

# TAWBA IN THE SUFI PSYCHOLOGY OF ABŪ ṬĀLIB AL-MAKKĪ (d. 996)

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## INTRODUCTION

Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī stands as one of the most influential writers of the early period of Sufism. Dhahabī (d. 1348) referred to him as a ‘leader (*imām*), renunciant (*zāhid*), and enlightened one (*‘ārif*), the *shaykh* of the Sufis’.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, as in the case of many of the early figures associated with the Sufi tradition, very little is known about his life.<sup>2</sup> Insofar as its details are concerned, what we can be more or less certain of is that he was born in the Persian province of Jibal and grew up in Makka, where he studied under Ibn al-A‘rābī (d. 952), a disciple of Junayd (d. 910), as well as other Makkan masters.<sup>3</sup> According to Ibn

<sup>1</sup> Shams al-Din Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubulā’* (ed. Shu‘ayb Arnā‘ūt; Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risāla, 1996), 536–7.

<sup>2</sup> This led Richard Gramlich in the introduction to his German translation of the *Qūt al-qulūb* to complain of ‘the meager information which has come down to us with respect to the life of Abū Ṭālib’: ‘Introduction’, *Die Nahrung der Herzen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992–95), i. 11. For brief analyses of his thought and role in early Sufism, see W. Mohammad Azam, ‘Abu Talib al-Makki: A Traditional Sufi’, *Hamdard Islamicus*, 22/3 (1999): 71–9; Abdel Salam Moghrabi, ‘La notion d’ascèse dans la pensée de Abu Talib al-Makki’, *Études Orientales*, 2 (1998): 52–5; Kojiro Nakamura, ‘Makkī and Ghazālī on Mystical Practices’, *Orient* (Tokyo), 20 (1984): 83–91; M. A. Shukri, ‘Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and his *Qūt al-Qulūb*’, *Islamic Studies*, 28/2 (1989): 161–70. Besides Gramlich’s German translation, John Renard has translated Makkī’s chapter on knowledge from the *Qūt* in his *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 112–263. Recently, a monograph has been published on Makkī by Saeko Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abu Talib al-Makki* (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); 121; John Renard, *Knowledge of God*, 34–5.

Khallikān (d. 1282), it was because of his time in Makka that he was given the attribution ‘al-Makkī’.<sup>4</sup> He left for Basra sometime near the middle of the tenth century where he joined the Sālimiyya, a theological school which retraced its mystical teachings back to Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) through his close friend and disciple, Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Sālim (d. 909).<sup>5</sup> Makkī studied under Ibn Sālim’s son, Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Sālim (d. 967).<sup>6</sup> He later moved to Baghdad to study with Sarrāj (d. 988),<sup>7</sup> author of the well known *Kitāb al-Luma’* (*Book of Flashes*), and remained there until his death<sup>8</sup> in 996. In his time Makkī was known for his knowledge of *ḥadīth*, his public preaching and his rigorous asceticism.<sup>9</sup> Although he is reported to have authored a number of works on *tawḥīd*,<sup>10</sup> none of them have survived. His most famous and influential treatise was the *Qūt al-qulūb* (*Nourishment of Hearts*), a work that is widely read and studied to this day.

### QŪT AL-QULŪB

Makkī’s most comprehensive discussion of *tawba*, usually translated as ‘repentance’,<sup>11</sup> appears in the thirty-second chapter of the *Qūt*. Running

<sup>4</sup> Abū l-‘Abbās b. Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a’yān* (ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās; Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1968–1973), iv. 303–4.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustarī* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1980), 110–28; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 121–2.

<sup>6</sup> Renard, *Knowledge of God*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Dhahabī (*Siyar*, xvi. 537) quotes a rather peculiar anecdote about his death: ‘Abū l-Qāsim b. Bishrān said: “I entered into the presence of our *shaykh*, Abū Tālib, who said: if you know that my final state is good, then sprinkle over my grave sugar and almonds [...] When I die, take my hand, and if I grasp yours, know that my final end has been good [...] When he [Makkī] passed away, he grasped my hand with much strength, and so I sprinkled over his grave sugar and almonds.”’ Considering Makkī’s rigorous asceticism, perhaps the sprinkling of the almonds and sugar over his body symbolizes the ultimate gratification of those desires that he renounced in this world.

<sup>9</sup> Dhahabī, *al-‘Ibar fī khabar man ghabar* (Kuwait: (vols. 1, 4, 5 ed. Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid; vols. 2, 3 ed. Fu’ād Sayyid; Dā’irat al-Maṭbu’at wa-l-Nashr, 1960–66), iii. 34; id., *Siyar*, xvi. 536–7; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, iv. 303–4.

<sup>10</sup> Abū Bakr b. ‘Alī al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1931), iii. 89; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, iv. 303–4.

<sup>11</sup> In its most basic lexical sense, *tawba* refers to a ‘return’ (*rujū’*). In the words of Ibn Fāris, ‘*tā*, *wāw* and *bā* are [when joined] a single word which refers to

twenty pages in the lithograph edition,<sup>12</sup> the chapter represents the longest single sustained treatment of *tawba*, written from a Sufi perspective, currently available to us from the first four centuries of Islam.<sup>13</sup> The *Qūt* was one of the most influential and widely read Sufi manuals in the formative period of the tradition. As Arberry observed, Makkī's magnum opus was, along with Qushayrī's (d. 1072) *Risāla*, among the most valuable works of early Sufi literature.<sup>14</sup> When Rūmī (d. 1273) spoke of the Prophet Noah's high spiritual standing, one which had been attained without book learning, he singled out the works of Makkī and Qushayrī. 'He had not read the *Risāla* nor the *Qūt*', he wrote in the *Mathnawī*.<sup>15</sup> Although clearly intended as a criticism of mere book learning, the Persian mystic made his point by acknowledging the status of the *Qūt* among Sufis. Ibn 'Abbād (d. 1390) recorded his own praise for Makkī's work when he observed that 'nothing else of its scope is available and I know of no one who has produced the likes of it. In it he sets forth the erudite sciences of Sufism [in a manner] which defies

"return". *Mu'jam maqāyīs al-lughā* (ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn; Cairo: Maktabat al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1969–72), i. 357. In a religious context (*ta'rif fī l-shar'*), however, it is typically translated as 'repentance'. al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān* (ed. Ṣafwān 'Adnān Dā'ūdī; Beirut: al-Dār al-Shāmiyya, 2nd edn., 1997), 169. See also T. H. Weir's entry on *tawba* in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, s.v. 'Repentance (Muhammadan)'. The commonly accepted English translation of *tawba* derives from a Latin root (*paenitēre*) which emphasizes not the act of turning away from the sin but the emotional experience of 'regret' or 'remorse' (= *nadam*) which follows in its wake. While repentance can function as a viable translation of *tawba* in most cases, it does occasionally obscure the deeper semantic nuances of the term which accent not an emotional experience but an ethical or moral directional reorientation. In the present analysis, however, repentance will be used to designate *tawba* because it functions as a workable translation. For similar challenges faced by biblical scholars in translating the Hebrew equivalent of *tawba*, namely *teshuvah*, see Jacob J. Petuchowski's observations in 'The Concept of "Teshuvah" in the Bible and the Talmud', *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal* 17 (1968): 180.

<sup>12</sup> I have used here the edition of Sa'īd Naṣīb Makārīm: *Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalat al-maḥbūb wa-waṣf tariq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawhīd* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> The *Aḥkām al-tawba* of Muḥāsibī is a much shorter work and is concerned not so much with *tawba* per se as with the various sins the *tā'ib* must turn away from. Currently the work only exists in manuscript form.

<sup>14</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Dover Publications, [repr.] 2002), xii.

<sup>15</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 18.

explanation'.<sup>16</sup> Makkī's most notable influence was undoubtedly on Ghāzālī (d. 1111), in whose *Ihyā'* there are literally pages drawn directly from the *Qūt*.<sup>17</sup>

Makkī's discussion of *tawba* falls within a lengthy section of the *Qūt* devoted to the Stations of Certainty (*maqāmāt al-yaqīn*). The Sufis differed on the number of these stations, as well as whether some of them are to be included instead among the *ahwāl* or 'states'. These stations, which, in Makkī's mystical theology, are nine in number, function as the rungs of a ladder that the spiritual aspirant must climb in his ascending journey to God. The inner growth and purification of the soul is not possible without traversing each of these stations and realizing their corresponding virtues. For Makkī these stations are, in the following order, *tawba*, patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), hope (*rajā'*), fear (*khawf*), renunciation (*zuhd*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), satisfaction (*riḍā*) and love (*maḥabbā*).<sup>18</sup> The elaborate analysis of these stations makes up almost a quarter of the entire *Qūt*, with the section on *tawakkul* by far the longest.<sup>19</sup>

The reader who comes to Makkī's text on repentance expecting to find an esoteric exploration of this concept will be disappointed. Although the *Qūt* remains one of the most important works in the history of Islamic mysticism, it was meant to serve as an instruction manual for spiritual novices and aspirants. Makkī's intention in his chapter on *tawba* is not to elucidate the transcendental mysteries of repentance,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda, (details below) 126. He also said that the *Qūt* is 'for Sufism what the *Mudawwana* is for legal science. It takes the place of all others and none can substitute for it'. The *Mudawwana* of Saḥnūn (d. 854), on which Ibn 'Abbād wrote a commentary, was 'by all accounts the most influential work in North African jurisprudence'. See John Renard (transl.), *Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda: Letters on the Sufi Path* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 'Introduction', 48.

<sup>17</sup> For the influence of Makkī's *Qūt* on Ghāzālī's *Ihyā'*, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1975), 34–5; Nakamura, 'Makkī and Ghāzālī on Mystical Practices', 83–91; Mohamed Sherif, *Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975), 105–7.

<sup>18</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 361.

<sup>19</sup> For more on *tawakkul* in Makkī, see Benedikt Reinert, *Die Lehre vom tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), 45–7, 85–90, 230, 264–8, 276–8, 285–9.

<sup>20</sup> Even the sections of the *Qūt* which are of a more theoretical nature, such as its brief inquiries into the reality of the heart, inner light, and faith, relate in some manner or another to the pragmatic concerns of the aspirant. By setting aside esoteric matters Makkī wishes to avoid diverting the attention of the amateur from the more pressing matters of the Path. Makkī's other extant work, *Ilm*

but to invite the seeker properly to situate himself in relation to his own transgressions against God, thereby preparing himself to acquire the other virtues that are necessary for inner growth, illumination, and progress on the Path. Although the work is primarily a practical work, it is also by no means simply a book of Sufi commandments. Like Muḥāsibī (d. 857–8) before him, Makkī minutely examines the workings of the human psyche and draws attention to the various maladies of the heart.<sup>21</sup> He explores, like an astute psychoanalyst, the inner promptings of the soul which impel it in the directions of virtue and vice. In this regard, the *Qūt* can be read as a work both of ethical philosophy and spiritual psychology, even though its primary purpose is pragmatic. Still, a perceptive reader will be able to draw out the universal relevance of many of his inquiries into human nature. Renard has not inaccurately described him as an ‘extraordinarily shrewd observer of the human condition’.<sup>22</sup>

The more universal appeal of the *Qūt*, however, can be difficult to discern considering the degree to which the work is steeped in the language of the Islamic revelation. The reader of the *Qūt* will not help

*al-qulūb*, supposedly authored shortly after the *Qūt*, was intended for more advanced mystics (ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā; Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, n. d. [?1964]). Scholarship is divided over its authenticity. Gramlich accepts its attribution to Makkī in his introductory remarks in *Die Nahrung der Herzen*, i. 19–20. Karamustafa, basing his view largely on the scholarship of Pourjavadi, disagrees, stating that the ‘*Ilm* is ‘likely a mid-fifth/eleventh century composition that relies heavily on the *Sustenance [Qūt]*’. See Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 87–8.

<sup>21</sup> There is little question that, in the development of his own psychology, Makkī was influenced by as prominent a figure as Muḥāsibī. Massignon stated that there are parts of the *Qūt* that are ‘pale reflection[s]’ of Muḥāsibī’s *Rī’āya*. See Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (transl. Benjamin Clark; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 164. The exact nature and extent of this influence, however, has not yet been studied, and would require a close comparative analysis of the works of Muḥāsibī and the *Qūt*, which is beyond the scope of this study. For the purposes of the present article, it is sufficient to note that a Muḥāsibian influence does not seem to be definitively present in Makkī’s discussion of *tawba*. Despite the liberty with which Makkī quotes his predecessors in his chapter on *tawba*, he makes no mention of Muḥāsibī. Nor does he draw in any obvious way from the sections in Muḥāsibī’s works where *tawba* is addressed. There are, however, some general conceptual overlaps between Muḥāsibī and Makkī’s treatments of *tawba*, but even here it remains difficult to know with any confidence whether these are due directly to Muḥāsibī’s influence or to certain ideas in general circulation within Sufi circles.

<sup>22</sup> Renard, *Knowledge of God*, 37.

but notice the extent to which the Qurʾān interlaces its fabric. Not only does Makkī open each chapter with the relevant thematic verses, he returns to the Scripture for every subject he broaches. So deeply is the Qurʾān interwoven into the text, one might argue that it is something of a *tafsīr* in a different key. Makkī's claim that 'the people of the Qurʾān [...] are the people of God, and His elect',<sup>23</sup> gives us a sense of the central role of Scripture in his system of ascetic and moral psychology. But this extreme reverence for Islam's primary text is not a peculiar characteristic of his unique brand of Sufism. As Schimmel has observed, 'the words of the Koran have formed the cornerstone of all mystical doctrines [in Islam]'.<sup>24</sup> By integrating the Qurʾān so deeply into the substance of the *Qūt* Makkī is also able to argue forcefully for the legitimacy of his views of *tauba* in particular, and Sufi ideas in general, through Revelation itself.<sup>25</sup> This employment of the sacred text should not be viewed simply as a strategy to win converts to Sufism, but reflects, as well, a genuine reverence and veneration for the message given to the Prophet of Islam, as well as the depth to which the Qurʾān was internalized by Makkī.

Makkī also extensively utilizes Prophetic traditions even though some critics, such as Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) accused him of employing weak *ḥadīths*<sup>26</sup>—unsurprisingly, the same charge that he would also level against Ghazālī's *Ihyāʾ*.<sup>27</sup> As we shall see in Makkī's discussion of repentance, he frequently elaborates an idea using a *ḥadīth* as his starting point. He also relies heavily on Sufi sayings and anecdotes. This almost excessive use of quotations—from the Qurʾān, the Prophet, and the Sufis

<sup>23</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 284. The saying is often cited as a prophetic tradition.

<sup>24</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> By developing his ideas on the basis of past revelation, Makkī was an instrumental player in the formation of a distinct Islamic Sufi tradition. Eric Hobsbawm's remarks on the construction of tradition aptly apply to the manner in which Makkī sought to legitimate Sufism through the *Qūt*. 'Inventing traditions', writes Hobsbawm, 'is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization characterized by reference to the past'. The 'ritualization' component is evident in Makkī's extensive treatment of the various forms of prayer, fasting, and meditation that he encourages the spiritual seeker to adopt, all of which have their precedent in some example from the life of the Prophet or his disciples. See Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1966), xi. 319–20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, xii. 174. This was because Ghazālī himself drew *ḥadīths* from the *Qūt* in the composition of his own work.

themselves—may be seen as a drawback, at least to the sensibilities of the modern reader accustomed to flowing, uninterrupted prose. One might get the impression that Makkī has simply strung together various sayings and divided them by subject headings. Knysh's contention that the *Qūt* 'simply brims with long-winded quotations',<sup>28</sup> is accurate, to a certain extent, and one can make a similar observation about other Sufi works that were composed around the same period. However, one should not forget that these compositions were among the first to systematically explicate Sufi ideas in Islamic history. Because the authors were transcribing teachings that were very often transmitted orally, it was only natural that some of these early works would be composed largely of the sayings of the Prophet, his disciples and the earliest representatives of the tradition that came to be defined later as Sufism. Thus one will find that much of what Kalābādhi (d. 994–5) and Sarrāj have to say in the *Ta'arruf* and the *K. al-Lumá'*—texts which were authored around the same time period as the *Qūt* and which constitute, along with it, the first real 'manuals' of Sufism—is quoted from earlier authorities.

Makkī's heavy reliance on quotations should not however lead one to believe that the text is a haphazard string of Qur'ānic verses, Prophetic traditions, and Sufi aphorisms. Although a superficial reading of the work might suggest that it is indeed, in the words of one scholar, 'a rather unsystematic heap of quotations',<sup>29</sup> a close analysis reveals that the quotations in fact serve as conceptual 'pegs' which allow Makkī to ground and develop his own arguments. By basing his own views on those of his early predecessors, Makkī demonstrates to the reader that his positions are not simply personal opinions, but rooted in the Sufi tradition which he is representing. Although his treatment of material may appear to be unsystematic and even disorganized at times,<sup>30</sup> this does not mean that Makkī's various analyses in the *Qūt* lack, as a whole, a coherent structure. This becomes clear in Makkī's discussion of repentance, as the quotations which he employs serve to substantiate and legitimate a complex and psychological analysis of the soul as it undergoes a process of *tawba* and return to God. Makkī does not simply repeat the tradition to which he is heir, but engages it in a way that allows him to express his personal views. His own ideas can be

<sup>28</sup> Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 121.

<sup>29</sup> S. D. Goitein, 'A Plea for the Periodization of Islamic History', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88/2 (1968): 224–8, at 225.

<sup>30</sup> This observation is also made by Nakamura, 'Makkī and Ghazālī', 84; and Renard, *Knowledge of God*, 37.

unearthed by paying close attention to the progression of his discussions, and the specific way he incorporates quotations into the chapter.

## THE OBLIGATORY NATURE OF TAWBA

Makkī begins his discussion of *tawba* by highlighting its obligatory nature within the religious and spiritual life. ‘There is nothing more obligatory on creation’ he writes, quoting Sahl al-Tustarī, ‘than repentance’.<sup>31</sup> *Tawba*, in Makkī’s eyes, is not an optional act of religious devotion meant primarily for those who have committed themselves completely to God, but a requirement for the generality of believers. Unlike other expressions of religious piety, *tawba* is an essential and inescapable requirement for anyone who surrenders to God. Nor is repentance meant only for individual sins, but must, instead, be an all-embracing process of self-purification. Like Muḥāsibī and numerous other Sufis, Makkī argues that the importance and value of *tawba* will only be felt by the heedless soul when the opportunity to repent is no more, and the soul is on the brink of final judgment. Makkī notes that according to one of the interpretations of the Qur’ānic verse, ‘a gulf is placed between them and what they desire’ (Q. 34. 54), the object of desire is the repentance that is no longer possible at the moment of death. It is then that the soul will desire a *tawba* that it is incapable of attaining.<sup>32</sup> ‘Repentance is not for those who do wrong’, he quotes the Qur’ān, ‘until when death attends one of them, he says, “lo! I repent

<sup>31</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 362.

<sup>32</sup> Qushayrī unequivocally presents this as the interpretation of the verse in his own commentary. See *Tafsīr al-Qushayrī, al-musammā Laṭā’if al-ishārāt* (ed. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Raḥmān; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), iii. 57. According to other interpretations found in the *tafsīr* tradition, the object of desire is anything from a ‘return to the world’, ‘worldly pleasures’, and ‘wealth and family’, to ‘faith’, ‘salvation [in the face] of punishment’ and ‘paradise’. See Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī al-Gharnāṭī, *Tas’bīl li-‘ulūm al-tanzīl* (ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khālīdī; Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, [1995].), ii. 170; Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, *Fathḥ al-qadīr* (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2nd revised edn., 1998), iv. 386; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* (eds. ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Arnā’ūṭ and Aḥmad Khālīd Shukrī; Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1998), 434; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), xxv. 236. The most common interpretation cited by Ṭabarī is faith, though he also mentions the interpretation of Mujāhid—whom Makkī may have anonymously referred to—for whom the object of desire is a ‘return to the world so that they may repent (*al-rujū’ ilā*



now!” (Q. 4. 18). The soul’s regret will be for neglecting to repent and reform itself while the opportunity was still present. Makkī writes, ‘He, most High, has decreed that repentance is not accepted after the signs of the next world are made manifest (*ḡuhūr al-lām al-ākħira*).’<sup>33</sup> Among the first of these signs is the appearance of the angel of death, the first eiphanic manifestation from the world of the unseen.<sup>34</sup>

## THE PROCESS AND CONDITIONS OF TAWBA

Makkī’s analysis of the inner process of repentance yields significant insights into the interrelation of the virtues within his psychological system. In this respect, his ideas bear a resemblance to Muḡāsibī’s moral psychology. Ultimately, for Makkī, *tawba* cannot be separated from the other *maqāmāt* which the aspirant must go through in his journey to God. Although, as we shall see, it is most deeply connected to the virtues of patience (*ṡabr*) and ascetic self-discipline/struggle (*muḡābada*), there are other positive qualities which the soul will necessarily acquire, or be forced to acquire, in order for its process of repentance to be sound, just as there are vices above and beyond the particular sin or sins it is leaving which it will be necessary to abandon. Repentance is an all consuming process that impels the soul in the direction of a fuller and more complete religious life.

Near the opening of his chapter, Makkī stipulates ten requirements for the repentance of individual sins. For much of his analysis of *tawba*, he elaborates, in one form or another, the implications of these requirements. An examination of the chapter reveals that many of his discussions can be drawn back to one or more of these conditions. Makkī emphasizes the importance of these conditions when he says that a close reading of the sayings of the earliest members of the Muslim community about repentance that have been transmitted to us will yield these ten conditions, and that the ones who came after them elaborated on these conditions. Only near the end of the chapter, when Makkī begins to probe some of the higher levels of repentance does he go beyond these

*l-dunyā’ li-yatūbū*). See Muḡammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifa, repr. 1992 [Bulaq, 1905–11]), xxi. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 365. For a treatment of the angel of death (*malak al-mawt*), see Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḡ al-ṡudūr bi-sharḡ ḡāl al-mawtā wa-l-qubūr* (ed. Ṭa’ma Ḥalabī; Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifa, 1996), 61–96. On the importance of *tawba* before witnessing the angel of death, see 95–6.

<sup>34</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 364. Cf. al-Ḥārith al-Muḡāsibī, *Aḡkām al-tawba* (MS. Berlin, 1435), fos. 9a–9b.

requirements. We will explore these further requirements at the end of our inquiry.

The ten conditions which Makkī states are incumbent upon the *tā'ib* (penitent or repenting one) are (1) not to repeat the sin, and (2) if tried by it, to avoid, at all costs, falling back. There must be no persistence in the sin. The *tā'ib* must (3) return to God from the sin, as well as (4) feel regret (*nadam*) for what has been lost. (5) He must then vow or resolve to remain upright for the remainder of his life, (6) fear the punishment which is his due, but also (7) have hope in Divine forgiveness. (8) He must acknowledge (*ī'tirāf*) that he has sinned, but also that (9) God has decreed that sin for him (*qaddara dhālika 'alayhi*) and that this decree does not detract from His justice (*'adl*). (10) Finally, he must follow the sin with a righteous act as a penance or atonement (*kaffāra*) for his previous wrong.<sup>35</sup>

Although Makkī's discussion of repentance remains, as just noted, to a large extent an elaboration of these conditions, he does not set up or structure his discussion so that the reader can see that he is in fact expanding these conditions. Makkī's discussion lacks the relatively neat structure one finds, for example, in a work such as Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*. The format of Makkī's analyses may be one reason why so few modern scholars have attempted to study the *Qūt*. Only a diligent and patient reader can begin to appreciate the full import of the work. Because of the efforts Makkī takes to demonstrate the legitimacy of his analyses, it is not surprising that he opens his analysis of repentance by stipulating the conditions outlined by the earliest generation of Muslims and then using them to develop his subsequent inquiry.

## THE PREDETERMINATION OF THE SIN

Makkī does not devote equal space to all of the conditions outlined above. In his chapter on *tawba* he has next to nothing to say about the ninth condition, even though it remains one of the most problematic and disputed issues in Islamic theology and a serious point of contention between the Ash'aris and Mu'tazilis.<sup>36</sup> The significance of this condition is moreover underscored by the fact that both Ghazālī and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240) in their chapters on *tawba* in the *Iḥyā'* and the *Futūḥāt*, devote

<sup>35</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 363–4.

<sup>36</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 35–57; id., *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2nd edn., 1983), 42–55.

significant attention to resolving the ethical dilemma raised by the religious imperative to repent of pre-determined and Divinely created sins.<sup>37</sup> One might even say that this question becomes the central problem in their respective analyses. We can only speculate as to why Makkī decides to overlook this issue altogether, with the exception of acknowledging in principle God's decree of the act. The reason seems to lie in the practical or *'amalī* nature of the work, which holds Makkī back from plunging into theological debates that have very little bearing on the immediate needs of the spiritual seeker. Makkī's silence might be no different than that of the Buddha when he was confronted by metaphysical questions. The Buddha explained that for a man struck by an arrow, it is of little use for him to know about trivial details about the archer and the arrow, details which would not alleviate his suffering or attend to the real problem at hand. The focus of an intelligent man would be on removing the arrow and treating the wound. For Makkī as well, theological inquiries in a chapter concerned fundamentally with *how to repent* may ultimately be seen to be of little use for one trying to pull out the arrows of sin from his soul and healing the wound with the medicine of *tawba*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See the chapters on *tawba* in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Aleppo: Dār al-Wa'ī, 1998), iv. 8–11, and Ibn al-'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub 'Ilmiyya, 1999), iii. 208–14. For an overview of Sufi approaches to predestination and God's creation of human acts, see Richard Gramlich, 'Mystical Dimensions of Islamic Monotheism' in Annemarie Schimmel and Abdoldjavad Falaturi (eds.), *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 136–49. On the contested issue of the exact nature of predestination in Ghazali, see Binyamin Abrahamov, 'Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality', *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 75–98; Thérèse-Anne Druart, 'Al-Ghazālī's Conception of the Agent in the *Taḥāfut* and the *Iqtisād*: Are People Really Agents?' in James Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 426–40; Michael Marmura, 'Ghazālian Causes and Intermediaries', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115 (1995): 89–100; id., 'Ghazali and Ash'arism Revisited', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12 (2002): 91–110. On Ibn al-'Arabī's view of predestination, see Chittick, 'Acts of God and Acts of Man' in *Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 205–11. For a general survey of the problem of predestination in *kalām*, see Harry Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 518–77.

<sup>38</sup> Makkī does, however, briefly touch on the question of the predestination of sins in his chapter on *riḍā*, but even here, he does not probe into the logic behind taking responsibility for acts that were determined by God. See *Qūt*, ii. 89–90,

Another related reason for his silence may have to do with a certain disdain for speculative theology (*kalām*) altogether, which we know of on the basis of remarks he makes about the theologians in other parts of the *Qūt*. He quotes, for example, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855) approvingly in his criticisms of the *mutakallimūn*.<sup>39</sup> Although Ghazālī could also be critical of *kalām*, he did not shy away from probing deeply into such philosophical matters when occasion demanded it, even in his later post-conversion years. In the case of Makkī, he appears to have had an aversion to such debates altogether, and the rational methods employed to resolve them. Even in the *‘Ilm al-qulūb* (*Knowledge of Hearts*) which was meant for advanced mystics—if we are to accept the attribution of the work to him—we do not find theological discussions of the kind addressed by the representatives of that science.

## TAWBA AND RESOLVE

The fifth condition Makkī highlights is particularly important in understanding the view he takes towards this *maqām*. His stipulates that the *tā’ib* must vow or resolve to remain upright until his death (*‘aqd al-istiqāma ilā l-tā’a ilā l-mawt*). In other words, he cannot truly be characterized by *tawba* as long as an effort is not made on his part to loosen the shackles of all sin and make a total commitment to obey God in all future matters. It would betray his sincerity if he were to repent of one sin while recklessly indulging in others. This is why Makkī says that the ‘reality of uprightness’ demands of the *tā’ib* to ‘follow the path of the one who sincerely turns (*sabīl man anāba*) to God’.<sup>40</sup> This *ināba*<sup>41</sup> must be complete and total, requiring the full commitment of the seeker. It is in this condition that we find what seems to be the most explicit requirement for the all-embracing character of repentance. Although Makkī nowhere states that God rejects the repentance of the sinner who

95. See also my forthcoming article, ‘Contentment, Satisfaction and Good-Pleasure (*Riḍā*) in Early Sufism’, *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*.

<sup>39</sup> Makkī cites the following saying from Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, ‘The scholars of *kalām* are heretics (*zanādiqa*)’. This is in a short section where he raises his objections to the science of dogmatic theology. See *Qūt*, i. 287.

<sup>40</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 362.

<sup>41</sup> *Ināba* is a close Qur’ānic synonym of *tawba*. According to al-Rāghib Iṣfahānī, it signifies ‘returning to Him through *tawba* and sincere action’. See *Mufradāt*, 828. Unlike *tawba*, however, *ināba* is never used in the Qur’ān with God as the subject: God is never *munīb*. The same applies to *awba*, another Qur’ānic synonym of *tawba*.

repents from one sin but not others—as some of the Mu‘tazili theologians held<sup>42</sup>—he does appear to come close to this position by requiring a complete change in the person’s life as part of the repentance process. This is reflected in the words of an anonymous ‘*ālim* he quotes: ‘he who repented from ninety-nine sins while there remained a single sin for which he did not repent is not from among the repentant ones in our estimation (*lam yakun ‘indanā min al-tā’ibīn*)’.<sup>43</sup> Makkī’s view of the all-consuming character of repentance is similar to that of Muḥāsibī, when he states in regard to the importance of being prepared for death: ‘It entails that the servant repent with a pure repentance (*tawba ṭāhira*) for sins and errors, so that if it were said to him, “you will die at this very hour,” he would find no sin requiring repentance for which he would request a postponement [of death].’<sup>44</sup>

## TAWBA AND REGRET

In his fourth condition of regret (*nadam*), Makkī is in agreement not only with the Sufis but virtually the entire spectrum of theologians, from the Ash‘aris to the Mu‘tazilis, and also the Shi‘a. If there is one condition about which there is consensus, it is regret. This consensus is no doubt rooted in one of the oft-repeated *ḥadīths* about *tawba*, that regret is the sign of repentance.<sup>45</sup> Makkī says the reality of the regret is that the sinner never returns to the likes of the sin which caused the regret. The regret, moreover, must be a deeply felt and perpetual sadness (*dawām al-ḥuzn*).

<sup>42</sup> See for example Mānakdim Aḥmad b. Abī Hāshim al-Qazwīnī, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa* (incorrectly attributed to ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad), (ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān; Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1965), 794.

<sup>43</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 385. Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq, the teacher of Qushayrī who was also a near contemporary of Makkī makes a similar point about the importance of a *tawba* that embraces all sins. He says that ‘nothing of this Path is opened’ for the one who ‘did not repent (*lam yatub*) at the hands of his *shaykh* or someone else, of all of his slips, both hidden and open, both small and large’. See ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī, *al-Anwār al-qudsiyya fī bayān qawā’id al-sūfiyya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2004), 238.

<sup>44</sup> Muḥāsibī, *al-Rī‘āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh*, (ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā; Cairo: Dār al-Kutab al-Ḥadītha, 1970), 154. See also Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mī’raj, Poetic, and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 180.

<sup>45</sup> Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla* (eds. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. Sharīf; Damascus: Dār al-Farfūr, [1996] 2002), 207.

‘Among the signs of the sincerity (or truth) of repentance’, he says, ‘are tenderness of heart and abundance of tears’.<sup>46</sup>

For Makkī, the feeling of regret is made deeper by what the *tāʿib* should see as the magnitude of the offence even though it may appear trivial to others. Deeming a sin to be trivial is, according to one authority he cites, itself a major sin (*istiṣghār al-dhanb kabīra*). Although Makkī does not consider all sins to be major, as some held,<sup>47</sup> he does encourage the repentant one to see the weight of the misdeed insofar as it is an act of disobedience against God. By considering the sin to be trite, one in fact magnifies it on the scales, and conversely, by magnifying it in one’s own eyes, one diminishes its weight on the scales.<sup>48</sup> Despite the subjectivity of this approach to sin, Makkī still divides sins into the major and minor, a classification which, in his view, remains independent of one’s orientation towards sin. Nevertheless, Makkī does seriously warn the *tāʿib* of trivializing his offence, as small as it may be in the eyes of the Law, because, as God warned one of His friends, ‘do not look at the insignificance of the wrong, but the magnificence of the One you face on its account’.<sup>49</sup>

## TAWBA AND OVERCOMING THE INCLINATION TO REPEAT THE SIN

One of the ways to ensure the feeling of regret does not subside is for the aspirant to continuously remember his sins. This will create a feeling of

<sup>46</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 367.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* This view was held by some on the grounds that insofar as every sin is an offence against God, it cannot be trivialized. Thus Makkī states that ‘minor sins (*ṣaghāʿir*) in the eyes of the fearful ones (*khāʿifin*) were major sins (*kabāʿir*)’. The view that there are no minor sins was famously attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās when he said that ‘everything that God has prohibited is a major sin (*kabīra*)’. See Ghazālī, *Ihyāʿ*, iv (*K. al-Tawba*). 50. Ghazālī (iv. 51) also quotes one of the enlightened ones (*bāʿ al-ʿārifin*) as saying, ‘there is no such thing as a minor sin, for every act of disobedience is a major sin’. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (*al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr*, xxix. 8) also observes that, from one perspective, every sin can indeed be seen as an enormity: ‘in its origin every sin is a major sin (*kabīra*), because the blessings of God are many, and to transgress [against] the Giver of blessings (*al-murīim*) is a great sin (*sayyʿa ʿazīma*)’. The Ashʿari theologian Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Bājūrī (d. 1860) in his criticism of this view ascribes it to the Kharijis, while ascribing the inverse view that all sins are minor to the Murjiʿis: *Tuḥfat al-murīd ʿalā jawharat al-tawḥīd* (ed. ʿAbd al-Salām al-Shannār; Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2002), 464.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ghazālī, *Ihyāʿ*, iv (*K. al-Tawba*). 50.

<sup>49</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 367.

humility before God. But Makkī also sees the need to occasionally turn away from the memory of the sin if such a memory has an adverse effect on the *tāʾib*. If he finds that by calling the sin to mind he feeds a renewed desire for it, Makkī suggests abstaining from the recollection altogether. This is because such remembrance defeats its intended purpose, which is to deepen the experience of *tawba* by intensifying the regret. Makkī does not dogmatically take the position that repentance requires of the beginner to remember his sin in all circumstances. Instead, like a true doctor of the soul, he administers medicine according to the illness of the *tāʾib*. Acknowledging the danger in remembering one's sins, Makkī writes:

Know that the one who is weak in certainty and of strong lower soul (*nafs*), is not safe, when he remembers his sins, from feeling a passion (*shahwa*) for them when he looks at them with his heart, or to incline towards them with his lower soul, experiencing a sense of sweetness (*ḥalāwa*). And this can become the cause for his [renewed] temptation.<sup>50</sup>

An individual of this kind should therefore avoid remembering past wrongs, because 'the cutting off of the causes [of sin] is safer, and what is safer for the aspirant is better [for him]'.<sup>51</sup> Since the desire for the sin and the sweetness the individual derives from it are causes of the sin, the *tāʾib* must make it a priority to eliminate such internal forces which draw him back to the direction he is turning away from, even if it requires adopting a course of action which might diminish the experience of regret and humility.

Although Makkī's concern with eliminating the soul's passionate desire (*shahwa* and *hawā*) for the sin, along with the sweetness (*ḥalāwa*) it experiences upon thinking about it, is guided by a desire to protect the sinner from repeating the offence, he also sees intrinsic value in their elimination. The presence of these qualities within the individual signifies a level of incompleteness within the *tawba* process. If *shahwa*, *hawā* and *ḥalāwa* are present, the person has only outwardly turned away from the sin. But since *tawba*—insofar as it is a return to God and to obedience from disobedience—must encompass both the outward and inward dimensions of the human being, the inward inclination to sin must also be cut off. The traces of the passion for the sin, as well as the sweetness the unregenerate soul feels when it considers it, must be eradicated. To highlight this point Makkī cites the sayings of some of the earlier Sufis: 'The repentance of the servant [of God] is not sound until he forgets his

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 368.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

passions [for sin]';<sup>52</sup> 'One of the signs of the sincerity of the repentant one is that the sweetness of passion (*hawā*) be replaced by the sweetness of obedience';<sup>53</sup> 'the servant [of God] is not repentant until the sweetness of conforming to the lower self is replaced by the bitterness of opposing it'.<sup>54</sup>

But Makkī also understands how difficult it can be to eradicate these inner inclinations. The difficulty in self-purification is compounded by the fact that the inner urges and inclinations are rooted in human nature, within the very elemental makeup of the human being. Makkī mentions Sahl al-Tustarī's response upon being asked about the man who repents from and leaves a particular sin, but then, when the thought of it occurs to him, or he sees or hears about it, he experiences a sense of sweetness. 'The sweetness [he finds] is a natural disposition of the human being (*al-ḥalāwa ṭab' al-bashariyya*)', Sahl al-Tustarī responds, adding:

There is no escape from it, except if he lifts his heart towards his Lord in complaint, by rejecting it within his heart, holding fast to the rejection (*inkār*) and not parting from it; and praying to God that He make him forget the remembrance of it and preoccupy him with other than it from His remembrance and worship.<sup>55</sup>

Although Makkī acknowledges, in conformity with Sahl, that the inner inclination is a part of human nature, the *tā'ib* is still obliged to strive against it. 'Repentance is not sound', writes Makkī, 'as long as passion persists (*ma'a baqā' al-shahwa*)'.<sup>56</sup> The *tā'ib* is called to subjugate those impulses which, though part of his nature, draw him to sin. Though Makkī does not explicitly state it, the elimination of these traits help ensure the *tā'ib* will remain true to the first, second, third and fifth conditions stipulated earlier, namely that he (1) not repeat the sin; (2) that if tried by it, he avoid it at all costs; and (3) that he return to his Lord completely. Eradicating the root cause of the sin helps him fulfill (5), his resolve to remain upright afterwards.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 366. Anonymously attributed to 'one of the enlightened ones (*ba'd al-ārifīn*)'.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 369.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 370. Interestingly, he quotes Sahl al-Tustarī of all people to justify the view that in some circumstances of the initial journey, it may be in the aspirant's interest to forget his sins. Although Sahl al-Tustarī is not taking the view that this 'forgetting' is because of one's spiritual development, as in the case of Junayd, it nevertheless indicates that there are circumstances where *tauba* need not be characterized by a remembrance of one's past wrongs.



The way to strive against these inclinations is through struggle (*mujāhada*) and patience (*ṣabr*), the second station on Makkī's schema of *maqāmāt*. By tying in the qualities of struggle and patience to the process of *tawba*, Makkī illustrates the unity and interrelation of the virtues in his mystical psychology. In the passage below, he argues that the eradication of the passions which attract one to the sin is essential for the completion of *tawba*. As long as these passions remain, there remains a latent danger of the *tā'ib*'s falling back into the sin. Makkī writes,

The best thing that a servant can do is cut off the passions of the lower soul. This is sweeter (*ahlā*) to him than what desire (*hawā*) [offers] because [the lower soul's] passions (*shahawāt*) have nothing [in truth] to offer that one might anticipate later, just like they have nothing in the beginning that can be traced [i.e. because they are fleeting]. If he does not cut them off there will be for him no end [to them]. If [on the other hand] he preoccupies himself with what he dislikes by increasing [acts] of obedience (*mazīd al-ṭā'āt*), he will find sweetness in worship (*ḥalāwat al-ibāda*). If not, he should adhere to patience and struggle. This is the way of the truthful ones (*ṣādiqīn*) from among the aspirants (*murīdīn*). It has been said, about His words, Most High, 'Seek help from God and be patient' [Q 7. 128], that they mean, seek help from Him in worship [or in order to worship] and be patient in your struggle against disobedience.<sup>57</sup>

Struggle and patience are therefore necessary components for the completion of *tawba* insofar as they help the *tā'ib* eliminate lingering inclinations to repeat the offence. By diligently submitting himself to religious acts of worship and self-denial, he will eventually come to find the obedience to God, which he previously abhorred, to be sweet. Even if the signs of this sweetness remain nowhere in sight, he must nevertheless persist in *ṣabr* and *mujāhada* until his persistence bears visible fruit.

One of the ways to prevent the inclination to sin from arising within the heart is by cutting it off from its internal sources. For Makkī the stages which lead one to the sin begin with the 'incoming evil thought' of the act (*khāṭir al-sū'*).<sup>58</sup> This is the first step towards the transgression. The safest course is for the *tā'ib* to block it as soon as it appears, before it grows into an '[evil] whispering of the soul (*waswās al-nafs*)', and the

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, i. 377.

<sup>58</sup> I follow Sachiko Murata in translating *khāṭir* as 'incoming thought' since it seems most accurately to convey the import of the term. The *khawāṭir* 'are "incoming"', writes Murata, because 'they come from some place'. See Murata, *The Tao of Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 293. We lose this sense of the term when *khāṭir* is rendered simply as 'passing thought'. See also n. 63 below.

whispering into a more powerful and potentially irresistible source of seduction:

The aspirant should work to eliminate the [evil] whispering of the soul (*waswās al-nafs*) [prompting him] to sins (*khaṭāyā*),<sup>59</sup> otherwise he will fall into them. This is because the [errant] thoughts (*khawāṭir*) grow strong and become whisperings. And if the whisperings multiply, they become inroads (*ṭuruq*) for the Enemy [Satan] through the embellishment and seduction [of sin]. The most harmful thing for the repentant one is to establish the evil thought in his heart by giving attention to it, for it leads him to his destruction. Every cause that induces one to disobedience, or calls one's attention to disobedience, is [itself an act of] disobedience. And every cause that eventually leads one to carry out the sin is [itself] a sin, even if it is [legally] permissible (*mubāḥ*). Cutting off [the permissible act] is [in turn] an act of worship. This is from among the subtleties of acts (*daqā'iq al-a'māl*).<sup>60</sup>

Makkī thus traces the root cause of the sin back to its very first thought. Although the *khāṭir* is weak and insignificant in its own right, it is the seed of the sin. If watered by the attention of the heart, it will grow into a passion until the passion eventually manifests itself externally in the form of an act.<sup>61</sup> The seed must therefore be unearthed from the heart of the *tā'ib* as soon as it is planted by the winds of circumstance so no possibility of disobedience remains.<sup>62</sup> Unlike the *wārid*, the *khāṭir* can be either a source of good or evil.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Khaṭāyā* are literally 'faults', 'mistakes', or 'errors'. *Khaṭī'a* is a close equivalent of *vice*, whose primary meaning is 'fault', 'defect', or 'flaw'.

<sup>60</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 379.

<sup>61</sup> Compare with Hujvīrī, who proposes a slightly different order of psychological 'events' which lead to the sin: 'the devil cannot enter a man's heart until he desires to commit a sin; but when a certain quantity of passion appears the devil takes it and decks it out and displays it to the man's heart, and this is called suggestion (*waswās*). It begins from passion [*hawā*']'. See 'Alī b. 'Uthmān al-Jullābī Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (transl. Reynold A. Nicholson; Lahore: Islamic Book Service, [1911] 1992), 208. The overriding concern of both authors is nevertheless with effacing the very origin of the offence.

<sup>62</sup> Although Makkī does not address the origin of the thought itself, we can presume it may emerge either through an external stimulus or spontaneously from within.

<sup>63</sup> The Sufi psychologists typically differentiate between four sources of the *khawāṭir*. They can either come from God, the angels, the self/soul, or satans. All *khawāṭir* that call to meritorious works are 'divine (*ilāhī*)'. See 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfīyya* (ed. 'Abd al-'Āl Shāhīn; Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1992), 177; id., *Rashḥ al-zulāl* (ed. Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ; Cairo: al-Maktabat

Like Muḥāsibī before him, Makkī is acutely aware of the potential of permissible acts or sources of pleasure to change, in the proper circumstances, into causes of sin.<sup>64</sup> If the *tā'ib* becomes aware of this danger, what is typically allowed by the Law becomes, in his particular case, objectionable.<sup>65</sup> Through a process of *murāqaba* and self-reflection, the *tā'ib* should strain to identify the subtlest causes for his disobedience to God and then strive to uproot them from his soul.<sup>66</sup> Insofar as the intention behind this effort remains to overcome the propensity and inclination to sin, the entire process of self-examination and taming the lower soul becomes a form of *'ibāda*.

al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāth, 1995), 90; Murata, *Tao*, 294. For more on the *khawāṭir* in Makkī see the thirtieth chapter of the *Qūt*, i. 238–68. See also Murata's brief discussion of Makkī's chapter and a few translated excerpts in the *Tao*, 294–95. For Makkī's analysis of the *khawāṭir* which arise in prayer, see *Qūt*, ii. 202–7. For one of the earliest Sufi discussions of the concept, see Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī, *al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (ed. Yuḥannā al-Ḥabīb Ṣādir; Beirut: Dar Ṣādir, 2001), 62–3, 114. For more on the technical relation of the *khawāṭir* to the *wārid* and *waswasa*, see Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 196, and Sells's translation in *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 142–6. See also Hujvīrī, *Kashf*, 208; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 256; Sulamī, *Darajāt al-ṣādiqīn (Stations of the Righteous)* (transl. Kenneth Honnerkamp) in *Three Early Sufi Texts* (eds. Nicholas Heer and Kenneth Honnerkamp; Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2003), 121, 125–6. These references illustrate the emphasis the Sufis placed on discerning the origin of the incoming thoughts.

<sup>64</sup> al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' man anāba ilā Allāh* in *al-Tawba* (ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā; Egypt: Dār al-Ītisām, 1984), 29. Unlike Muḥāsibī, Makkī does not suggest that one deprive himself of permissible pleasures to punish the lower soul for its intransigent defiance. The self-lacerating mortification Muḥāsibī encourages for the *tā'ib*, though present in the *Qūt*, appears less pronounced.

<sup>65</sup> In another context Makkī quotes Sahl al-Tustarī, '*tawba* is not made sound except by [their] leaving much of what is legally permissible (*kathīr min al-ḥalāl*) out of fear that it might take them into other than it (i.e. *ḥarām*)', *Qūt*, i. 380. The saying also appears in the Tustarī *tafsīr* as a gloss on Q. 25. 70, where, instead of *kathīr min al-ḥalāl*, he speaks of *kathīr min al-mubāb*. Immediately after Sahl's aphorism in the *tafsīr*, 'Ā'isha is quoted as saying, 'Place a screen [or protection] of what is lawful (*sitr min al-ḥalāl*) between yourselves and what is unlawful'. This scrupulousness is thereby legitimated by no less an authority than the wife of the Prophet himself. See Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (eds. Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Sa'd and Sa'd Ḥasan Muḥammad 'Alī; Cairo: Dār al-Haram li-l-Turāth, 2004), 209.

<sup>66</sup> For Makkī's discussion of *murāqaba*, see *Qūt*, i. 188–200, i. 210–30. For *muhāsaba*, see 162–174. See also Qushayrī's chapter on *murāqaba* in the *Risāla*, 353–6.

## ON EFFORTLESSLY ABANDONING THE SIN

Even though Makkī considers struggling against the inclination to sin to be laudable, and a proof of the *tā'ib's* sincerity, the one who is able to renounce the sin without much exertion, has, in his eyes, a loftier standing before God.<sup>67</sup> This is because the absence of such struggle (*tanāzu'/mujāhada*) on his part reflects a higher level of purity and the presence of a submissive lower soul, at least in relation to the particular sin in question. The position Makkī takes on this particular matter was not, however, as he points out, shared by all of the early Sufis. He notes that they were divided over the question of whether the individual who had to struggle against a particular sin held a loftier position, in the eyes of God, or the one who was able to leave the sin without much effort.<sup>68</sup> Ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī (d. 844–5)<sup>69</sup> and the companions of Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 830)<sup>70</sup> held that the former held a higher position because he would be rewarded both for his *tawba* and his *mujāhada*. The one who did not have to struggle, on the other hand, received only the reward for abandoning the sin. In their eyes, the temptation to sin was not itself blameworthy. Rabāḥ b. 'Amr al-Qaysī, (d. 767)<sup>71</sup> however, as Makkī notes, and with whom he agrees, argued that the one whose lower soul puts up no resistance because “one of the signs of certainty and repose (*shāhid min shawāhid al-yaqīn wa-l-ṭuma'nīna*<sup>72</sup>)” has a higher standing.

<sup>67</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 369.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Cf. Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* (*K. al-Tawba*), iv. 64–5.

<sup>69</sup> For biographical entries, see Hujvīrī, *Kashf*, 118–19; Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 86–7.

<sup>70</sup> For a survey of the source material on Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, see Richard Gramlich, 'Abū Sulaymān ad-Dārānī', *Oriens*, 33 (1992): 22–85.

<sup>71</sup> For more on him see Massignon, *Essay*, 150.

<sup>72</sup> Makkī may be drawing a relation between *ṭuma'nīna* and *yaqīn* partly on the basis of Muḥāsibī's influence. In the *Risālat al-mustarshidīn* Muḥāsibī states that '*yaqīn* has a beginning and an end: its beginning is *ṭuma'nīna* and its end is finding sufficiency in being alone with God (*ifrād Allāh bi-l-kifāya*)'. See *Risālat al-mustarshidīn* (ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda; Aleppo: Maktab al-Maṭbū' at al-Islāmiyya, 1964), 92. The relation between 'certainty' and 'repose' can be traced back to the Qur'ān, in which Abraham asks for a direct sign from God 'so that my heart may be at rest (*li-yaṭma'inna qalbī*)' (Q. 2. 260). According to Sahl al-Tustarī, Abraham was not troubled by doubt but asked for a direct unveiling that would increase his *yaqīn*. See 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr: tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz* (ed. Sayyid Umrān; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2001), i. 79. The twelfth century Maybudī saw in Abraham's request a desire that his 'knowledge of certainty (*ilm al-yaqīn*) might become the eye of certainty (*ayn al-yaqīn*)'. Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'an Commentary of*

He is less likely to fall back into the sin considering the temptation to return is, in his case, altogether absent. The one who has to struggle against his inclination is not safeguarded from returning.<sup>73</sup> This debate was similar to another one, notes Makkī, regarding whether the individual who had to struggle to give charity in the way of God was more virtuous than the one who was generous without effort.<sup>74</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 922)<sup>75</sup> and his companions held that the former was in a better position since he would receive two rewards, one for his efforts and the other for his charity. Junayd on the other hand argued that the latter held a higher station because his effortless generosity (*sakhāwa*) was the fruit of *zuhd*. His generosity meant that he had already acquired a positive character trait which was wanting in the case of the former, whose struggle against worldly attachments signified that he had not yet attained to the same rank.<sup>76</sup>

For Makkī, although the struggle in the case of both individuals in the examples above is commendable, the one who is able to perform virtuous acts without internal impediments is more spiritually advanced, more secure from the sin, and therefore closer to God. We can presume that for Makkī such a person has already gone through, at some earlier stage in his life, the struggle which has brought him to the station at which he now stands. This remains a mere presumption, however,

*Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), 227. For a similar explanation put forward by an earlier but anonymous Sufi, see Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq*, i. 79; also Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, i. 120–1. Al-Anṣārī al-Harawī defined *ṭuma’nīna*, to which he devoted an entire chapter in the *Manāzil al-sā’irīn*, as a ‘repose (*sukūn*) which is strengthened by a true security similar to direct experience’: Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 227; al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Manāzil as-sā’irīn Sharḥ Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāsānī* (ed. Muḥsin Bīdārfar; Qum: Sharī‘at, 2nd edn., 1381 SH), 371. Most importantly, *ṭuma’nīna* comes from the same quadrilateral root as *muṭma’inna*. This latter term is used in the Qur’ān to describe the ‘soul at peace’, the *naḥs al-muṭma’inna* of Q. 89. 27, which for many Sufi psychologists represents the summit of human realization.

<sup>73</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 369. The debate was essentially one between the ulema of Iraq and Syria, with the Basrans giving preference to the *mujāhid tā’ib*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> For more on Abū l-‘Abbās b. ‘Aṭā’, see Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 115–16. Sulamī frequently quotes him in the *tafsīr*. See also Richard Gramlich, *Abī l-‘Abbās b. ‘Aṭā’: Sufi und Koranausleger* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1995).

<sup>76</sup> For a brief comparative analysis of the contrasting views of Junayd and Ibn ‘Aṭā’ on this and other areas of the mystical path, see Massignon, *Essay*, 151; id., *The Passion of al-Hallāj* (transl. Herbert Mason; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), i. 91–3.

because Makkī does not explicitly state it. Although Makkī's stance in this debate is, on the whole, persuasive, he does not address the question of the person who is able to renounce the sin, not because he has reached a level of self-mastery as a consequence of subjecting himself to a regimen of ascetic training and spiritual exercise (*riyāḍa*), but because of a peculiar God-given temperament. In this case, the position of Ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī and Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī's companions would appear more convincing. It would make little sense for God to deprive the repenting one who struggles to overcome a certain sin of a reward, while rewarding the one who does not have to struggle simply because he is born with an innate disinterest in the vice, or a weaker passion for it. In fact, he might, one could argue, be more accountable for falling into the sin to begin with. A person who has a strong appetite for food, for example, a characteristic he is born with, should not receive, one would think, a lesser reward for keeping a gluttonous impulse in check than the one who eats little because he lacks such cravings to begin with. Although it is unclear how Makkī would respond to these particular scenarios considering he does not address them, his general position, as already mentioned, is to privilege abandoning a sin or vice without exertion and inner resistance.

What is perhaps most interesting about this aspect of Makkī's discussion, brief as it is, is that it reflects the more universal significance of some of the issues that were being addressed in early Sufism. A similar question as the one touched on in the *Qūt* was dealt with in Western ethical philosophy,<sup>77</sup> starting primarily with Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he argued that a person could not be characterized by a particular virtue if the performance of that virtue did not come easily to him. In order to possess the virtue in question, the individual had to genuinely enjoy and find pleasure in it. There had to be an inner attraction for the virtue and a corresponding repulsion from the

<sup>77</sup> Susan Stark has succinctly expressed the proposition vigorously debated in Western philosophy from the time of Aristotle, namely, that 'it matters not only that a person do the right action, but also that she feel the right away'. See her 'Virtue and Emotion', *Nous* 35/3 (2001): 440–55. For further treatments of this question in Western ethical philosophy, see Jack Kelly, 'Virtue and Pleasure', *Mind* 82 (1973): 401–8; Gabriele Taylor and Sybil Wolfram, 'Virtues and Passions', *Analysis* 31/3 (1971): 76–83. The debate among the Sufis centred on determining which action is more virtuous, while in Western ethical philosophy, the parallel debate was centred on determining whether a virtuous action requires a corresponding emotion. The relation between these two issues is drawn out in the following analysis.

opposing vice for him to be qualified by the exemplary character trait.<sup>78</sup> For Aristotle, a man could not be called courageous if he felt fear in the face of circumstances that required bravery, or did not delight in acts of courage. Generosity, likewise, required that one found selflessness and munificence enjoyable. Thus he wrote that ‘moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains’.<sup>79</sup> If one did not experience joy in a particular virtue, he would be required to train himself, in Aristotle’s view, until he found it enjoyable. A virtue had to be learned in the same way as a craft or a particular art, through practice and repetition. He argued that just as men become builders by practising the craft of building, or lyre-players by continually playing the lyre, ‘so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts’.<sup>80</sup> The learning of virtues, however, did not consist of acquiring a theoretical knowledge of them, or mastering their external forms, but of habituating the soul to find them pleasurable. Virtue was therefore something which had to be acquired through practice and repetition. It would be inappropriate to characterize someone as virtuous who was undergoing a process of habituation just as one could not be called a craftsman until he learned the particular craft in question.

Aristotle’s understanding of the ideal virtuous man is not entirely different from the realized Sufi in Makkī’s thought, at least in relation to the question of the soul’s inclination and attraction to what is virtuous. Just as for Aristotle the ethically accomplished man finds it pleasurable to do all that is good, the advanced Sufi, for Makkī, finds obedience to God pleasant. His soul is so trained through *mujāhada* that what he may have found to be difficult at the outset of his spiritual journey comes effortlessly near the end, and becomes a source of inner joy. The ‘spiritual athleticism’ that he has undergone, and which has brought him to his present state, is, in many ways, similar to the habituation Aristotle speaks of. Both the virtuous man and the ideal Sufi possess a purity of soul actualized through laborious practice. The performance of good

<sup>78</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (transl. David Ross; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 1104b4–b6; Taylor and Wolfram, ‘Virtues and Passions’, 76.

<sup>79</sup> The full passage in Aristotle runs, ‘We must take as a sign of states of character the pleasure or pain that supervenes upon acts; for the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent, and he who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward. For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains’ (1104b4–b10).

<sup>80</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a–b.

deeds, and the avoidance of evil ones, is second-nature to both of them, ingrained into the substance of their beings. For both Makkī and Aristotle, it is not enough simply to know a virtue, or to practise it with a heart that delights in its exact opposite. The one who strives to attain ethical or spiritual perfection must actualize the latent goodness of his soul, so that it comes to find all that is morally good to be sweet, and all that is evil to be repugnant.

Despite these similarities, however, for Makkī the performance of a good act without struggle does not mean that the act itself cannot be considered virtuous or good. If someone is grudgingly generous, he is still generous because of the effort he makes to do what is commendable. Aristotle, we know, would have disagreed. In his view such a man would simply be on his way to acquiring the virtue. He was habituating himself—as he should—to eventually find it pleasant, even though he could not yet be properly qualified by it. Insofar as they both consider the one who does what is good without struggle to stand at a higher rank of ethical and spiritual development, Aristotle and Makkī are in agreement, just as they are about the thoroughly lamentable state of the one who is repelled by virtue and makes no effort to pursue it.

A slightly different perspective on this question of inner inclination and virtue was articulated in the Western philosophical tradition by Immanuel Kant.<sup>81</sup> He presents the case of a man who on account of some personal sorrow ‘which extinguishes all sympathy for the plight of others’,<sup>82</sup> manages to show them benevolence out of duty to the good. This act, in Kant’s eyes, has more moral worth than the kindness shown by a man naturally disposed to such sympathetic conduct, who acts simply on account of a good tempered and congenial predilection. For the German philosopher it is not the inclination and feeling to do what is good that makes an act morally commendable, but carrying it out solely out of a sense of duty to the ‘categorical imperatives’ of the universal moral law.<sup>83</sup> The ideal scenario is of a man who carries it out against

<sup>81</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?* (transl. Lewis White Beck; New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959), 14–15; Taylor and Wolfram, ‘Virtues and Passions’, 76.

<sup>82</sup> Kant, *Foundations*, 14–15.

<sup>83</sup> This law for Kant is a rational law. In so far as he places reason at the very centre of morality, his ethical philosophy comes very close to that of the Mu‘tazilis. For a recent study of Mu‘tazili ethics, see Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Mu‘tazilite Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). See also Richard Martin, Mark Woodward, and Dwi Atmaja, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu‘tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).



inner resistance with no personal benefit. For Kant only then can one know that it is accomplished out of a sense duty and not mere feeling.<sup>84</sup> Insofar as Kant presents the man who struggles against his own urge to do what is right as a model of virtue, his view comes close to the one which Makkī attributes to Ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī and Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī's disciples, when they argue that the *tā'ib* who leaves a sin with struggle is superior to the one who leaves it without exertion. The struggle to do what is right signals for both Kant and this group of Sufis the seriousness of the agent's commitment to what is morally right.

What we can gather from this comparison is the universal significance of many of the debates that were taking place in early Sufism and which are addressed in the *Qūt*. The Sufis were not simply concerned with issues unique to their own community but with ethical questions which had broad relevance and could be intelligible to those outside of Muslim civilization. Even though the vocabulary of these debates was, for the most part, derived from Islamic Revelation, it is not impossible to extrapolate the universal import of these debates from their specific religious and cultural contexts.

## DOES TAWBA EVER COME TO AN END?

Despite the practical concerns of the *Qūt*, a feature of the text which we have repeatedly drawn attention to in the course of this article, a few of Makkī's analyses broach areas typically explored in greater detail in more advanced mystical texts. Near the end of his chapter, shortly before his classification of the seven sins which the aspirant must avoid, or, if committed, immediately repent of, he goes into a short discussion of the requirements of *tawba naṣūḥ*, the 'sincere repentance' of Q. 66. 8. One cannot, for Makkī, stand among the ranks of the *tawwābīn* loved by God<sup>85</sup> without fulfilling these requirements. The ten conditions that Makkī opened his chapter with lead up to and in a sense culminate in this complementary list, the first nine of which summarize many of the

<sup>84</sup> Kant, *Foundations*, 14–15. The reasons which for Kant make it so difficult for us to understand the motives behind apparently virtuous actions are not unlike those which Ghazālī presents in the *Kitāb al-nīya wa-l-ikhlāṣ wa-l-ṣidq* of the *Ihyā'*. Both Kant and Ghazālī provide four examples of humans actions to illustrate the complexity of human intention; cf. Kant, *Foundations*, 9–14; Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, v. 112–14.

<sup>85</sup> See Q. 2. 222. This is the only occasion in the Qur'ān where the human being is referred to by the emphatic *tawwāb*. In the other ten instances the *mubāligha* form is used only of God.

themes he has explored in the chapter. The main intention behind these conditions is to ensure that the *tā'ib*'s abandonment of what he has left for God be total and uncompromising. The *tawbāt* or 'repentances' for *tawba naṣūh*, after the *tā'ib* abandons the sin, are that he must turn away from (2) speaking of the sin, (3) of all of its causes, (4) of whatever is similar to the sin, (5) of thinking about what he has left, (6) of listening to those who speak of it, (7) of his aspiration or yearning for it, (8) of his deficiencies in fulfilling the rights of *tawba*,<sup>86</sup> and (9) of not completely desiring the face of God in his *tawba*.<sup>87</sup> These nine requirements are confined to the themes that he has explored, in greater and lesser detail, over the course of the chapter. Makkī in a sense reiterates the steps the *tā'ib* must take to turn away from the sin both externally and internally.

It is in the tenth condition however that he introduces a new theme—central to many Sufi explorations—of the never-ending cycle of repentance. Makkī states that the final requirement of the aspiring *tawwāb* ('oft-repenting one') is that he should repent of becoming complacent with his repentance and bringing it to a close.<sup>88</sup> According to this last stipulation, the process of *tawba* should never reach an end. The reason for this, argues Makkī, is that even after the aspirant is able to turn away from the particular sin, or sins, he is still tainted by deficiencies and less perceptible faults in his return to God. Following his abandonment of the sin or vice, he should repent of his shortcomings in fulfilling what is demanded by the right of Divine Lordship (*min taqṣīrihi 'an al-qiyām bi-ḥaqq al-rubūbiyya*), and then, of what is demanded by the reality of his vision or witnessing of God (*min taqṣīrihi 'an al-qiyām bi-ḥaqqat mushāhadatihi*).<sup>89</sup> To put it less opaquely, let us recall that *tawba* has two dimensions: turning away from the sin, on the one hand, and turning towards God, on the other. It comprises an 'aversion' and a complementary 'conversion', or spiritual 'inversion', in which one labours to shift his focus from the created realm to his Origin. Makkī states that even when one succeeds in turning away from his sin, he will still fall short in the second half of *tawba*, in his turn towards God and in his *mushāhada* of His magnificence. This is a higher stage of *tawba*, and one which can only be realistically pursued by one who is not tried by more elementary sins which afflict the common lot of believers. But for those who have already left them, their focus should be on perfecting repentance, and this perfection is only possible when the *tā'ib* realizes that since repentance is an unending process, he can never fulfill the

<sup>86</sup> This, we can assume, would include shortcomings in *iṣlāḥ*.

<sup>87</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 385.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

conditions of *tawba naṣūḥ*. Paradoxically, only when he realizes this fact, that he is never free of its demands, does he fulfill its requirements and become a *tawwāb*.

The underlying reason that the return to God through *tawba* is never ending, at least in this world, is because of the inability of the human being to attain moral and spiritual perfection. Although the sins that one turns away from become subtler and more difficult to detect as the aspirant matures on the Path, they never disappear. No one is ever free of faults, not even the most advanced of Sufis. 'For everything he witnesses other than God', says Makkī, 'there is a sin, and in every rest he finds in other than Him, there is blame'.<sup>90</sup> Even the mystic who is absorbed in his contemplation of God will have to turn in *tawba* from a contemplation that is less perfect to one that is more perfect. This is why Makkī says that ultimately 'there is no end to the repentance of the enlightened one (*lā nihāya li-tawbat al-ʿārif*)'.<sup>91</sup> Since even the prophets did not shy away from *tawba*, how, asks Makkī, can those who do not stand at the prophetic rank feel absolved of the obligation to repent? He writes:

For every station there is a repentance, and for every state from a station there is a repentance, and for every act of witnessing (*mushāhada*) and unveiling (*mukāshafa*) there is a repentance. This is the state of the *tāʾib munīb* who is drawn close (*muqarrab*) to God and loved by Him (*ʿindahū ḥabīb*). This is the station of the one who is tried and oft-repenting (*muftan tawwāb*), meaning, tried and tested by things and yet oft-repenting (*tawwāb*) to God most High.<sup>92</sup>

On the basis of this passage, Makkī's position on the obligation to repent in all circumstances seems uncompromising. However, earlier in the chapter Makkī broaches a related subject, in which he takes a view that might appear to conflict, at least on the surface, with the position he takes above. In response to the debate that occurred in early Sufism as to whether *tawba* should entail never forgetting one's sin, or never remembering it, Makkī acknowledges that the latter view represents a position more appropriate for advanced Sufis. He sees turning away from the remembrance of sins to engage in the remembrance of God to be a higher form of *tawba*, but not necessarily appropriate for novices. Thus he argues:

Some of them have said that the reality of repentance is that you [always] place the sin before your two eyes. Another (group) has said that the reality of repentance is that you forget your sin. These are the approaches of the two

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 385–6.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 385.

<sup>92</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 385.

groups, and the states of the folk of the two stations (*abl al-maḳāmayn*). As for the remembrance of sins: the way of the aspirants (*al-murīdīn*) and the state of the fearful ones (*khāʿifīn*), brings forth for them, through the remembrance of sins, perpetual grief (*al-ḥuzn al-dāʿim*) and an inescapable fear. As for the forgetting of sins (because one is) preoccupied with prayers (*al-adhkār*) and what one puts forward by way of an increase in acts of worship (*mā yastaqbilu min mazīd al-ā māl*), this is the way of the enlightened ones and the state of the lovers [of God]. Their goal is witnessing Divine Unity (*shahādat al-tawḥīd*), and this is a station of knowing (*maḳām fī l-tāʿarruf*). The goal of the first group (on the other hand) is observing the boundaries and limits (*al-tawqīf wa-l-taḥdīd*), and this is a station of propriety (*maḳām fī l-tāʿrīf*) [...but...] the station of witnessing Divine unity (*maḳām shahādat al-tawḥīd*) is superior, in the eyes of the enlightened ones, to observing propriety (*mushādat al-tāʿrīf*).<sup>93</sup>

If Makkī sees immersing oneself in the contemplation of God to be superior to remembering one's sins, then does his view that one must always strive to eliminate his shortcomings, regardless of the level of his mystical standing, lead to a contradiction, or at least a tension, in his views? It might, if we understand the second position to amount to an abandoning of *tawba* altogether, as many of the Sufis did who used Junayd's position to develop the concept of *tark al-tawba*. For these Sufis, forgetting one's sins because of one's absorption in the contemplation of God meant, essentially, that one had reached a stage where one was no longer preoccupied either with oneself, or one's faults. Since *tawba* necessitated giving attention to one's faults in order to turn away from them, forgetting one's faults meant, for these Sufis, also to forget one's *tawba*, or to abandon *tawba* altogether. Ibn ʿArabī argued that the *tāʿīb* is in a state of distance from his Divine origin because he is preoccupied with a return through *tawba*.<sup>94</sup> The repentant ones, he said, are the exiled ones, because only those in a state of exile (*ḥāl al-ghurba*) strive to come back to their home. 'There is no exile for the one who has returned to his family', wrote Ibn ʿArabī, 'except for the absent one (*al-ghāʿīb*), and the absent one is in exile, and the exiled ones are the repentant ones'.<sup>95</sup> Sometimes this concept of *tark al-tawba* was also expressed through the idea of repenting of repentance, of *tawbat al-tawba* or *al-tawba min al-tawba*, as in the case of the Andalusian Ibn al-ʿArīf (d. 1141), when he poetically declared, 'many have repented, but no one has repented of repentance but I (*qad tāba aqwām kathīr, wa-mā*

<sup>93</sup> Makkī, *Qūt*, i. 368. Cf. Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* (*K. al-Tawba*), iv. 65–6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, iii. 215–16.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, iii. 216.

*tāba min al-tawba illā anā*).<sup>96</sup> Ruwaym (d. 915)<sup>97</sup> was perhaps one of the earliest Sufi figures to speak in such terms. For Sarrāj, his expression conveyed the fundamental import of Junayd's definition:

As for the response of Junayd, may God have mercy on him, that [*tawba* entails] one forget his sin, it refers to the repentance of the realized ones (*al-muḥaqqiqīn*) who do not recall their sins as a result of what has overcome their hearts of the Majesty of God, and of the persistence of their remembrance of Him. This is similar to [the response of] Ruwaym b. Ahmad, may God have mercy on him, when he was asked about *tawba* and said that it is repenting of repentance (*al-tawba min al-tawba*).<sup>98</sup>

Since to repent of something is to leave it, by drawing a parallel between Ruwaym's words and those of Junayd, Sarrāj saw that Junayd's definition of *tawba* could imply turning away from repentance altogether. It is true that many authorities, including Sarrāj, understood that *al-tawba min al-tawba* could also mean repenting of the deficiencies in one's repentance, which is to say, repenting of falling short in fulfilling its requirements. This, for example, is how Kalābādhī explained Ruwaym's words. He wrote that what Ruwaym meant was no different from Rābi'a al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 801) when she said, 'I seek forgiveness from my little sincerity in my saying, "I seek forgiveness from God"'.<sup>99</sup> But although this later interpretation of *al-tawba min al-tawba* was common,<sup>100</sup> it did not necessarily preclude the first one. One could understand the expression in both senses, commensurate with the level of the mystic.

<sup>96</sup> Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, iii. 215. See also the 241st *mawāqif* of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī's *Kitāb al-mawāqif* (Dār al-Yaqza, 1966), ii. 544. He is most likely citing Ibn al-ʿArif indirectly through Ibn ʿArabī, whose influence on his own discussion of *tawba*, as well as the *Mawāqif* in general, is clear.

<sup>97</sup> For a survey of the source material on him, see Gramlich, *Abī l-ʿAbbās b. ʿAtāʾ*; id., *Alte Vorbilder des Sufitums* (Weisbaden: Harrasowitz, 1995–96), i. 447–82.

<sup>98</sup> ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAlī al-Sarrāj, *K. al-Lumāʾ fī al-taṣawwuf* (ed. Reynold Nicholson; Leiden: Brill, 1914), 43; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 199–200. See also Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 213

<sup>99</sup> Kalābādhī, *Taʿarruf*, 64; cf. A. J. Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Ṣufīs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 83.

<sup>100</sup> So common that even an astute modern scholar such as Renard restricts his explanation of Ruwaym's definition to this interpretation when he writes, 'others such as Ruwaym, emphasize that genuine repentance requires that one repent even of repenting itself, *as if warning of the danger of complacency and of self-congratulatory willingness to rest in this humble beginning* [*italics mine*]'. See John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press), 199–200.

There were figures who objected to the first interpretation, such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) who vehemently criticized the idea of abandoning *tawba* altogether in his commentary on Anṣārī's own advice in the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* to 'repent of repentance'. Ibn al-Qayyim stated that 'repentance is of the greatest of good deeds (*tawba min a'ẓam al-ḥasanāt*) and to repent of good deeds is of the greatest of evil deeds, nay it is [outright] disbelief (*bal huwa al-kufr*)'. Although he accepted the idea of *tawba min al-tawba*, what it meant for him is that the individual 'repent of the shortcoming of repentance (*fa-yatūbu min nuqṣān al-tawba*)'.<sup>101</sup> What is significant for our purposes, however, is that numerous Sufi authorities interpreted Junayd's words to imply the possibility of leaving repentance at a certain level of mystic realization.

Despite these interpretations of Junayd, he himself did not explicitly speak of turning away from or abandoning *tawba* based on our sources. When he said that *tawba* is to forget one's sin, he simply defined the *tawba* of advanced mystics, but without stipulating that the mystic should ever leave *tawba* altogether. By preferring Junayd's definition of *tawba* for more realized individuals, Makkī does not necessarily contradict himself. The apparent inconsistency is based on an interpretation of Junayd's definition that is not necessarily required by his own words. It is not surprising that Makkī does not quote Ruwaym anywhere in his chapter on *tawba*. Since both Kalābādhī and Sarrāj in their own works, authored shortly around the same time as the *Qūt*, cite Ruwaym's words in their much shorter chapters on *tawba*, we can presume that Makkī, though familiar with his expression, wished to avoid any confusion that quoting him might create in the minds of his readers.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize the results of our analysis of Makkī's treatment of *tawba*, it is, as we have seen, first and foremost directed at the practical needs of the spiritual aspirant. To this end he stipulates a number of requirements for repentance to be sound and therefore acceptable to God. *Tawba* is obligatory for all sins because without it the sinner stands in the perilous state of potentially facing the consequences of his misdeeds in the form of divine punishment. Unless God decides to forgive these offences out of

<sup>101</sup> For Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya *tawba min al-tawba* can include *tawba* for witnessing one's *tawba* as if it were one's own and not the result of a divine gift. See *Madārij al-sālikīn bayna manāzil Iyyāka nā'budu wa-iyyāka nastā'im* (ed. 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Nāṣir al-Julayyil; Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 1423 [2002–3]), i. 374–5.

his unlimited Mercy, *tawba* is the only way to avoid these consequences. The requirements of repentance, as we have also seen, are both external and internal. Externally, the *tā'ib* is called to avoid those circumstances which might tempt him to repeat the offence, while internally he must strive to eradicate all the impulses which attract him to the sin. Moreover, he must feel regret for his wrong, strive to rectify his past mistake, and follow the misdeed with pious acts as a display of the seriousness of his commitment to *tawba*. The entire process is difficult and laborious and calls for patience, struggle, and beseeching divine help. We can better appreciate how Makkī unifies and interrelates the virtues within his mystical psychology by observing how the process of repentance integrates these other key virtues. Although Makkī does touch on some themes which are dealt with in greater detail in more advanced mystical texts, his primary focus, as we have seen, is to aid the aspirant in his spiritual maturation and journey to God. His extensive use of Qur'ānic verses, Prophetic traditions, and sayings and anecdotes of the early Sufis legitimates, ultimately, the preliminary stages of the Sufi path.