

Jāmī

Flashes of Light

A Treatise on Sufism



Golden Elixir Press

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A Treatise on Sufism

Translated by E.H. Whinfield, M.A.,
and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḳazvīnī

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Originally published as *Lawāi'ih: A Treatise on Šūfism by Nūr-ud-dīn 'Abd-ur-Raḥmān Jāmī. Facsimile of an Old Ms., With a Translation by E.H. Whinfield, M.A., and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḳazvīnī, and Preface on the Influence of Greek Philosophy upon Šūfism* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1906)

This edition © 2010 by Golden Elixir Press
Golden Elixir Press, Mountain View, CA
www.goldenelixir.com

ISBN 978-0-9843082-2-4 (ebook)

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See but One, say but One, know but One.

GULSHAN I RAZ: l. 883

The *Alif* of the Loved One's form is graven on my heart,
No other letter did my Shaikh ever to me impart.

ḤĀFIZ: Ode 416 (ed. Brockhaus)

My heart inquired, "What is the heaven-sent lore?
If thou'st attained it, teach me, I implore."

"*Alif*," I said, "if there be one within,
One letter serves to name him—say no more."

OMAR KHAYYĀM: Quatrain 109

Publisher's Note

This book was originally published as *Lawāi'h: A Treatise on Ṣūfism by Nūr-ud-dīn 'Abd-ur-Raḥmān Jāmī. Facsimile of an Old Ms., With a Translation by E.H. Whinfield, M.A., and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḳazvīnī, and Preface on the Influence of Greek Philosophy upon Ṣūfism* by the Royal Asiatic Society (London, 1906). The present edition omits the reproduction of the original manuscript, as well as the original preface and one of the three original appendixes, which contain outdated and equivocal statements about Sufism and Jāmī's work, concerning in particular the direct historical origins of fundamental notions of Sufism in Greek thought. (Traces of this view are still visible in a few footnotes, which have been left intact.)

According to E.H. Whinfield's original preface, the translation was initially conducted on an undated manuscript, "probably written within a century of Jāmī's death in 898 A.H." Whinfield provides the following information:

[The manuscript] once belonged to the royal library at Delhi, and the outside pages contain notes by the librarians, one of which, dated the twenty-fourth year of Aurangzīb, states that it was worm-eaten even then. W.H. Morley, who also owned it, has noted on the fly-leaf his opinion that it is not Jāmī's work, but written by one Sayyid 'Abd-ul Kāfi. This, however, is certainly a mistake. Haji Khalfa, in his notice of Jāmī's *Lawāi'h*, quotes the beginning, which agrees with the beginning of this manuscript, and one of the quatrains gives Jāmī's name. The British Museum possesses three copies—viz., Add. 16,820 (Rieu, p. 44a); Add. 16,819, iv (Rieu, p. 826b); and Add. 7,689, iv, folio 150 onwards (Rieu, p. 810b). Copies are to be found in other libraries.

Eventually, however, the translation turned out to be the outcome of a cooperation between Whinfield and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḳazvīnī, a distinguished Persian scholar. As Whinfield states in his preface:

I began the translation some years ago, but, owing to failing eyesight, had to stop after getting to the end of Flash VII. I have now been fortunate enough to secure the assistance of a very competent scholar, Mīrzā Muḥammad Kaẓvīnī, who has furnished me with a literal French version of the whole, together with some valuable notes. In his translation the Mīrzā has chiefly followed the British Museum Manuscript, Add. No. 16,819, which contains several passages not found in this manuscript (*i.e.*, *the manuscript on which Whinfield had begun his own translation*). Most, if not all, of these seem to me to be glosses which have crept into the text, but I have given them in this translation, marking them with square brackets. Up to the end of Flash VII, the accompanying translation is that made by me some years ago, with some corrections suggested by the Mīrzā's version. From the beginning of Flash VIII to the end of the book the translation is the Mīrzā's French version turned into English by me. In this part of the work I have followed the Mīrzā closely, only referring to the original to verify a word here and there. I am solely responsible for the preface and notes. If they contain errors of fact or doctrine, these must not be imputed to the Mīrzā.

Whinfield's preface is concluded by the following remark:

The references to the *Gulshan i Rāz* are to my edition of that work (Trübner, 1880); those to the *Masnavī* of Jalāl-ud-dīn Rūmī to my translation of that poem (second edition, published in Trübner's Oriental Series, 1898); those to Omar Khayyām to my text and translation, published in the same series, second edition, 1901.

Translation

“I do not render praises unto Thee.”¹ How is this, seeing that “all praise returns to Thee?”² The threshold of Thy sanctity is too high for my praises. Thou art what Thine own praises declare Thee. O Lord, we are not able to tell Thy praises or set forth Thy glories. Whatsoever is manifested on the pages of the universe is praise reflected back to the threshold of Thy most glorious Majesty. What can faculty or tongue of mine declare worthy of Thy glory and honour? Thou art such as Thou hast Thyself declared, and the pearls of Thy praise are what Thyself hast strung.

In the vast largesse of Thy Majesty
This whole world's but a drop from out the sea;
What power have we to celebrate Thy praise?
No praises save Thine own are meet for Thee!

Where the speaker of the words, “I am the most eloquent [of the Arabs],”³ lowered the flag of his eloquence, and found himself impotent to render Thee fitting praises, how shall a mere stammerer venture to open his mouth or a dullard deliver an apt discourse? Nevertheless, in this case to excuse one's self on the ground of one's incapacity and deficiencies is itself the gravest of defects, and to put one's self on a level with that

¹ A saying of Muḥammad.

² Fluegel (Haji Khalfa, v. 344) translates, “Quomodo possim?” Cp. Surah, xvii. 46, “Neither is there aught which doth not celebrate Thy praise,” and Ps. cxlv. 10.

³ Referring to the saying, “I am the most eloquent of those who pronounce the letter Zād (Dzād),” the Arab shibboleth.

prince of the world and of the faith would be a serious breach of propriety.

What am I? Can I count myself the peer
Of the poor dog that's suffered to draw near?
I may not join the caravan—enough
If from afar the camel bells I hear.

O Lord, send down Thy blessing upon Muḥammad, the standard-bearer of praise and possessor of “the glorious station,”⁴ and upon his family, and upon his companions who through earnest endeavour have succeeded in attaining the goal of their desire, and pour upon them all Thy perfect peace!

*Supplications*⁵

O God, deliver us from preoccupation with worldly vanities, and show us the nature of things “as they really are.”⁶ Remove from our eyes the veil of ignorance, and show us things as they really are. Show not to us non-existence as existent, nor cast the veil of non-existence over the beauty of existence. Make this phenomenal world the mirror⁷ to reflect the manifestations of Thy beauty, and not a veil to separate and repel us from Thee. Cause these unreal phenomena of the universe to be for us the sources of knowledge and insight, and not the cause of ignorance and blindness. Our alienation and severance from

⁴ “It may be, O Muḥammad, that thy Lord will raise thee to a glorious station” (Koran, xvii. 81), interpreted to mean, his power of intercession.

⁵ The headings are all omitted in this manuscript, but spaces are left, which were probably intended to be filled in with gold lettering.

⁶ A prayer ascribed to Muḥammad. See *Gulshan i Rāz*, p. 21, note 1.

⁷ The divine Real Being is reflected in “Notbeing” (*adm*) as in a mirror, and gives it all the reality it possesses. See *Gulshan i Rāz*, p. 14, l. 134. This idea comes from Plotinus, “the Shaikh of the Greeks.”

Thy beauty all proceed from ourselves. Deliver us from ourselves, and accord to us intimate knowledge of Thee.

Make my heart pure, my soul from error free,
 Make tears and sighs my daily lot to be,
 And lead me on Thy road away from self,
 That lost to self I may approach to Thee!

Set enmity between the world and me,
 Make me averse from worldly company:
 From other objects turn away my heart,
 So that it be engrossed with love to Thee.

How were it, Lord, if Thou should'st set me free
 From error's grasp and cause me truth to see?
 Guebres by scores Thou makest Musulmans,
 Why, then, not make a Musulman of me?

My lust for this world and the next efface,
 Grant me the crown of poverty and grace
 To be partaker in Thy mysteries,
 From paths that lead not towards Thee turn my face.

Preface

This is a treatise entitled *Lawāi'ih*⁸ ("Flashes of Light"), explanatory of the intuitions and verities displayed on the pages of the hearts and minds of men of insight and divine knowledge, and of those who enjoy spiritual raptures and ecstasies. It is written in suitable language adorned with pleasing explanations. I trust that readers will hold of no account the personality of the author of this commentary, and will refrain from taking their seats upon the carpet of caviling and animadversion. For the author plays only the part of interpreter in the following

⁸ Haji Khalfa (v., p. 344) says Sayyid Kāseh Karrānī wrote a Persian commentary upon it.

discussions; his sole function is that of mouthpiece, and nothing else.

Believe me, I am naught—yea, less than naught.
 By naught and less than naught what can be taught?
 I tell the mysteries of truth, but know
 Naught save the telling to this task I brought.

For poverty to make no sign is best,
 On love divine to hold one's peace is best;
 For him who never felt ecstatic joys
 To play a mere reporter's part is best.

With men of light I sought these pearls to string,
 The drift of mystics sayings forth to bring;
 Now let his trusty slaves this tribute bear
 From foolish me to Hamadān's wise king.⁹

⁹ The person referred to is probably Shāh Manuchahr, Governor of Hamadān, who paid much attention to Jāmī when he visited the town in 877 A.H. See Lee's preface to the *Nafahāt*, p. 11. Note the pun on "Hama Dān" ("All-knowing"). Amīr Sayyid 'Alī of Hamadān, a Šūfī saint, is mentioned in the *Nafahāt*, p. 515, but as he died in 786 A.H., it is not likely that Jāmī is speaking of him.

Flash I¹

God has not made man with two hearts within him.² The Incomparable Majesty who has conferred the boon of existence upon thee has placed within thee but one heart, to the end that with single heart thou mayest love Him alone, and mayest turn thy back on all besides and devote thyself to Him alone, and refrain from dividing thy heart into a hundred portions, each portion devoted to a different object.

O votary of earthly idols' fane,
Why let these veils of flesh enwrap thy brain?
 'Tis folly to pursue a host of loves;
A single heart can but one love contain!

¹ "Lā'ihah." These headings, which are found in other manuscripts, are omitted in this, as before remarked.

² Koran, xxxiii. 4.

Flash II

Distraction or disunion (*Tafriqah*) consists in dividing the heart by attaching it to divers objects. Union or collectedness (*jam'īyyat*¹) consists in forsaking all else and being wholly engrossed in the contemplation of the One Unique Being. Those who fancy that collectedness results from the collecting of worldly goods remain in perpetual distraction, whilst those who are convinced that amassing wealth is the cause of distraction renounce all worldly goods.

O thou whose heart is torn by lust for all,
 Yet vainly strives to burst these bonds of all,
 This "all" begets distraction of the heart:
 Give up thy heart to ONE and break with all.

While thou'rt distraught by hell-born vanity,
 Thou'rt seen by men of union base to be;
 By God, thou art a demon,² and no man,
 Too ignorant thy devilry to see.

O pilgrim³ on the "path" vain talk reject;
 All roads save that to Unity neglect;
 Naught but distractedness proceeds from wealth:
 Collect thine heart, not store of wealth collect.

O heart, thy high-prized learning of the schools,
 Geometry and metaphysic rules—
 Yea, all but lore of God is devils' lore:
 Fear God and leave this evil lore to fools.

¹ Also "tranquillity," "congregation," "totality."

² *Nasnās*; literally, a fabulous monster, a satyr.

³ *Salik*.

Flash III

The Truth, most glorious and most exalted, is omnipresent. He knows the outer and inner state of all men in every condition. Oh, what a loss will be thine if thou turnest thine eyes from His face to fix them on other objects, and forsakest the way that is pleasing to Him to follow other roads!

My Love stood by me at the dawn of day,
And said, "To grief you make my heart a prey;
 Whilst I am casting looks of love at you,
Have you no shame to turn your eyes away?"

All my life long I tread love's path of pain,
If peradventure "union" I may gain.
 Better to catch one moment's glimpse of Thee
Than earthly beauties' love through life retain.

Flash IV

Everything other than the Truth (may He be glorified and exalted) is subject to decay and annihilation. Its substance is a mental figment with no objective existence, and its form is a merely imaginary entity.

Yesterday this universe neither existed nor appeared to exist, while to-day it appears to exist, but has no real existence: it is a mere semblance, and to-morrow nothing thereof will be seen. What does it profit thee to allow thyself to be guided by vain passions and desires? Why dost thou place reliance on these transitory objects that glitter with false lustre? Turn thy heart away from all of them, and firmly attach it to God. Break loose from all these, and cleave closely to Him. It is only He who always has been and always will continue to be. The countenance of His eternity is never scarred by the thorn of contingency.

The fleeting phantoms you admire to-day
Will soon at Heaven's behest be swept away.
O give your heart to Him who never fails,
Who's ever with you and will ever stay.

When to fair idols' shrines I did repair,
I vexed my heart with griefs encountered there;
Now earthly beauty has lost all its charm,
Eternal beauty is my only care.

Things that abide not to eternity
Expose thee to misfortune's battery;
In *this* life, then, sever thyself from all
From which thy death is bound to sever thee.

FLASHES OF LIGHT

Perchance with wealth and sons endowed thou art.
Yet with all these erelong thou'lt have to part.

Thrice happy he who gives his heart to ONE,
And sets affection on the men of heart.

Flash V

The Absolute Beauty is the Divine Majesty endued with [the attributes of] power and bounty. Every beauty and perfection manifested in the theatre of the various grades of beings is a ray of His perfect beauty reflected therein. It is from these rays that exalted souls have received their impress of beauty and their quality of perfection.¹ Whosoever is wise derives his wisdom from the Divine wisdom. Wherever intelligence is found it is the fruit of the Divine intelligence. In a word, all are attributes of Deity which have descended from the zenith of the Universal and Absolute to the nadir of the particular and relative. [They have descended] to the end that thou mayest direct thy course from the part towards the Whole, and from the relative deduce the Absolute, and not imagine the part to be distinct from the Whole, nor be so engrossed with what is merely relative as to cut thyself off from the Absolute.

The Loved One's rose-parterre I went to see,
 That beauty's Torch² espied me, and, quoth He,
 "I am the tree; these flowers My offshoots are.
 Let not these offshoots hide from thee the tree."

What profit rosy cheeks, forms full of grace,
 And ringlets clustering round a lovely face?
 When Beauty Absolute beams all around,
 Why linger finite beauties to embrace?

¹ Spenser in the "Hymn of Heavenly Love" expresses the same idea, which comes from Plato.

² Literally, "Torch of Tīrāz," a town in Turkistān famed for its beautiful women.

Flash VI

Man, in regard to his corporeal nature, stands at the lowest point of degradation; nevertheless, in regard to his spiritual nature, he is at the summit of nobility. He takes the impress of every thing to which he directs his attention, and assumes the colour of every thing to which he approaches. Wherefore philosophers say that when the reasonable soul adorns itself with exact and faithful impressions of realities, and appropriates to itself the true character of such realities, it becomes such as if it were itself altogether essential Being. In like manner the vulgar, by the force of their conjunction with these material forms and extreme preoccupation with these corporeal liens, come to be such that they cannot distinguish themselves from these forms or perceive any difference between the two. Well says the Maulavī of Rūmī (may God sanctify his secret) in the *Masnavī*:

O brother, thou art wholly thought,
 For the rest of thee is only bone and muscle:
 If thy thought be a rose, thou art a rose-bouquet;
 If it be a thorn, thou art fuel for the fire.

Wherefore it behoves thee to strive and hide thyself from thy sight,¹ and occupy thyself with Very Being, and concern thyself with the Truth. For the various grades of created things are theatres of His revealed beauty, and all things that exist are mirrors of his perfections.

And in this course thou must persevere until He mingles Himself with thy soul, and thine own individual existence passes out of thy sight. Then, if thou regardest thyself, it is He

¹ Variant, "hide thyself from the sight of the world."

whom thou art regarding; if thou speakest of thyself, it is He of whom thou art speaking. The relative has become the Absolute, and “I am the Truth” is equivalent to “He is the Truth.”²

If love of rose or bulbul fill thine heart,
Thyself a rose or eager bulbul art.
Thou art a part; the Truth is all in all.
Dwell on the Truth, and cease to be a part.

Of my soul’s union with this fleshly frame,
Of life and death Thou art the end and aim.
I pass away; Thou only dost endure.
When I say “me,” ‘tis Thee I mean to name.³

When will this mortal dress be torn away,
And Beauty Absolute His face display,
Merging my soul in His resplendent light,
Blinding my heart with His o’erpowering ray?

² The saving of Maṣṣūr i Ḥallāj (or Ibn Ḥallāj), the Sūfī martyr.

³ Compare the story of the Sūfī aspirant who was refused admittance by his Pīr till he ceased to speak of “me” and called himself “thee” (*Masnawī*, p. 47).

Flash VII

It is necessary for thee to habituate thyself to this intimate relation in such wise that at no time and in no circumstance thou mayest be without the sense of it, whether in coming or in going, in eating or sleeping, in speaking or listening. In short, thou must ever be on the alert both when resting and when working, not to waste thy time in insensibility [to this relation] —nay, more, thou must watch every breath, and take heed that it goeth not forth in negligence.

The years roll on; Thou showest not Thy face,
Yet nothing from my breast Thy love can chase;
Thine image ever dwells before mine eyes,
And in my heart Thy love aye holds its place.

Flash VIII

In like manner, as it behoves thee to maintain the said relation continually, so it is of the first importance to develop the quality thereof by detaching thyself from mundane relations and by emancipating thyself from attention to contingent forms; and this is possible only through hard striving and earnest endeavour to expel vain thoughts and imaginations from thy mind. The more these thoughts are cast out and these suggestions checked, the stronger and closer this relation becomes. It is, then, necessary to use every endeavour to force these thoughts to encamp outside the enclosure of thy breast, and that the Truth most glorious may cast His beams into thy heart, and deliver thee from thyself, and save thee from the trouble of entertaining His rivals in thy heart. Then there will abide with thee neither consciousness of thyself, nor even consciousness of such absence of consciousness¹—nay, there will abide nothing save the One God alone.

From my brute nature;² Lord, deliver me,
And from this life of evil set me free;
Purge me of my own sense and ignorance,
And make me lose my very self in Thee.

When poor indeed and dead to self thou'lt need
No visions, knowledge, certitude, or creed;
When self has perished naught but God remains,
For "Perfect poverty is God indeed."³

¹ See the passage from Ghazzālī in Appendix II.

² *Dadī*, brutishness. Some manuscripts read *duwī*, disease, but this does not suit the rhyme, which in verses with a burden (*radīf*) always precedes it. Scan *dādīyī*, dissolving long *ī* and lengthening the *izāfat*.

³ Seemingly a Ḥadīth. Poverty, utter annihilation of self (*Gulshan i Rāz*, l. 128,

Flash IX

Self-annihilation consists in this, that through the overpowering influence of the Very Being upon the inner man, there remains no consciousness of aught beside Him. Annihilation of annihilation consists in this, that there remains no consciousness even of that unconsciousness. It is evident that annihilation of annihilation is involved in [the very notion of] annihilation. For if he who has attained annihilation should retain the least consciousness of his annihilation, he would not be in the state of annihilation, because the quality of annihilation and the person possessing such quality are both things distinct from the Very Being, the Truth most glorious. Therefore, to be conscious of annihilation is incompatible with annihilation.¹

While fondness for your “self” you still retain,
 You’ll not reduce its bulk a single grain—
 Yea, while you feel one hair’s-breadth of yourself
 Claims to annihilation are but vain.

and note).

¹ So Ghazzālī, quoted in Appendix II.

Flash X

Unification¹ consists in unifying the heart—that is to say, in purifying it and expelling from it attachment to all things other than the Truth most glorious, including not only desire and will, but also knowledge and intelligence. In fact, one must quench desire of all things hitherto desired, and cease to will what one has hitherto willed, and also remove from the intellectual vision all concepts and all cognitions, and turn away the mind from all things whatsoever, so that there remains no consciousness or cognition of aught save the Truth most glorious. [Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī said: “Unification is not merely believing Him to be One, but in thyself being one with Him.”²]

“Oneness” in pilgrims’ phraseology
Is from concern with “other” to be free;
Learn, then, the highest “station” of the birds,³
If language of the birds be known to thee.

¹ *Tauḥīd* is the *Henōsis* of Plotinus, the becoming one with the One.

² This sentence occurs only in the British Museum copy, Add. 16,819. Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt, who died 481 A.H., was named the Shaikh of Islām, and is often quoted by Jāmī in the *Nafahāt*. See Haji Khalfā, i., 235.

³ Alluding to the “Discourse of the Birds and their Pilgrimage to the Sīmurgh,” by Farīd-ud-dīn ‘Attār. “Other,” the *Heterotēs* of Plotinus.

Flash XI

So long as a man remains imprisoned in the snare of passions and lusts, it is hard for him to maintain this close communion [with the Truth]. But from the moment that sweet influence takes effect on him, expelling from his mind the firebrand of vain imaginations and suggestions, the pleasure he experiences therefrom predominates over bodily pleasures and intellectual enjoyments. Then the painful sense of effort passes away, and the joys of contemplation take possession of his mind; he banishes from his heart all alien distractions, and with the tongue of ecstasy murmurs this canticle:

Like bulbul I'm inebriate with Thee,¹
My sorrows grow from memories of Thee,
 Yet all earth's joys are dust beneath the feet
Of those entrancing memories of Thee.

¹ So in the *Stabat Mater*: "Fac me cruce inebriari."

Flash XII

When the true aspirant perceives in himself the beginnings of this Divine attraction, which consists in experiencing pleasure whenever he thinks of the Truth most glorious, he ought to exert all his endeavours to develop and strengthen this experience, and simultaneously to banish whatever is incompatible therewith. He ought to know, for instance, that even though he should employ an eternity in cultivating this communion, that would count as nothing, and he would not have discharged his duty as he ought.

On my soul's lute a chord was struck by Love,
Transmuting all my being into love;
Ages would not discharge my bounden debt Of gratitude for
one short hour of love.

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