

# Forms of Gnosis in Sulamī's Sufi Exegesis of the *Fātiḥa*

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper will look at the Sufi interpretations of Sūrat al-fātiḥa found in the early mystical Qur'an commentary known as the Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr by the well known Sufi, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021). The Sufi tafsīr of this sūra will be read not only as a compilation of early mystical interpretations of the Qur'an, but also as a unique work by Sulamī himself. A close reading of the various Sufi authors' interpretations set out by Sulamī will show how his own positions concerning the fundamental Sufi concept of ma'rifa come about.*

The greater Qur'ān commentary known as the *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* by the well known 'Sufi from Nishapūr, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021 CE), was written during the first phase in the history of Sufi qur'ānic exegesis and is therefore an important resource for early mystical interpretations of the Qur'an.<sup>1</sup> It has been noted by Alan Godlas that the *Ḥaqā'iq* has influenced many mystical Qur'an commentators, such as the famous Persian sage Rūzbehān Baqlī (d. 1209 CE) in his Arabic *tafsīr*, *'Arā'is al-bayān*.<sup>2</sup> In modern scholarship, a number of important studies have been carried out of both Sulamī's greater commentary and his minor commentary, the *Ziyādāt ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*.<sup>3</sup> And, since Sulamī's commentaries are essentially compilations of Sufi interpretations of the Qur'an attributed to numerous mystics, the qur'anic interpretations of several of these major authorities have in turn been extracted from the *Ḥaqā'iq* and presented in separate editions.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to contribute to this body of literature on Sulamī's Sufi commentaries on the Qur'an, the approach of this paper will be twofold. Because of the central importance of *Sūrat al-fātiḥa* in the daily lives of Muslims, along with the fact that it has not infrequently been the subject of a number of independent Sufi commentaries, I will first take a close look at Sulamī's commentary on *Sūrat al-fātiḥa* in the *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, analyzing it in terms of its structure and content. The *tafsīr* of this *sūra* will be read not so much as a collection of numerous Sufi exegetical remarks but as representative of Sulamī's own positions concerning the fundamental Sufi concept of *ma'rifa* (mystical knowledge or gnosis) which emerge from the various interpretations quoted by him.<sup>5</sup> In other words, I will read Sulamī's *tafsīr* not only as a 'compilation', but also as his own unique 'composition'.

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Secondly, an appendix of select translations from this commentary of the *Fātiḥa* will also be included. It is hoped that these translations will expose readers to the wide range of esoteric interpretations and Sufi themes found throughout Sulamī's *tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa*.<sup>6</sup>

### Sulamī's *Tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa*: Structure and Content<sup>7</sup>

Moshe Idel's remarks about the 'polysemic attitude' (Idel, 2000, p. 88) towards the Bible implied by the Zohar (the primary text for Jewish mysticism) may also be applied to the interpretations in Sulamī's *Ḥaḡā'iq*. Indeed, there are a number of statements quoted by Sulamī which deal with the symbolic interpretations of the letters of qur'anic words. In the case of the *Fātiḥa*, such interpretations are primarily based on the *basmala*, the *ḥamdala* and the Divine Name 'Allāh', while brief discussions, anecdotes or, more commonly, pithy mystical insights are prompted by individual qur'anic words or phrases. This phenomenon has been described by Gerhard Böwering as follows:

With these [qur'anic] keynotes the listener associates a cluster of images emerging from the content of his personal experience. These images merge with the Qur'anic keynotes and find their expression in the allusions that are jotted down in the commentary in a condensed, abbreviated form. (Böwering, 1991, p. 51)

Instances of the inclusion of quotations from the Qur'an and the hadith in order to shed light on the mystical interpretations of the *Fātiḥa* can be found in individual mystics' comments, although Sulamī himself does not attempt to do this.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, most of the exegetical comments on the verses of the *Fātiḥa* appear to be anonymous while it is the famous Sufis al-Kharrāz, Junayd, Ibn 'Aṭā' and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq who are the most frequently cited authorities.<sup>9</sup> Also, each verse is commented upon (this does not happen in every *sūra*), with the bulk of the interpretations devoted to the *basmala* and *ḥamdala* respectively. As would be expected, within the *basmala* itself, the Divine Name Allāh receives the most extensive treatment.

It should be noted that Sulamī's voice is seldom heard throughout his *tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa*, which is also the case with the rest of the *Ḥaḡā'iq* and his above-mentioned minor Qur'an commentary, the *Ziyādāt*. But in the commentary on the *Fātiḥa* in the *Ḥaḡā'iq* there is one instance in which Sulamī clearly states his uncertainty as to whether or not one of the interpretations he is presenting is authentic. This occurs in the section of interpretations dealing with the *basmala* where he narrates a symbolic interpretation of its letters attributed to the Prophet: 'It is related that the Prophet, God bless him and his family and grant them peace—if this is authentic (*in ṣaḥḥa*)—said that the *bā'* is His Splendor (*bahā'*), the *sīn* His Majesty (*sanā'*) and the *mīm* His Grandeur (*majd*)' (British Museum (BM), Or. 9433, fol. 2b).<sup>10</sup> What this expression of doubt can yield by way of shedding light on Sulamī's actual positions *vis-à-vis* the mystical interpretations offered in his commentary is difficult to infer. But this serves as a hint that, although the *Ḥaḡā'iq* can be read as a source book for early Sufi Qur'an commentaries as expounded by numerous Sufi masters from the eight to the eleventh centuries, it also reflects something of Sulamī's own mystical positions. This statement would be difficult to substantiate based on one expression of doubt, but a closer reading of many of the mystical interpretations presented by Sulamī will allow us to abstract from them some of the compiler's own mystical positions, clandestine as they may be.

Reading the *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* in this way can therefore tell us a great deal about how the esoteric interpretations are 'held together' by Sulamī's organizational technique and how he makes himself heard through the mouths of the many Sufi authorities he quotes in his *tafsīr*.

That this is a legitimate approach to reading Sulamī's *tafsīr* is supported by the fact that Sulamī does not state how his compilation of esoteric interpretations is to be understood. In fact, all we really have to work with are a few of his remarks in his introduction to the *Ḥaqā'iq* where he observes that nobody had compiled a *tafsīr* 'in accordance with the language of reality' (*alā lisān al-ḥaqīqa*) up to his time (*ibid.*, fol. 1b). Sulamī notes that there were some scattered and unordered mystical Qur'anic interpretations attributed to the important Sufis Ibn <sup>ʿ</sup>Aṭā' and Ja<sup>c</sup>far al-Ṣādiq, but that he set out to fill the gap by compiling their sayings alongside those which were attributed to other masters of the Path (*ibid.*). With regard to this new book Sulamī says that he arranged it 'in *sūras* according to the best of my abilities (*ḥasba wus<sup>c</sup>ī wa-ṭāqatī*)' (*ibid.*). Besides these titbits of information he also mentions the famous saying attributed to Ja<sup>c</sup>far al-Ṣādiq which speaks of the four 'senses' in which scripture can be interpreted: expressions (*ibārāt*), allusions (*ishārāt*), subtleties (*laṭā'if*) and realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) (*ibid.*, fol. 2a).<sup>11</sup> There is also a similar saying attributed to the fourth Caliph, <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī, and he is quoted a second time, where he answers a question as to whether or not revelation (*wahy*) was to continue after the Prophet's death. As expected, he answers in the negative, but adds that what is to continue after the Prophet's death is people's understanding the Qur'an (*ibid.*, fol. 2a). This latter saying attributed to <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī seems to function more as a claim to authority, for it is the Sufis who understand the Qur'an better than anyone else, and they are therefore the real heirs to the Prophetic legacy. As for the sayings attributed to Ja<sup>c</sup>far and <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī concerning the scriptural 'senses', such statements do not function as articulations of a particular hermeneutical method employed by Sulamī. Indeed, the interpretations offered in the *Ḥaqā'iq* are mostly esoteric in nature, which is why these statements by Ja<sup>c</sup>far and <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī about the scriptural 'senses' should be considered in the same light as <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī's reply to the question concerning the continuity of revelation after the Prophet's death.

### Forms of Gnosis in Sulamī's *Tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa*

'He who knows himself knows his Lord (*man <sup>ʿ</sup>arafa nafsahu faqad <sup>ʿ</sup>arafa rabbahu*).'<sup>12</sup> These are the words of a famous Prophetic tradition which makes the point that self-knowledge leads one to the knowledge of God. We see a similar notion in Plotinus, his student Porphyry and St Augustine, where they interpret the famous Delphic maxim, 'know thyself', as referring to the fact that it is through self-knowledge that one comes to know God (Augustine, 1992, p. 180, n. 1).<sup>12</sup> In the Sufi tradition the idea that self-knowledge was the key to gnosis was taken for granted, but this did not stop the Sufis from explaining gnosis in other ways as well. In fact, the formative period of Sufism was host to a number of different definitions of gnosis. Gnosis was at times defined in contradistinction to formal knowledge (*ilm*), as can be seen in the case of Hujwīrī's *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Hujwīrī, 1976, pp. 382–383)<sup>13</sup> and with reference to the knowledge of one's uncertainty about death, as is seen in Muḥāsibī's *Ri'āya fī ḥuqūq Allāh* (Sells, 1996, p. 818); or it could have been subdivided into parts, which is how it was spoken of by the author of the *Khatm al-awliyā'*, al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī (Renard, 2004, pp. 24–25). But most importantly, gnosis was often defined by other Sufi technical terms. As John

Renard points out in his survey of the development of *maʿrifa* in the Islamic mystical tradition, gnosis was defined as certitude (*yaqīn*), the passing away of one's own qualities (*fanāʾ*), bewilderment (*ḥayra*) and awe (*ḥayba*) (*ibid.*, pp. 11–63). It was also defined as unveiling (*kashf*) and finding (*wujūd*) (Nwyia, 1970, pp. 272–274).<sup>14</sup>

After closely examining Sulamī's *tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa* in the *Ḥaḡāʾiq*, it becomes clear that Sulamī was actually trying to take some of these definitions of gnosis expounded by his predecessors into account without stating his preference for the definition he considered most authoritative. What he ended up doing instead was masterfully juxtaposing those mystical interpretations which implicitly or explicitly spoke of gnosis. By doing this he was able to bring out many nuances concerning the nature of mystical knowledge which would otherwise have been indiscernible. But it is precisely through these nuances that Sulamī's own positions emerge. Essentially, there are three main forms of gnosis highlighted in this commentary on the *Fātiḥa*. Some interpretations of the qur'anic verses reveal a unique form of mystical knowledge through the Sufi's knowledge of God's praise for Himself. And, in its most pronounced form, gnosis is directly associated with the fundamental Sufi concepts of annihilation and bewilderment. At times, however, there are implicit references to gnosis while other interpretations tend to speak of gnostics and not gnosis. In such cases ideas of mystical knowledge are presupposed by the interpreter quoted by Sulamī. We shall first attempt to unearth the ideas of gnosis which are implicit in such interpretations before turning to the more concrete cases.

#### *Witnessing and Servanthood*

Because the gnostics have a special kind of knowledge in which others do not have a share, they are certainly above them in rank, both in this world and in the world to come. Commenting on the fourth verse of the *Fātiḥa*, the important Sufi, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ, finely illustrates this point. The verse says that God is the 'Master of the Day of Judgment'. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ understands this to mean that God is:

The One who will reward every person on the day of reckoning in accordance with their intentions and spiritual aspirations. So He will reward the gnostics (*ʿārifīn*) with nearness to Him and the sight of His Noble countenance (*al-naẓru ilā wajhihi al-karīm*), while He will reward those whose sole concern is the performance of religious devotions (*arbāb al-muʿāmalāt*) with the gardens of paradise (*jannāt*). (BM, Or. 9433, fol. 5b)

The idea of beholding God or witnessing Him is known as *mushāhada* (witnessing) in Sufi nomenclature. To be sure, important mystical commentators such as Sulamī's predecessor, Sahl al-Tustarī, understood witnessing to be an essentially Prophetic archetype (Böwering, 1979, p. 213). In *sūra* 53 it is said that the Prophet's sight did not waver or go astray at what he witnessed (*mā zāghā al-baṣaru wa-mā ṭaghā*) during his Ascension to Heaven.<sup>15</sup> In Sulamī's *tafsīr* of the last verse of the *Fātiḥa* ('guide us to the straight path...') an interpretation is presented in which the direct witnessing of the Divine is the actual objective of one's prayers. Prayer is said to be a request to be guided to the path of those who are blessed by God with 'beholding (*mushāhada*) the Bestower of blessings, without beholding the blessings' (BM, Or. 9433, fol. 7a). In another interpretation, this time of verse four of the *Fātiḥa*, an anonymous Sufi says that when the servants of God

witness the King (*al-mālik*), they will forget everything else in the kingdom (*mamlaka*) (*ibid.*, fol. 5b). Also, in the very well known hadith of Gabriel, the Prophet states that spiritual excellence (*iḥsān*) is to 'worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you'. The last part of this tradition is explicitly mentioned in one of the interpretations of the sixth verse of the *Fātiḥa* in the context of *mushāhada* (*ibid.*, fols 7a–7b). Although none of the interpretations presented by Sulamī directly links *mushāhada* with *maʿrifā*, the abundance of references to gnosis and gnosis throughout the *tafsīr* can justifiably be said to provide the 'setting' in which the discussions on witnessing are framed. What is gnosis other than a perpetual state of witnessing the Divine? It is with this question in mind that we should meditate upon the saying famous amongst the Sufis to the effect that the gnostic is the one who is overcome by perpetually witnessing the Divine (*al-ʿarīf man ghalaba ʿalayhi dawām al-shuhūd*). Statements such as that referred to above, which says that witnessing the King leads one to forget about the kingdom, will be better understood if we look at the other interpretations which deal with similar themes. As will be seen below, it is the concept of *fanāʾ* or annihilation that best resembles this state. *Fanāʾ* is certainly identified with gnosis and from this perspective so is *mushāhada*.<sup>16</sup> Since witnessing means to behold the Divine at every instant and annihilation (*fanāʾ*) is the passing away of one's individual qualities before the Divine, we can see how they both function as gnosis here, and how witnessing is understood to be a type of annihilation.

Additionally, we learn in one interpretation of a verse that those who dedicate their worship to God alone are given knowledge of Him (BM, Or. 9433, fol. 6a), which itself is the result of God's selecting them and bestowing upon them an understanding of the worship that is His due. Naturally, this induces in them a state in which they see that their seeking refuge in God and their worshipping Him occurs only through Him (*ibid.*). In other words, their servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*) towards God leads them to a heightened sense of awareness in which they see their own acts as proceeding through God. Here, gnosis is the result of religious devotion. It is important to keep in mind that the Sufi path requires one's personal effort, and from this perspective the way of servanthood can be said to characterize Sufi practice in general. But it is also to be remembered that once gnosis is attained, the Sufi comes to the full realization that his endeavors were contingent on God's will to begin with. This is an important theme that occurs several times in Sulamī's commentary on the *Fātiḥa*. The dialectical relationship between servant and God, between knower and Known, will be highlighted below, when we treat the idea of God's praise for Himself in detail.

### *God's Praise for Himself*

The beginning of the second verse of the *Fātiḥa* reads, 'Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds'. Several of the Sufi interpretations of the *ḥamdala* in Sulamī's *Ḥaqāʾiq* emphasize that it is through knowledge of God's praise for Himself that the Sufis gain mystical insight. This point is finely demonstrated in an important interpretation of the *ḥamdala* attributed to Jaʿfar al-Šādiq. In his exegesis of the verse in question, he characteristically focuses on the esoteric and symbolic meaning of each radical found in the noun *ḥamd*:

He who praises Him with His attributes, just as He has described Himself, has indeed praised Him, because praise (*ḥamd*) consists of a *ḥāʾ*, a *mīm*, and a *dāl*. The *ḥāʾ*

comes from His Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), the *mīm* from His Kingdom (*mulk*) and the *dāl* from His Eternality (*daymūmiyya*). So whoever knows God Most High through His Oneness, Kingdom and Eternality, has indeed known Him (*fa-qad ʿarafahu*). (*ibid.*, fol. 4b)<sup>17</sup>

What is significant about this passage is that it emphasizes gnosis as a result of knowing certain qualities of God which all point to His absolute transcendence. The noun *ḥamd* yields three distinct qualities of God (His Kingship, Eternality and Oneness) with which He praises Himself. God's servants can only come to know of Him through those attributes with which He describes Himself. Attempts to know Him without recourse to what He has to say about Himself will be colored with our own human shortcomings.<sup>18</sup> What is significant for our purposes is that it is God who describes Himself through the *ḥamdala*, the recitation of which will yield authentic knowledge of Him. Thus, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq is careful not to equate praising God with gnosis itself. Rather, he says that only when the aspirant knows the qualities inherent in God's praise for Himself will God grant him mystical knowledge of Himself.

Moreover, another interpretation of the *ḥamdala* draws our attention to the fact that the gnostics take part in the *ḥamd* primarily because they realize God's Lordship (*istiḥqāq rubūbiyyatihi*), which is a form of magnification (*taʿzīm*) (BM, Or. 9433, fol. 4b). The *ḥamdala* is also said to be the gnostics' praise for God out of longing to be with Him (*ibid.*). Taken together then, the three interpretations of the *ḥamdala* considered thus far paint a picture of an important form of gnosis which would not be discernible were these interpretations to be viewed independently. While the first interpretation by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq informs us that there is some form of knowing God through His attributes which emerge from our knowledge of His praise for Himself, the second and third interpretations indicate that this praise of God is based on a prior knowledge that the gnostics have of Him. In these latter two instances, praising God is either a type of glorification because of His greatness or it is an expression of longing for Him. But these three interpretations are not mutually exclusive. What is crucial to note is that the last two interpretations speak of gnostics and not gnosis. In other words, it assumes in both instances that the mystics' glorifying God is the fruit of gnosis, which is why these interpretations speak of the gnostics' praise for God as a result of their realizing His Lordship, or an expression of their longing for Him. In both these instances, gnosis has already been achieved, whereas in Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq's exegesis of the *ḥamdala* gnosis is the result of knowing God's praise for Himself. It would be safe to say that these passages work in a dialectical fashion: on the one hand, God praises Himself because of His knowledge of Himself, and it is the people who understand this praise who attain gnosis; while on the other hand, it is those who have attained gnosis who praise God. With these considerations in mind, another important interpretation of the *ḥamdala* speaks of it as signifying God's praising Himself from sempiternity (*azal*) because of His foreknowledge that His creation would not be able to praise Him adequately:

It is said that when He knew the inability of His servants to praise Him, He praised Himself by Himself (*bi-nafsihi*), to Himself (*li-nafsihi*) from sempiternity (*fī al-azal*), because of the impotence of His servants, as it was impossible for them to praise Him. How is a created thing supposed to contend with the beginninglessly Eternal (*al-qadīm*)? (*ibid.*, fol. 5a)

Thus, although the gnostics praise God in their state of gnosis, it is nothing more than a reiteration of God's praise for Himself, which has been taking place from all of eternity. From this perspective then, it is the gnostics who are entitled to praise Him since they are the ones who have realized that He cannot be praised except by Himself. This is why the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have declared that he was unable to enumerate God's praises, for He is as He has praised Himself (*ibid.*). At the same time, it is through the knowledge of God's praise for Himself that gnosis can be attained. So knowledge of God's praise of Himself leads to gnosis of Him, and those realized in Him then praise Him as He has praised Himself. Therefore, gnosis is brilliantly portrayed here as both the *knowledge* and the *declaration* of God's praise for Himself.

#### *Annihilation and Bewilderment*

In his *tafsīr* of *Sūrat al-fātiḥa* Sulamī quotes sayings which emphasize the uniqueness of the Divine Name Allāh. The greatest of all Sufis, Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240 CE), would have felt very much at home with the following anonymous statement quoted by Sulamī: 'It is said that the inner meaning of His saying Allāh is that all the Divine Names and all their inner meanings enter into this Name' (*ibid.*, fol. 3b).<sup>19</sup> Towards the end of his *tafsīr* of the first part of the *basmala*, Sulamī adds another interesting quotation which explicitly refers to the hadith-based doctrine of taking on the 'character traits' or 'qualities' of God (*al-takhal-luq bi-akhlāq Allāh*). The passage says that the Divine Names of God, with the exception of the Name Allāh, are susceptible to being followed and imitated (*ibid.*, fol. 4a). Thus, one may become merciful by taking on the qualities of the Merciful, designated by the Name *al-Raḥmān*, or one may become loving by taking on the qualities of the Loving, designated by the name *al-Wadūd*. But taking on the qualities of the Name Allāh is impossible:

Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Wāsiṭī said, 'There is not a single person that calls upon one of the Names of God Most High but that he has a share (*naṣīb*) from it for himself, except his calling upon [the Name] Allāh.' He said, 'This Name leads one to God's Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), but no one has a share in It.' (*ibid.*, fol. 2b)

The reason we do not have a share in the Name Allāh is because it is the Name which at once denotes the Divine Essence—the knowledge of which is completely inaccessible to anyone other than Him—and also accounts for the realities of the other Names.<sup>20</sup> With these considerations in mind, it must be noted that Sulamī does include several sayings which conspicuously state that the Divine Name Allāh, insofar as It can be intimated by God's creatures, is the exclusive preserve of the People of Reality. Thus, we also find an interpretation of the *basmala* which says that were the Divine Name Allāh to begin the Qur'an instead of it beginning *in* His name (*bismillāh*), all created things, with the exception of the saints and the Prophets, would perish (BM, Or. 9433, fol. 2b). Immediately following this, Sulamī states in his own words that the Name Allāh is the mark of the Real impressed upon the hearts of the People of Reality (*ibid.*). He then goes on to add an anonymous report which comments on the phrase *bismillāh*, stating that 'the People of Reality invoke His Name so that they may not adorn themselves except with the Real and so that they may bear no mark but His' (*ibid.*). Thus, throughout his commentary on the *Fātiḥa*, Sulamī wants to maintain the ultimate unknowability of the

Divine Name Allāh while also attempting to show how some type of knowledge of this Name is not categorically closed off to God's chosen servants. In the foregoing quotation there is no direct indication that the People of Reality are those gnostics who have attained mystical knowledge as a result of their calling upon the Divine Name. The following statement attributed to Junayd gives us an indication of how such people attain gnosis, 'the people of gnosis negated (*nafaw*) everything besides God from their hearts, and have purified their hearts for God' (*ibid.*, fol. 2a). Such pure hearts are therefore capable of invoking the Divine Name, the traces of which transform their entire being to the point that they become annihilated.

While the results of mystical awareness can come in the form of God cleansing the heart of His servants so that their hearts are pure enough to call upon His Name Allāh—whose very vestiges render their perceiving other than Him impossible—Sulamī also adds several interpretations from various Sufis which say that it is through the act of remembering God (*dhikr*) that the mystic becomes utterly baffled at God's Majesty and becomes realized in Him to the point that he cannot think of anything but God:

And when it was said to one of them, 'what do you want?', he replied, 'Allāh'; 'and what are you saying?', he replied, 'Allāh'; 'what do you know?', he replied, 'Allāh'. And if his limbs were to speak they would say 'Allāh'. His body parts are filled with the light stored with Allāh Most High. (*ibid.*, fol. 2b)

The passage then concludes by saying that by continuously saying 'Allāh', the gnostics attained the highest merit, for they have relinquished 'the intellect of the intelligent for bewilderment (*ḥayra*) and non-bewilderment (*lā ḥayra*)' (*ibid.*). That bewilderment is a positive quality for the Sufis is evidenced by the Prophet's supplication to God: 'Oh my Lord increase me in bewilderment of You (*rabbī zidnī taḥayyuran fika*)'.<sup>21</sup> There is also another phrase used to denote bewilderment (*walah*) which implies losing one's senses because of being in love, excessively overjoyed or in a state of ecstasy.<sup>22</sup> Thus, *walah* may be translated as 'enrapture' and it here appears in an interpretation of the *basma*: 'It is said that every state of being enraptured (*walah*) is because of His Name Allāh. Madmen and lovers become enraptured by this Name since they are incapable of knowing anything about It' (*ibid.*, fol. 3a). The idea of being bewildered by the Divine Name, whether it is conveyed by the term *walah* or *ḥayra*, is different from annihilation. Annihilation is a result of God's annihilating the mystic from perceiving himself, while bewilderment results from the mystic's perception of himself as incapable of comprehending God, which therefore renders him perplexed and awe-struck. What these forms of gnosis do have in common, however, is that it is through the function of remembrance or invocation (*dhikr*) that gnosis is attained. Thus, with annihilation we see *dhikr* itself leading to this state, whereas in the case of bewilderment, gnosis is attained as a result of one's invocation of God as well as, paradoxically, the recognition of one's inability to comprehend Him.<sup>23</sup>

One may be tempted to see another form of gnosis emerge from within the interpretations we have considered. Bewilderment as a form of gnosis resulting from one's inability to know God bears an interesting similarity to what was said earlier about attaining gnosis through the knowledge of God's praise for Himself. In this case, it is through the knowledge of God's praise for Himself and the knowledge that one cannot praise Him that gnosis is attained. But here the declaration of God's praise for Himself, that is, the

*ḥamdala*, can also lead to gnosis. It would, therefore, be difficult to find other forms of gnosis amongst these interpretations. While it is true that *dhikr* has an important role to play in both annihilation and bewilderment with respect to the attainment of gnosis, *dhikr* is at the same time not directly connected to gnosis through the knowledge of God's praise for Himself, or even through servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*). Also, *dhikr* is not a form of gnosis in and of itself but is a means to attain gnosis. Having said this, there is a significant overarching principle common to all the forms of gnosis we have considered, which is that human endeavor is required in the pursuit of mystical knowledge. In every case we have examined, with the exception of *mushāhada* (which should nevertheless be looked at with respect to *fanā'*), it is the human being who must 'perform' as it were, if any type of gnosis is going to take place. We have seen a clear example of the need for human effort in the case of servanthood, where religious devotion itself can lead to gnosis, although we have noted that there is a sense in which the servant does not have a say in whether or not he will attain gnosis—but this is only realized once gnosis is attained. In the case of God's praise for Himself, we see that it is through the *ḥamdala* that gnosis can be attained, but in this case gnosis is the result of a dialectical process. In the case of annihilation and bewilderment as forms of gnosis, we have also seen that it was through *dhikr* that one gains gnosis, with the added element in the case of bewilderment of the servant's knowledge of his inability to praise God as also leading to gnosis. Therefore, through these expositions of the different forms of mystical knowledge Sulamī also wants to convey the fact that our own efforts have a significant role to play in whether or not we will ultimately be recipients of mystical knowledge, and, it may be surmised, the forms of gnosis to which we will be receptive as well. Of course, once gnosis is attained, the Sufi will discover that his realization was not due to his own efforts, but that it was because of God's sheer generosity that He allowed His servant to know Him. From this perspective all forms of gnosis are indeed one, since the object of knowledge is One. But this marks the end of the journey to God (*al-sayr ilā Allāh*) and the beginning of the journey in God (*al-sayr fī Allāh*), as the Sufis like to put it. And it is here that the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) is truly realized, that God becomes the hearing with which the gnostic hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the foot upon which he walks.

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### Notes

1. Böwering (1996a) divides the activity of Sufi exegesis into five phases (pp. 42–43). The first phase is further subdivided into two stages, the second of which is where Sulamī's *tafsīr* is placed (*ibid.*). Surveys of the history and development of Sufi qur'anic exegesis can be found in Alan Godlas' 'al-Tafsir al-Sufi', forthcoming in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* (currently at Godlas, 'Sufi Koran commentary: a survey of the genre' at [www.uga.edu/islam/suftaf/tafsuftoc.html](http://www.uga.edu/islam/suftaf/tafsuftoc.html)), Böwering (1989) and Habil (1987). For more detailed studies see Ateş (1974) and Nwyia (1970).
2. See the heading, 'The elementary phase: the forebears, and Solamī and his sources', in the forthcoming article by Godlas. In this same section it is noted that Sulamī's *tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa*, the subject of this

- present paper, also exercised influence on Ithnā ʿAsharī Shiʿi qurʿānic exegesis during the Safavid period. With regard to Rūzbehān Baqlī, Godlas is currently working on a critical edition and translation of his ʿArāʾis.
3. Böwering has published a critical edition of the *Ziyādāt* (Sulamī, 1995) based on a single manuscript he discovered in a library in Bosnia. He is also working on a critical edition of Sulamī's *Ḥaqāʾiq*, which is based on the best extant manuscripts. It should be noted that the edition of the *Ḥaqāʾiq* edited by Sayyid ʿImrān (Sulamī, 2001) is not reliable since it is based on one late and corrupted manuscript. In addition, the edition is missing the commentary on the twelfth *sāra*. For important articles related to Sulamī's major and minor Qurʿan commentaries, see Böwering (1991; 1996a; 1996b, esp. pp. 214–221; 2001, esp. pp. 132–136). For material related to the individual commentaries taken from the *Ḥaqāʾiq* see n. 4 below. The only monograph written on Sulamī's *Ḥaqāʾiq* is Ateş (1969).
  4. Editions of separate Qurʿan commentaries are available for Jaʿfar al-Şādiq (Nwyia, 1968a), Nūrī (Nwyia, 1968b), Ibn ʿAṭāʾ (Nwyia, 1973, pp. 23–182) and Ḥallāj (Massignon, 1968, pp. 359–412). These four *tafsīrs* have been reproduced (with Nwyia's original French introductions to his editions of the commentaries by Jaʿfar al-Şādiq and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ translated into Persian) in Pūrjavādī (1369, pp. 1–292). Apart from Nwyia's edition of the Qurʿan commentary by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ, Richard Gramlich's monograph (Gramlich, 1995) should be noted. This provides a complete German translation of the Sufi Qurʿan commentary attributed to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ (pp. 130–317).
  5. Fredrick Colby has taken a similar approach in dealing with another of Sulamī's works (Colby, 2002) and states the following: 'In what follows I will survey the principal outlines of al-Sulamī's Ascension work by discussing four major themes that al-Sulamī develops through his selection of Sufi sayings. I shall argue that these four Ascension themes reflect al-Sulamī's own mystical and theological agenda, the harmonization between Sufi exegesis and official Muslim tradition on the Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet' (pp. 167–168). Colby is currently working on a translation and edition of Sulamī's treatise on the Prophet's Ascension to be published by Fons Vitae.
  6. Indeed, there is a relative scarcity of primary sources on Sufi qurʿānic exegesis available in English. One major exception is the volume by Michael Sells (1996) in which he devotes an entire chapter to early Sufi qurʿānic exegesis with important translations from the *tafsīrs* of Jaʿfar al-Şādiq and Tustarī.
  7. This study of Sulamī's mystical exegesis of the *Sūrat al-fātiḥa* is based on the British Museum's manuscript of the *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, which is one of the most authoritative copies available. It should be noted that many of the translations from Sulamī's commentary, both here and in the appendix, are anything but literal. With a view to preserving the mode of communication found in Sulamī's commentary I have at times taken the liberty of adding words or phrases either because they are assumed in the Arabic, or because the depth and terseness of the comments in the original Arabic often require some degree of elaboration without the excessive use of parentheses, which often disrupt the flow of the text.
  8. Incidentally, nowhere in the *tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa* is the *sāra* referred to by the qurʿānic phrase *sabʿan min al-mathānī* or 'the seven oft-repeated' (Q 15.87), which, alongside various other interpretations, is understood to be a reference to the seven verses of the opening chapter. For more on this see Ibn Kathīr (1999, vol. 3, p. 202), Nwyia (1970, p. 161) and the brief comment on Q 15.87 by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (2003). In Sulamī's *Ḥaqāʾiq*, the 'seven oft-repeated' are interpreted by Jaʿfar al-Şādiq as meaning 'la Bonne direction (*hudā*), le don de la prophétie, la miséricorde, la pitié, l'amitié et la sociabilité, le bonheur, la quiétude (*sakīna*) et le Coran glorieux qui contient le Nom suprême de Dieu' (quoted in Nwyia, 1970, p. 161).
  9. Although Kharrāz's and Junayd's *tafsīrs* have not been edited into a single collection as has been done for both Jaʿfar al-Şādiq and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ, some work has been done on their other writings. Editions of Kharrāz's works are available, such as his *Rasāʾil* (1967) and his *Kitāb al-şidq* (1975, originally published as *Al-tarīqa ilā Allāh* in 1964 and recently reprinted in Cairo, 2002), along with another Arabic edition and its English translation by Arberry (1937). Also, under the supervision of Professor Böwering, Nada Saab has recently completed a PhD dissertation at Yale University on Kharrāz under the title *Mystical Language and Theory in the Sufi Writings of al-Kharrāz*. As for Junayd, there is a monograph on his life and writings (Abdel-Kader, 1962). This study comes with an edition and English translation of Junayd's *Rasāʾil* (which include his *Kitāb al-fanāʾ* and *Kitāb al-mithāq*). See also Josef van Ess's review of this book in *Oriens* 20 (1967), pp. 217–219. Junayd's *Kitāb al-fanāʾ* and some of his other essays (*masāʾil*) have more recently been translated by Sells (1996, pp. 251–265).
  10. The same interpretation is offered without any reservations by Sulamī's student, the famous Sufi al-Qushayrī (d. 1072 CE) in his six volume *tafsīr* (1968, vol. 1, p. 52), but not on the authority of the

Prophet, and not as one transmission. Ateş (1969, p. 110) cites this same example in the context of his extensive treatment of the exegetical method employed by Sulamī in his *Ḥaqā'iq*. My thanks go to Maria Subtelny for helping me decipher this book's Turkish content.

11. It has been suggested that the four point scriptural 'senses' in Jewish and Christian scriptural exegesis—expressed by the acronym *PaRDeS* in the case of the former, and the statement *littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*, in the case of the latter—have somehow influenced such four point expositions of the scriptural senses as the one attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq. But as Böwering (2003) rightly observes, a direct historical relationship between Islam's mystical exegetical methodology and the exegetical methodologies of Judaism and Christianity has not been established.
12. With reference to both the Prophetic tradition and the Delphic maxim, the following observation is particularly noteworthy: 'The saying of the Delphic oracle, "Know thyself", or that of the Prophet of Islam, "He who knoweth himself knoweth his lord", is true not because man as an earthly creature is the measure of all things but because man is himself the reflection of that archetypal reality which is the measure of all things' (Nasr, 1989, p. 167).
13. Apart from Nicholson's translation of this work in its entirety, the sections in which Hujwīrī deals with *ma'rifa* have recently been translated by John Renard in his new volume on mystical knowledge in early Sufism (2004, pp. 264–285).
14. For an excellent study of the different ways in which gnosis has been expressed in the Sufi tradition, see the recent article written by Reza Shah-Kazemi (2002).
15. For a thorough list of references on the Prophet's Night Journey (*isrā*) and Ascension (*mi'rāj*) in Sufi literature, as well as many Sufis' own ascension accounts, see Colby (2002, pp. 167–168, n. 4). To this list we may also add a few more important works in English: Ibn 'Arabī, 2002 (especially the last section by James Morris, Ibn al-'Arabī's spiritual ascensions, pp. 198–230); Chittick (1983, *passim*); Murata (1991, *passim*); and Sells (1996, pp. 47–56, 82–84, 95–96).
16. For some of the Sufis writing before Sulamī, such as Abū Tālib al-Makkī, the author of the highly influential manual of early Sufism the *Qūt al-qulūb*, witnessing was an independent form of gnosis (Renard, 2004, p. 37). See also Makkī's significant but shamefully neglected *ʿIlm al-qulūb* (1964, *passim*), for references to gnosis. With respect to Makkī's *Qūt*, see Atif Khalil's key study (forthcoming), in which he devotes an important section to Makkī's understanding of mystical knowledge as elucidated in the *Qūt al-qulūb*, while also presenting a coherent picture of the theological and political context which paved the way for Makkī's activity.
17. For an introduction to the science dealing with the esoteric interpretations of letters in Islam (*'ilm al-jafr*) see Canteins (1991) and Schimmel (1975, pp. 411–425). The observations made by Schuon (1998, p. 62, n. 37) are also particularly noteworthy.
18. This point is stressed by al-Kalābādī in his well-known *Kitāb al-ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (1969, pp. 49–52); cf. Arberry's translation (Kalābādī, 1977, p. 19, n. 1).
19. For Ibn 'Arabī's sophisticated view of the Divine Names, see Chittick (1989, pp. 33–76).
20. Apart from the abovementioned reference to Chittick (1989), see also Chittick (1998, p. 53); Bayrak (1999, pp. 45–48); Corbin (1997, p. 120); 'Abd al-Karīm Jīlī, *Al-insān al-kāmil*, various editions, chapter 1 (*fi al-dhāt*); Schimmel (1975, *passim*); and Shabistarī (1975, chs 1 and 2).
21. A curious interpretation of the fifth verse of the *Fātiḥa* attributed to Junayd states that it is a prayer of guidance to be recited by the Sufis so that they do not enter into a state of bewilderment which may come about upon witnessing God's Divine attributes: 'Junayd said that the Folk (*al-qawm*) asked for guidance from the bewilderment that would come to them in the face of witnessing God's sempiternal Attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-azaliyya*). So they asked for guidance to [perform various] types of religious devotions lest they drown in the vision (*ru'ya*) of God's sempiternal Attributes' (BM, Or. 9433, fol. 6b). Indeed, witnessing may be understood as a form of bewilderment (*ḥayra*), but it seems clear that in this passage *ḥayra* is not to be understood as 'bewilderment', which is, after all, positive. If anything, this passage can be read as showing how witnessing the Divine attributes is a form of gnosis.
22. In his *Iṣṭilāḥ al-ṣūfiyya* Ibn 'Arabī defines *walah* as an 'excess of ecstasy' (*ifrāt al-wajd*), that is, being over-ecstatic or overjoyed (Ibn 'Arabī, 1997, p. 534). Carl Ernst (1999) consistently renders *walah* as 'ravishing'. Nwyia (1970) likewise consistently translates *walah* as 'ravisement'.
23. For an interesting discussion on self-effacement and gnosis, see Shah-Kazemi (2002, pp. 172–176).
24. Citing this same example in order to demonstrate the significance of the letter *hā'* in the Divine Name, Böwering remarks: 'A widely shared Šūfī view holds that "Allāh" is the supreme name of God because, even if stripped of its letters one by one, the Arabic typeface of the tetragrammaton 'llh, (pronounced

“Allāh”) continues to enunciate none else but God alone: *’llh* meaning, Allāh, “God”, *llh*, meaning *li-llāh*, “to God”, *lh*, meaning *lahu* “to Him”, and *h*, meaning *hu*, that is to say, *huwa*, “He”. Hence, the ineffable mystery of God is concealed in the letter *h*, which is articulated in pronunciation with an almost inaudible sound’ (Böwering, 1996b, p. 210). For Ibn ʿArabī’s unique symbolic interpretations of the letters comprising the Name Allāh in the context of the *Ḥamdalah*, see Gerald Elmore, 1997, pp. 80–86.

25. The references here are to Q 112, *Sūrat al-ikhhlās*, also known as *Sūrat al-aḥad*.
26. Literally, ‘whereas My creation’s praise for Me is tainted by reasons [for worshipping Me]’.
27. One also says *amin* after the *Fātiḥa* in those prayers which are recited to oneself (*al-ṣalāt al-sirriyya*), although it is not said aloud; rather, it is said to oneself. See al-Miṣrī (1994, p. 133).

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## Appendix

### Select Translations from al-Sulamī's *Tafsīr of the Fātiḥa*

A select number of the interpretations of the *Fātiḥa* related by Sulamī in his *Ḥaqāʾiq* are translated below. I have added little by way of explanatory notes, except where necessary.

Most of the passages which are included here and which deal with gnosis (*ma<sup>c</sup>rifa*) are also to be found throughout the accompanying essay on this *sūra*. Their reappearing here will give the reader an idea of how these interpretations ‘fit in’ with the other mystical interpretations not discussed in the previous section.

**(1:1) *Bismillāh al-rahmān al-raḥīm***

It is related that al-<sup>c</sup>Abbās b. <sup>c</sup>Aṭā’ said, ‘The *bā*’ is His Kindness (*birr*) shown to the souls of the Prophets through their being inspired with messengerhood (*risāla*) and prophecy (*nubūwwa*). The *sīn* is His secret (*sirr*) with the people of gnosis, through their being inspired with Divine nearness and intimacy. The *mīm* are His graces (*minan*) upon the spiritual aspirants, by His continually looking upon them with the eye of compassion.’ (fol. 2a)

About *Bismillāh al-rahmān al-raḥīm*, Junayd said, ‘*Bismillāh* contains His awe (*hayba*), *al-rahmān* His help (*‘awn*), and *al-raḥīm* His love (*ḥubb*) and affection (*mawadda*).’ (fol. 2a)

It is related that Abū Bakr al-Shiblī said, ‘Nobody [can truly] say Allāh other than Allāh Most High. Indeed, everyone who says it, says it according to an allotment (*bi-ḥaẓẓ*) [of knowledge given to him], but how are allotments of knowledge (*ḥuẓūẓ*) to attain unto Divine realities (*ḥaqā’iq*)?’ (fol. 2a)

Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Wāsiṭī said, ‘There is not a single person that calls upon one of the Names of God Most High but that he has a share (*naṣīb*) from it for himself, except his calling upon [the Name] Allāh.’ He said, ‘This Name leads one to God’s Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), but no one has a share in It.’ (fol. 2b)

In *The Book of the Ranks of the Spiritual Aspirants (Kitāb darajāt al-murādīn)*, Abū Sa’īd al-Kharrāz said, ‘From amongst them [i.e. the Sufis] is one who transcends the limit of forgetting the allotments assigned to him, thus ending up forgetting that allotment which comes from God Most High, and forgetting his need of God Most High. So he says, “I do not know what I want, what I am saying and who I am. I do not know from whence I lost my name, so I do not have a name. I am ignorant, and I have no knowledge; but I have knowledge, and am not ignorant. I long for someone who understands what I am saying, so that he may assist me in what I am saying.”’ (fol. 2b)

The Name is the mark of the Real upon the hearts of the People of Gnosis (*ahl al-ma<sup>c</sup>rifa*). (fol. 2b)

It is said that the first *alif* from His Name Allāh represents His originating things (*ibtidā’*), the first *lām* is the *lām* of gnosis (*ma<sup>c</sup>rifa*) and the second *lām* is the *lām* of bounties (*ālā*) and graces (*na<sup>c</sup>ma*). The mark between the two *lāms* (*safr*) stands for the inner meanings of the commands and prohibitions, while the *hā*’ represents, without doubt, the extent that it is possible to express the Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*). (fol. 3a)

It is said that the *alif* represents the bounties (*ālā*) of God, the *lām* God’s kindness (*lutf*), the second *lām* one’s meeting with God Most High and the *hā*’ an admonition. It is as if one were to say, ‘It is by God’s bounties and kindness that those who arrive to meet with God can meet with Him Most High. So take admonition!’ (fol. 3a)

It is said that in His saying Allāh, the *alif* is an allusion (*ishāra*) to His Oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), the *lām* an allusion to the effacement of allusions (*maḥw al-ishārāt*) and the second *lām* an allusion to the effacement of the effacement in unveiling the *hā*’ (*maḥw al-maḥw fī kashf al-hā*). (fol. 3a)

It is said that the allusion in the *alif* is to the Real's existence through Himself (*qiyām bi-nafsihi*) and His being independent (*infiṣāl*) from all of His creatures. So nothing from His creation may be attached to Him (*ittiṣāl lahu*) just as it is forbidden for an initial *alif* to join with any of the other letters. Rather, the letters are next to the *alif* because of their need for it, in the same way as [God's creatures] need Him while He is independent of them. (fol. 3a–3b)

It is said that among the Names of God Most High, there is no Name that remains when every letter from the Name is dropped, with the exception of the Name Allāh. For It is [the Name] Allāh (الله): when you drop the *alif* from It, *lillāh* (لل) remains. When you drop one of the *lāms* from it you get *lahu* (له). And when you drop the second *lām* from it, you are left with the *hā'* (ه) which is where all allusions come to an end (*wa-huwa ghāyat al-ishārāt*).<sup>24</sup> (fol. 3b)

Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz wrote to one of his brothers: 'Is there anything other than God Most High? Does anyone even have the ability to say "God" except God Most High? Does anyone see God other than God? Did anyone or does anyone know God except God? Was there anything before the servant and the [rest of] creation other than God Most High? And is there, right now, in the Heavens and the Earths and whatever is in between these two anyone other than God?' (fol. 3b)

Abū Sa'īd said, 'The first thing God Most High calls His servants to is to profess His Unity (*kalima wāḥida*). Whoever comprehends this has understood that which follows it, which is His saying, "Allāh". Have you not seen how He said, "Say, He is Allāh"?<sup>25</sup> This suffices the People of Divine Realities (*ahl al-ḥaqā'iq*). Then He added an elucidation for the elect (*kḥāṣṣ*), and said, "One", and added [another] elucidation [for them] and said, "The Eternal". Thereafter, He added an elucidation for the commoner (*ʿāmm*) and said, "He does not beget, nor was He begotten, and there is none like unto Him." So the People of Divine Realities suffice with His Name Allāh, while these elucidations are in place for people lower than them in spiritual rank.' (fol. 4a)

Al-Wāsiṭī said, 'Nobody can approach the Merciful (*al-raḥmān*) except from the aspect of His Mercifulness (*raḥmāniyya*). And the Compassionate (*al-raḥīm*), one can approach Him through acts of obedience because He shares in this [quality of compassion] with His Messenger. He said, "[The Prophet] is gentle and compassionate towards the believers" (Q 9.128). (fol. 4a)

### (1:2) *Al-ḥamd li-llāh rabb al-ʿālamīn*

Ibn ʿAṭā' said, 'The verse means thanks (*shukr*) to God. The gratitude (*imtinān*) for our being taught about Him so that we may praise Him is from Him.' (fol. 4b)

It is said that 'Praise be to God' means, 'You are praised on account of all of Your Attributes (*ṣifāt*) and Actions (*afʿāl*).' (fol. 4b)

It is said that 'Praise be to God' means 'there is none that praises God except God'. (fol. 4b)

About His saying 'Praise be to God', it is related that Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, said, 'He who praises Him with His attributes, just as He has described Himself, has indeed praised Him, because praise (*ḥamd*) consists of a *ḥā'*, a *mīm*, and a *dāl*. The *ḥā'* comes from His Oneness (*wahdāniyya*), the *mīm* from His Kingdom (*mulk*) and the *dāl* from His Eternality (*daymūmiyya*). So whoever knows God Most High through His oneness, kingdom and eternity, has indeed known Him (*fa-qad ʿarafahu*).' (fol. 4b)

A man said ‘Praise be to God’ in front of Junayd, so the latter said, ‘Complete it as God most High says’; that is, say ‘the Lord of the worlds’. The man replied, ‘And what are the worlds that they should be mentioned alongside the Real?’ Junayd replied, ‘Oh my brother, say this for when originated things are associated (*qurina*) with the Beginninglessly Eternal, not a trace of them remains.’ (fol. 4b)

It is also said, ‘Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the Worlds, from the worlds, before the worlds, because of the inability of the worlds to praise the Lord of the worlds.’ (fol. 4b)

Concerning the verse ‘Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds’, it is said that praise (*ḥamd*) is reserved for times of hardship and difficulty, whereas gratitude (*shukr*) is only reserved for times of blessings. (fol. 5a)

It is said that His saying ‘Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds’ means: ‘Praise proceeds from Me for Myself, before any one of the worlds can praise Me. And My self-praise to Myself in sempiternity is not for any reason, whereas my creation praises Me for various reasons.’<sup>26</sup> (fol. 5a)

It is said that when He knew the inability of His servants to praise Him, He praised Himself by Himself (*bi-nafsihi*), to Himself (*li-nafsihi*) from sempiternity (*fī al-azal*), because of the impotency of His servants, for it was impossible for them to praise Him. How is a created thing supposed to contend with the beginninglessly Eternal (*al-qadīm*)? Have you not seen how the Master of Messengers (*sayyid al-mursalīn*) expressed the inability to praise God (*al-ʿajz*) in his saying, ‘I cannot enumerate your Praise. You are as you have praised Yourself?’ (fol. 4b)

### (1:3) *Al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*

[God is named] the Compassionate (*al-raḥmān*) because of His illuminating the hearts (*asrār*) of His friends (*awliyāʾ*) and by His Self-Disclosure (*tajallī*) to the souls of His Prophets. [He is named] the Merciful (*al-raḥīm*) because of the kindness He shows to every creature—the pious and the sinful amongst them—by giving them their livelihood. (fol. 5b)

It is said that the Compassionate (*al-raḥmān*) is a specific Name with a specific function, whereas the Merciful (*al-raḥīm*) is a general Name with a general function. (fol. 5b)

It is said that the Compassionate (*al-raḥmān*) [is known] through the discovery of luminosities and that the Merciful (*al-raḥīm*) [is known] through guarding the repositories of mysteries. (fol. 5b)

It is said that [God is] the Compassionate (*al-raḥmān*) through His Essence, and the Merciful (*al-raḥīm*) through His qualities and attributes. . . (fol. 5b)

### (1:4) *Mālik yawm al-dīn*

Ibn ʿAta’ said [that ‘Master of the Day of judgment’ means], ‘The One who will reward every person on the day of reckoning in accordance with their intentions and spiritual aspirations. So He will reward the gnostics (*ʿarifīn*) with nearness to Him and the sight of His Noble countenance (*al-naẓr ilā wajhihi al-karīm*), while He will reward those whose sole concern is the performance of religious devotions (*arbāb al-muʿamalāt*) with the gardens of paradise (*jannāt*).’ (fol. 5b)

It is said, ‘It is incumbent upon the servants that when they behold their King, they forget the Kingdom because of their witnessing (*mushāhada*) their King.’ (fol. 5b)

**(1:5) *Iyyāka naʿbudu wa-iyyāka nastaʿīn***

That is, 'We worship You by cutting [ourselves] away from attachments (*ʿalāʾiq*) and the want for rewards (*aʿwād*). And we ask you for help for firmness (*ithbāt*) in this state (*ḥāl*), for we can be like this only through You, not by ourselves.' (fol. 6a)

Also, 'We worship You with sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*) and we seek help from You from our secrets being revealed. We worship You with will (*irāda*) and seek help from You in giving us spiritual aspiration (*himma*) in our worship.' (fol. 6a)

**(1:6) *Ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm***

It is said that this verse means, 'Make our hearts incline towards You so that we are not separate from You.' (fol. 6a)

Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh [al-Tustarī] said [that the verse means], 'Guide us with Your assistance to the Path leading to You.' (fol. 6b)

It is related that about 'guide us to the straight path' Abū ʿUthmān, God have mercy on him, interpreted it as meaning, 'Guide us to the performance of the Prophet's customs (*sunan*) when performing obligatory acts of worship (*farāʾid*).' (fol. 6b)

Junayd said that the Folk (*al-qawm*) asked for guidance from the bewilderment that would come to them in the face of witnessing God's sempiternal Attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-azaliyya*). So they asked for guidance to [perform various] types of religious devotions lest they drown in the vision (*ruʾya*) of God's sempiternal Attributes. (fol. 6b)

**(1:7) *Ṣirāṭ alladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim . . .***

It is related that Abū ʿUthmān said [interpreting this verse], 'The path of those whom You have blessed so that you may inform them of the dangers of the path, the snares of the Devil and the deceptions of the self (*khiyānat al-naḥs*).' (fol. 7a)

It is said '[Guide us to] the path of those whom You have blessed with the ability to worship you because of their witnessing you, just as it has been reported that the Prophet, God bless him and his family and grant them peace said, "[*Iḥsān* is] that you worship God as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him He nonetheless sees you.'" (fol. 7a)

Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh was asked about the meaning of the verse 'the path of those whom you have blessed'. He replied, 'It means following the way of the Prophetic example (*sunna*).' (fol. 7b)

**(1:7) . . . *Ghayr al-maghḍūb ʿalayhim wa-lā al-ḍāllīn***

It is said [that this verse means] 'Not the path of those with whom You are angry because of their seeing their own actions, nor of those who are misguided from recognizing Your blessings.' (fol. 7b)

It is said, 'Not the path of those with whom You are angry because of their seeking recompense for their actions, nor of those who are misguided from the path of showing gratitude over the favors done for them.' (fol. 7b)

It is said that this verse means ‘not of those with whom You are angry by following reprehensible innovations (*bidʿa*), nor of those who have gone astray from the Prophet’s customs which give guidance (*sunan al-hudā*)’. (fol. 7b)

### ***Amīn***

It is the way of the Prophet (*sunna*) for one to say *amīn* [aloud] after reciting this *sūra* in those prayers which are recited aloud (*ṣalāt al-jahriyya*).<sup>27</sup> (fol. 7a)

Junayd said, *amīn* means ‘We are incapable of praising You with our qualities, but can do so only by following Muḥammad.’ (fol. 7a)