

AUSPICES OF DIVINE LOVERS

Sawānih al-'ushshāq

Selections from *Sawānih al-'ushshāq* of Aḥmad al-Ghazzālī Translated for this volume by Joseph Lumbard.¹

7

Love comes and goes, it has increase, decrease and perfection, and the lover has states within it. In the beginning he may deny it, then he may submit to it. Then he may be disgraced and again take to the path of denial. These states change according to the moment and the individual; sometimes love increases and the lover denies it, sometimes love decreases and the one who possesses it denies the decrease. For love must open the castle of the lover to have a house for itself within, so that the lover becomes tame and surrenders.

I said to the heart, 'Do not tell the secret to the companion!
Beware! Tell no more of love's tale.'

The heart said to me, 'Don't say this again.
Expose your body to affliction and say no more.'

8

(1) The special character of man is this, is it not enough that he was beloved before being a lover? This is no small virtue. 'He loves them'² brought down so much

1. There are many printed editions of the *Sawānih*. The four most reliable editions are: *Sawānih*, ed. Aḥmad Mujāhid, in *Majmū'a-ye āthār-i fārsī-ye Aḥmad Ghazzālī*, pp. 89–173; *Sawānih*, ed. Naṣrullāh Pourjavady (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād Farhang-i Īrān, 1359HS/1980); *Sawānih*, in *Ganjīnih-i 'Irfān*, ed. Ḥāmid Rabbānī (Tehran: Ganjīnih, 1973); *Swānih*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, 1368HS/1989). The edition by Pourjavady is based upon that of Ritter and supplemented by additional manuscripts which predate those upon which Ritter relied. Though five editions were published between those of Ritter and Pourjavady, none surpassed Ritter's. The edition of Pourjavady can in some ways be seen as a supplement to Ritter's, as he admittedly builds upon Ritter's extant apparatus. Mujāhid's edition has a critical apparatus adopted in part from other editions. It is, however, nowhere near the quality of Ritter's apparatus. Rabbānī's edition does not provide an apparatus, but in several instances Rabbānī provides readings which make more sense than those of Pourjavady or Ritter. For this translation I will therefore rely upon the editions of Pourjavady, Ritter and Rabbānī. In re-rendering the *Sawānih* into English, I am deeply indebted to Naṣrullāh Pourjavady for his previous English translation; *Sawānih: Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits, The Oldest Sufi Treatise on Love* (London, 1986).

2. This is a reference to the famous Qur'ānic verse, 'He loves them and they love Him' (5:54).

sustenance for that beggar before his arrival that he continues to partake of it for eternity upon eternity, yet it remains.

(2) O noble lad, the sustenance which is sent down in pre-temporality, how can it be received fully except in post-temporality? No, rather contingency can only receive the sustenance which eternity placed in pre-temporality completely in post-temporality.

(3) O noble lad, pre-temporality has reached here, post-temporality can never reach an end. The sustenance that descends will never reach complete exhaustion. If you gain insight into the secret of your moment, know that the ‘two bows length’¹ of pre-temporality and post-temporality are your heart and your moment.²

9

(1) The secret of this—that love never shows the whole of its face to anyone—is that it is the bird of pre-temporality. What has come here is the traveller of post-temporality. Here it does not show its face to the vision of contingent beings, for not every house deserves to be a nest for it, as it has always had a nest in the abode of the magnificence of pre-temporality.³ Now and then it flies with pre-temporality and hides behind the veil of the curtain of its majesty and greatness. It has never

Aḥmad Ghazzālī sees this as an expression of the beginning of all human love through a pact with the Divine. He explains this love-pact by referring to the Qur’ānic story of man’s pre-temporal covenant with God made while all of mankind was still in Adam’s loins. As the Qur’ān states: And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we testify’—lest You should say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘As for us, we were heedless of this’ (7:172).

The day of this covenant is known in the Persian Sufi tradition as *rūz-i alast* (the day of ‘Am I not [your Lord]’). It is understood by Aḥmad Ghazzālī and others as a covenant fashioned in love and through love. When God said to man ‘Am I not your Lord’ this was His love for them. When man responded by saying ‘yes’ (*balā*) this was his love for God. From this perspective, only through God’s making him beloved did man become a lover, and all of man’s love and striving for God originates from God’s pre-temporal love for man. Man’s love for God is thus the self-same love which God has for man. Although man’s love finds expression in the temporal order, its origin is pre-temporal and its goal is post-temporal.

1. This is a reference to the famous night journey and ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad, wherein he is said to have been ‘two-bows length’ from God; ‘He was two bows length or nearer. Then God revealed to him what He revealed’ (53:9–10). For Ghazzālī, the two bows represent the arc of spiritual descent from pre-temporality and the arc of spiritual ascent to post-temporality. Together they comprise the entire circle of existence. Pre-temporality is the point from which the arc of descent begins and post-temporality is the point to which the arc of ascent returns. As one descends into the corporeal world, one actualizes various modes of manifestation, but in order for these to be integrated and unified one must return upon the path of ascent.

2. To say that the path of descent from pre-temporality and the path of ascent to post-temporality are the spiritual wayfarer’s heart and moment is to say that one’s true nature is determined by where one stands in the process of spiritual reintegration.

3. i.e. the pure human heart.

shown the face of beauty completely to the vision of knowledge and will never reveal it.

(2) Because of this secret, if for a moment one sees the locus of its trust,¹ it would be the moment at which he is liberated from the attachments and obstacles of ‘mundaneness’ and released from the imagination of knowledge, the calculation of fantasy, the philosophy of imagination and the espionage of the senses.

Bring what draws the hearts of the friends together.
Like a whale draw sorrow from my heart with one breath.

When I draw the sword of wine from the sheath of the goblet,
time must suffer from me.
Bring the son of the Magian and give it to the old Magian.

For Rustam is carried only by Rustam’s Raksh.²
For those two are both from ‘thereness’, not ‘hereness’.

10

Love is its own bird and its own nest, its own essence and its own attribute, its own wing and its own wind, its own arc and its own flight, its own hunter and its own game, its own direction and what is directed there, its own seeker and its own goal. It is its own beginning and its own end, its own king and its own subject, its own sword and its own sheath. It is garden as well as tree, branch as well as fruit, nest as well as bird.

In the sorrow of love we are our own consoler;
We are frenzied and bewildered by our own affair,

Enamoured by our own fortune,
Ourselves the hunters, ourselves the game.

11

Beauty is one thing and belovedness is another. The glance of beauty is one thing and the coquetry of belovedness is another. The coquetry of beauty has no face toward another and has no connection with what is outside. But as for the coquetry

1. i.e. realizes the moment of belovedness on the day of the pre-temporal covenant—*rūz-i alast*. See note 1 above.

2. Rustam is an character in Firdowsi’s *Shāh-nāma* who was of such power and stature that only his steed *Rakhsh* could carry him.

of belovedness, amorous gestures, flirting, and coquetry, that is a reality which derives its support from the lover, without him they will find no way. There is no doubt that the beloved is here dependent upon the lover.

A Story:

There was a king with whom the stove-tender of the public bath fell in love, and the vizier informed the king. The king wanted to punish him. But the vizier said, 'You are known for justice. It is not proper that you punish him for love and a deed in which there is no choice. Punishing him for what is beyond his will is far from just.'

It so happened that the king's route passed by the stove of that poor man, who would sit in that place everyday waiting until the king would pass by. The king when reaching that point would join the glance of belovedness to the glance of beauty and the vizier noticed this. Until one day the king came and the stove-tender was not sitting there. The king had assumed the glance of belovedness; that glance of belovedness required the glimpse of the need of love. When he was not there the king was left naked, for he did not find the place of acceptance. Anger overtook the king. The vizier was shrewd and perceived what had happened. He bowed down and said, 'I said that punishing him would have no meaning, for no harm came from him. Now we know for ourselves that his need has to be answered.'

(2) O noble lad, the glance of belovedness in beauty is like salt in the pot in order that the perfection of charm (*milāḥat*) be connected to the perfection of beauty.

O noble lad, what would you say if it was said to the king that he is free of you and has taken up with another and become his lover? I do not know if any jealousy would arise from within him or not.

O friend, do what you like but do not be the companion of another.
For then there will no longer be anything left for me.

(3) Love is the connecting band; it has an attachment to both sides. If its relation to the side of the lover becomes sound a connection is necessary from both sides, for it itself is the prelude to oneness.

The secret of the face of everything is the point of His connection and a sign is hidden in creation, and beauty is the sign of creation. The secret of the face is that which faces love. So long as one does not see that secret, he will never see the sign of creation and beauty. That face is the beauty of 'and the face of your Lord remains'.

Other than Him there is no face, for 'all that dwells upon the earth will perish.'¹ And that face is naught, as you know.

13

(1) The eye of beauty looks away from its own beauty, for it cannot find the perfection of its own beauty except in the mirror of the love of the lover. In this way beauty must have a lover so that the beloved can take nourishment from its own beauty in the mirror of love and the seeking of the lover. This is a great secret and the secret of many secrets.

My increasing in drunkenness from her face was not without cause.
There was wine, the cup and no rival to joy.

Forgive me if you say it was you.
It was she who was searching, for I sought nothing.

(2) So the lover himself is closer to the beauty of the beloved than the beloved, for the beloved takes nourishment through the intermediary of the lover from her own beauty and loveliness. Thus the lover is more a self than the self of the beloved. That is why the beloved becomes jealous of the lover because of his vision of the beloved. Regarding this reality it has been said:

O Lord, take justice for me from Alexander's soul,
For he has made a mirror in which You behold Yourself.

(3) Here where the lover becomes more the beloved than the beloved, the wonders of the attachments of connection are prepared as a condition for the non-attachment of the lover with himself. Love's connection will reach to the place where the lover claims that he himself is the beloved: 'I am the Real'² and 'Glory be to me'³ are this point. And if he is in the very state of banishment, separation and unwantedness, he imagines that he has no place and that he himself is the beloved.

There is so much coyness in my head from your love
That I mistakenly think you are a lover for me.

1. Qur'an 55:26. Beauty is the means whereby the lover witnesses the manifestation of Absolute Love in the delimited form of the beloved. The beauty of each thing is called by Ghazzālī 'the brand of creation'. This beauty is the secret face which faces Absolute Love and by virtue of which all things truly exist. For if they did not have a face turned towards the absolute, there would be no way for them to derive their existence from it.

2. A famous saying of Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (d. 309/922).

3. A famous saying of Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 261/875).

Either union with you pitches a tent by my door,
Or I have lost my head in complete error.

14

The beloved said to the lover: 'Come! Become me! For if I become you, then the beloved will be in need, the lover will increase and need and necessity will become greater. Yet when you become me the beloved will increase, all will be beloved not lover, all will be coyness not need, all will be finding not necessity, all will be wealth not poverty, all will be remedy not helplessness.'

15

(1) This affair will reach a place where he will become jealous of himself and jealous of his own eye. Regarding this reality they have said:

O friend, I do not take you to be the friend himself.
Being envious of you, I take not the vision of myself as a friend.

I am sad not because I am not with you in my quarter,
I am sad because I am not with you in the same skin.

(2) And this point will sometimes reach a place where if one day the beloved becomes more beautiful the lover will become distressed and angry. So long as one has not tasted this meaning is difficult to understand.

16

(1) In reality love is affliction. Intimacy and comfort in it are strange and borrowed, since separation in love is really duality and union is really one. The rest is all the imagination of union, not the reality of union. Regarding this it is said:

Love is affliction. I am the one who does not withdraw from affliction.
When love is asleep, I stir up evil.

My friends told me to withdraw from affliction.
Affliction is the heart, how can I withdraw from the heart.

The tree of love grows from within the heart.
When it needs water, I pour it from the eyes.

Although love is pleasant, and unpleasant is love's sorrow,
I am happy when I mix the two together.

17

(1) Since love is affliction, its nourishment in knowledge is from the persecution which the beloved performs. There where there is no knowledge, love itself is the reality of its nourishment from oneness.

(2) Until there is proof for love and until a connection [between the lover and the beloved] is the necessity of the moment, a conflict chosen by the friend is more desired than ten reconciliations.

(3) The beggar of love is combined from rebuke and conflict, so that the heart will take to guarding its breaths, for it cannot disregard anything. Until at last it eats regret and bites his hand because of the regret of separation and strikes the top of regret with the hand of remorse.

When I was in union with my idol,
I was always in strife and conflict with her.

When distance came I was content with imagination.
O wheel! Punish me well for my interloping.

Thus it is among conflict, strife, peace, reconciliation, coquetry and glancing that this discourse will be established.¹

18

(1) To be self through one's own self is one thing, and to be self through one's own beloved is another. To be self through one's own self is the unripeness of the beginning of love. When on the path of ripening he is self and arrives from self, then he has reached beyond her. Then he will reach beyond the self with her and beyond her.

(2) Here is where annihilation becomes the *qibla* of subsistence, the pilgrim begins to circumambulate the holy Ka'ba, and like a moth connects to annihilation from the frontier of subsistence.² This is not contained in knowledge except

1. i.e. the discussion of spiritual wayfaring is a discussion of these states, until one reaches union which is beyond all spiritual states.

2. *Fanā'* (annihilation) and *baqā'* (subsistence) are considered by many to be the final two stages of the spiritual path. As Sachiko Murata observes: 'Annihilation designates the purification of the self and the elimination of the constricting limitations of ignorance and forgetfulness; or the transformation of blameworthy character traits into praiseworthy character traits. It is usually paired with 'subsistence' (*baqā'*), which is the actualization of the divine attributes in whose image the human being was created.' *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light* (Albany, 2000), p. 56.

through allegory. Perhaps these verses which I composed in my youth indicate this reality:

So long as the world-revealing cup is in my hand,¹
Out of wisdom, the highest wheel is subservient to me.

So long as the Ka'ba of non-being is the *qibla* of my being,
The most sober man of the world is intoxicated with me.

(3) 'This is my Lord',² 'I am the Real', and 'Glory be to me' are all the chameleon of this coloration (*talwīn*) and are far from stability (*tamkīn*).³

19

(1) So long as he is his own self through himself, he is subject to the edicts of separation and union, receiving and rejecting, expansion (*baṣṭ*) and contraction (*qabḍ*), and sorrow and joy, and he is captive of the moment. When the moment overcomes him he must follow the edict of the moment's colour, whatever edict the moment has. The moment paints the lover according to its colour and edict and he will belong to the moment. But in the path of annihilation from self, these edicts are wiped out and these opposites are removed, because its origin transcends cause and desire.

(2) When the lover comes back from it (love) to his self his way to self is from it and through it. Since his way to self is from it and through it, these edicts do not apply to him. What would the edicts of separation and union do here? When would acceptance and rejection entangle him? When would expansion and contraction and sorrow and joy go around the court of his empire?⁴ As these verses say:

We sought the foundation of the universe and the origin of the world.
And passed easily beyond cause and caused.

1. The 'world-revealing cup' (*jām-i jahān namā*) is a legendary possession of the pre-Islamic Persian king Jamshīd. It came to be used by Sufis as a symbol for the heart of the gnostic-lover which, purified of ignorance and forgetfulness, is able to behold all things as they truly are.

2. Qur'ān 6:76–8. This is a reference to the story of Abraham who said of a star, then of the moon and then of the sun 'This is my Lord', then denied each as it set until he affirmed pure monotheism.

3. The degree of stability (*tamkīn*) is considered by many Sufis to be the highest degree of spiritual realization. Here the lover has transcended the degree of coloration (*talwīn*) of moving from state to state in the lover-beloved duality and is now in the stability (*tamkīn*) of love wherein nothing but pure love remains.

4. This paragraph refers to the state beyond the first paragraph. The first is seeing the images of the beloved on the surface of the ocean of love. The second is being completely immersed in the ocean, beyond all forms and imaginations.

And that black light which is beyond the point of *lā*,
Beyond this too we passed, neither this nor that remained.¹

(3) Here he is the master of the moment.² When he descends to the sky of the world he will overcome the moment, the moment will not overcome him, and he will be free from the moment.

(4) Yes, his being is to her and from her.³ Perhaps this is the separation of this state, and his annihilation is from her and in her. They call this 'hiding in the essence of *illa*.'⁴ Sometimes they call it being a hair in the beloved's tress. As has been said:

I have suffered so much cruelty from your tress,
That I have become a hair from those two curved tresses.

What wonder from this then if I stay together with you?
What does one hair add or remove from your tress?

1. These verses are most likely by Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Bustī (d. c. 485/1092). They have circulated widely in Persian Sufi literature. Aḥmad Ghazzālī's foremost disciple, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī cites them twice in the *Tamhīdāt*, ed. 'Afīf 'Usayrān (Tehran, 1962), p. 119 and p. 249, and is the first to attribute them to Bustī; Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī cites them twice in *Kashf al-asrār*, ed. 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran, 1381 Sh./2002), vol. 1, p. 114 and vol. 2, p. 249; they are also transmitted by 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī in *Nafāḥāt al-'uns*, ed. Maḥmūd 'Ābidī (Tehran, 1380 Sh./2001) p. 413.

The point of the *lā* referred to in the third verse is where the *lām* and *alif* are joined in the *lā* of the first testimony of faith (*shahāda*)—*lā ilāha illa-Allāh*—No god, but God. Aḥmad Ghazzālī sees this *lā* as the word of ultimate negation (*nafy*) in which attachment to everything save God is obliterated. The point of the *lā* is the very essence of negation, for were it not for that point, the *alif* and *lām* would not be joined. It is thus the archetype of spiritual *fanā* (annihilation) beyond separation and union. The black light is then an allusion to the station of *baqā'* (subsistence) in which one abides with the Divine alone, beyond all the edicts of separation and union, expansion and contraction, sorrow and happiness. But once in the black light of subsistence he is the master of the moment, for the edicts of coloration cannot bear the effulgence of the black light. Regarding this no knowledge can be obtained, for it is beyond all distinctions and can only be perceived or tasted in the trans-personal depth of one's pre-temporal being, i.e. in the heart.

2. Before Aḥmad Ghazzālī, Sufis had termed the accomplished spiritual wayfarer as a 'son of the moment (*ibn al-waqt*)'. He turns this on its head to say that 'the son of the moment' is still subject to coloration (*talwīn*) but in spiritual stability (*tamkīn*) he becomes 'the master of the moment.'

3. i.e. to the beloved and through the beloved—but in fact through and to love *vis-à-vis* the beloved.

4. This refers to the 'but' of the first testimony of faith, 'No god but God'—*lā ilāha illa Allāh*. This means that the spiritual wayfarer has reached a point where he abandons all the hidden inner idols for the true worship of the One God.

20

(1) When this reality becomes known, affliction and oppression are her castle-crashing mangonel for removing your you-ness from you until you become her.

(2) When an arrow which has been shot from the bow of the will of the beloved at your you-ness let it be an arrow of oppression or kindness, for the conversation is about defect or not-the arrow must have a direction or target, and its target must be the qibla of the moment. Until she has turned her entirety to you, how can she shoot? And when the shooting is at you specifically it will no doubt require an account from you. How can these many links not be sufficient, when one of them itself is enough? Here is where it has been said:

Draw one arrow from your quiver to shoot it.
Then place it in your strong bow.

If you want a target, here is my heart.
From you a violent shot, from me a joyful sigh.

21

(1) The beginning of love is this, that the seed of beauty is planted in the ground of the heart's seclusion by the hand of witnessing. Its nurture is from the shining of observation (*nazar*), but it is not one color. The planting of the seed and its picking must be one. Regarding this they have said:

The origin of all loverness is from vision;
When the eye sees, then the affair begins.

How many birds fall into the snare of covetousness?
In coveting light the moth falls into the flame.

(2) Love's reality is a conjunction between two hearts. But the lover's love for the beloved is one thing, and the beloved's love for the lover is another. The love of the lover is real and the love of the beloved is the image of the reflection of lover's love in her mirror.

(3) Since there has been conjunction in witnessing, the lover's love requires helplessness, baseness, suffering, wretchedness and submission in all affairs, and the beloved's love requires hubris, august and sublime.

Because of the beauty and the majesty of our beloved,
We are not suitable for her, she is suitable for us.

(4) However, I do not know which the lover is and which the beloved is. This is a great mystery, because it is possible that the beloved's allure comes first, then [comes] accomplishment of this. But here the realities are opposite: 'And you do not will unless God wills.'¹ 'He loves them' is before 'they love him'²—no doubt. Bāyazīd [Baṣṭāmī] said, 'For a long time I imagined that I desired Him. He Himself first desired me.'³

22

(1) Although in the beginning the beloved's friends are friends and his enemies are enemies, when the affair reaches perfection it is opposite and jealousy appears. The lover would not want anyone to look at her:

I cannot watch the wind blow upon you,
Nor can I see anyone in the world look upon you.

A piece of dust which the soul of your foot has graced,
Your servant will envy.

(2) From this turn the affair will reach a place where her friend becomes an enemy and her enemy becomes a friend, so long as no injury comes to him. Then this affair reaches a place where the lover is jealous of her name, let alone of her. He does not want to hear her name from anybody. He does not want anyone to see her beauty, which is the locus of the heart's consideration. He does not want anyone to hear her name, which is the locus of his consolation. It would seem that she is the *qibla* of love, and he does not want anyone to reach there.

1. Qur'ān, 81:19.

2. Qur'ān, 5:57. See n. 1.

3. Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 261/875). This is a famous Persian saying, similar versions of which are attributed to Baṣṭāmī in Fariḍ ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, (London and Leiden, 1905–1907), p. 168 and p. 255, which was, however, written over one century after the *Sawāniḥ*. A similar Arabic saying is attributed to Baṣṭāmī in Abū Nu'aym Isfahānī's *Hilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā (Beirut, 1997), vol. 10, p. 34: 'At the outset I erred in four things: I imagined that I remembered Him, that I knew Him, that I loved Him and that I sought Him. When I reached the end, I saw that His remembrance preceded my remembrance, that His knowledge preceded my knowledge, that His love was before my love, and that His seeking me was first so that I would seek Him.'

23

(1) So long as love is in the beginning, wherever he sees a likeness of this affair he brings it to the beloved. Majnūn had not eaten food for some days when a deer fell in his trap. He was kind to it and set it free. [They asked him why did you do that?] He said, 'There was something resembling Laylā in it.' Cruelty is not fair.

(2) But this is still the very beginning of love. When love reaches perfection, we believe perfection belongs to the beloved and finds no likeness to her among what is other than her, and cannot find [such likeness]. His intimacy with others is cut off, except from that which has an attachment with her, like the dog of her quarter, the dust of her way, and what is like unto that.

(3) When it reaches greater perfection, this consolation also withdraws, for consolation in love is deficiency-and his ecstasy increases. And every yearning from which union can take something away, that is something diseased and defective. Union must be the kindling for the fire of desire, so that it increases. This is that step where the lover believes the beloved is perfection and seeks unification, and whatever is outside of this will never satiate him. And he sees a crowd because of his own existence. As has been said:

In your love my singleness is intense.
In describing you my ability is impotence.

24

(1) In the beginning there is shouting, crying out, and lamentation, for love has not yet taken the entire dominion (*wilāyat*). When the affair reaches perfection and it has taken control, the situation is complete, and the lamentation [of the lover] is replaced by [his] leanness and [his] observation [of the beloved]; for impurity has been replaced by purity. As the poet said:

In the beginning when I was new to love,
My neighbour had no rest from my cries.

Now that my pain has increased, the cries have decreased.
When fire consumes all, smoke decreases.

25

When the lover sees the beloved, agitation arises within him, because his being is borrowed and has a face toward the *qibla* of non-being. His existence becomes agitated in ecstasy, until he sits with the reality of the affair. Yet there is still not

complete maturity. When he becomes completely mature, he becomes absent to himself in the encounter; for when the lover becomes mature in love and love has opened his true nature, then when the vanguard of union appears his existence will leave in accordance with the measure of his maturity in the affair.

A Story:

It has been transmitted that the people of Majnūn's tribe gathered together and said to Laylā's family, 'This man will be destroyed because of love. What harm is there in giving him permission to see Laylā once?' They said, 'On our part there is no stinginess regarding this, but Majnūn himself does not have the fortitude to see her.' They brought Majnūn and drew back the door of Laylā's tent. Laylā's shadow had not yet appeared when Majnūn, it must be said, became unconscious. They said, 'We said that he did not have the capacity to see her.' Here is where the lover has an affair with the dust of her quarter.¹

If separation does not grant me audience with your union,
I will have an affair with the dust of your quarter.

[This is] because he is able to eat nourishment from her in the being of knowledge. But he cannot eat nourishment from the reality of union, since [there] his he-ness does not remain.²

26

(1) The flight of the beloved from the lover is because union is no small affair. Just as the lover must surrender in order to not be him[self], so too the beloved must surrender in order for the lover to be her lover. So long as she does not consume him completely within herself and does not consider him to be part of herself, and so long as she does not accept him completely, she will flee from him. For although he does not know this reality outwardly, his heart and soul know the

1. The dust of her quarter is here the knowledge of the beloved which pertains to the realm of Divine Oneness (*wāḥidiyya*) but not yet to the realm of unseen of the unseen or *ghayb al-ghuyūb*.

2. The fullness of love which is realized in 'union' is beyond and discursive knowledge, it can only be 'tasted.' Aḥmad Ghazzālī maintains that even the Prophet Muḥammad was incapable of 'knowledge' of the Divine Essence or the unseen of the unseen: 'Whenever the Messenger of God was carried to the ocean of knowledge it would flow forth, but when he was cast into the ocean of gnosis he said, 'I do not realize, I only worship (*lā adri innamā a'budu*).'" Aḥmad Ghazzālī, *Majālis-i Aḥmad Ghazzālī*, ed. with Persian translation by Aḥmad Mujāhid (Tehran, 1385 Sh./1998), p. 61.

whale of love, which is in the inner nature of the lover,¹ what he extracts from it and what is sent to it.

(2) Then this unification is of many kinds: sometimes it is the sword and this is the sheath, sometimes the opposite. Sometimes there is no way to account for it.

27

(1) From this reality it becomes known that if separation is through the choice of the beloved, it is because she is not content with one lover. And if it is through the choice of the lover then it is because he has not yet completely entrusted his dominion (*wilāyat*) and has not been fully tamed by love.

(2) And it may be that surrender and contentment come from both sides, but separation is the edict of the moment and the blow of fortune, for many affairs lie outside their choice, save an affair outside of which there is nothing.

28

(1) Separation is beyond union to some degree; for so long as there is no union there is no separation, since separation is itself a kind of connection. In reality union is separation from self, just as in reality separation is union to self, except in imperfect love where the lover has still not reached complete maturity.

2) The fault which the lover commits under the oppression (*qahr*) of love is that he seeks separation from himself through his own destruction, for union is bound to it. It may also be that his failure to find is due to the oppression of his affair or the predominance of zeal.

29

(1) As long as love is in the beginning, in separation there is nourishment from imagination and that is the vision of knowledge, observing a form which has been represented within mind. But when the affair reaches perfection and that form enters the heart, neither knowledge nor imagination can eat nourishment from it. Because what is perceived through the imagination is same as the locus of imagination. So long as love has not taken hold completely something of the lover remains, so that he brings a report about it back with the externality of knowledge in order to be informed. But when it takes over the realm completely, nothing remains of the lover to give a report in order to eat nourishment from it.

(2) Furthermore, when it comes inside, the externality of knowledge cannot find

1. This is an allusion to the fact that the full reality of love is always deep within the lover—it is in fact his very reality—though he must travel through the veils of loveliness and belovedness to discover it.

the coinage of the interior of the secret's curtain. Then there is finding, but there is no report from finding, for all is the essence of the affair. Perhaps 'the incapacity to realize perception is perception'¹ is an allusion to something of this nature.

30

(1) The lover is not an external existence, so as to always have a report from himself. This external existence is an observer, sometimes the coinage of the moment may show a face to him within and sometimes it may not. Sometimes his own coinage may present itself to him, sometimes it may not. The inner worlds cannot be realized so easily. This is not so easy because there are screens, veils, treasures and wonders there. In this station there is no capacity to explain that.

31

(1) If one sees in his sleep, that is because he has a face towards himself. His whole body has become the eye, and the whole eye has become the face and been brought to the beloved, or to her form; for it has been imprinted on his being.

(2) Here there is a great secret, it is that whatever is the lover is inherent to the love of the beloved and nearness and farness do not veil her; for the hand of nearness and farness does not reach her skirt. Seeking that point is one thing, seeking the outward is another.

(3) Now, when he sees in sleep that is because he has seen something on the face of the heart and sends the awareness toward knowledge in order to bring out a report from within the veils.

32

(1) The lover is duplicitous with creation, with himself and with the beloved. His duplicity with creation and with himself is of the kind where he is pleased with a lie he himself has told, although he knows he is lying. The reason is that when the mind accepts the event of union, the presence of the beloved becomes established within—in the imaginal [realm]—and his mind sees a share of union. So at that moment he eats nourishment from her.

(2) So long as he is still himself, he is not free of hypocrisy and he still fears blame. When he has become tame, he has no fear and has been saved from every kind of hypocrisy.

(3) The hypocrisy with the beloved is that the light of the lover shines within him and the outward hides [love] to the extent that for a while he hides love from

1. A famous Arabic saying attributed to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), a close companion of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first Sunni Caliph.

the beloved, and while hiding from her loves her. But when the defect withdraws and surrender comes, the light of love also shines upon his face; for his whole being has been lost in her. In this state is found the magnificence of oneness. What place is there for reticence?

33

(1) The royal court of love is the balcony of the spirit, for in pre-eternity the brand of 'Am I not your lord'¹ had put its mark there. If the curtains become transparent, it will also shine from within the veils.

2) Here there is a great secret, for the love of this court comes outside from within and the love of man comes inside from without. But it is apparent that it can only go so far. Its end reaches the pericardium (*shaghāf*). Regarding that state of Zulaykhā the Qur'ān revealed, 'he has affected her so that the love of him has entered beneath the pericardium of her heart' (*qad shaghafahā ḥubban*).² The pericardium is a cover, an externality of the heart, the heart is in the middle of the realm and the decent of the illumination of love reaches to it.

(3) If the veils withdraw completely, the soul will also come to the affair. But a lifetime is required in this affair in order for the soul to come to the path of love. The free scope of the world, creation, passions and language is in the curtains of the heart's externality. It is rare that it reaches the heart, and the heart itself never reaches love.

34

(1) The beginning of love is such that the lover wants the beloved for his own sake. This person is a lover of himself through the intermediary of the beloved, but he does not know that he wants to use her on the path of his own will. As the poet said:

I said, 'You become an idol which is a homeland for the spirit.'
She said, 'Speak not of the soul if you are not a Shaman.'

I said, 'How much you beat me with the sword of argument!'
She said, 'You are still a lover of yourself.'

1. Qur'ān 7:172. See n. 1.

2. Qur'ān 12:30. This is a reference to the famous story of Joseph and Zulaykhā, which is often used as a symbol of the transformative power of true love. Zulaykhā had desired Joseph, but Joseph chose chastity over fornication. She thus plotted to have him imprisoned. Later Sufi commentators expand upon this to say that after Joseph was released Zulaykhā came to love him with a pure love. Though this dimension of the story is not found in the Qur'ān.

(2) When the perfection of love shines its smallest portion is that he wants himself for her, and in pleasing her he gives his soul gleefully. Love is this, all else is delirium and deficiency.

35

Love is a man-eater. It eats man and leaves nothing. When it eats man, it is the master of the dominion (*wilāyat*) and the edict belongs to it. If beauty shines upon perfection, love also eats the otherness of the beloved, but this happens so much later.

36

(1) The beloved never became familiar with the lover, and at that moment that he considers himself closer to her and her closer to him she is farther because the kingdom is hers and 'the king has no friend.' The reality of familiarity pertains to having the same level, and this is impossible between the lover and the beloved, because the lover is all the earth of baseness and the beloved is all the sky of greatness and grandeur. If there is familiarity it would be by the edict of the breath and the moment, and this would be borrowed.

I endured sorrow equal in weight to heaven and earth,
Neither I become satiated nor loved other.

A gazelle, for example, may become accustomed to people.
You will not, though I did a thousand tricks.

(2) When will the magnificence of the beloved and the baseness of the lover come together? When will the grace of the one sought and the need of the seeker come together? She is this one's cure and this one is her helpless one. The patient needs medicine. Medicine has no need for the patient; for the patient dwindles from not attaining medicine, whereas the medicine need not regard the patient. As has been said:

What can the lover do who has no heart ?
What can the indigent one do who has no provisions?

The nobility of your beauty is not due to my bazaar.
What loss to the idol if it has no idol worshipper?

37

The reality of love rides nothing but the mount of the spirit. But the heart is the locus of its attributes and it itself is glorious through the veils of its glory. What does anyone know of its essence and attributes? Not a single one of its subtle points shows its face to the eye of knowledge. For it is not possible that anything more than an explanation or a sign be given from the surface of the heart's tablet. But in the imaginal world, in order to reveal its face, sometimes love may have a sign concretely and sometimes it may not.

38

(1) Sometimes the sign is through the tress, sometimes through the cheek, sometimes the mole and sometimes stature, sometimes the eye and sometimes the eyebrow, sometimes a wink, sometimes the giggle of the beloved and sometimes through rebuke.

(2) Each of these realities has a sign from the quest of the lover's spirit. That which has the sign of love upon the eye of the beloved, its nourishment is from observation of the beloved and is further from deficiencies, for it is the precious pearl of the heart and spirit. Love which makes a sign with the eye of the beloved in the world of imagination is an indication of the quest of the spirit and the heart and is far from bodily deficiencies. And if it is with the eyebrow [that it makes a sign] it is a quest from his spirit. But the vanguard of bewilderment stands before that quest, because the eyebrow is apportioned to the eye.

(3) In this way, each one of these signs on the path of the perspicacity of love makes clear a quest pertaining to the spirit, the body, deficiency or fault; for love has a sign in each of the interior curtains and these realities are its signs on the curtain of imagination. Thus its sign makes clear the level of love.

39

(1) When the reality of love appears, the lover becomes the nourishment for the beloved. The beloved does not become the nourishment for the lover because the lover can be contained in the compass of the beloved, but the beloved cannot be contained in the compass of the lover. The lover can become one hair in the tress of the beloved, but the whole of the lover cannot bear one hair of the beloved and can give it no refuge.

(2) The nourishment of the moth that becomes the lover of fire is distant from illumination. The vanguard of the illumination welcomes him and invites him, and he flies toward love with the wings of his aspiration (*himmat*) in the air of his quest. But he must have many wings in order to reach fire. When he reaches fire he has

no course. The course of fire is within him. Nor does he have any nourishment, the fire has nourishment. And this is a great secret. For one moment he becomes his own beloved. This is his perfection. And all of his flying and circumambulating were for this one moment. When shall this be? Before this we have explained that the reality of union is this. One hour the attribute of 'being fire' welcomes him and soon sends him out through the door of 'being ash.' There must be so much provision that he reaches love. His being and attributes are themselves the provision of the path. 'You have wasted your life building the inward, where is annihilation in witnessing oneness (*tawḥīd*)?'¹ is this.

(3) Of all that the lover can have there is nothing that can become the instrument of union. The beloved can have the instrument of union. This is also a great secret, for union is the level of the beloved and her right. It is separation which is the level of the lover and his right. Thus the existence of the lover is the instrument of separation and the existence of the beloved is the instrument of union.

Love itself, in its essence, is far from these attachments and defects; for love has no attributes from union and separation. These are the attributes of the lover and the beloved. Thus union is the level of the glory and greatness of the beloved and separation is the level of the baseness and poverty of the lover. Therefore, the beloved can possess the instrument of union and the lover that of separation and the existence of the lover is one of the provisions of separation.

In your love my singleness is a crowd.

One whose existence is a crowd and a provision of separation, from where will he obtain the provision of union?

(4) The ground of union becomes non-being and the ground of separation becomes being; so long as the witness of annihilation associates, union is union. When he returns the reality of separation cast its shadow and the possibility of union withdraws, for the lover cannot possess the provision of union because that is the function of the beloved.

A Story

It has been transmitted that one day Sulṭān Maḥmūd² was sitting in his court. A man came and had a plate of salt in his hand. He came to the middle of the assembly of Maḥmūd's court and cried out, 'Who will buy salt?' Maḥmūd had never seen that and ordered that they arrest him. When he was alone, he summoned him and said, 'What insolence is this that you commit? And what kind of place is Maḥmūd's palace for crying out to sell salt?'

1. This is a famous saying of Maṣṣūr Hallāj, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Ma'rūf Zariq and 'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Balṭajī (Beirut, 1413/1993), p. 165.

2. Sulṭān Maḥmūd of Ghazna (389/999–421/1030).

He said: ‘O noble lad, our affair is with Ayāz,¹ salt is but a pretext.’

Maḥmūd said, ‘O beggar, who are you that you can put your hand in a bowl with Maḥmūd? I who have eight hundred elephants, a worldwide kingdom and realm, and you do not have a night’s worth of bread!’

He said, ‘Don’t speak so long, for this that you own and possess is the provision of union, not the provision of love. The provision of love is a roasted heart,² and my heart is perfectly so—this is a condition for the affair. No Maḥmūd, rather my heart is empty, therefore there is no place for eight hundred elephants in it. Accounting and managing many realms is not the affair. I have an empty heart burning with the love of Ayāz. O Maḥmūd do you know what the secret of this salt is? That in the pot of your love must be the salt of disengaging and abasement, for you’re so dominating. Know that verse of the highest assembly, ‘And we glorify in praise of You and call You Holy.’³ He said to six hundred peacock feathers, ‘You need the disengaging which is the condition of this affair, but when that happens, you will not be what you are now. You do not have the provision for that so as to separate yourselves.’

O Maḥmūd, all this that you possess is the provision of union, and love has no attribute from union. When the moment of union comes, Ayāz himself has the provision of union completely. O Maḥmūd, are these eight hundred elephants and the entire realm of China and India worth anything without Ayāz, or can they stand in the place of one hair from his tress?’

Maḥmūd said, ‘No.’

He said, ‘Is being with him in the dung-room of a public bath-house or in a dark room like being in the garden of Eden, and the state of perfect union?’

Maḥmūd said, ‘It is.’

He said, ‘Then all this that you possess is not even the provision of union, for only the beloved can have the provision of union, not the lover.’ This is perfect beauty, and the cheek, the mole and the tress. And those are the signs of beauty.

(5) From here you know that love has no attribute from union or from separation, and nothing is known to the lover about the provision of union, nor can it be known. The provision of union is the existence of the beloved and the provision of separation is the existence of the lover, and love has no need for either. If the joy of the moment assists, this existence becomes the sacrifice for that existence. This is perfect union.

1. Ayāz b. Uymāq Abū Najm (d. 449/1059) is known as the perfect loyal servant and was therefore beloved to Sulṭān Maḥmūd. Here he is used as a symbol of the beloved just as Laylā was used as a symbol in the story of Laylā and Majnūn. Both of these love legends have been used by Sufis as models of the pure and chaste love for the beloved. It is important that for the Sufis the beloved can be either male or female, what matters is the essence of love which is beyond all duality.

2. Here Ghazzālī is playing on the term which he has previously used for maturity (*pukhtagī*) which literally means ‘cooked’. A broiled heart would thus be even more immersed in love.

3. Qur’ān 2:30.

A perfect love and a beautiful heart-render,
The heart full of speech and the tongue mute,

Where has there been a state rarer than this?
I thirst, and before me flows pure water.

40

(1) As regards the reality of the affair, the beloved gains no profit from the lover, nor loss. But as regards the manner (*sunna*) of love's generosity, love binds the lover to the beloved. Through the connection of love, the lover becomes the locus of the beloved's observation in every state.

(2) Here is where separation through the choice of the beloved is more union than union through the choice of the lover. Because in the beloved's choosing separation, the lover becomes the locus of observation for the heart of the beloved and choice and her desire. And on the path of her lover's choosing union, there is not any observation from the beloved, and she has no concern for him. This is a great level in gnosis. But no one can understand this perfectly. Thus the beloved's observation of the lover is a scale in measuring the degrees and attributes of love, in perfection, increase and decrease.

41

(1) Whatever is glory, magnificence, self-sufficiency and greatness in the share of love becomes the attributes of the beloved, and whatever is baseness, weakness, wretchedness, poverty, need and helplessness is the share of the lover. Thus the nourishment of love is the attributes of the lover, for love is the master of the lover's fortune—whatever fortune may bring. And this changes according to the moment.

2) However, these attributes of the beloved do not become manifest except through the manifestation of their opposites in the lover—so long as the poverty of this is not, her self-sufficiency does not appear. Likewise, all the attributes are suitable for her because of this.

42

When it is like this the lover and beloved are opposites. Thus they are not together except on condition of sacrifice and annihilation. Regarding this it has been said:

When the green-beloved saw my face yellow,
She said, 'No longer hope for my union,

‘Because you have become our opposite in vision,
You have the colour of autumn and we the colour of spring.’

43

(1) The beloved itself is the beloved in every state, thus self-sufficiency is her attribute. And the lover is the lover in every state, thus poverty is his attribute. The lover always needs the beloved, thus poverty is always his attribute. And the beloved needs nothing, for she always has herself. Therefore, self-sufficiency is her attribute.

Every night, out of sorrow for you, my tears are blood,
And from separation with you, there is a nightly assault in my heart.

You are with yourself O beloved, from that you are joyful.
You are never without yourself, how do you know what night is like?

You always steal hearts, you are excused.
You have never experienced sorrow, you are excused.

I have spent a thousand nights in blood without you.
You have never spent a night without yourself, you are excused.

(2) And if this error comes to you, that it may be that the lover is the master and the beloved is the servant, such that in union she is next to the lover, that is a grave error. For the reality of love puts the necklace of the sultanate on the neck of the beloved and takes off the ring of servitude.

(3) The beloved can never be a possession. This is why those who speak of poverty lose the heart and spirit and put religion, the world and fortune in the middle.¹ They do anything and withdraw from everything. They also do not fear [for] their heads and put their foot on the two worlds. But when the affair reaches the point of love, they never put the beloved in the middle and are not able to do so. Because it is only a possession which can be put in the middle, not the possessor. The beloved is a possessor.

(4) The hand of freedom never reaches the edge of love and loveliness. Just as all bonds are released there—I mean in the freedom of poverty—all openings are bound here—I mean in the bondage of love.

(5) When these realities become known, then perhaps the magnificence of love will appear so that the lover loses his own profit (*sūd*) [in order] to withdraw from deficiencies and is saved from profit and loss.

1. i.e., risk everything.

44

If it were possible for the lover to eat nourishment from the beloved, it would only be in the compass of the heart. But since loverness is being without a heart, when will this reality be? So where will the heartless one eat? She steals his heart and she sends nourishment, but he still has not eaten and she takes it back. We say nourishment is from the beloved and this is far, far away. I do not want that nourishment which is from imagining through words heard and beauty seen, for that is not union. That is not on this page. Those who look at the sun are many and the world is illuminated by its light. But in reality people have no nourishment from it. So do not be in error.

45

(1) Love is such that oppression from the beloved in the union of love becomes increase and kindling for the fire of love; for the nourishment of love is from oppression. Thus love increases. So long as he is in union it is of this attribute. But in separation the oppression of the beloved would help and be the cause of consolation—so long as he is in the door of choice and something from him is observing the affair.

(2) But when he becomes completely and perfectly tame before love and the sultanate of love has taken complete control, how will increase and decrease have a way there?¹

I do not flee from the friend because of a hundred and one afflictions.
This is a condition for me in love if I hold fast.

1. i.e. there is no increase and decrease when one has gone beyond the beloved into love itself.