remain rooted in a world view unaware of and inimical to the concept of the Hierarchy of Being. No integral Tradition has lacked a psychology, but traditional psychology has been seen to occupy its proper place, and deals with its proper subject, the soul, the nafs. Sufism has been particularly rich in such teachings, and the techniques of traditional Graeco-Avicennan medicine, psychic healing, dream interpretation and so on have been much discussed and highly developed in Sufi circles. Modern psychology could be granted a measure of legitimacy, according to Nurbakhsh, if it were capable of recognizing its own limitations as a form of knowledge dealing with health and balance. Instead it has denied the Transcendent, or reduced it to the level of the unconscious (the positions, respectively, of Freud and Jung); it has cut man off from his higher potential and thus rejected the reality of the supraconscious Path and the Master who guides men on that Path. Such an act of denial cannot help but have psychic repercussions, and in fact psychology has become 'a caricature, a parody' of esotericism, with the psychiatrist usurping the role of Master, analysis the role of initiation, and so on.

'The spiritual psychology of the Sufis recognizes two principal kinds of unconsciousness: the heart (dil) and the "demanding soul" (nafs-i ammārah). The heart is considered as a divine gift. It is compared to a mirror which must be cleansed of the rust of the natural and material world, until it becomes polished and reflects the Truth.

'The nafs-i ammārah, on the other hand, is considered to be a power which must be transmuted in a real sense into the nafs-i lawwāmāh (the "blaming soul") and finally into the nafs-i muṭma'innah (the "soul at peace") so that it will be able to return to the Truth. The Sufis have taken this concept from the Quranic verse: 'O soul at peace, return

unto thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing!" (LXXXIX, 27-28).

'In the heart reside love, compassion, self-sacrifice, spiritual chivalry, purity and goodness. This is expressed by the saying of the Prophet: "The heart is between the two fingers of the Merciful". From the carnal soul, on the other hand, arise animal tendencies, aggressiveness, baseness and impurity. It is about this soul that the Quran says: "Surely the soul of man incites (ammārah) to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy!" (XII, 53). The discipline and spiritual method of the Path gradually purifies the heart and brings out its spiritual quality, and at the same time, they transmute the nafs-i ammārah. When the Sufi has attained that purified heart, he will also attain the nafs-i muṭma'innah. That is why the great Sufis have said: "Sufism is the abandonment of the soul to servitude and the attachment of the heart to the divine Lordship!".'

While most Sufi shaykhs have avoided accepting disciples who were unbalanced, since the psychic 'knots' of even so-called normal human beings are difficult enough to untie, there have been masters who could make use of the traditional methods to cure even the most disturbed seekers and bring them to the point where irādah could begin to function in them as in an ordinary disciple. Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī was one of the most outstanding of these shaykhs; as we have mentioned, he declared, 'Send whomsoever is rejected by other masters to me, and I will train him according to his aptitude'. There is still every possibility that contemporary psychology could make use of the wisdom of such Masters, though unfortunately there appear to be but few signs of its readiness to do so. In order to benefit from Sufism, psychoanalysis itself would have to 'commit suicide'; for as long as this self-proclaimed science continues to usurp the rights of Tradition, rather than submitting whole-heartedly to its power of salvation, no rapprochement can be expected. And if psychoanalysis *could* achieve such a 'reform', it would virtually cease to be psychoanalysis.

As for psychology in the broader sense of the word, it could well survive an encounter with Tradition, since in fact no society has ever been without a science of the soul. If our own age is defective in its grasp of this science, there still exist open

channels through which we might learn from the perennial Tradition.

* * *

Dr Nurbakhsh has agreed to an interview. We arrive at the khāniqāh in the afternoon and are ushered through the dark rooms to his small office behind stained-glass doors decorated with the crossed axes and begging bowl. He sits on the floor dressed in light summer clothes and a robe, surrounded by piles of books and manuscripts and precious pieces of calligraphy, under a huge photograph of his Master, Mūnis 'Alī Shāh. Aqā Kubārī brings in tea and fruit, new cucumbers and sweets. Nurbakhsh tells us the story of his initiation and early years, clears up some of our questions about the history and doctrines of the Order.

'Just as Iran lies symbolically between the West and East, so the method of the Ni'matullāhī Order lies symbolically between the two. We may take the "West" as representing totally external activity, and the "East" its opposite, total inward attention. Naturally we do not say that everyone in the actual West and the actual East falls into these categories, since nowadays you can find materialists in India and super-quietistic types even in America; but we may use them to stand for two extreme attitudes.

'But man belongs to both the inner and the outer world, and must participate in both. Our "Western" man will end with mental illness and the effects of nervousness, tension and exhaustion, for he has neglected his essence. On the other hand, a person who pays attention only to his inner state and is forgetful of external reality will become lazy, inert, inactive, unable to continue even in his contemplation.

'Sufism is effective because of its long tradition and its great experience of balance between these two extremes. If a man who simply pays attention to inner experience (let us call him the "fakir") comes to a Sufi and asks for advice, the Sufi may tell him, "Get a job!" If a "Westerner" asks, what should I be? the Sufi tells him, be human: be a man. Each of them comes from a different direction, and both of them can meet in one place: Sufism. In this sense Sufism represents the real purpose of Islam, which has so justly been called the religion of the people (ummah) of the Middle [Quran II, 143].

'In any case, every man must participate in inner activity for God, and external activity – also for God. Both are indispensable: one must be *for God* with one's total being. If one of these functions is not working in a man, he cannot realize his true essence, he cannot be a "good man", a real man; for to be truly human one must be completely dedicated to the divine, the Absolute. The "fakir" is not working for God, and thus can never reach perfection; the "Westerner" has become forgetful of his true self – all his activity is devoted to money!

'Westerners who become dervishes must be instructed in inner activity, even when we know they're really still after material ends; after all, we have patience and can leave these problems for the future. At first they find it very difficult to devote both their inner and their outer activity to God, so we concentrate on the area where they are weakest: the interior. It may take many years before a sense of inwardness spreads its roots through Western culture, and even the outer activity can be controlled. It may never happen.

'We can say roughly that Sufism has two levels: a public aspect, and a deeper level reserved for the élite. We prescribe the public or outer aspect for the West, and hope that this will cure (if anything can) the disease of the West. But the deep and secret aspect of Sufism will always be for the élite.

'Westerners who try to imitate the externals of oriental Sufism, however, without grasping the real Sufi Path, are playing a game which is not only ineffective but in the long run dangerous. There are those who are attracted to things like the Sufi posture of meditation, or the Sufi dance. They mistake these things for Sufism. The real Sufi who dances does so as an expression of an inner state, which is manifesting itself *through* dance. The dance is not caused by his will: he simply cannot help dancing. To believe that if you start dancing you will therefore be able to reach this state . . . this is no more than cha-cha. After all, any physical activity gives some sort of relief, some release and expression of pent-up emotions. But one should not take for spirituality what is no more than mild refreshment.

'Again, real meditation is used in Sufism to draw the traveller's whole attention from the external world, to concentrate his senses inwardly on God. All forces, all faculties are channelled in one direction, one Path: towards the Absolute and

away from the relative. Now, the so-called meditation so popular in the West is no more than a rest from the noise of the world, a numbness, a sleep. In the long run, such activity can result in no profound spiritual effect.

'Needless to say, what I have called the public aspect of Sufism is in itself very important. The mistaken notions of Sufism now current in the West are evidence of this importance: to grasp even the true *externals* of Sufism is already a great deal. Moreover, it goes without saying that the élite, those who are destined to reach the end of the Path, are by no means limited to only one part of the world; they are as likely to be found in the West as in the East, given the right conditions. For various reasons, a few Westerners have begun to become dissatisfied with the spiritual sterility which surrounds them. There is no need for Sufism to come to them. They will come to Sufism.'

We had finished eating dinner, and had talked till almost midnight. We excused ourselves, and Dr Nurbakhsh saw us to the gate of the khāniqāh, where with a formal hand-kiss and a 'Yā 'Alī!' we left.

Notes

1. In preparing this chapter we have not attempted a complete study of the Sufism of Dr. Nurbakhsh, since a large number of his writings are now available in English (see Bibliography), but have instead concentrated on his Persian writings and on interviews.

2. Stain with wine your prayermat
If the Magian Pir commands you.

Hāfiz, *Diwān*, Qazvinī ed., p. 2.

3. Nurbakhsh, *Gulzār-i Mūnis III: ādāb-i wurūd dar silk-i ahl-i dil*, 'The Pre-requisites for Initiation in the Path of the People of the Heart', a small pamphlet published by the Khāniqāh with an introduction by Mūnis 'Alī Shāh (Tehran 1328 S.).

4. Literally Burāq, the symbolic beast which carried the Prophet on his Night Ascension, the archetypal 'mystical experience' for Islam.

5. Nurbakhsh, *Gulzār-i Mūnis II: Khāniqāh*.

6. Following the symbolism given so far for the other prophets, the Christ-

ian would expect to find that the khāniqāh of J̄esus was perhaps first the stable in Bethlehem, then the desert, or something of the sort. Islam, however, has always associated Christianity with the monastery and monks, institutions for which some of the Sufis have had the greatest admiration.

7. *Gulzār-i Mūnis I: sukhan-i dīl*, 'The Speech (or Practice) of the Heart', intro. by Mūnis 'Alī Shāh (Tehran 1327 S.).

8. In fact, he has written or translated some thirty books and pamphlets, largely in collaboration with various professional colleagues, on various aspects of modern psychology. We have not taken these into consideration since they have (according to Dr Nurbakhsh himself) no bearing on the present work.

9. 'Sufism and Psychoanalysis', an unpublished paper.

PART II

POETRY

I The Poetry of Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī

Take one step beyond yourself –
the whole path lasts no longer than a step.
Beg alms from yourself – don't go wandering –
outside yourself the Way cannot be found.
If it's love you're after, naught yourself;
only the lover minus self knows love.
In the hope of His union suffer
the weight of separation all your life.
A rose without thorns cannot be found –
there is no gathering of roses without shedding blood.
Seek His pearl-secret from the ocean-hearted dervish –
there is no diver in His ocean but the dervish heart.
Speak not of infidelity or faith,
no, be sacrificed in the way of love;
for in His presence there is no room, no time
for dogma, infidelity or faith.
Seeker, no one attains to love
without rising above yesterday and tomorrow.
The day is today. No lover
knows care for the future!
Speak no more of silver and gold with Ni'matullāh* –
this lovely gold of yours is nothing but a jaundiced corpse.

Diwān, p. 180

* The conventions of lyric composition require the poet to mention his name (or 'takhalluṣ' – nom de plume) usually in the final couplet of the ghazal. Shāh refers to himself either as Ni'matullāh or as 'Sayyid' (descendant of the Prophet) which we have sometimes translated as 'Master'.

If you seek her, she will suddenly come to you;
if you call at her door, she will open.

If you put a bright mirror before her face
the picture of her loveliness will appear in it.

Your precious life will not last forever –
better spend it loving her.

O Reason, we are drunk and you are not –
your preaching has no place in our assembly.

I see her wherever I look,
I cannot deny it, I testify to her Being.

While beauty shines from her eyes
my sight is darkened without her light.

He who feels joy at these sayings of the Master
will adorn the royal festival with his intoxication.

Diwān, pp. 349–50

I had my wits but in His love I lost them all;
I found the Friend, became a stranger to myself.

The flame of His love consumes my candle's wick –
as a gnostic I discover the pleasures of the moth.

I have become an outcast wandering the wineseller's streets,
I drain the cup again, and again fall drunk.

I stayed for a while with the hermits in their cells,
but nothing happened. I have come back to the tavern.

You desire the Beloved's secret; seek it, seek it from my soul –
for since my soul was sacrificed it shares in the Mystery.

I have opened the bottle, I hold a full glass in my hand.
I've broken my vow of repentance and sworn a new one with
the Cup.

Always I see the drunken eye of Nī'matullāh –
how then can you blame me for my madness and excess?

Diwān, p. 470

Our looking for God is not like yours,
as if for something separate from us.
Indeed, something is sought by everyone,
but by us, only God.

We sacrifice life and heart for Him
and demand no reward in return.

We are overtaken by His affliction –
how strange that we look for nothing else.

Yes, we suffer heartache
but desire no remedy for the pain.

Yes, we are murdered by His love
but demand no blood-money.

O Sayyid, you have become the very thing you seek,
and so in the end, seek nothing but us.

Dīwān, pp. 516–17

With such pain, better to seek no remedy –
love's destruction, for the one enmeshed in love, is joy.

If you thirst, you will find streaming abundance in our tears,
clear fountains of ecstasy – look, look deep into our eyes.

The ocean of love in a single wave floods the wide world;
pure jets from that infinite sea are best.

In the assembly of revellers speak no more of Paradise and
houris –

come to the Carnival of Drunkards; better here and now.

By God's command the Saki fills my cup with a continual
stream –

a charming baksheesh – but, by God's command, so much
better!

If even the thickness of a hair still veils you, cut it like a fakir;
in the gathering of dervishes, the bankrupt qalandar is chief.

Here in the tavern of annihilation the Saki passes round with
cup after cup –

we are Nī'matullāh's boon companions; his simple company is
our joy.

Dīwān, pp. 379–80

If you know Him, know Him not separate from yourself –
you are of God, not God of you.

You abandon the world for the dervish path
only by His grace – don't imagine this baksheesh is your own!

He is the only one anywhere who acts with free will;
truly, not one of your deeds belongs to you.

We are in need of Him and He is in need of nothing –
you are poor, self-sufficiency is His.

Pass in sweetness beyond annihilation and eternity,
but never believe that you are the source of either.

He gives the pain, He also gives the medicine –
O gnostic, neither disease nor remedy is yours.

O darling, whatever may be your state,
don't imagine that Ni'matullāh is separate from you.

Dīwān, p. 559

You are the heart's beloved, comfort of the soul – what can be
done?

You are the Sultan of the universe – what can be done?

In a pure heart the reflection of Your face appears
and in that mirror You see Yourself alone – what can be done?

You are our king, and we Your obedient slaves;
whether You summon or dismiss us, what can be done?

For a lifetime You submerged us in the sorrow of love;
if we must sit for another lifetime waiting, what can be done?

We have traced Your image upon our eyes –
if you read this letter or not, what can be done?

Nowhere can You evade the Master's glance –
You are clear to my eyes as light – what can be done?

Dīwān, p. 245

If I say 'I am the beautiful' find no fault with me
since I am He – and so drunk I've lost the sense of words.

I am the seeker and the Sought, begging myself from myself –
but what have I lost to be engaged on such a quest?

If I'm not the drunken Saki, why have I sought out these
reprobates?

Or if I've never tasted wine, why do I find myself in this
tavern?

I am the Commander of the Winesellers, these revellers my
servants;

I am the Commander of the Universal Soul, all kings my
subjects.

His beauty appears in this mirror of mine, so finely made;
how then can the sober deny my claim: 'I am the Beautiful'?

If I see a stranger's image printed on the water's face
the tears of my cup will fracture it, wash it away.

Do you seek only the best companion? Search for me –
for, in this Age, I am Ni'matullāh, 'the Grace of God.'

Dīwān, pp. 550–1

So pleasantly does my heart pain me, what use have I for cure?
Bound in the infidelity of His tresses, what good is faith?

Since my soul was sacrificed at Love's altar, my heart lives;
why should I have life at all, but to serve Him?

Reason, in its dry depression, bids us behave;
we are drunk with love – what do we want with Order?

King Love came and subdued the Land of Heart –
except for this sultan, what good are kings?

Imperial festivity reigns in the solitude of this tavern;
what need have we of gardens, what profit in Paradise?

God, give me Māhān, if I can be with those silver-faced fair
ones,

for without the company of the inhabitants of Heaven, what
good is Māhān?

With the Master of mad drunkards here, Kirman is like a
Paradise,

but what good, other than the light of his presence, comes
from Kirman?

Dīwān, p. 750

An ocean of water floats us, yet we thirst – how strange;
we are at home, yet strangers – what paradox.

At the very point of Union, separation overwhelms us
and we fall far from the Friend; yet He is closer to us than our
selves.

Crippled with pain, still we rejoice, flowing with life –
shall we feel pain, if our physician is the Beloved?

Majnūn's eyes are filled with Laylā's face
and lover's eyes see nought but the secret of the Beloved.

O Reason, you are sick and sober.

I am the lover, drunken lover.

Ah, my learned colleagues, make not such loud complaint
if we possess both Intellect and love.

In the Divine Domain you are Moses;
in the Human World, nothing but a bulrush basket.

Jesus hides within you –
your husk is the heavy cross.

Indeed, we are both Beloved and the one who loves –
lord and worshipper in one body – just look – how strange!

Dīwān, p. 88

Quatrains

1. Since you send me to sleep, day and night
I see you in dreams, day and night.
Your face is the moon, my eyes fill with tears –
I see your reflection in the water, day and night.

Dīwān, p. 817

2. Dear Heart, in the way of love all roads are one;
In the land of love, both subject and king are one.
Renounce two-colouredness, give up hypocrisy –
Only then will you see that Ni'matullāh is one.

Dīwān, p. 850

3. Morning, dawn, the nightingale, the rosebud – all are one;
Beloved, lover, friend and love – all, all are one.
The more I look inside His house the more I see
That the circle, point and compass – all are one.

Dīwān, p. 850

4. My heart is chained, netted in her dark curls;
Her eyes, like the languid narcissus, render me drunk.
I have faded away, escaped the last remnants of existence
And all that you see of me, is she.

Dīwān, p. 867

Couplets

No atom but contains a sun, no drop of water anywhere
that cannot be found in our inner sea.

Dīwān, p. 911

* * *

Listen to the secret of the moon's rotation:
hidden inside it is a sun.

Dīwān, p. 923

* * *

If the fire of my pain flares up
in a single breath an entire world will burn down.

Dīwān, p. 921

* * *

I cannot tell secrets with pen and paper –
a gnostic cannot speak of the Mysteries in two different ways.

Dīwān, p. 920

* * *

If you never discover the Creator in His creation –
you will find the house, but not the door.

Dīwān, p. 926

* * *

This little bird, wandering from place to place:
the Friend is with him, yet he cries, 'Where is He, where is
He?'

Dīwān, p. 924

Mathnawī

Engage yourself as much as you can, my friend, in
remembrance of God
if you can work, remember Him at your labour.
Be pure, take not one breath without ablution;
for your companions, seek none but the Pure.

Shun the meeting-house of fantasy and image,
 let your conversation be solely with the People of Perfection.
 Offend not religion by even so much as the tip of a hair,
 and if any does so, praise him not.
 Befriend the travellers of the Way of Truth,
 find a guide and keep to a Path.
 Whether the cup you see is of gold or clay,
 drink from both – pure water.
 Be warm, kindle a good fire
 and burn your heart's incense in the censer of your breast.
 Look for the meaning of 'Comprehensive Unity'
 and in every artifact, see the Craftsman.
 Whatever you see, see as a manifestation of the Names;
 whoever you meet, think of him as our lover;
 and whether you meet a Master or a Slave
 send him a greeting from us. *Wa Salaam*.

Dīwān, p. 794

Note

The 'Prophetic' Poems of Shāh Ni'matullāh

Although the Ni'matullāhis themselves pay very little attention to the poems by Shāh Ni'matullāh commonly called 'prophetic', nevertheless they have received, at different times and by different people, a great deal of attention of a not very intelligent kind. In *Glory of the Shia World* (by P.M. Sykes, London, 1910), p. 11, it is written, 'As to the saint's prophetic greatness, I will merely mention that, some years ago, it was one of his prophecies which caused a revolt of the Indians against the English in Hindustan. This potent prophecy ran as follows:

Fireworship for a hundred years
 A century of Christ and tears
 Then the true God shall come again
 And every infidel be slain.'

Although to judge by the style of this doggerel it is very difficult to believe that Ni'matullāh actually composed it, E.G. Browne has also attributed to Ni'matullāh a qasidah of a prophetic nature, which he copied from a manuscript during his visit to Māhān (*Literary History of Persia*, pp. 465–70). This poem received a great deal of circulation during the last war in the subcontinent, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh, for many simple Muslims believed that Ni'matullāh had foretold the war in his poem. There is supposed to be a Ni'matullāhī tradition that the very publication and distribution of this qasidah will be in itself a sign of the approaching end of the world which it describes. Did Browne know what he was doing?

II The Saki, the Minstrel, the Wine

NŪR 'ALĪ SHĀH

I come again like Moses to reveal the White Hand
Drown Pharaoh and his legions again in the Red Sea
I come again like Jesus to cut the throat of Anti-Christ
And by the Mahdī's command resurrect the universe with a
breath

I come again like Abraham with miracles unending
Nimrod and his followers will vanish into dust
Sometimes like the Sun I cause the moon to radiate
Or in the belly of Jonah's Whale sink to the sea's depths
From toe to crown I have drowned in the Ocean of Essence
My heart and my pocket are shells full of bright pearls
O hermit cease your bragging – crawl to your cell and die
Hush – or I'll draw the curtain from your hypocrite's game
You cannot tell me who I am, for I neither am nor am not
Who could I be or what could I be, to uncover the secrets of
Truth?

I am the boundless, the place where God appears
Each moment in the *Dīwān* of my heart I finish a new page
When the Light of 'Alī shone forth in my heart
I, the Lover, unveiled the Arcana to all the world.

Dīwān-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh Isfahānī, ed. J. Nurbakhsh (Tehran
1349 S.), pp. 105-6

Open your eyes my heart and witness the unveiling of the
Beloved
He is shining everywhere, from the walls, from the door.

Men who thread the way of Love hide something
 Which cannot be revealed except upon the gallows.
 How much blood flows from the throats of those who thirst
 That none may wet his lips with the wine of the Mysteries.
 O shaykh what do you know of the secrets of Truth?
 In all your life you have gained nothing but a turban and gown.
 The Sun of the Friend's face blazes before you
 But your mirror is clouded and can hold no light.
 That which the veil concealed God's customers have revealed
 In the bazaar to the tune of tambourine and reed.
 I swear by God that not a shadow of this world below
 Will survive the light of 'Alī rising above dawn's horizon.

p. 75

O Saki come fill my cup with petals of wine
 That I may tear the thorns of sorrow, the roots of Time from
 my heart.
 How long must I hide behind my sleeve to drink?
 I want to flaunt the cup, drunk as Jamshīd, unveiled.
 Nothing blossoms in my heart but the briar of melancholy
 Better to burn the dry twigs of reputation and make an end
 of it.
 How can the Judge and the Grand Muftī, drinking and playing
 the tambourine
 Send their constables to persecute the Companions of the
 Vine?
 This continual prostration before every idol brands you
 heretic
 If you seek Union break all idols but One.
 For the ease of my heart I desire the Light of Him who eases all
 hearts
 But in the end it was He who bereft my heart of its last
 comfort.

pp. 140-1

I am the wave, the ocean, the ship, the storm
 In the depths of the bottomless sea I am the pearl.

I open my eyes to the Light of Revelation and become
The Light itself in the beholder's eye.

My darling, I am the very soul of the Beloved's body –
What body? What soul? No, I am the Soul of Soul.

For lovers by day, lovers by night, in union and separation
I am the Light and the fire, Paradise and the pits of Hell.

The Overlord of the entire Domain of Spirit and Soul
in this Age – I say it openly – is I.

By losing my head and the very structure of my being in His
Love

I have become the very order of existence for His Lovers.

As the reveller breathes wine, I, like the Light of 'Alī,
Am he who overflows and breathes forth the very revellers
themselves.

p. 100

We are the rainclouds streaming pearls

Hey Mountain man hey

We are the womb-like sea which stores them

Hey get up move along!

If you seek the Light of God why wander

vainly back and forth?

We are the Orient of Light

Hey Great Mountain hey!

If you seek the Hidden Mysteries

all open and unveiled

We are the Treasury of Secrets

Hey get up move along!

If your day has become like night and storm

misted and obscure

We are the candle to banish gloom

Hey Mountain Man hey!

If you see merchandise you desire

in the Caravan of Oneness

We are the Caravan's camel driver

Hey get up move along!

We are the revellers drunk and free

of the shreds of reputation

The wine of this tavern is ours to sell

Hey Great Mountain hey!

On the Day of Covenant we said 'Yes!'
 to the Lord of all Creation
 This very moment that 'yes' is confirmed
 Hey get up move along!
 All the heavens and all the hells
 are nothing to us, nor will be
 We are the seekers of Vision pure
 Hey Great Mountain hey!
 We have lost ourselves to Annihilation
 living in God alone
 We are Hallāj on the Gallows tree
 Hey get up move along!
 In the beginning and at the end
 both within and without
 We are the Beloved's beams of light
 Hey Great Mountain hey!
 At the mountain which crumbled when God appeared
 we demanded 'Show Thyself'
 And in the vision completely drowned
 Hey get up move along!
 Miserable hermit pierce us not
 with your melancholic words
 We are the sigh which burns through flesh
 Hey Mountain Man hey!
 In the Tavern of Oneness like Nūr 'Alī
 we are forever drunk
 With the spirit and wine of Almighty God
 Hey get up move along!

pp. 98-9

Tarjī'band

I.

O you who seek God!
 Recognize in us the mirror of Truth
 Come in revelry to the Tavern of Annihilation
 Change the coarse wool of asceticism
 for a soft robe
 then sell the robe and buy wine.
 Become a stranger to yourself – only then
 Will you find again the well-known Friend.

Until you break the talisman of 'There is no God'
How will you find the Treasure of 'but God'?
How wonderful: a man looking for the neighbourhood of
Union

Loses his hands and feet and wanders lost in longing.

O Shaykh can you not recognize us?

In the Kaaba

And in the temples of Somnath

We are.

All the world is our attribute

We are the Essence.

II.

We are the ones who have lost ourselves

Heads buzzing with that Magian wine

Cleansed of being and non-being

Free of the traps of Time.

Not a scrap remains except the Friend

Now that the fire of love has blazed.

If there were a sign of Signlessness

It would be us.

Can you not recognize us in our Divine Oneness?

The Friend came and we forgot the rest;

Love came and Reason stole away.

Bewildered with her fine hair, her beauty spot,

We marvel at puritan fantasies of snare and bait.

Whether secretly or openly, in our company

There is none but God.

In the Kaaba

And in the temples of Somnath

We are.

All the world is our attribute

We are the Essence.

III.

We broke the bones of abstinence

We sat in this tavern for an Age

We threw the rosary in the dusty road

And for a Christian sash wear nothing but her curl.

From our depths we draw forth 'HU!'

And rend asunder the garment of restraint.

We have cut off the world
And escaped the headaches of the circling skies.
Never have we raised ourselves from the tavern floor
For we are drunk with the circling of her eyes.
So long as Jamshid's world-revealing cup is ours
We shall drink the last dregs of the Eternal Covenant.
Though outwardly we are insignificance itself
Inwardly we are . . . what we are.

In the Kaaba
And in the temples of Somnath
We are.
All the world is our attribute
We are the Essence.

IV.

We loitered waiting by the heart's door
And caught a glimpse of the Beloved;
The Sultan of Sorrow has raised his banners
And added to his empire the land of Heart;
The hidden secrets of the Saki's face
Are reflected in the interior cup;
With the inward eye we are forever
Watching God in the panorama of the breast;
In the ocean of His Love for us
The heart-pearl has taken shape;
How many souls in the hunt of Love
Have fallen prey to His wiles?
Taking wing in the Garden of the Spirit
At dawn the heart's-dove sings:

In the Kaaba
And in the temples of Somnath
We are.
All the world is our attribute
We are the Essence.

V.

Last night He came, my comforter
And in the solitude of my heart reclined at ease.
The rays of his revelation shining
Through the wine have rendered it still more pure.
He saw in my mirror none but His own reflection
And fell in the trap of His own love-lock.

The sun of His beauty has opened
Night's curtain from the morning's face
And the Saki of Love in his mercy cries
'Drink, drink!' through the streets of eternity.
Whoever drains this cup will see
The beginning of all things and their end.
Last night as I burned
In sorrow for the Beloved
From the voice of the Unseen I heard:
 In the Kaaba
 And in the temples of Somnath
 We are.
 All the world is our attribute
 We are the Essence.

VI.

Go, extinguish yourself in annihilation
Find your place within His Permanence.
Come: from inside our eye
You can see the Face of God.
Drink but the last lees from our cup
And find at last a remedy for your heart's pain;
Enter this ocean, as a drop
Loses itself in the boundless sea.
If you seek the Treasure which cannot die
Look to the corner of the heart
Open your eye,
Come forth bravely from the prison of self,
Face the Kaaba of Resignation,
Pass beyond self-love with Ḥallāj the Martyr,
Climb to the top of the gallows and echo his cry:
 In the Kaaba
 And in the temples of Somnath
 We are.
 All the world is our attribute
 We are the Essence.

VII.

We are the sun in the sky of Nowhere
Out and beyond the world of body and soul.
I am a key to the Hidden Treasure
The whole secret of 'Be! . . . and it was.'

In every glance I am the all-seeing eye
 In every tongue which moves I am the speaker
 We are mad, ruined beyond all care
 We are in the world but not of it.
 In Love's special Retreat we breathe
 In rhythm with the Lord of the End of Time.
 He whom we dismiss
 Can find no other door.
 Like Nūr 'Alī endlessly we repeat
 in every tongue:

In the Kaaba
 And in the temples of Somnath
 We are.
 All the world is our attribute
 We are the Essence.

pp. 194-7

HAYĀTĪ

Because I have ravaged my soul with fire, a night-moth,
 I set the soft glow of your face for a candle in my breast
 My breast ripped open with your love
 My eyes sewn shut against all idols.
 For years I was Love's companion on the road
 until I learned the trade of Lover.
 Now after my death a bed of tulips grows from my dust
 Within me I treasure a field of red scars.
 In the bazaar of Love Hayātī
 Has sold her religion and her heart
 For a single glance.

Diwān-i Hayātī Kirmānī (Tehran 1349 S.), p. 37

From the assembly of dervishes a worshipper finds the tavern
 Passing round the cup becomes his rosary of incantation
 A Magian boy, tulipfaced, brings him the slenderthroated
 vase
 (He who carried notebooks to school now in the tavern carries
 wine)

A sweet smile appears on the lip of the wineglass
Dissolves his intellect, leaves him lunatic
The spell of the music like a highwayman steals away his Faith
The merit of his piety goes the way of all fables.
O Ḥayātī he who has seen the arched eyebrows of our
cupbearer
Prostrates himself to give thanks and follows the path of
gratitude.

p. 27

Now that the grassgrown courtyard under Spring's overflow
Blossoms everywhere with faces, flowers of the Beloved
The Dove throws her exquisite murmuring to the sky
And at the nightingale's song Venus comes down to dance.

p. 57

The Saki has unmasked the rose of his face
The sweetvoiced minstrel touched the strings of his rebab:
One ravished my heart with his wordless song
I have taken liquid rubies from the other's hyacinthine lips.

p. 58

No trace of rose or rosebed will remain
The nightingale's sigh and his cry will die away
The flower's colour, the nightingale's song is for today
And neither one nor the other will stay for tomorrow.

p. 59

In the moment of death, moment of the final breath
In that single inhalation I desire to see you
My friend, in that last breath, come
For God's sake, in that split second, hear my cry.

p. 58

Now is the assembly of delight, feastday, jubilee, song of the
 rebab
 And the rays from this clear wineglass shame the sun and
 moon.
 There are no strangers in the house, musicians play, the Saki
 befriends us
 The touch of those sweet lips fills drunkards' mouths with pure
 honey.
 The ceiling is gilt, the floor silver, a throne is set out for the
 king
 Inlaid cups wait, filled with melted rubies.
 The king is with us, the moon captures hearts, wine erases
 sorrow
 The flesh is strong, the heart serene, the soul satisfied with
 intimacy.
 How, in the world of wakefulness, can such celebration be?
 Is it but a daydream? Do I sleep?
 My Lord, in your beneficence, cut not the way
 For my soul's fingers to grasp the sleeve of pleasure, till
 Judgement Day.
 If, for Ḥayātī, in the heart of night the sun should shine
 Tell her to unveil the face of the Daughter of the Vine.

pp. 13-14

Your name passed whispered from my tongue
 leaving my mouth my lips more sweet.
 Sorrow for you will not quit my heart
 even if my soul flies from my body.
 Each night in the pain of separation from your moon-like face
 my cries reach the sky, the moon.
 Never shall I seek a perfumed garden –
 I have found one in your house.
 You left and the lightning of longing for you
 burned through my bones in a single flash.
 In the wilderness of sorrow for you like Majnūn
 a wanderer am I, weak and mournful.
 O Ḥayātī in the sky of your heart
 I see no sun but Nūr 'Alī.

p. 38

I told him my life's breath caught in my mouth
for those incarnadine lips sparkling as if with pearls.
'With such sighs', he replied, 'unnumbered lives
have fluttered at the lips and passed beyond.'
'I will pay for one kiss with my soul', I begged.
'How many of my customers offer me that', he smiled.
'So many Zulaykās circle you', I said,
'like Mars about the Morning Star.'
'Yes', he replied, 'for Egyptian Joseph
has been seen in the slave market.'
'But why should they, whose bodies
are as beautiful as the cypress, yearn for you?'
'I am the cypress itself', he boasted,
'walking in the garden of my caprice.'
'In the long night without you
Hayātī burns down like a candle.'
'An easy affliction', he exclaimed
'and yet it seems so difficult to her!'

p. 19

The armies of sadness range themselves in ranks
to eat the blood of my breast
Carrying the cries of my heart
before them like banners.
The caravan of the moon
disappears from my sight
But my heart cries after it
like a camel bell.
His tresses bear away
my heart so easily
But how difficult, a kiss
from his ruby lips.
His glances slay like
the bloodthirsty Turk
Inclemency and cruelty each moment
wound my heart again.

So there's nothing for you
 in his face, Ḥayātī
 No pleasure but sorrow
 no honour but your lowness.

p. 43

Last night glad news came to the tavern:
 I heard from the messenger of the Unseen
 'Why do you sit here so hopelessly sober?
 Rise, take the cup from the Saki's hand and drink!
 If your purse is empty
 Pawn your puritan's robe to the vintner.
 Why waste your strength in self-denial?
 Try one hour with wine and the musician.
 When the sea of forgiveness reaches full tide
 It will wash away the mountain of your disobedience.
 Does the bird of the heart mourn each dawn in his garden?
 Does the cockerel crow from the throne of heaven?
 If like Ḥayātī you drain the grail of love
 Poison will become honey in your mouth.'

p. 32

'The "Knot" Qaṣīdah'

Hope's thread will not be unknotted
 till the heart ties itself to those braided curls.
 On Covenant Day my heart was freed from affliction –
 in that Union there was no obstacle to the harmony of my soul.
 This world is a snare, knowledge its victim –
 truly the trap is well-made, firmly tied.
 Since I closed the eye of avarice against all things not-God
 the hand of Truth has undone my difficulties.
 The knot in the nightingale's heart was not untied
 till the rosebud ungirdled its robe and bloomed.
 The soul's hand of thought untangles all –
 let the enemy, worshipper of flesh, bind us everywhere.

Look: the miracle of love which ties at every breath
a knot in lovers' hearts from waves of the ocean of air.*
When I remember that knot all the doors of love
unlock and open on the face of the soul. Ah, well done!
Though the zephyr scatters rose-petals to the wind
it also undoes the knot in the nightingale's heart.
He untangled the ravelled affairs of all prophets
Adam and Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.
The sword of 'Alī the supreme and high
cut every clot from Muṣṭafā's heart,
For before the light of 'Alī was revealed
revelation lay hidden, tied up in the Prophet's heart.
The Prophet's soul in eagerness for his beauty
was bound both morning and evening
To the king who, by breaking all idols, opened
obstruction from the noble mind of God's friend;
To the king whose generous fingers, touching
the harp of magnanimity, made no disharmonious music.
Thank God for the tie which binds, the cord
of his sainthood and love, soul-expanding bondage!
Those of his enemies who are not thus captured
are tied instead to the lurid glow of Hell.
In such hearts as his love finds a place
the mundane world can weave no confusion.
O master, whoever is chained as your slave
cannot be trapped by love of this world or the next.
Now that my life's thread is tied to your love
my soul is no more bothered by the terrifying cry of
nothingness.
O songbird of the garden of solitude and spirituality
why, with your wings of yearning, do you bind up your
desires?
Spread your wings in the sky of praise for that king
and in the sea of praise all barriers will dissolve.
In his garden of freedom from bondage
even the bonds have begun to sing like birds.

* The dhikr is often made with a system of breathing – each breath is here compared to an ocean wave: the result should be an imprint or 'knot' of God's name in the heart.

Not until Gabriel passed under the wing of wisdom
 did his own pinions loosen and allow him flight.
 The kāf of kamāl (perfection) and the nūn of nawāl
 (generosity)
 together tied and untied the knot of kun (creation).^{*}
 Till He tied together kāf and nūn
 earth and sky would not weave themselves into one.
 Whoso ponders on the birth of sky and earth
 will find this knot the unraveller of all his trials.
 How beautiful the hand of power, that the knot of creation
 opens all doors of knowledge on the face of thought.
 'Alī the king in his generosity ties together
 Being and Essence in intimate union – how beautiful the
 bondage!
 Since Ḥayātī's tongue cannot suffice in eloquence for your
 praise
 she weaves into this ode the cloth of supplication.[†]
 As long as Beauty's amorous deeds in the hearts of lovers
 braid together your two scented locks
 Untie in your kindness all knots from the soul of your friend
 and bind up forever the soul of your enemy in your wrath.
 pp. 5–6

O you whose face illuminates my dark room
 This moth circling your body is my heart;
 O candied mouth, with the pure water of your lips
 The Eternal Master's hand of Power shaped my clay.

p. 57

MUZAFFAR 'ALĪ SHĀH

I am that celebrant, head spinning round the Magian
 wineshop,
 Too drunk to tell head from feet, low from high.

^{*} That is, the initial 'K' of kamāl and the 'N' of nawāl spell 'kun', literally 'Be!' – the word with which God brought creation into existence.

[†] Like the scraps of cloth which women tie over the graves of saints, or any sacred place, in order to receive a favour.

If you cannot rise above LĀ ILĀHA how will you reach the skirt of ILL' ALLĀH?

Untie yourself from strangers, find yourself coupled with the Friend.

How strange the sea of love where such multitudes have drowned:

The lovers' hearts are fish, her curls the hook.

Come to the tavern with us, re-inforce with a drink

That vow you made to the ancient Magus on Covenant Day.

Sink yourself in the ocean of extinction: to escape that sea Is to perish, to drown is to be saved.

When you have smashed the glass of Being with the stone of Annihilation

The Saki will fill your soul-cup from the jug of Permanence.

With our heart's eye we witnessed Mushtāq, Saki of the madmen:

In one hand the sword of 'Alī, Zulfikar – in the other, a cup of wine.

Dīwān-i Mushtāqiyyah, pp. 205–6

Before this present sun lent its splendour to the Fourth Heaven

Flashes from the Light of 'Alī filled the horizons with glory.

The hidden world of the soul contained heavens and horizons

Long before this outward sky with its boundaries came to be.

Before the Chain of Being was set in order and lit with splendour

The tale of our scented hair had passed round the circle of lovers.

Before our Lord questioned us, before we promised 'Yes'; That word and that Covenant were already our secret.

I drank one sip and was freed from my bonds

For the cup the Saki offered me held the wine of the Absolute.

Those sparks which fell in Plato's soul

Were flashes from the bright face of Illumination itself.

That clear abundance spilled in the Stoics' mouths

Was but a drop from an overflowing cup of pure wine.

That breath of the Merciful which came from Yemen to
 Yethrab
 Was a single breeze bringing sweet scent to the Prophet's
 senses.

Ni'matullāh opened joy and bounty to us –
 He laid the table, but God provides the feast.

Heart's care and sorrow vanish by the power of sanctity
 As if they were poison and the grace of 'Alī the antidote.
 No wonder if from 'Alī's wealth some spilled on our souls
 For we needed him, and he was eager for our company.

pp. 52–3

At God's own festival I am the cupbearer
 Revellers take from me the draught of immortality.
 With the first cup I let them taste Extinction
 With the next I give them the Permanence that follows.
 First I remove the 'I' and 'We' from me and us
 And then I return them.
 I am the Saki for those drunk on the wine of the Unseen
 World,
 The wine with which I enrapture the Masters of Purity.
 I am the minstrel of Paradise
 I make the Masters of Fidelity dance to my tune.
 The proud drink modesty from my bowl
 And with the reedflute I purify the People of Hypocrisy.
 Enjoy the Divine Providence – see God.
 In the face of Mushtāq 'Alī, see the Light of God.

p. 8

The cup is the Saki's face, his beauty the wine
 The cup is the moon, cupped wine the sun.
 Cup, wine, sun, moon – the Saki's finger like the crescent;
 Bubbles formed in the wine each moment rise as stars.
 Get up, Saki, pour me one measure of
 That ancient water that brings me to ruin.
 Minstrel, the hordes of sorrow invade my heart;
 Play on your rebab for me a sweet song.

Who but Nūr 'Alī could bear the cup for our Age?
Master of the madmen's bright hearts, king of the beheading.
Who makes music for God's companions but Mushtāq
Or gives to lovers the essence of intoxication, overflowing with
gifts?

The forehead of Nūr 'Alī is the title of the Quran
The face of Mushtāq reads 'In the Name of God', the
Opening.

p. 19

You are not of the human race
but the sign of that Divine Subtlety
Whose beauty cannot die
majesty of the All-mighty.

Your face, not of this world
pen-marks of the Unseen
Your body inhuman, unborn
immaterial, celestial.

Your body, mixed
of divine elements
Neither Earth, Air,
Fire nor Water.

Mendicants at your door
we scorn the King's gate
And say such beggary is
better than a thousand empires.

You ravaged my heart
sit with me now a breath
Breathe on my heart's breakage
mend it.

Hermit I tire of your
lukewarm hypocrisy
I with my Way of Excess
you with your ceremonies of denial.

Mushtāq 'Alī, breathing in and out
cracks open the sky

Are you surprised?
He inhales the breath of God.

pp. 185-6

RIḌĀ' 'ALĪ SHĀH HARĀTĪ

(from the *Dīwān-i Riḍā'* 'Alī Shāh Harātī, ed. Ramadan Khorvash, printed by order of Mūnis 'Alī Shah, 1345 A.H. in Tehran)

'Drum Song'

Neither drunk nor sober
 Neither sleeping nor awake
 Neither faithful nor unfaithful
 Far from fantasies and dreams
 Neither in myself nor outside
 Neither Sultan nor dervish
 Far am I from 'more or less'
 Boon companion of the Friend
 Sometimes wrapped in deep seclusion
 Sometimes in the drunkards' circle
 Sometimes lost in desert mountains
 Sometimes in the busy streets
 Now my soulbird soars into
 The empty skies of Oneness
 Now I wander through the cities
 Of the endless world of flesh
 Pain in heart and wound in body
 Crazed with love and drunk at heart
 No one anywhere deserves this
 Only I in my misfortune
 Cup in hand and goblet tilted
 Winepot on my shoulder, heedless
 Out of selflessness, like Manṣūr
 I have reached the gallows tree
 I drink wine and stagger
 I play harp, rebab and tambour
 I'm no puritan, no mufti
 Elders of the tavern guide me
 If you're begging me for signs then
 Search around the Nameless City
 If you envy my position
 I have placed it in the Placeless
 I know Riḍā', I read Riḍā'
 I seek Riḍā', I say Riḍā'
 Day and night I still repeat it
 Riḍā', Riḍā', Riḍā', Riḍā'!

We are the ones who are drunk with the Meeting
nothing more

We are effaced of self – we are Permanence
nothing more.

The mantle of cant and hypocrisy has dropped from our
shoulders

We are naked, bereft of the cloak of 'ME'
nothing more.

We cut for ourselves a garment of blame and revelry
Free from your common sash and gown
nothing more.

We drank deep from the cup of His Pure Light
We in this tavern remember Him
nothing more.

True, we have learned of the Throne of Kingship
Though to the eyes of the world we are beggars
nothing more.

In the spirit assembly of sweetheart, Saki and bowl of wine
We are enraptured with music, flute and tambour
nothing more.

We are the sacred nightingale fled from its cage of flesh
We sing in the hidden rosebed
nothing more.

How rude to bicker with worshippers of the Vine
We have set aside 'Why?' and 'How?'
nothing more.

Heart and soul we surrender ourselves to His Cause
Wherever He takes us we are content
and nothing more.

p. 17

In the absolute madness of love I am sane – and I dance
In His dreams and fantasies I am awake – and I dance.
Out of ocean depths of desiring Him I overflow – and I laugh
I am filled with His bountiful drunkenness – and I dance.
My idleness is busyness and all my business is idle
I have no work – I am unemployed – and I dance.
From the land of loneliness I have reached the Station of King
Jamshīd
And now I am Chief in the country of all souls – and I dance.

Eager for the encounter I escaped myself
Like Manşūr I am strung upon the gallows – and I dance.
A vagabond lover wandering through alleyways and bazaars
The Beloved has dropped His mask – I'm helpless – and I
dance.
No longer can I give my love to water and clay
My heart has chased after Him – yet I have found my heart –
and I dance.
No thought of infamy passes through the lover's mind
In the realm of fame and reputation I am first – and I dance.
My unconsciousness is awareness – my sobriety is
drunkenness
In drunkenness and sobriety I am with the Friend – and I
dance.
I am content, within and without, I have surrendered myself
Brought myself back from Other-than-He – and I dance.

p. 31

Out of the sky of Nowhere we shall make a place
and in the corner of the heart's house build a courtyard of
the soul.
We shall free the bird inside us from its cage of bones
and build our nest high in the spheres of heaven.
If the sky and its stars do not accord with our desire
we shall destroy them and create another sky, new stars.
We shall change dry morals for madness
and metamorphose puritans into addicts of wine.
Ah the intellectuals' guts are branded with regret
while we make propaganda here and there for love.
Are you a mosquito? We'll make you big enough to feed a
hawk
Are you a skulking fox? We'll make you a lion.
The pearl of the ocean of Truth has passed into our hands
and we pour the drop back into its shoreless sea.
Our ruined hut needs no repairs
under these shambles we have hidden vast treasures.
In the realm of soul with the help of heart-masters
every beggar of love shall be king of the world.

In the presence of the Mahdī, Lord of the End of Time
We shall conquer and shame all those who deny God's
Way.

The road of surrender and contentment holds no danger or
fear

even the thief who enters this Path will become a guard.

p. 15

A man insane with love cares nothing for gold
A ship adrift in madness has no anchor.

I thought so much of Laylā I became Majnūn
In all the wilderness of love I found no guide.

A beggar's rags will suit me – let kingdoms go
I lost my head somewhere on the path – I need no crown.

Alone He conquers this world and the next;
No armies for the Sultan of the Land of Heart.

She flies without wings to her Nest of Nowhere:
What need of feathers has the Bird of Union?

Delicacies will give your lusts new strength
Provisions for this lover's journey have no taste.

O Flood of Effacement we bow in the dust of Thy Threshold –
Who lives in a ruined house need fear no theft.

How can one speak of love to worldly people?
The Nation of the Ego knows no Prophet.

If the earth turns against me I shall not surrender to sorrow
For all that concerns me is to satisfy the Friend.

p. 16

In one hour I passed from the realm of Being and Space
When love came you appeared – I disappeared.

I told my heart 'I shall see His Face in my soul's mirror'
But when He shone forth, I departed, He remained.

I wanted that sweet Moon for a guest in my house but
By the time He arrived I possessed neither house nor means to
entertain him.

In this valley I have reached there is no need of name and
address

At a sign from the friend I received a new name, a new mark.

Nothing but 'HE' is printed on my eyes

I have gone beyond this and that – both worlds have vanished.

Love's madmen know a different world – as for yours

My dear ones, it has left me and I have left it:

In His Way I became nothing – my disappearance pleases me

Permanence and I came face to face and I went away happy.

I found one cannot tread the Path with one's own feet

So I took the Master's hand and set out without a Why or

How.

I surrendered to the techniques of love, tied my heart to
satisfaction

And having reached the end, pass from Here to Nowhere.

III The Hidden Tavern

ŞADR AL-MAMĀLIK AND QUDRAT 'ALĪ SHĀH

Born in Ardabīl, Şadr al-Mamālik travelled widely in Iran and was initiated in Isfahan by Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh. 'Abbās Mīrzā (then Crown Prince) hired him as tutor to his son, who was living with his own retinue in Tabriz. When the son, Muḥammad Mīrzā, became king instead of his father (who had died), he asked his old tutor to act as his Prime Minister, but Şadr al-Mamālik refused. He accepted the title of Şidārat (Premier), and the notorious Hājji Mīrzā Āqāsī became Vizier instead. For fourteen years Şadr al-Mamālik lived a peaceful and honourable life, advising the king in affairs of state and the dervishes in affairs of the spirit. When Muḥammad Shāh died, he was banished to Iraq, where he died in 1271/1854 (*B-a-S*, p. 67, and *T-a-H*, p. 240). Şadr al-Mamālik was the author of a *Dīwān* of poetry (Tehran, 1352 S.).

Although Şadr al-Mamālik had remained loyal to the Quṭbs, his own followers thought of him as a Quṭb in his own right, and after his death recognized his son, Mīrzā Hādī, called Qudrat 'Alī Shāh. They had quite a sizeable group in Azerbaijan, especially Ardabīl, and the succession seems to have continued for some time even after the death of Qudrat; recently, however, they have rejoined the main body of the Order.

Şadr al-Mamālik's poetry was good, but his son's was better: clear and lucid, in the style of Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Shāh Nī'matullāh. He claims to be the 'Walī', and his poetry makes ample claims for his having 'arrived'.

We are the King of the World, ruler of creation;
 We are the guide (hādī) of all creatures to the Absolute, the
 Ni'matullāh of the Age;
 We are the Lord of the Last Day (the Mahdī).
 (Quoted in *Diwān-i Šadr al-Mamālik*, p. 151.)

His takhalluṣ was Nuṣratuddīn; like Rūmī and Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh, he composed in the name of some one else, in this case his father, whose pen-name was also Nuṣrat, or Nuṣratuddīn.

I am the king of kings. Come! I am the crown of the righteous,
 The remedy for every pain. Come! Come to me! . . .
 I am the pure spirit of the Prophet, and am with him in the
 same cloak;
 Sometimes Muṣṭafā, sometimes 'Alī, sometimes Solomon.
 I am Nuṣrat, the king of the world, Ni'matullāh of the Time;
 I am the very faith in the heart of the faithful.
 (*Diwān-i Šadr al-Mamālik*, p. 197.)

ŠADR AL-MAMĀLIK

How pleasant to open the eye of regret and see your face,
 to caress the tip of your tress, to set out wandering.
 Come, take my life, take it as well you know how:
 on my side, all that exists of sacrifice; on your side:
 amorousness.
 I have an idol in my house round which I circumambulate.
 What do I need of Mecca or the Kaaba or the long
 journey to Arabia?
 The bodies of those who die in your love need neither ablution
 nor shroud;
 what does a shroudless corpse need of prayers for the
 dead?
 The Quarter of our darling is the sanctuary of the Kaaba.
 Inside it, one can pray facing any direction.

Listen, I shall tell you the way and form of self-sufficiency:
offer courteously and in dire necessity your heart and
soul.

In the shelter of the love of Nuşrat, why fear whims and
desires?

As if you wandered in a jungle full of lions, worrying
about the attack of a dog!

From the *Dīwān-i Şadr al-Mamālik*,
ghazal No. 35, pp. 32-3.

QUDRAT 'ALĪ SHĀH

I am He, the same, the very soul,
same soul, soul of the world!

I am that lion forever lying in the grove
not some cur searching for bones.

From the World of Meaning the Beloved's face
has been reflected, revealed,

And polished the rust of illusion
and fantasy from the mirror.

I am all that is hidden, whatever you see,
all that is manifest – I do not understand how!

If you have heard the Sufis whispering in secret
now come and see for yourself: I am revealed.

You do not know the secret of drunkenness:
whatever I tell you is a tale.

I am not that reveller you dreamt of:
I am purified of all imagination.

Come O chief of the drunkards, Nuşratuddīn,
you know that without you I have no spirit, no soul!

From *Ibid.*, ghazal No. 81, p. 199

If the wine is fermenting it will not take forever;
if the nightingale is silent now, soon she will sing.

The ears of God are needed to hear divine secrets –
not every ear in the world is fit for such speech.

How long will you sit dry-lipped day and night with the
puritans?

Come to the festival of yearning, where there is nothing
but 'To your health!'

The things of this world for me are naught but form –
but then, form is naught but a cover for meaning.

The generous men of God gave me the robe of poverty –
thank God I do not wear the cloak of hypocrisy on my
shoulders.

Sit by the barrel, take cup after cup and pass out –
whoever sits here bids farewell to sobriety.

Only the lion of God can guide us on this Path,
for the guide of the Way of Truth, my boy, cannot be a
rabbit!

From *Ibid.*, ghazal No. 125, pp. 165–6

SURŪR 'ALĪ

Sayyid 'Alī Mustawfī was initiated by Šāmit 'Alī and again
by Wafā' 'Alī Shāh. He was made shaykh of Kermanshah by
Mūnis 'Alī Shāh. He was a calligrapher and man of letters. He
copied the Quran 13 times. By trade he was a government
auditor, but rose to the posts of Vice-Governor of Gilān and
Governor of Arāk. He died in 1312 S./1933 at the age of 96.
(See *Gulistān-i jāvid* [GJ], III, 1336 S., p. 17.)

So many tears flood her lawn
it seems a little Oxus
Why should she care
for a thousand like me?

For years she watched me burn
without mentioning my name
Fearing that her very words
would be singed.

The moth's head and its wings burned
its heart disappeared in smoke
But why should the candle
weep for a insect's daring?

All night I rivet my eyes to the Path
in the morning the breeze
Carries a soul perfume from
its store of Chinese musk.

Do not ask this simpleton
what was done by
That iron fist, that stone heart
that silver cheek

Those amber tresses, that flower face
those lips of garnet
That fiery perspiration, steel-blue hair
crystalline flesh.

The shattered pieces of my heart
are lost in the harvest of her locks
Who will comb them
from those tangled ringlets?

From afar she rebukes me
in her anger
I wish she would come closer
I would kiss her lips.

That fine down, the hairs of leaves
have caused Surūr to faint.
Her garden walks, lined with sweet herbs
are my sole delight.

From *GJ* III, p. 26

KHUSRAWĪ

Muḥammad Bāqir, born 1266/1850 in Kirmanshah, was a great-grandson of the Qājār king Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh. He was a quiet, humble and peaceful person, unlike many of the Qājār gentry, and was initiated into Sufism by Šāmit 'Alī, the Goldsmith. He was one of the first of Iran's writers to use

forms imported from the West, and produced a three-volume historical novel, *Shams wa Tughrā*, set in Shiraz in the time of Sa' dī, which is still read and admired today. He was a supporter of the Constitution, for which offence he was banished from Kirmanshah; he came to Tehran where he was given an official position, and died in 1338/1920.

Khusrawī was an outstanding calligrapher, and an extraordinarily well-educated man of letters. A poet himself, he was an expert in the pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia, of which he had memorized vast amounts, and on which he produced a valuable study. Besides *Shams wa Tughrā* he wrote another less well-known novel on the rise of the Qājār dynasty. He was one of the first Persian writers to call for a clearer and less bombastic prose style, and to encourage the use of the simple vernacular; as such, his writing is still of much importance to the student of modern Persian literature. In his own Sufi poetry, however, he adhered to the traditional style.

(See the introduction to the *Dīwān-i Khusrawī*, Tehran 1304 S., by Rashīd Yāsīmī.)

Here in your street I have no desire
to walk in some rose garden;
Still prisoned in my cage of flesh
I am already bound and tied by you.

The chains on my feet
are the curls of your locks:
If I flew to heaven
they would draw me back.

Leave me alone one moment
to pray and I swear
I will beg God for nothing
but the sorrow of your love.

He who knows
does not speak
Who then can I ask
'Who am I?' 'Where am I from?'

Do not blame me if I gamble
my life on your path;
What could I do?
it was all I owned.

I would set fire to
the tree of life
If I could snatch one burning branch
from the flames of your love.

I have wandered after
Love's caravan:
The whining of the lute in my ear
is a distant camel bell.

Every evening I limped
after the night-watch
Hoping to be arrested
and thrown in your dungeon.

Thank God I am checkmated
by the face of the king
No longer like the queens worrying
about bishops and knights.

Ever since you took the lid
off your sugar bowl, my friend
I am no longer Khusrawī
but a poor fly.

From the *Diwān-i Khusrawī*, pp. 194-5

You will not hear signs of love from the blind,
for sight and hearing on our Path are one.
Everything in this world sings aloud love's song
but how can you hear with cotton in your ears?
Life passes. The rosebud is pregnant with blood
and dies with its heart pressed against the thorn.

I told my secrets to the old wineseller
 for one should not conceal disease from the physician.
 I wanted to sleep and dream for you
 but your image blocks my eyes from the road to sleep.
 I shall sprinkle tears on this dust, this flesh
 that no breeze may blow me from your street.
 If you dive for pearls, Khusrawī, do not fear the storm.
 Perhaps you will find a gem that can be pierced.

From the *Diwān-i Khusrawī*, p. 201

MĪRZĀ MUḤAMMAD 'ALĪ MAẒLŪM KIRMĀNShĀHĪ
 (1240 S. – 1307 S./1861 – 1928)

A disciple of Ṣādiq 'Alī Shāh and shaykh of the Order in Mashhad. He was extremely fond of Rūmī, recited from the *Mathnawī* beautifully, and used it as a teaching medium.
 (See *GJ*, IV, pp. 2–13.)

Again again you shatter me
 why should I not weep blood?
 The bottle is smashed in a hundred pieces
 why should I not leak wine?

While Laylā drinks with the rivals
 why should Majnūn
 Not rain blood from his heart
 in jealousy?

When Flower befriends Thorn
 love and desire are confused.
 Tell the nightingale to spare
 her vain tears of regret.

If the moth consumes itself
 for love of the candle
 Should the mourning candle not
 throw dust upon its head?

I thought I could plead myself free
from the trap of her sweet hair
But the serpent spits no snakestone
for a magic charm.

Are these words sliding through her teeth
slipping from her tongue
Or pearls from shells? No oyster
ever birthed such gems.

As she walked in the desert I spread my heart
for a carpet at her feet
That the grains of love like sand that clung to her skirt
might not be lost.

Of all those who hunt wild birds
no one has used so many
Different kinds of bait: almonds,
pistachios, sugar.

Throw love's fire, toss
our dust to the wind
Save our hearts from the shame
of running after filth.

The cloud of mercy rains joy
not water on the peoples' heads
But the whirling bowl of heaven
drops nothing on lovers but ruin.

How can Maẓlūm attain the goal
the fountain of life
Till dew pours like sweat
from the blue sky's brow?

From *GJ* IV, pp. 5-6

SAFĀ' 'ALĪ

Darvīsh Abu'l-Qāsim Kirmānī (Ṣafā' 'Alī Shāh) (1280 – 1359/1863 – 1940), the khalīfah, or shaykh, of the Order in

Mashhad, wrote in the preface to his *Diwān* the following account of his initiation:

My father was an honest man; for a long time, none of his children had survived infancy. His house happened to be next to the khāniqāh of Rawnaq 'Alī Shāh, which at that time was under the charge of Mirzā Abu'l-Ḥasan Kalāntari. One night they had a gathering and meal at the khāniqāh, and my father, being a neighbour, in all sincerity asked them for a loaf of bread as barakah, hoping that thereby he would be able to beget a son. Through the grace of the dhikr and the holy breath of the old men of the Path, that celestial food indeed constituted my very substance; and so I was born in the year 1280, entering the City of Being from the Desert of Nothingness. When I was seven I became eager for education, and continued to study the basics until I was fourteen. But then I began to feel another aspiration, a more exalted pain, and became inclined towards the men of Insight; wherever I found a dervish who seemed to have an inkling of the Truth I would chase after him, and even at that tender age I pleaded with God to show me the Straight Path. It was not long before Abu'l-Qāsim Sirjānī, known as Wafī 'Alī Shāh (one of the shaykhs of Wafā' 'Alī Shāh) gave me a glance which attracted me mightily, so that I thoroughly forgot myself; but since I was so young I was barred from his majlis, and had to content myself with seeing him at a distance.

At this time I used to chant the poems of Shāh Nī'matullāh to myself, and one day I happened to read this verse:

Bless the Prophet and you will find what you seek,
If in truth you are one of his people.

This line seemed pointed at my heart. I was inspired to repeat the blessing on the Prophet as if it were my dhikr, and before long strange doors began to open for me in my dreams. One night I saw 'Alī, who called me. It was a marvellous state, and what I saw then, God knows. When I awoke from that dream I was struck speechless for three days.

At this time, two dervishes from Shiraz, one of whom was old Shaykh Muḥsin, had come to Kirman for a visit. I noticed Wafī 'Alī Shāh go into the house where they were staying, and I thought of a plan whereby I would use these visitors as a means to attain my goal. After Wafī 'Alī Shāh had left them, I entered the house on some pretext or another. One of them asked me, 'Young man, what do you want from the dervishes?'

'I cannot explain with my tongue the burning I feel inside me', I answered. 'I can only say that for some time now I have been completely distracted and confused, and have asked God to guide me on the Straight Path. I hang on to anyone who seems to promise hope. Whenever I see Wafi 'Alī Shāh, my turbulence increases. I beg you to take my hand and intercede for me!'

'Don't worry', they answered. 'The time of your deliverance is approaching.'

Next day Wafi 'Alī Shāh again came to visit them, so I took advantage of the opportunity and went into the room where they were sitting, and began waiting on them. Old Shaykh Muḥsin whispered something in Wafi 'Alī Shāh's ear, and he answered by announcing, 'Tomorrow, which is Thursday night, I must go to Māhān. When I come back I will arrange everything.'

After three days, however, he had still not returned. Instead a letter arrived from Māhān for Shaykh Muḥsin, ordering him to leave for Isfahan 'by the desert way' and to take me with him. As soon as he had read this, Muḥsin announced, 'We leave tomorrow', and I agreed joyfully.

Next day in the evening we left Kirman (this was in the year 1306), and after staying for a few days in Yazd, set out again for the village of Nuhgunbad. Suddenly, in the middle of nowhere, the dervishes gave me back my bag and said, 'Go away! Turn back! Leave us!' and left me there alone in the desert.

I was amazed. I was dumbfounded. I tried to think what sin I had committed to be punished in such a way. Thoroughly distressed, I sat down and wept in desperation. Suddenly I received an inspiration: Why are you sitting here in vain? This is the Path of Love, not the road to the bath-house! There are dangers and tests to be undergone, many ups and downs, high mountains and deep oceans. I jumped up and in the heart of the night surrendered my soul to God. I set out walking towards my destination, singing

You may brush me away or swat me but

This fly will not leave the sweet-seller's shop!

I did not rest that night. Next morning I arrived at a caravanserai and asked for my erstwhile companions. I was told that they had already left. Without a moment's hesitation I ran after them – the people of the caravanserai cried after me, 'This is a wilderness! No water, no villages, no inhabitants. You will die!' But I trusted in God and continued on my way

till the sun reached the height of the sky, and heat and exhaustion were nearly killing me. Suddenly, in the midst of the desert, I saw an old man, who asked me, 'Water or bread – which do you want?' I asked for water, and he gave it to me. As I drank, he told me there was a caravanserai near by, and pointed the way. I kept on going until I came upon a heap of wheat, with some people around threshing and winnowing it; when I got there I collapsed beside the wheat and fainted. When I came to, one of the farmers gave me some bread and water. After eating and drinking I fell asleep. I awoke at dawn, and after the prayer I proceeded on the way to Nā'in. There I introduced myself to some people and asked after my companions. I found the address, went there, and knocked at the door. Shaykh Muhsin answered, and joyfully he embraced me; weeping, he exclaimed, 'My son, don't worry, you have reached the goal.' It was then that I realized that their cruelty towards me was in essence a planned act of kindness and mercy.

We stayed in Nā'in for two days, and on the third moved on to Isfahan. There I met the shaykh of the khāniqāh, Mīr Muḥammad Hādī, and gave him the letter with which I had been entrusted by Wafī 'Alī Shāh. It said:

I had intended to initiate this young man myself, and had promised to do it when I came back from Māhān. But on Thursday night in the sepulchre of Shāh Nī'matullāh I had a vision in which I saw a baby being put into your hands, and you suckled it like a mother. So I am sending this dervish to you, that you might help and initiate (lit. 'release') him.

* * *

That marauder who plundered our religion with a glance
by his absence set fire to our poor harvest.

The folk of Vision fly to the circus of his paradise;
who but the lover can follow them there?

All our companions reached the goal but
in our weakness we were left behind.

Our master told us, wash your heart of the others
if you want the perfect grace of my breath.

O Ṣafā', do not leave the company of the revellers;

By God, your problems will be solved in the tavern!

From *GJ*, IV, pp. 20–9

SAYYID 'ABD AL-KARĪM GHAYRAT KIRMĀNShĀHĪ
(1295-1376/1878-1956)

A disciple of Mūnis 'Alī Shāh. When Mūnis visited Kirmanshah in 1315 S./1936, Ghayrat improvised three ghazals on the spot; this is one of them.

Your eyebrows are arched like bows.
I fell in love with them
But only became the target
for arrows of reproach.

Under my thighs
the wild horse of luck
Was tamed when I rode beside
the prince of your affection.

I wandered the world
for years in vain
When after all you were
in the marrow of my soul.

If I choose the company
of the People of the Path
I have joined their caravan
only from fear of bandits.

How can abstinence
share the table with love?
How can doubt
assail me after faith?

I spent my life
for nothing till
I made my mouth
your spokesman.

The Night Ascent of Love
is nearness to your temple
I have reached to heaven
from the dust in your street.

The Houris and palaces and
boys of eternal Paradise
are no reward for him who brings
good news of the garden at Māhān.

Great Caesar and the Emperor of China
were not fit to be doormen
for Ni'matullāh Walī, Pole of the Time,
King of all the world.

From *GJ* I, p. 34

SAFĪ 'ALĪ SHĀH

(see Appendix II).

A heart roped in the lasso of your curls –
where is the way for it to escape?

Yet it deserves to suffer for its rashness
in daring to love one so powerful.

The wound which Separation opened in my breast
has grown too serious to be cured by Union.

Though I narrowed my mind to the fineness of a hair
I could not find my way to your embrace.

You tied a sash about your waist, you open it
and my eyes seem drowned beneath the sea.

Shall I grovel in the dust and pluck at your gown
while you turn haughtily away?

Safi, even the words 'cup' and 'wine' make you drunk – what will happen if you smell the breeze from the tavern door?

Dīwān-i Šafī 'Alī Shāh, (ed. by Maṇšūr Muṣṭafī,
Tehran, 1336 S.), p. 79

MŪNIS 'ALĪ SHĀH

(For his biography, see Part I, Chapter VII, pp. 164–66.)

'Religion and Infidelity'

Religion and infidelity for righteous lovers are one;
Kaaba and idol-temple; rosary and Christian girdle: one.

If you see the world through the eye of the search for Truth
you will find lover and love, beloved, heart and heart's
master – all are one.

When I stepped into the tavern I saw
That among all the drunken customers, one was sober.

Though every atom of this world cries 'I am Truth!'
only one of them ever buys the hangman's noose.

We are the reeds and you the reed-flute player –
but if you know the end of the tale, these two are one.

Rays from the sun of his face, reflected in the heart's mirror,
these light-beams seem different, but are one.

I am at peace with all the creatures of the earth –
to me the injustice of strangers and mercy of the friend
are one.

Hide these sayings of Truth from the ignorant, O Mūnis,
for to them even a lump of mud and the Royal Pearl are
one!

From the *Diwān-i Mūnis*, Tehran 1345 S., pp. K-L

'Slowly and Slowly'

That moon's face emerged from behind its mask, slowly,
slowly
and slowly sunlight was revealed through clouds.

On her cloud-face I saw the sun like a drop of sweat, and she
said,

'Witness strange splendours of water and fire, coming
together, slowly, slowly.'

She hunted me first with the arrows of her amorous glance
then with the lasso of her tresses roped my soul's neck,
slowly, slowly.

By the shadows of her curls, the cloud of her fine hair, and the
smoke of the sighs of those who yearn
the sun was at last eclipsed, slowly, slowly.

Old age has made a night-raid on my sinews and soul
and slowly, slowly stolen the thought of youth from my
heart.

Since the Friend has seen fit now to journey far from the house
of Mūnis,
O camel-driver, ride on, in your munificence, slowly,
slowly.

Ibid., p. N.

‘An Easy Solution’

What I looked for in my heart I found –
how simply was the problem solved.
Like a lover I chased Him from street to street
but found the Beloved at last in my own house.
I lived many years in the borderland of separation from His
face
before finding the eternal Paradise.
My heart drowned day and night in Love’s sea of sorrow;
when I gave up my life I reached the shore.
I found eternity in emptiness, I became void in Him
and the oneness of knower and known fell into my hand.
The Beloved does not appear till the heart is polished –
O Mūnis, how can the forgetful find Him?
Grace and attention from the Old Magian have helped,
but only my receptive heart could receive the gift.

Ibid., p. Y.

‘Her Face’

The gold of the lover’s face cannot be hoarded,
the heart that is ripped by love cannot be sewn.
O food of my spirit, these tears of the sorrow of love
are streams of pearls that cannot be contained.
Will my heart burn in Hell? No, I tell you to your face
that what is burned in your love cannot be burned again!
The cypress, the rose, the bright meadow
do not excite me as much as your face and body.
Not one secret have I learned from her mouth
for this is a mystery that cannot be transmitted.

Mūnis, it was a mistake to compare her tress with Orient
 musk;
 this perfume comes from the wilds of Tartary, not the
 courts of China!

Ibid., p. K.

‘Giving Up Heart and Religion’

On the day I first loved you I swore by my soul
 and renounced my heart and religion.
 Last night in sighing for those wet-ruby lips
 I embroidered my robe with tears of pearl.
 My heart was lost in the land of desire;
 two hundred times I prostrated, eyes in the dust.
 And yet, on that first day I was not so bewildered as now;
 I have fallen in this trap thinking of your dark hair.
 In love of you, the only face of beauty in this world,
 I have coupled with sorrow, wounded by separation.
 O preacher, blame me not for worshipping Love;
 many of your sort have advised me, but I heard them not.
 They warned me, ‘Mūnis, we will chastise you even in
 dreams . . .’
 Years have passed, and how could I sleep, thinking of
 Him?

Ibid., pp. M–N.

A Poetical Commentary on a Ghazal of Shāh Nī‘matullāh

(Note: The lines enclosed in quotation marks are from ghazal No. 691, *Dīwān-i Shāh Nī‘matullāh Walī*.)

Ignorant is the wanderer with no guide
 Easy for him to lose the way
 And drift, lost for a whole lifetime:
 ‘A soul without the Beloved is a body without soul –
 Only with Him is there joy.’

O you who have fallen by the way, mired in mud
Your reward nothing but regret and sorrow
How long will you forget that
 'The medicine for those in pain is more pain –
 My remedy consists of the disease itself.'

He who holds love for the Image in his heart
Escapes from everything beside the Friend
How could he choose the ordinary mind?
 'Where does an orderly life connect with love?
 The Lover's task is disorder.'

He who is driven mad by that face of moonlight
Will be tangled in these dark curls, like me,
For days and nights he will fall into distraction;
 'Whoever is bound by the locks of such an idol
 Will flutter like a wisp of dishevelled hair.'

Stricken by love, he will be murdered;
How sweet, how worthy of respect that death,
The end of one who has striven and reached the goal:
 'Killed by love for him
 He will not die, but gain eternal life.'

How could a stranger become his friend?
Only the drunken lover is worthy of him,
One who has lost his reason and gone mad;
 'Love is a treasure, the heart a ruin –
 His wealth is hidden in this desolate heart.'

O Mūnis, since you are the guide, say it openly
To the one who seeks the company of saints
To the one who treads the Path of 'Alī:
 'If you are seeking both the Master and the slave
 Look for Nī'matullāh; he is both "this" and "that".'

Ibid., pp. 29–31

IV 'I am no Sage'

THE POETRY OF JAVAD NURBAKHSI

Feigning Negligence

Tears of blood fall from my eyes, since no salt, no sigh
remains;
how strange that I should come to depend on a little smile, a
glance.

This vain fantasy, this incessant brooding vanished,
disappeared;
all nothing but a worthless snare, empty of the waking shock.
To whom shall I report this feigning of negligence? The
nightingale
never cried in regret for the rose's face. It's been a great
mistake.

The tongue that babbles 'I am the lover'
has broken faith and will never find Love's direction.

Leave water and clay behind, sell heart and religion,
choose a rose-like idol in the perfection of royal beauty.

Sit, seal your lips, say nothing, keep silence,
abandon your sober opinions, seek not a Way.

If he gives you good news of some Station you have reached
feel no satisfied hope. Beware! Ignore him.

Seeing that you are what you are, a parasite of Love and
drunkenness,
you will still escape, at every breath and not just sometimes
from your self-adoration.

Love's Bazaar

Who opens his eyes to see you loses his blindness
Who finds a place in your Love will become placeless.

Your face can be seen through your eyes only, if at all,
for what can any man perceive with his own?
O you origin of all desires and yet completely free
what else in the world can anyone demand?
The merchant of Love's Bazaar is no one but the customer
himself;
where then is the profit in trying to buy and sell?
We, we are the veil upon your face, but you yourself
were never hidden, never needed to be found again.
Let anyone give away Love's secrets
for in your presence there is neither confidante nor stranger.
O Nurbakhsh, we have been in disgrace for him all our lives
and now no blame remains with which to disgrace us more.

Love's Treasure

Ask not for a report – I am no sage.
Do not cover your face – I am no stranger.
My heart fills with blood-tears, but I do not cry like the candle;
I burn inwardly and yet do not resemble the moth.
The shaykh of the city, who admired me for my knowledge,
was crazy, absolutely crazy, to say I am not mad.
The saki, seeing that the cup, goblet and glass
failed to satisfy me, offered me the jug, and then the tavern.
I drowned and dissolved in the wine, I have become wine,
clear wine,
the very wine the vintner in this tavern sells.
The Lover, Beloved and their Book are nothing but a pleasant
tale
which I discarded. I am not after fables anymore.
Love is the treasure, Lover and Beloved its talisman seal
but in search of it I have not gone wandering amongst the
ruins.
Why, you ask, did Nurbakhsh give his heart to Love?
I said at the beginning: I am no sage.

The Secret of Creation

O Rational Man, you are ignorant of the secret of creation;
even the little you know you grasp imperfectly.

And O you Puritan, your own feet never walk to the mosque:
a hand, of which you are ignorant, guides you there.

You, Professor, with your endless lecturing,
you misunderstand not only your own words but the book as
well.

And Lover, you will find in your Beloved only what you seek:
your love will achieve union, but not ultimate Union.

You, Pathgoer, searching on every side for a way to hope,
what can you, ignorant of the Heart's Language, ask of us?

Gnostic, you see nothing but ship and sea:
you are lost in a whirlpool which you have mistaken for dry
land.

And you, Nurbakhsh, you escape this noise so easily
you can no longer remember the ones whose feet are stuck in
mud.

Intimate with God

He who is intimate with God
breaks with the memory of all that is not divine.

He who becomes His patient knows
that malady from Him is its own remedy.

Adoring yourself is not worshipping God:
this truth makes up our Credo.

Cease to exist, that you may be.
Know that Absolute Being is God alone.

When the drop lost sight of itself in Annihilation
it became the Sea – in Permanence.

There is no quarrel among the revellers:
who joins this festivity gains purity.

Nurbakhsh, light-giver to the world, is one, is one
though there may be thousands of mirrors.

Love's Discourse

Beyond words and their meanings Love speaks
another language, different words.

My rival demands 'Say something of Love' –
what will his deaf heart hear but silence?

A heart aware of the Lover's world
hears only the whispering of Love
a tongue unknown to the vulgar.

Leave behind their nonsense, their headaches.
He who denies Love will never grasp these words –
nothing we could say would move him;
discourse in the School of Love is speechless
only the bankrupt chatter behind their doors.

Nurbakhsh, the breath of Love makes you eloquent
your words precious to the gnostics' hearts.

(Note: All poems from the *Diwān-i Nūrbakhsh*, Tehran 1345 S.)

Chart 1

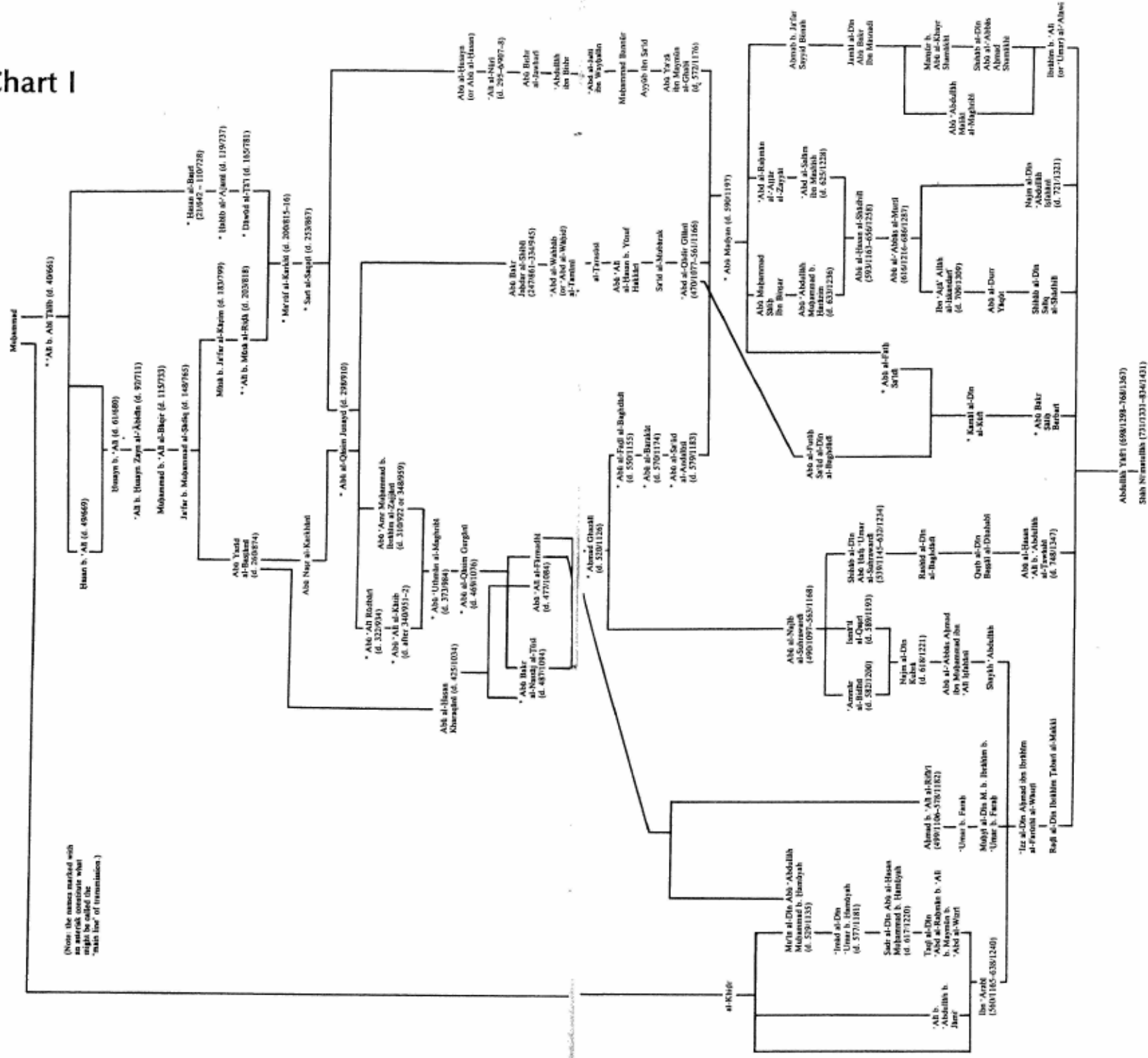
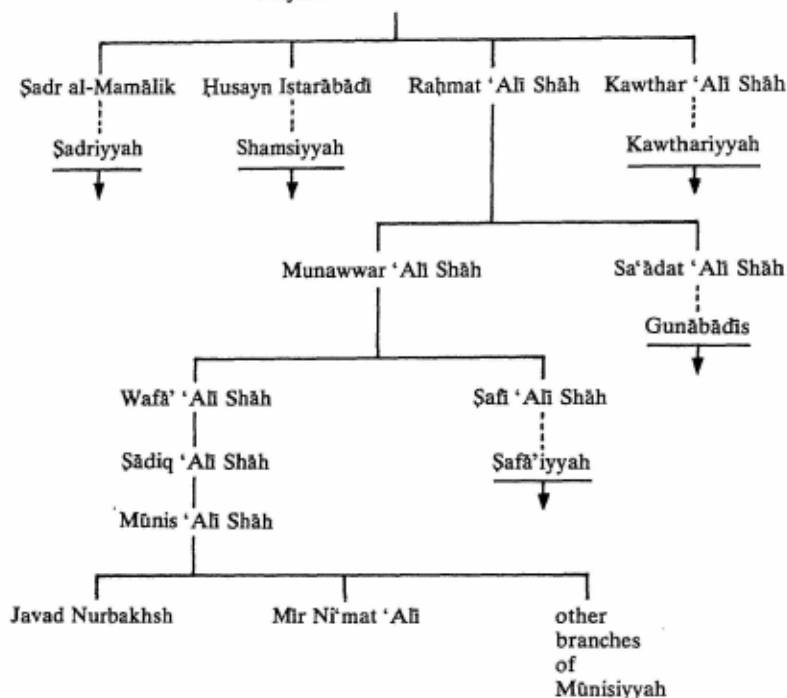


Chart II

The *Silsilah* from Shāh Nī'matullāh to the Present.

Shāh Nī'matullāh Walī
 Shāh Khaḥlullāh I
 Shāh Ḥabīb al-Dīn Muḥibbullāh I
 Shāh Kamāl al-Dīn 'Aḥiyyatullāh I
 Shāh Khaḥlullāh II
 Shāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad I
 Shāh Ḥabīb al-Dīn Muḥibbullāh II
 Shāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad II
 Shāh Kamāl al-Dīn 'Aḥiyyatullāh II
 Shāh Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad III
 Mīr Maḥmūd Deccani
 Shaykh Shams al-Dīn Deccani
 Ridā 'Alī Shāh Deccani
 Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Deccani
 Nūr 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī
 Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī
 Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh



Notes to Chart II

BRANCHES OF THE NĪMATULLĀHIYYAH

As far as we know, no branching of the tree of the Nīmatullāhī silsilah occurred in India. We do know that at least three of Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Deccanī's shaykhs came to Persia. Shāh Tāhīr, a fellow disciple of Ma'sūm who also came to Persia, is recorded as having had only one disciple; Zuhūr 'Alī Shāh established a separate line through his disciple the alchemist Ustād Shishahgar, some of whose followers seem to have joined Sādiq 'Alī Shāh after Shishahgar's death. The whole question of the mysterious Zuhūr 'Alī Shāh and the Nīmatullāhī alchemists is a complex one, and we hope to treat it in a separate article. We do not know whether the Zuhūrī line survives independently or not.

Under Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh there occurred no breaks or branchings. The Order was attempting to establish itself in the midst of chaos and persecution, outside factors which lent weight to the already powerful sense of unity the dervishes experienced and cherished. Even though they were scattered geographically from India to Iraq, they held together. This situation continued under Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh as well, both of whom had had direct experience of the grimmest days of persecution and poverty.

By the time of Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, however, the outward situation had improved greatly. Less and less persecution was aimed at the Sufis from 'ulamā' and court, until, with the coronation of Muḥammad Shāh Qājār, the Nīmatullāhī Order had penetrated the Court itself. After the death of Majdhūb (1238/1823), it began to divide itself into various branches, in a process that has continued more or less regularly till the present.

One of the reasons for this branching may be sought in the organizational structure of the Order. The Quṭb cannot be everywhere at once, and must delegate spiritual authority to his shaykhs. The dervishes of a shaykh in, say, Shiraz, will obviously come to feel a greater attachment to their own guide than to the chosen successor of the Quṭb in, say, Isfahan. When the Quṭb dies they may find it difficult to transfer their loyalties. If their own shaykh claims to be Quṭb, or is proclaimed Quṭb by some of the dervishes, or decides to follow someone else other than the chosen successor, the local group of devotees will tend to abide by the decision of the man they have 'worked with' rather than that of some distant authority. Particularly if the old Quṭb has died without clearly designating a successor, the situation may become especially confused. In these ways, Sufi orders often seem to

behave as microcosms of Islamic society in general, with its perennial problems of rule.

In composing this book so that the main text relates to one particular branch of the Order, currently led by Javad Nurbakhsh, and in relegating some of the other branches to an appendix, we are not seeking to make any value judgments. We have written the book from our own point of view: circumstances permitted us full access to the 'Nurbakhshi' branch, in terms of both written records and experience, while in fact we often experienced great difficulty in tracing even the vague outlines of the histories of other branches. It could be argued that these other branches have sometimes flowered into spiritual beauty and power comparable to that in the branch we have concentrated on in our main text, and if we have failed to do justice to every spiritual line and master, we must plead the exigencies of research rather than any calculated intent.

All of the branches we will discuss here have sometimes been called Nūr 'Alī Shāhī as well as Nūr matullāhī, which may indicate that there was a need to differentiate them from some other branches, such as the Zuhūriyyah, which had no initiatic connection with Nūr 'Alī Shāh. With this proviso, then, we can say that the major branches of the Nūr matullāhī Order are as follows:

1. *Ṣadriyyah*: After the death of Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, Ṣadr al-Mamālik, the man who had washed his corpse, either proclaimed himself Quṭb or was proclaimed Quṭb by his son Qudrat 'Alī Shāh, who eventually succeeded him. This line does not appear to have survived (see pages 223–26).

2. *Kawthariyyah*:

a. Kawthar 'Alī Shāh is said to have been appointed Majdhūb's successor but later 'disinherited' (see page 146 and note 21 for this and other information about Kawthar). This story seems highly unlikely, but in any case Kawthar was accepted as Quṭb by a section of the Order. After his death in 1247/1831, he was succeeded by

b. Mirzā 'Alī Naqī, called Sāghar ('Cup') 'Alī Shāh, son of Kawthar 'Alī Shāh; died in Rajab 1297/1880, and is buried in Hamadan near the tomb of Bābā Ṭahir.

c. Ḥājj Aṣadullāh Kabīr Āqā, called Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh. Born 1246/1830;² date of death unknown.

d. Ḥājj Mu'in al-'Ulamā' Marāgha'i (from the town of Marāghah in Azerbaijan).

e. Mashhadī Muḥammad Ḥasan Āqā Marāgha'i, called Maḥbūb ('Beloved') 'Alī Shāh. Born 1279/1862, died 1334 S./1955 aged 96 in Tehran, buried in the Ibn Bābawayh cemetery in Rayy. He was on intimate terms with Mūnis 'Alī Shāh, and Dr Nurbakhsh wrote *Gūlzar-i Mūnis II (Khāniqāh)* at his request.³

f. Ḥājj Malik Niyā, called Naṣir 'Alī Shāh. The present Quṭb of the Kawthariyyah lives in the city of Rayy, and has a number of disciples in America, besides his adherents in Iran. His American disciples have published a small book, *What is Sufism?* (Khaneghah Maleknia Naseralishah, New York, 1974) which contains some information about the silsilah and his teachings.

3. *Shamsiyyah*: Named after the most famous shaykh of the branch, Shams al-'Urafā' (see below).

a. Husayn Istarābādī, acclaimed Quṭb after Majdhūb by a group within the Order.

b. Shāh Kalāl of Lucknow (in India).

c. Mīr 'Alam Shāh Hindī ('The Indian').

d. Shaykh 'Abd al-Quddūs Kirmānshāhī, died 1309/1892.

e. Sayyid Husayn Husaynī, called Shams al-'Urafā' ('Sun of the Gnostics'). Born 1288/1871 (on Imām Husayn's birthday), died 1353/1935. Shams al-'Urafā' was one of the most outstanding Sufi masters in Iran in this century. His khāniqāh in Tehran was a centre for numerous disciples, whom he guided on the Path, and instructed in such Sufi classics as the *Gulshan-i rāz*, the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyyah* and the *Miršād al-'ibād*. He was initiated by Shaykh 'Abd al-Quddūs; a fascinating account of the initiation in Shams' own words can be found in Nasr's *Sufi Essays* (pp. 64–6). He was visited by orientalisists such as Massignon and Rypka; the latter has written a moving description of his meetings with Shams in *L'Âme de l'Iran* (ed. R. Grousset, L. Massignon and H. Massé, Paris, 1951) in an essay called 'Dans l'intimité d'un mystique iranien' (pp. 179–200). Shams is said to have exchanged letters and photographs with Pope Pius XII.⁴ He had two wives but no children. He wrote a risālah known as the *Shamsiyyah* (Tehran 1345 A.H.). He was intimate with Mūnis 'Alī Shāh, and apparently stipulated in his will that, after his death, his disciples were to transfer their allegiance to Mūnis. When in fact he died, his Pīr-i daḥlī, a man called Mirzā Bābājān Tafrishī, was re-initiated by Mūnis and given the Sufi name Rawshan 'Alī. This man was made the shaykh of Shams' old khāniqāh and was given charge of Shams' disciples.⁵ Not all of them accepted this state of affairs apparently, since there appears to be an independent continuation of the *Shamsiyyah* under

f. 'Abd al-Ḥujjat Balāghī, who lives at present in Qum and is the author of several chaotic books on the history of the Order, including *Maqālāt al-ḥunafā' fī maqāmāt-i Shams al-'Urafā'* (in 2 vols; Tehran, 1327 S. and 1337 S.).

4. *Gunābādī Branch*:⁶

a. Muḥammad Kāzīm Ṭawūs al-'Urafā', called Sa'adat 'Alī Shāh, was acclaimed Quṭb by his followers after the death of Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh. He received the marvellously fanciful title 'Peacock of the Gnostics' (Ṭawūs al-'Urafā') from Muḥammad Shāh Qājār, in recognition of his propensity for dandyism (and nothing was ever more gorgeous than a Qājār dandy). In 1276/1859 he was given the name Sa'adat ('Happiness') 'Alī Shāh by Raḥmat, and in the same year was appointed shaykh of Isfahan. At first the dervishes there refused to accept him because he was illiterate; but he returned again with a letter from Raḥmat, re-asserting his authority. He died in 1293/1876, and was buried in Rayy. One of his disciples, Ḥajj Mullā Sulṭān Muḥammad, claimed Ṭawūs al-'Urafā' to have been Quṭb, and himself successor. He appointed his son after him, and from this silsilah extends the Gunābādī Sufi Order.

b. Hājī Sulṭān Muḥammad Bīdukhtī (from Bīdukht, a village near Gunābād; hence he is also called Gunābādī), born 1251/1835, died (reportedly assassinated by his enemies) in 1327/1909. He was initiated in 1280/1863 by Ṭāwūs al-'Urafā' and succeeded him in 1293/1876. He studied philosophy with the great Mullā Ḥādī Sabziwārī, and is said to have known medicine. Like all his descendants, who were to follow him as leaders of the Order, he was a mullā. Perhaps under the influence of positivistic and Western-oriented philosophy, he (like many of his contemporaries) emphasized the importance of work – although naturally he justified his attitude with ḥadīth and other traditions of the great Sufis and religious leaders of the past – and disparaged the other traditional Sufi point of view on the subject, which we might call that of 'noble laziness'. He, like all his descendants, worked as a farmer in Gunābād. He was succeeded by his son

c. Hājī Mullā 'Alī, called Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, born 1284/1867, died 1337/1919. As a youth he studied in Mashhad and 'became doubtful about his father's position'. He began searching for the truth, and his travels took him over the entire Muslim world from India to Egypt. Along the way he studied and practised engraving, pen-case and hat making, tailoring and other trades as well as occult science and calligraphy. In 1305/1888, during the ḥajj, he met his father in Mecca but 'ignored him'! Finally however they were reconciled and Mullā 'Alī returned to Gunābād where in 1314/1896 he was appointed his father's successor. After becoming Quṭb he went to Kashan for a trip and died before reaching Tehran. Besides farming he also taught and wrote several books. He was succeeded by his son

d. Hājī Muḥammad Ḥasan Bīchārah ('Helpless') Bīdukhtī, called Šālīḥ 'Alī Shāh, born 1308/1891, died 1386/1966. When the Iranian government ordered all citizens to take last names in 1928 he chose the name 'Helpless' for his identity card. He was also a farmer, and visited Mecca, Syria and Lebanon, as well as Geneva (for an operation). He was succeeded by his eldest son

e. Sulṭān Ḥusayn Tābandah, called Riḍā 'Alī Shāh, born 1332/1914, the present head of the Order. Although he received a traditional education, and dresses as a mullā, he also studied at Tehran University. He farms, and has written several books.

Today the Gunābādī Nī'matullāhiyyah is numerically one of the largest, perhaps the largest, of the Sufi Orders in Iran. They are characterized by strict adherence to the Shar'ah (they make a point of declaring opium forbidden, for example, and even frown on tea and tobacco).

5. *Šafī'iyyah*: Hājī Mirzā Ḥasan Iṣfāhānī, known as Šafī 'Alī Shāh. Originally initiated by Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh, he at first swore allegiance to Munawwar 'Alī Shāh, who sent him to India to initiate Ismā'ilīs at the request of the second Āgā Khān. He later fell out with Munawwar, and although he apparently never openly proclaimed himself Quṭb, he did omit Munawwar's name in his poem on the silsilah, the *Nasab nāmah* (*Diwān-i Šafī 'Alī Shāh*, pp. 228–33). His disciple Zahr al-Dawlah, a Qājār courtier, did recognize Šafī as Quṭb, and formed a group which many important Court figures joined. (See *Khāṭirāt-i Zahr al-Dawlah*, ed. Iraj Afshar, Tehran,

1972.) Šafi was undoubtedly one of the finest Sufi poets of the nineteenth century, and his *Diwān* deserves at least a partial translation.

The Order is sometimes called Šafi-‘Alī-Shāhī and sometimes Šafā’iyyah, after Zāhīr al-Dawlah, whose dervish name was Šafā’ ‘Alī Shāh. A year after Šafi’s death, in 1317/1899, Zāhīr officially organized the group as an Order, but did not claim to be Quṭb. Instead he formed a Committee of twelve shaykhs, with himself as ‘President’, perhaps in imitation of certain Western secret societies then gaining popularity in Iran. To this day no one has claimed to be Quṭb of the Order, which gradually gained a rather ‘qalandari’ reputation, and attracted many outstanding musicians of the late Qājār and early Pahlavī periods. The elaborate khāniqāh is used today for fashionable funerals, a most un-Sufi activity.

6. *Mūnisiyyah*: Since Mūnis ‘Alī Shāh never actually officially named a successor there was a great deal of confusion at his death. According to one source,⁷ thirteen people claimed to be Quṭb; but of them all, only two appear to have any adherents today. One is of course Dr Nurbakhsh, the other is Mirzā Zayn al-‘Abidin Nī‘matullāhī, called Nī‘mat ‘Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī. He is the son of Mirza ‘Abbas Pāqal’a’ī (died 1350/1931), the shaykh of Wafā ‘Alī Shāh in Isfahan. Nī‘mat ‘Alī Shāh inherited his father’s khāniqāh in the district of Isfahan called Pā-yi Qal’ah, and was made shaykh by Mūnis in 1352/1933. A man of venerable appearance, most gracious and humorous, he has many devotees in Isfahan.

* * *

The branching of the Nī‘matullāhī Order during the past century and a half constitutes a fact which could be interpreted in various ways; but amongst the dervishes themselves it is taken for granted that only those who lack understanding, as a result of their own imperfections, have allowed this branching to produce enmity and hostility between the various groups. Of such types, we might quote Rūmī, who says that

When colourlessness becomes enslaved to colour

One Moses picks fights with another!

(*Mathnawī*, ed. M. Ramaḡāni, Tehran, 1319 S., p. 50)

Among the advanced initiates of all the branches, however, we find a spirit of brotherhood and unity which transcends the vagaries of history, and is exemplified, for instance, in the friendship of Mūnis ‘Alī Shāh, Maḥbūb ‘Alī Shāh and Shams al-‘Urafā’. The origin of this spirit need be sought nowhere else than in the very spirit of Sufism itself; and if we may be allowed a personal comment, we might say that it is this spirit which most needs to be emphasized in an age such as the present, when the forces of secular modernism represent a far more dangerous threat to Sufism as a whole than the violence of a ‘Šūfi-kush’, or of any of the enemies of Sufism who have persecuted it in the past. True Sufis should put aside their differences – not only the dervishes of the different branches of the Nī‘matullāhiyyah, but *all* Sufis of *all* orders.

And something even more personal: this sense of brotherhood should ultimately extend to all those who believe in God and Revelation, however they define those terms. Not all Paths are the same, but for all true Paths, the Goal is One.

Footnotes

1. This is according to the Qājār prince Riḍā Qulī Mīrzā (called Majnūn 'Alī), a disciple of Naqlī's successor Kabīr Āqā, and author of the *Mir'āt al-'āshiqīn* (Tehran 1322 A.H.). The contents of this volume are as follows: the *Mir'āt al-'āshiqīn* itself, a long poem about Sufism composed at the order of Kabīr Āqā (pp. 1-105); the *Silsilah nāmāh* (pp. 106-9; the reference to Sāghar 'Alī is in this work); the *Anwār al-hikmah* of Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, which has also been published by the Khāniqāh Nī'matullāhī in *Majmū'ah-i az āthār-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh* (see pp. 129-30 of this book for some translations); and a miscellaneous selection of poems by Nūr 'Alī Shāh, Majnūn 'Alī himself, and others.

Mīrzā 'Alī Naqlī is called Jannat ('Paradise') 'Alī Shāh in another source (Hujjat Balāghī, *Maqāmāt al-hunafā'*, Vol. 1, Tehran 1327 S., p. 215) but we consider that Majnūn 'Alī's opinion is probably to be respected in this case.

2. In *Mir'āt al-'āshiqīn*, p. 104, Majnūn 'Alī mentions that when he finished the book in 1319 A.H., Kabīr Āqā was 73 years old.

3. *GJ* VI, p. 13.

4. Balāghī, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-9.

5. *GJ* VI, pp. 11-13.

6. See *Tārīkh wa juhrāft-yi Gunābād* by the present head of the Order, Ḥājī Sulṭān Ḥusayn Tābandah (Tehran 1348 S.); and 'Silsilah-i šūfiyyah Gunābādī' by Darvish in *Wahid*, Number 4, pp. 170-6 and 221-4 (also published in Sulṭānī, *op. cit.*)

7. Balāghī, *Maqāmāt al-hunafā'*, Vol. II, p. 483.

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