

# Everything Muhammad: The Image of the Prophet in the Writings of 'Ayn al-Qudat

*By Mohammed Rustom*

So long as I live, I am the Quran's servant.  
I am dust upon the path of Muhammad the Chosen One.  
If someone relates other than this saying of mine,  
I shall disown him, and be disgusted with his words.

*Rumi*<sup>1</sup>

## Opening

It is well-known that Rumi (d. 1273) was a great lover of the Prophet Muhammad. This is best typified in such verses as the ones with which the present article begins. Given our knowledge of the devotion to the Prophet that we find in Rumi's writings and in the works of many other Sufi authors,<sup>2</sup> I would here like to discuss the views of another major devotee of the Prophet. His name was Abu'l Ma'ali 'Abd Allah al-Miyanji, and is most commonly known as 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani. He was born

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation and alternative translation of this famous quatrain, one may consult the indispensable work by Ibrahim Gamard and Rawan Farhadi (trans. and ed.), *The Quatrains of Rumi* (San Rafael, CA: Sufi Dari Books, 2008), pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> For the traditional Muslim veneration of the Prophet, see Claude Addas, *La Maison muhammadienne: Aperçus de la dévotion au Prophète en mystique musulmane* (Paris: Gallimard, 2015) and Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

in 1097, having been put to death in 1131 at the tender age of thirty-four, ostensibly on charges of “heresy.”<sup>3</sup>

‘Ayn al-Qudat was the foremost disciple of Ahmad Ghazali (d. 1126),<sup>4</sup> and himself became a Sufi master in his late twenties. It can easily be argued that he was the first author in Islamic history to present Sufi doctrine in a highly developed and metaphysical form, thereby acting as a forerunner to the tradition of theoretical gnosis (*‘irfan-i nazari*) that is commonly associated with Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) and his followers.<sup>5</sup> His writings are also replete with many of the ideas, themes, tropes, and images that we find in the Persian Sufi poets who came after him, such as Farid al-Din ‘Attar (d. ca. 1220) and Rumi. To be sure, one major aspect of ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s teachings is his emphasis on divine love and beauty, which explains why he is often referred to as the “sultan of lovers” (*sultan-i ‘ushshaq*).<sup>6</sup>

Another major theme which runs throughout ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s writings is that of the Muhammadan light (*nur-i Mubammadi*). This idea is developed by ‘Ayn al-Qudat in a doctrinal manner unlike any writer before him, and is closely linked to what we can call his wider “Muhammadology.” It would be outside the scope of the present article to offer a complete portrait of ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s understanding of the cosmic function of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the important role he plays with respect to the notions of “belief” and “unbelief.”<sup>7</sup> What follows, therefore, are

<sup>3</sup> Omid Safi has astutely shown that the outward cause for ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s death was purely political. See his *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chapter 6. ‘Ayn al-Qudat also identified an inward “cause” for his eventual demise, namely the “divine jealousy” (*ghayrat-i ilabi*). See Mohammed Rustom, “‘Ayn al-Qudat Between Divine Jealousy and Political Intrigue,” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 6, no. 2 (2017), forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> A major study of the life and thought of Ahmad Ghazali is now available: Joseph Lumbard, *Ahmad al-Ghazali, Remembrance, and the Metaphysics of Love* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> An introduction to the life and teachings of ‘Ayn al-Qudat can be found in Rustom, *Inrushes of the Spirit: The Mystical Theology of ‘Ayn al-Qudat* (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming). For a survey of the philosophical Sufi tradition from Ibn ‘Arabi onwards, see Rustom, “Philosophical Sufism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Richard Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 399–411.

<sup>6</sup> Curiously, amongst Sufi authors who wrote in Arabic, the Arabic version of this title (i.e., *sultan al-‘ashiqin*) is reserved for ‘Umar Ibn al-Farid (d. 1235). See Th. Emil Homerin, *Passion Before Me, My Fate Behind: Ibn al-Farid and the Poetry of Recollection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> For which, see Rustom, *Inrushes of the Spirit*, chapter 9.

several broad strokes which convey something of the image of the Prophet that dominates the landscape of 'Ayn al-Qudat's worldview.

### Honour

Following a long-established tradition in which the Prophet is seen as having a special rank in the eyes of God, 'Ayn al-Qudat dedicates a good deal of attention to explaining both the roots and implications of this holy honour. In one passage he states, "Listen! Have you not ever heard that Abraham was the possessor of tasting, Moses the possessor of delight, and Muhammad the possessor of sweetness?"<sup>8</sup> Sweetness is more preferable than tasting and delight in the same way that "seeing honey is one thing, eating honey is another thing, and *being* honey is quite another thing."<sup>9</sup> This prophetic sweetness derives from nothing less than the Prophet's being the very purpose for the existence of the cosmic order. As 'Ayn al-Qudat reminds us, "All of the existents have been created on account of Muhammad."<sup>10</sup>

'Ayn al-Qudat also argues that, whereas the wayfarers on the path to God have travelled to God from their "selves," the Prophet was sent to them from God.<sup>11</sup> Thus, not only is he the purpose of existence, but he is also the means by which God's creatures may reach Him:

O Muhammad! We taught you what you did not know: *He taught thee what thou knewest not; God's Bounty toward thee is indeed tremendous* (Q 4:13).<sup>12</sup> O Muhammad! Take on Our character traits, and from the bounties and character traits that we have given to you, pour a handful upon the helpless ones so that whoever sees you, sees Us, and whoever obeys you, obeys Us. This is the meaning of, *whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God* (Q 4:80) *and he teaches you what you knew not* (Q 2:51).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, ed. Afif 'Usayran (Tehran: Intisharat-i Manuchihri, 1994), p. 310, § 408. All of the translations from 'Ayn al-Qudat's writings cited in this article are taken from Rustom, *Inrushes of the Spirit*. To locate these passages in *Inrushes of the Spirit*, see the book's "Index of Translated Texts."

<sup>9</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 311, § 408.

<sup>10</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, pp. 180-181, § 238.

<sup>11</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 301, § 395.

<sup>12</sup> Translations from the Quran are taken, with modifications, from *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 185, § 242.

At the same time, the Prophet also “travelled” to God. Yet this wayfaring was done *for* him, which again distinguishes him from the rest of creation, including such great prophets as Moses:

*Came* (Q 7:143)—“he came”—was said about Moses; *He carried* (Q 17:1)—“We brought him”—was said about Mustafa. Having come is not like having been brought. The prophets swore by the names and attributes of God. But God has sworn by the soul, head, hair, and face of Mustafa: *By thy life* (Q 15:72); *By the morning brightness, and by the night when still* (Q 93:1-2). To Moses it was said, “*Look upon the mountain*” (Q 7:143). To Mustafa it was said, “We are looking at you—you too look at Us entirely”: *Hast thou not considered thy Lord, how He spreads out the shade?* (Q 25:45).<sup>14</sup>

### Light

Although amongst us as a “body,” Ayn al-Qudat insists that the nature of the Prophet is not to be confused with the human state as such:

Alas! Whoever calls the pure spirit of Mustafa “human” is an unbeliever. Hear it from God: *They said, “Will a man guide us?” So they disbelieved* (Q 64:6). In another place, He said, “*Shall we follow a single human being from amongst us? Then we would surely be astray and mad!*” (Q 54:24). This is a spirit that is pure of humanity, and is free of this world. “*I am only a human being like you*” (Q 18:110) refers to a bodily frame that is not of this world.<sup>15</sup>

If the Prophet is not to be characterized by the normal human and bodily state, why does he appear in the world in a body and as a person? For ‘Ayn al-Qudat it is all quite clear: the Prophet appears as a body because he is sent to human beings. In himself, he is light, and this means that even the body in which he appears is not the usual kind of body:

Alas! I dare not speak, for the worlds will be thrown into turmoil! Look at what Sahl b. ‘Abd Allah<sup>16</sup> says: “In the cloak of humanity, Mustafa appeared with a bodily frame by taking on the likeness of people. If he did not, his heart was nevertheless light—what relation does light have with bodily frame? *There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book* (Q 5:15). Thus, if he

<sup>14</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 20, § 31.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, pp. 164–165, § 220.

<sup>16</sup> This is a reference to the famous early Sufi figure Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896). For a study of his thought, see Gerhard Böwering, *The Classical Vision of Existence in Islam: The Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari* (d. 283/896) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980). A translation of his Sufi commentary upon the Quran is now available: *Tafsir al-Tustari*, trans. Annabel and Ali Keeler (Louisville: Fons Vitae), 2011.

was not light and was only bodily frame, then *thou seest them looking upon thee, but they see not* (Q 7:198) would not have an explanation for itself. But if he had a bodily frame just as you and I do, why did he not have a shadow, just as we have? "He used to walk, and he had no shadow."<sup>17</sup>

Those who only see the body of the Prophet and not his true nature as light are likened by 'Ayn al-Qudat to readers of the Quran who only see the black ink with which the Quran is written. Blinded by the dark form of the letters, they do not see the luminous meanings contained in them:

Have you not read or heard the verse in the Quran?—*There has come unto you, from God, a light and a clear Book* (Q 5:15). It calls Muhammad "light" and it calls the Quran, which is the Word of God, "light": *and those who follow the light that has been sent down with him* (Q 7:157). From the Quran you see black letters on white paper. But paper, ink, and lines are not light!<sup>18</sup>

'Ayn al-Qudat is quick to remind us that the other prophets are also to be understood as light. But Muhammad is of greater luminosity: "O friend! All of the prophets are light, but Muhammad is more light (*nurtar*) than all of them."<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Prophet's light is not of a fixed nature. Rather, he continues to increase in light, since his light derives from God's light, which is infinite:

Since Mustafa is light, what is this verse?—"Our Lord, complete our light for us" (Q 66:8). If you do not believe this verse, what is this prayer?—"O God! Give me a light in my face, a light in my body, a light in my heart, a light upon my limbs, and a light in my bones." However much there is increase in light, the more light must one request: "Our Lord, complete our light for us." Here, God's light is being requested, not a light other than He.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 248, § 326.

<sup>18</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 2, § 2. Cf. *Tambidat*, p. 348, § 461: "What report do you have from this world! The distance from this station to that place wherein is the light of Mustafa is as much as going from black to white, or from movement to rest. All of the travelers have reached a person through whom abides the world of the kingdom and the Dominion. Some of them have known him as the light of Ahmad, and some as self-sufficient beauty."

<sup>19</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 322, § 422.

<sup>20</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 323, § 423. Cf. *Tambidat*, p. 323, § 423: "Alas! Mustafa is with that which is light. O friend! He is a light, for he is *upon light* (Q 24:35). I know that you are saying, "So what is the point of this discussion?" The point is, "He who sees me has seen the Real."

## Love

In Q 48:2, God speaks of Muhammad’s “sin” (*dbanb*). This has historically troubled Muslim theologians, especially since the notion of sin with respect to a prophet would contradict the widely established Islamic belief in the prophets’ infallibility (*‘isma*). To this effect, the theologians have offered a number of creative solutions to square the circle.<sup>21</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat also weighs in on this debate. For him, the sin in question had nothing to do with any action that the Prophet did or did not do. Rather, his “sin” was the result of his being in the right place at the right time:

O, alas! Iblis’ sin was his love for God!<sup>22</sup> Do you know what Mustafa’s sin was? It was God’s love for him. That is, Iblis’ falling in love with God was his sin, and God’s falling in love with the Prophet was his sin. *That God may forgive thee thy sins that went before and that which is to come* (Q 48:2) is a sign for this discussion.<sup>23</sup>

Viewed from another perspective, ‘Ayn al-Qudat also places a great deal of emphasis upon the manner in which God’s love for Muhammad is, in reality, love for His own Self. As he puts it, “God’s love for Mustafa is also Self-love.”<sup>24</sup> This position clearly implies that those who are of the opinion that God loves the Prophet are in fact wrong. Since God is the only Self, and since the Prophet himself said “He who sees me has seen the Real,” God’s loving Muhammad means that God actually loves Himself:

Alas! O listener of these words! By the spirit of Mustafa, people have imagined that God’s grace and love for creation is for their sake. It is not for the sake of creation! Rather, it is for Himself: when a lover gives a gift to a beloved, and is kind to her, he does not actually show this kindness to the beloved as much as he shows it out of love for himself.

Alas! From these words you imagine that God’s love for Mustafa is for Mustafa. But this love for him is for Himself. Have you not heard it from that great one, who said, “God has fallen in love with Himself so much that He has no care for anybody, and He does not turn toward anybody”? Yet people imagine that He is their lover!

<sup>21</sup> For a range of approaches, see Joseph Lombard’s commentary upon the verse in question in *The Study Quran*, p. 1248.

<sup>22</sup> For Iblis’ love for God and its cosmic consequences, see Rustom, *Inrushes of the Spirit*, chapter 9.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 229, § 297.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 218, § 279.

If you want, hear it from Shaykh Shibli, who one time in intimate discourse with God said, “O God! For whom were You?” He replied, “Nobody.” He said, “For whom are You?” He replied, “Nobody.” He said, “For whom will You be?” He replied, “Nobody.”<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a great mystery in God’s Self-love as being manifested in His love for the Prophet. The Prophet has been selected as the object of God’s divine gaze. Although He sees him and through him sees Himself, others do not, in reality, see Muhammad as he should be seen:

God is only a lover of Himself. Thus, I say that God’s love for Mustafa is also love for Himself. Alas! Listen to these words, and hear with the ear of your spirit: God loves Mustafa. He looked upon him out of all of the engendered things and treasures, and concealed him from the sentient beings. Have you not heard it from that great one, who said, “The entire world has known God, yet they have not recognized Him. But they have not known Muhammad, and have not recognized him”?<sup>26</sup>

### Closing

In concluding this brief inquiry into the image of the Prophet in ‘Ayn al-Qudat, it would be fitting to see what ‘Ayn al-Qudat has to say about the reason behind why some people accept the Prophet while others do not. As a mercy to all of creation, the Prophet merely brings out what is already within people. Those whose souls are pure and ready are able to receive him, and from such beautiful souls beauty shall emerge. But those whose souls are impure and unprepared will reject him, thereby bringing about their own inner ugliness:

Since the coming of Muhammad is a favor for the believers, what do the unbelievers get from this coming? *Truly it is the same for the unbelievers whether thou warnest them or warnest them not—they do not believe* (Q 2:6). What benefit did Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab find from the verse, *and We sent thee not, except as a mercy to the worlds?* (Q 21:107). Have you not seen that the sun is a comfort for the entire world, and that it is a mercy to all beings? But, if the sun shines on a pit of garbage (*gulkhan*), repulsive scents will emerge from it; and if it shines on a bed of roses (*gulshan*), pleasant

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, p. 217, § 278. For a detailed study of Shibli, see Kenneth Avery, *Shibli: His Life and Thought in the Sufi Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, pp. 220–221, § 282.

scents will emerge from it. These defects do not come from the sun. Rather, these defects and disparities come from the roots and contours of those things.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the one whose soul has become a “bed of roses” puts himself within the ambit of the Prophet’s guidance and mercy. When such an individual attains his own perfection by following the Prophet and travelling the spiritual path, at the end of the road he will find the Prophet waiting for him, taking him by the hand and leading him to the Threshold of the Divine Court:

When man reaches this station—namely that he becomes intoxicated by the wine of knowledge—when he reaches the perfection of intoxication and the end of his own finality, the spirit of Muhammad—*A messenger has indeed come unto you from yourselves* (Q 9:128)—is displayed to him. “Blessed be the one who sees me and believes in me.” The robe of his days is prepared. He finds a wealth beyond which there is no other wealth. Whoever knows his own self, knows the spirit of Muhammad. And whoever knows the spirit of Muhammad has placed the foot of aspiration in knowing the Essence of God: “He who sees me has seen the Real.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, pp. 185-186, § 243.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *Tambidat*, pp. 56-57, § 77.