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Fallen in Love: **ʿAyn al-Qudāt on Satan** **as Tragic Lover**

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Like every student of Sufism, I have always benefited from Professor Danner's scholarship, particularly his pathbreaking translation of and commentary upon Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's *Ḥikam* or *Aphorisms*. I also spent a good deal of time as a graduate student reading his 1970 Harvard University PhD thesis on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, and since then have had many opportunities to delve into his writings, such as his still unmatched survey article on the development of Sufism that was published in 1987 in the first volume of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's excellent edited collection of articles entitled *Islamic Spirituality*.¹ One of the motifs recurrent in Professor Danner's thoughtful and carefully documented research is the role of the spiritual master along the Sufi path. This makes perfect sense, given how much time he spent reading the great masters of the Sufi tradition and meditating on the significance of the student-teacher relationship in various traditional and modern Sufi contexts. In one of his articles going back to 1976 and published in the journal *Studies in Comparative Religion*, he sums up the function of spiritual guides in Islamic mysticism in exquisite fashion. He says that these masters are able to "Bring the chaotic substance of their disciples into conformity with the Divine Presence so that it might shine unimpeded in their hearts by the egocentric movements of their souls, and so that they too might

¹ Victor Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 239–264.

accomplish their own contemplative voyage back to the Divine Source of all things.”²

Another issue of abiding concern for Professor Danner was that of translation, and it also turns out to be the one problematic that most informs my work as a scholar and teacher of Islamic thought. The question that has thus guided my approach to translation is as follows: can the abstract and theoretical discussions in texts of Islamic thought be brought to life on paper and in the classroom? That is, how can the concerns and worldviews enshrined in premodern Islamic texts be made relevant to the lives and concerns of audiences today?

Thankfully, we do not have to approach these kinds of questions from scratch. A distinctive feature of the Islamic intellectual tradition is the manner in which its foremost representatives were able to take their highly specialized forms of knowledge to a wide variety of audiences through a plethora of creative methods. This focus on translatability is most noticeable in the so-called “later” or “postclassical” era, concerning which the past several decades have witnessed a wave of scholarship. By “later” era I have in mind what is commonly referred to as the “post-Avicennian” phase of Islamic thought, which takes in an enormous enterprise of intellectual activity from the death of the most influential Islamic philosopher Avicenna to several generations of thinkers following the demise of

² “Islamic Mysticism,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* (1976): <http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/uploads/ArticlePDFs/283.pdf>.

that other towering philosophical figure Mullā Ṣadrā [Avicenna died in 1037 and Mullā Ṣadrā in 1640].

This second wave covers a vast geographical expanse, from Spain in the west to China in the east, and almost every place in between. And this is to say nothing of the major figures in this six-hundred-year period who, on a conservative estimate, number in the hundreds. The major linguistic vehicles of expression here are naturally Arabic and Persian, but also Ottoman Turkish and Chinese. Muslim intellectuals in this period were still engaged, in one form or another, with the heritage of Ancient Greece and Late Antiquity (primarily developed forms of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism), but were also in conversation with very different civilizations and religious worldviews, including Hinduism in India, Neo Confucianism in China, and Buddhism in Iran and Central Asia.

Now, add to this complicated picture the rise of varying intellectual schools and perspectives indigenous to Islam and the dominating presence of rational discourse in Islamic philosophy and theology, coupled with the ever-increasing tendency for many thinkers after Avicenna (and partly because of him) to unite a variety of theoretical and spiritual perspectives into their own projects, and you have nothing short of an all-imposing intellectual edifice. Thus, the aforementioned “wave” of scholarship amounts to just a tiny drop in the vast ocean of post-Avicennian Islamic thought.

It should be recalled that most of the giants belonging to this period, such as ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, Shihāb al-Dīn

Suhrawardī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn ‘Arabī were completely unknown to the Latin West, and hence were (and sometimes still are) virtually absent from standard intellectual histories (the one major exception here being Peter Adamson’s superlative podcast and book series, the *History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*). [These figures just mentioned all died within a period of just over a hundred years, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt dying in 1131 and Ibn ‘Arabī in 1240].

Beginning with post-Avicennan Islamic thought and my preoccupation with translatability, I would like to share with you my preliminary observations related to an ongoing research project in which I attempt to chart, both historically and conceptually, the manner in which the most significant post-classical philosophers and Sufis attempted to translate their theoretical doctrines into concrete and expressible terms through what is known as imaginalization (*tamaththul*, *takhayyul*). Imaginalization in this context specifically refers to the process of rendering recondite concepts into concrete images by way of a variety of methods, from translations of texts and myth-making on the one hand, to music and poetry on the other. While *tamaththul*, *tamthīl* and other related terms are key to discussions on the beauty of language and practices of wonder in Arabic literature, as shown most recently by Lara Harb in her brilliant book entitled *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature*, my project has a very different focus, namely how post-Avicennan philosophers and Sufis attempted to communicate their metaphysical, cosmological, and

anthropological doctrines by employing scripture, symbolism, and story-telling, thereby pointing up a distinctive feature of this later phase of Islamic thought that sought to translate abstract ideas into palpable and humanly experiential terms.

I do not wish to suggest that imagination or *khayāl* came to the fore post-Avicenna. Indeed, a number of major Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī (d. 950) and Avicenna himself dealt with imagination in various contexts, such as *khayāl* as a general psychological faculty and as a specifically prophetic one through which the prophet was able to communicate philosophical truths to non-philosophers in symbolic and representational ways. And this is to say nothing of the significant advances in philosophical storytelling in the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' and Ibn Ṭufayl, who was inspired by Avicenna in this regard.

In the fully developed post-Avicennan tradition, however, imagination and more particularly the imaginal world (*'ālam al-khayāl*) came to refer to an intermediary "space" that brings opposites together, and this allowed Muslim thinkers of various intellectual persuasions to offer new solutions to age-old theological problems. Imagination primarily provided them with an objective means to express the manner in which the realm of metaphysical meaning (*ma'nā*) flows into and interpenetrates the world of physical forms (*ṣūra*). Although the world of images (*'ālam al-mithāl*) was extensively dealt with by Suhrawardī and his later followers, the world of imagination proper came to occupy

center stage on account of the writings of one of the most impressive authors in premodern Islam, the Andalusian sage Ibn 'Arabī. Ibn 'Arabī's expositions of imagination and imaginalization informed much of later Islamic discourse, as well as other domains of Islamic life and thought, from art to architecture.

Yet neither Suhrawardī nor Ibn 'Arabī were thinking out of a vacuum. Their immersion in imagination was certainly indebted to earlier discussions, but there is a serious disconnect between their treatments of imagination and what we find in the writings of someone such as al-Fārābī. The missing piece to the puzzle has evaded scholars of Islamic thought for many years, and this I believe because the period between Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and Ibn 'Arabī is largely terra incognita. When we turn to writings belonging to this period, the missing piece to the puzzle emerges. The specific figure who developed imagination and imaginalization far beyond anything done before him, and which predates Ibn 'Arabī by almost a hundred years, was 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī. As I have argued in my recent book, he was a highly innovative author who wrote in both Arabic and Persian, and whose ideas in so many domains, from cosmology and metaphysics to epistemology and psychology, left an indelible mark upon later Islamic thought.

'Ayn al-Quḍāt was a first-rate legal judge, poet, scriptural exegete, Sufi master, theologian, and philosopher. His writings in Persian had a lasting influence upon various Sufi figures and circles in Persia, the Ottoman

Empire, and particularly India, while his Arabic writings were studied throughout the Muslim east right up to the early modern period, and were even influential during the time of the British Raj.

His full name was Abū'l-Ma'ālī Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad al-Miyānajī al-Hamadānī. The name “‘Ayn al-Quḍāt” was a title given to him when he became chief judge or *qāḍī* of Hamadan in his late teens. He was born in the Western Iranian city of Hamadan in 1097 and received his early education in Shāfi'ī law, Ash'arī theology, Arabic poetry, and mathematics. He was already a well-known author before the age of twenty, and by his own admission, he astoundingly completed his most important and dense Arabic work *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* (*The Essence of Reality*) in a matter of three days at the age of 24.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt's main teacher in Sufism was Aḥmad Ghazālī, the brother of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. Before Aḥmad Ghazālī died in 1126, he appointed ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt as his spiritual successor, when he was around 29 years of age. As I have shown elsewhere, through a complex set of events starting in 1128, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was publicly executed by the Seljuq government in 1131, at the tender age of thirty-four. In Hamadan today, there are many roads and buildings named after him, as well as an impressive cultural complex dedicated to his memory.

I should state here that a working hypothesis in my ongoing project is that the concern with imaginalization among the post-Avicennan authors, beginning with ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, grew out of the enterprise of Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), particularly with reference to Quran 19:17, in

which the angel Gabriel appears to Mary in the form of a man in order to inform her of her imminent virgin birth:

فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

See how this discussion drags me from one place to another? Recognizing imaginalization is no trifling matter! Most divine mysteries are known through imaginalization, and they are seen through it. Alas! *He imaginalized himself to her as a perfect man* [Q 19:17] is a complete answer. From the world of the spirit into the garb of humanity Gabriel showed himself to Mary by way of imaginalization, and she saw him as a man in human form.³

It is clear why this verse would attract the attention of Islamic thinkers who sought to explain how the formless enters into forms. Gabriel is an angel and is thus the antipode of a body, and yet he becomes embodied. The act of embodiment, of moving from spirit to form, is featured in the Quran as a verb, namely *tamaththala* (from which we have the *maṣḍar tamaththul*). The reflexive form of the verb suggests that it has to do with something becoming a likeness or image (*mithl*) of something else. Hence Gabriel, through imaginalization, or if you like the

³ Unless otherwise stated, translations from ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s writings are adapted from Mohammed Rustom, *Inrushes of the Heart: The Sufi Philosophy of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2023).

act self-imaging, takes on the appearance of a human being.

Another key narration that is always discussed in post-Avicennan treatments of imaginalization is when Gabriel appeared to the Prophet in the form of an extraordinarily beautiful Companion named *Dihya al-Kalbī*. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt seems to be the first author to draw attention to the imaginalizing nature of this encounter, and has this to say about it:

If the person who appeared was Gabriel, who is spiritual, how did he assume form so that he could be seen in the garb of a human? And if it was not Gabriel, who, then, was it? Know that it was imaginalization, plain and simple.

Since imaginalization is a process through which meanings translate into forms or the unchanging, eternal, and non-dual realm translates into the changing, temporal, and dual realm, it is often likened to the function of dreams and mirrors. Delving into the imaginal nature of dreams will take me too far afield for my present purposes, so I will here focus on 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's perspective on mirrors, which will then segue into his vision of imaginalization as it pertains to his all-embracing view of love.

An object in a mirror represents an image to the conscious observer that corresponds to reality, but which is, in itself, not actually "there" and hence not fully "real." The reflection of an object in a mirror is not the object itself. At the same time, it does capture something of the

true nature of the object placed before the mirror. The forms people perceive in mirrors are, therefore, both real and unreal, which is precisely the situation of imagination: standing between the highest ontological order and the lowest, it occupies an in-between kind of status, as do the images that appear through imaginalization.

كلّ ما في الوجود فهو فان من حيث الحقيقة ولا بقاء إلا لوجه
الحَيّ القيوم كما أنّ الصورة التي في المرآة فانية بالحقيقة ولا بقاء
إلا للصورة الخارجة هذا من حيث النظر العامّي في القناعة
بالأمثلة المحسوسة وإلا فالصورة الخارجة مع المرآة في نظر
العارف فانية أيضاً حسب فناء الصورة الداخلة في المرآة من
غير تفاوت.

From the perspective of reality, everything in existence is transitory, and the only thing that remains is the face of the Living, the Self-Abiding. It is just like a transitory form in a mirror—only the form outside the mirror remains insofar as general observation is concerned, satisfied as it is with sensory imagery. In the eyes of the recognizer, the form outside the mirror is also transitory, just like the form inside the mirror, with no distinction between them.⁴

⁴ 'Ayn al-Qudāt, *The Essence of Reality: A Defense of Philosophical Sufism*, ed. and trans. Mohammed Rustom (New York: NYU Press, 2022), 92–93.

What is key in ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s vision of imaginalization, and which any theory of imaginalization in post-Avicennan Islamic thought will have to account for, is the particular set of eyes that are required to behold imaginalized forms—what he calls the “eyes of the recognizer” (*‘arīf*). These are a special set of eyes and are the result of what ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt refers to as an “alchemical transformation” of the substance of the human self, allowing the recognizer to see that everything is a manifestation of love, which is the source of existence.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s metaphysical doctrine of love is essential to his worldview, and it was influential on all later discussions on love in the Sufi tradition. Let us look at some passages wherein he envisions love as an indescribable reality that is only attainable by the one who recognizes God in all things.

Do not think that you and your likes have known love, apart from its trappings without reality! Love is only obtained by the one who obtains recognition.

An explication of love cannot be given except through symbols and images, and this so that love can be spoken of. If not, what could be said of love, and what should be spoken?

The world cannot obtain the secret of love, but is enamored and confounded by it. And love knows what has been done to the world—it is always in a state of sadness and grief.

How then can ‘Ayn al-Qudāt speak of the secret of love, which is so exalted and unattainable? The answer lies in imaginalization, which allows him to explain how God, who is love and is simple, immaterial, and one, shares this Self-love, causing it to enter into the world of composition, materiality, and multiplicity. When divine love is imaginalized, beauty emerges in the world of forms, which ‘Ayn al-Qudāt explains can only be seen by a recognizer:

If love did not have the ruse of imaginalization, all the travelers on the path to God would become unbelievers because, in most moments, they would see everything in one form and in one state only. In seeing the moment like that, it would be one of blame. But when one sees increase in beauty and an added form at every instant or every day, love becomes greater and the desire to see the object of one’s yearning greater. At every instant, *He loves them* [Q 5:54] is imaginalized for *they love Him*, and *they love Him* is, likewise, imaginalized. Thus, in this station, the lover sees the Beloved at every instant in another form of beauty, and herself in a more perfect and more complete form of love.

Through imaginalized forms then, the lover can behold the Beloved in palpable and increasingly new modes. This explains why ‘Ayn al-Qudāt relates imaginalization to every dimension of the human experience, from looking at a beautiful face to posthumous states of existence. But the most concrete application of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s doctrine of imaginalization is in the art of story-telling in general, and his explanation of the story of Iblīs or Satan in particular.

Reflecting on this story, he states, “If anyone in existence knew how to listen to the tale of Iblīs, especially its mysteries, his tale would become extremely dear to him.”

In discussing what in Islamic thought is known as *tawḥīd Iblīs* or the devil’s monotheism, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is following a well-trodden path first paved by the famous tenth century Sufi martyr al-Ḥallāj who was then proceeded by a number of major twelfth and thirteenth century figures such as Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Sanā’ī, and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār.

The background to the *tawḥīd Iblīs* doctrine has its roots in the Quran (particularly 7:11–25). Iblīs, who according to Quran 18:50 was a jinn, was asked by God to bow down to Adam. But he refused, saying, “*I am better than him. You created me from fire, while You created him from clay*” (7:12). Iblīs was consequently banished from Paradise and given respite by God until the Final Day. While cast away from God’s Presence, Iblīs would attempt to misguide human beings by any means necessary with the hope that he would lead as many of them to Hell as he could.

For the likes of Ḥallāj and Aḥmad Ghazālī, Iblīs’s refusal to bow to Adam was not on account of obstinacy but simply because he could not bow to anyone other than his Maker and his First Love. God asked him to devote himself to another, and Iblīs could never go against his nature, that of primordial monotheism. Accused by God of pride in Quran 38:74, Iblīs patiently accepted his Beloved’s insults and his attendant fate as an outcast from Paradise.

In one of the most moving passages in Sufi literature, Ḥallāj puts on Iblīs' tongue a kind of defense for his divine defiance: Iblīs had a right to be proud because of his original proximity to God. At the same time, he was fated to follow God's will, which in his case meant disobeying God's command. As a true lover, he did not choose his path for himself; rather, his Beloved chose it, and so he obediently accepted it and loved it:

لو كان لي معك لحظة لكان يليق بي التكبر والتجبر وأنا الذي
عرفتك في الأزل أنا خير منه لأن لي قدمة في الخدمة وليس في
الكونين أعرف متي بك ولي فيك إرادة ولك في إرادتك
في سابقة إن سجدت لغيرك وإن لم أسجد فلا بد لي من الرجوع
إلى الأصل لأتتك خلقتني من النار والنار ترجع إلى النار ولك
التقدير والاختيار.

If I had a single moment with You, my pride and haughtiness would be fitting. For I have recognized You since the beginningless. *I am better than him* [Q 7:12] because of my precedence in service: none was there in the two worlds who recognized You more than I. I have a desire in You and You have a desire in me, but Your desire in me is precedent. If I bow before anyone other than You or do not bow, I will inescapably return to my origin. *You have*

created me from fire [Q 7:12], and fire returns to fire. So, determining and choosing are Yours alone.⁵

What makes ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s treatment of the *tawḥīd Iblīs* doctrine so unique is that he develops it in greater detail, and with more ingenuity and creativity, than any other author in the Islamic tradition. Although there is some modern scholarship on ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s defense of Iblīs, it does not pay attention to his philosophical and theological doctrines which are connected to it. For my purposes here, I will seek to demonstrate how ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Satanology turns out to be intimately related to his teachings on freedom and determinism. At the same time, he uses his Sufi defense of Iblīs to take us to his position on the centrality and dominating nature of love. This is not to say that ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Sufism negates his theoretical ideas; rather, these ideas emerge as quite insufficient for explaining, living, and experiencing what is at stake the further one moves along the path of life and self-discovery. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is thus not simply providing us with a symbolic and mythic re-presentation of his abstract philosophical ideas through his re-telling of the story of Iblīs. This view lends itself all too easily to the simplistic thesis that sees religion and mysticism as nothing more than symbolic expressions of philosophy. Thanks to imaginalization, something much deeper is at work here. An imaginalized story is affective, embodied,

⁵ Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, ed. Louis Massignon (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1913), 43–44.

and “real” for philosophers to the extent that the images it presents to them allow them to encounter what Wendy Doniger refers to as “the darker, flesh-and-blood aspects of their abstract inquiries.”⁶ As we will see, the various “flesh-and-blood” angles from which ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt approaches the imaginalized story of Iblīs account for a variety of possibilities in our human and lived experience—indeed, these are accounted for, but by no means exhausted by, our author’s theoretical understanding of human agency.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt espouses a position to the effect that secondary causes act out of a kind of divine compulsion. That is to say, God compels the natural order to act in certain ways. But, when it comes to human beings, can we say that they are free, or they somehow also compelled? People are free for ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, but the kind of freedom in question is not what is today referred to as “libertarianism.” Rather, it is a free will that takes us not in the direction of constraint by virtue of a divine determinism, but into a kind of constrained freedom of agency. Put differently, we must act, but within the confines of the rules laid out by the One who truly acts. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states that, “Through their choice, people are compelled [*muḍṭarr*], overpowered, and subjugated.” Elsewhere, he qualifies his statement by saying people have the attribute (*ṣifa*) of choice or will by virtue of which

⁶ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 9.

they must choose, just as fire, by virtue of the attribute of burning inherent in it, must burn.

This doctrine of compelled freedom goes back to Avicenna, who says that “People are compelled in the forms of freely-choosing agents [*al-insān muḏṭarr fī ṣūrat mukhtār*].”⁷ In his account, ‘Ayn al-Quḏāt is particularly concerned with illustrating how actions are subjugated by virtue of a thing’s inherent quality. In one example, he explains that the qualities inherent in the utensils used for writing are subjugated by people in order to carry out the act of writing. What the example is meant to do is highlight the manner in which human actions are constrained and ultimately implicated in a determinative network of causation that goes back to God as the only real Cause.

But the example does not adequately explain how human choice factors into this determinative network. Thankfully, ‘Ayn al-Quḏāt addresses this point elsewhere, taking his own situation as a potential writer of a particular letter as a case in point. In both writing and not writing, he is compelled to perform some kind of action, and since this action proceeds from his will, it is based on his limited freedom of choice.

I will now switch gears and look at how ‘Ayn al-Quḏāt’s Satanology relates to his doctrine of human agency. Unlike his presentation of human constrained freedom, in many texts he tends to present Iblīs less as a constrained free

⁷ Avicenna, *Ta’līqāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay’at al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1973), 51.

actor on the cosmic stage than what we can call a pawn in the hands of the Divine Chess Player with very little real freedom of choice or individual volition. This is best demonstrated when ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt explains that God’s command to Iblīs that he should bow down to Adam was preceded by a contrary, secret command: never bow down to Adam. By uttering the words thus given to him, Iblīs was simply fulfilling God’s will:

Openly, God said to him, “*Prostrate before Adam*” [2:34]. But in secret, He said to him, “O Iblīs! Say, ‘*Shall I prostrate before one whom You have created from clay?* [17:61]”

آتش به دلم در زدی نفت به جان آنگه گوئی که راز ما دار نهان

You set my heart on fire and throw oil on my spirit.
Then You say, “Hide our secret!”⁸

ألقاه في البحر مشدوداً وقال له إياك إياك أن تبتلّ بالماء

He threw him into the ocean with his hands tied behind his back.

Then He said, “Watch out! Don’t get wet!”⁹

⁸ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Nāma-hā*, ed. ‘Alī Naqī Munzawī and ‘Afīf ‘Usayrān (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asāṭīr, 1998), vol. 2, § 660, p. 418.

⁹ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Nāma-hā*, vol. 2, § 650, 412.

Iblīs was thus “compelled” to act, and in a very specific manner. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt introduces love as the ultimate variable into the equation as that which compels his action. Iblīs, the teacher of the angels, had such foresight and love of God that he could see right through the “command” to bow down to Adam. Iblīs’ students could not see this, being as they were raw and “uncooked” in their love:

O friend! Perhaps you have not seen someone who, knowing the desire of his friend and beloved, opposes his command in conformity with his desire. What do you hear? Iblīs knew God’s desire, namely that He did not want Iblīs to prostrate when He said, “*Prostrate before Adam*” [2:34]. It was a test—who, by His command, would prostrate to someone else? Everyone prostrated, except the teacher of the angels. It was inescapably like this: the teacher must be riper than the student!

Therefore, it was not only due to God’s desire that Iblīs did not bow down to another; it was also due to Iblīs’ love for God. Here, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt cites Iblīs’ “disobedience” as a worthwhile lesson for all of those aspiring to walk the path of divine love:

Iblīs chose separation from the Beloved over prostration to someone else. How excellent was his perfection of love! *The gaze swerved not, nor did it transgress* [53:17].

In addition to being an imaginalization of his understanding of human agency, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s Iblīs figures as a teacher—not only of the angels, but also of human beings. Now what, exactly, does Iblīs teach? For starters, he has the perfect quality of “aspiration” (*himma*). Given his high aspiration for God, Iblīs was naturally quite happy with the will of his Beloved, even if it meant suffering at His hands. In fact, for Iblīs, the “suffering” in question is no suffering at all. Rather, he explains that it is an honor and a joy, coming as it does from the Object of his desire:

That chevalier Iblīs says, “If others flee from Your assault, I will take it with my neck!”

One must be an aspirant of the quality of Iblīs so that something comes from him. How fine was his aspiration! He said, “I am ready for endless pain, so give me the eternal mercilessness that is my due!”

The tale of Iblīs is therefore to be taken as an image; it is our moment, and our mirror, showing us what it means to be a lover of God: whatever the Beloved chooses is what the lover chooses. The question is thus not so much the status of the freely-choosing human agent’s choice as much as it is his ability to conform to the Divine Agent’s choice. Like Iblīs, the lover has no real choice, since her very existence is implicated in the cycle of love. Consider these two pertinent statements by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt:

The lover is choice-less. Whatever the lover does comes into existence without her will, and issues forth without her choice.

Alas! What can be said of love? What trace should be given of love, and what indication can be provided? In taking the step of love, a person is submitted for she is not with herself. She abandons herself, and prefers love over herself.

For ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, his defense of Satan best imaginalizes his conception of love and is told as a story precisely because, qua story, it allows us to see an imaginalized version of our own aspirations and tendencies. As Cyrus Zargar puts it, “[N]arratives seem distinctively able to reveal values, situations, decisions, character, and the relationship between them all.”¹⁰

Seen through this lens, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s telling of the story of Iblīs is akin to a mirror which displays to its readers and listeners the story of their own lives. Looking into this mirror, Iblīs’ story will come to mean something entirely different to its observers precisely because they will see the story of their own, tragic, fallen state in it. Nowhere in the Iblīs narrative is this most evident than in the manner in which Iblīs is cast as an ideal lover of God who had fallen in his love precisely because he had fallen in love. I would

¹⁰ Cyrus Zargar, *The Polished Mirror: Storytelling and the Pursuit of Virtue in Islamic Philosophy and Sufism* (London: Oneworld, 2017), 20.

like to close with one last passage from 'Ayn al-Quḍāt wherein he brings all these points home:

The derangement of love is of better worth than the cleverness of the entire world! Whoever is not a lover is a self-seer. To be a lover is to be without selfhood, and without a path.



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