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THE HERITAGE
OF SUFISM

VOLUME I

Classical Persian Sufism
from its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)

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VI

The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism, from Rābiʿa to Rūzbihān

Carl W. Ernst

Everyone acknowledges that love is hard to classify, but that has not kept people from trying to do so. Especially in a tradition like Persian Sufism, in which love is the subject of innumerable tributes, it has been impossible to resist the attempt to describe the character of love. The panorama of early Sufism in Persia offers many testimonies to love and its many moods and degrees. Mystical classifications of the stages of love differed from secular, legal, and philosophical analyses of love in that the Sufis consistently placed love in the context of their mystical psychology of ‘states’ and ‘stations’, with an emphasis on love as the transcendence of the self.¹ Moreover, love in its various forms was of such importance that it generally was recognized as “the highest goal of the stations and the loftiest summit of the stages,” in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s phrase.² The classifications of the stages of love according to the early Sufis differed in detail, but the fundamental emphasis throughout was on love as the most important form of the human-divine

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². See page 436—
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relationship. We can trace the historical development of the classifications of love in Persian Sufism in an almost direct line from its origins through Râbi’î of Basra to the summa of love by the sixth/twelfth-century Sufi of Shiraz, Rûzbîhân Baqli. Throughout this development, we can see the gradual elaboration of many refinements, and even the intrusion of vocabulary from the secular philosophical tradition, but the fundamental emphasis is on love aspiring to union with God.

The problem of the classification of love’s stages is inseparable from the larger theme of the states (ahwâl) and stations (maqâmât) in Sufism. Ultimately, the impulse to categorize goes back to the Koran, with its differentiation of souls in the eschaton, and the term maqâm is fairly frequent in the Koran. In Sufism, many commentators have noticed that this type of classification goes back at least to Dhu’l-Nun the Egyptian (d. 246/861), who is credited with lists of nineteen or eight stages, while in Iran, Yahyâ ibn Mu’âdh (d. 258/872) spoke of seven or four. Paul Nwyia has traced the Sufi concern with the structure of mystical experience to the sixth Imam of the Shi’ites, Ja’far al-Sâdiq (d. 148/765), whose Koran commentary formed the basis for the Sufi exegesis of Dhu’l-Nun. Ja’far al-Sâdiq compiled three lists of stages, which analyzed the spiritual itinerary toward the vision of the face of God: the twelve springs of gnosis, the twelve constellations of the heart, and the forty lights deriving from the light of God. As Nwyia pointed out, the order and selection of the terms included in the different lists vary considerably.


3. The term maqâm occurs fourteen times in the Koran. It hardly seems necessary to suppose with Massion that this concept is a “philosophical intrusion” of Stoic origin; cf. Louis Massion, La Passion de Husayn ibn Mansur Hallâj, martyr mystique de l’Islam exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922, new ed., 4 vols., (Paris: Gallimard 1975), I, 590, a. 5.


6. The Berlin MS has here instead “soul (nafs),” corresponding to no. 8 on the list of Hallâj, given below.

7. See page 438—>

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indicating that the stages of the soul’s progress were far from being fixed at this time. Yet it is significant that stages of love occupied prominent positions in Ja’far al-Sâdiq’s lists: love (mâhabba) and intimacy (iṣâs) are the eleventh and twelfth of the twelve springs of gnosis, while love (mâhabba), longing (shawq), and ravishing (walâh) are the last three constellations of the heart. For the sake of illustration, Ja’far’s second list reads as follows:

Heaven is called “heaven” due to its loftiness. The heart is a heaven, since it ascends by faith and gnosis without limit or restriction. Just as “the known” [i.e., God] is unlimited, so the gnosis of it is unlimited. The zodiacal signs of heaven are the courses of the sun and moon, and they are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. In the heart there are zodiacal signs, and they are:

1. The sign of faith (iṣâs);
2. The sign of gnosia (ma’rifa);
3. The sign of intellect (‘âqîd);
4. The sign of certainty (yaqîn); 6
5. The sign of submission (iṣlâm);
6. The sign of beneficence (iḥsân);
7. The sign of trust in God (tawakkul);
8. The sign of fear (khawf);
9. The sign of hope (rajî); 10.
10. The sign of love (mâhabba);
11. The sign of longing (shawq);
12. The sign of ravishing (walâh).

It is by these twelve zodiacal signs that the heart remains good, just as it is by the twelve zodiacal signs, from Aries and Taurus to the end, that the evanescent world and its people are good. 7
If it is correct to see a progression or ascent in this early classification, then the stages of love occupy an important, not to say pre-eminent, position in the spiritual experience of the soul.

The elevation of the love of God to a supreme level in Sufism has most often been connected to Râbi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 815/801), the famous woman saint of Basra. An early Sufi ascetic of the so-called school of Basra, ‘Abd al-Wâhid ibn Zayd in the seventh century, had introduced the non-Koranic term īshq or ‘passionate love’ to describe the divine-human relationship. Another Basran, Rabî‘ al-Qaysî, used the Koranic term khulûl or ‘friendship.’ But it is especially Râbi‘a who has gained fame as one who distinguished between the selfish lover of God who seeks paradise and the selfless lover who thinks only of the divine beloved. For her, love (ḥubb or mahābbat) meant concentration on God to the exclusion of all else. When Sufyân al-Thawrî asked Râbi‘a what was the reality of her faith, she replied, “I have not worshipped Him from fear of His fire, nor for love of His garden, so that I should be like a lowly hireling; rather, I have worshipped Him for love of Him and longing for Him.” Her oft-quoted distinction between the ‘two loves,’ a selfish love seeking paradise and a selfless love seeking God’s pleasure, is the fundamental beginning point in the understanding of the stages of love. She wrote,

10. Râbi‘a, in Ghazzî, Ilîyâ’, IV, 2598. Gardet, p. 165, n. 20, cites Kalâbâdî (d. 855/97), and Abû ‘Abbâd al-Makkî (d. 386/996) as transmitters of this poem with a variant reading in the second half of the third line: “Would that I see no more creatures, but see You!”
12. Râbi‘a, in Ghazzî, Ilîyâ’, IV, 2598. Gardet, p. 165, n. 20, cites Kalâbâdî (d. 855/97), and Abû ‘Abbâd al-Makkî (d. 386/996) as transmitters of this poem with a variant reading in the second half of the third line: “Would that I see no more creatures, but see You!”
14. Râbi‘a was the subject of a biography by the Hanbali scholar Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 397/1200) (Massignon, Essai, p. 239), and her story was told by European Christians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a model of true charity (Gardet, p. 167, n. 25-26; Schimmel, p. 8). Modern tributes to her include the well-known monograph by Margaret Smith, Râbi‘a ‘alîy Sofa and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1928); ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Badawi, Shahihat al-‘îshq al-îlâyî, Râbi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, Dirasat Islâmîyya, no. 8 (Cairo: al-Nahda 1946); a hagiography by Widad el Sakkakini, First Among Sufis: The Life and Thoughts of Rabia al-‘Adawiyya, the Woman Saint of Basra, trans. Nabî Safwat (London: The Octagon Press 1982); and reworkings of English translations of her poetry by Charles Upton, Doorkeeper of the Heart: Versions of Râbi‘a (Putney, VT: Threshold Books 1988).
Khūrāsān, was especially interested in psychological classification. Of him Sulamī (d. 412/1021) remarked, “I believe that he was the first to speak of the sciences of mystical states (ahwāl) in the districts of Khūrāsān.”\textsuperscript{15} In a small treatise on worship, Ādāb al-‘ibādāt (“The Manners of Worship”), Shaqiq gave one of the earliest descriptions in Sufi literature of the progress of the soul through different abodes (mandāzīl). These abodes are four: asceticism (ziyād), fear (khawf), longing for paradise (shawq ilā al-jannah), and love of God (mahabbāt ilā llāh). This classification is evidently very archaic. Shaqiq describes each stage in terms of a forty-day retreat, and for the first two abodes he gives details of the discipline of appetite and emotion, and of the illuminations of divine grace bestowed on the aspirant. The third abode calls for meditation on the delights of paradise to such an extent that by the fortieth day one has forgotten about the previous stages and possesses a happiness that no misfortune can disturb.\textsuperscript{16}

Although many enter the abodes of asceticism, fear, and longing for paradise, according to Shaqiq, not all enter the abode of love, which is the highest station. Those purified ones whom God brings to this abode have their hearts filled with the light of love and forget the previous stations; the light of divine love eclipses the other experiences, as the rising sun makes the moon and stars invisible. The essence of the experience of the love of God is that it is absolute and exclusive devotion, leaving room for nothing else in the heart.\textsuperscript{17} It is especially noteworthy that in this classification, the term longing (shawq) is here reserved for longing for paradise, while in later discussions of love it is another mode of the soul’s desire for God. It seems that the early Sufis’ concern with establishing the primacy of the love of God succeeded in excluding the desire for paradise as a legitimate goal of mysticism; henceforth, longing can only be directed toward God.

It is difficult to trace out the precise development of Sufi teachings about love’s stages from this point, but it is clear that the Baghdādī Sufis in the third/ninth century devoted much attention to this topic. As we can tell by his nickname, ‘the Lover,’ Summūn al-Muhīb (d. 287/900) is reported to have raised love to the highest position in his teaching. In a testimony preserved by the Ghaznavid master ‘Alī Hujwīrī (d. 465/1072), Summūn described love as the highest and most comprehensive of spiritual states. “Love is the principle and foundation of the Path to God Most High. The states and stations are abodes [all related to love]; in whichever abode the seeker resides, it is appropriate that it should end, except for the stage of love. In no way is it appropriate that this should come to an end, as long as the Path exists.”\textsuperscript{18} Hujwīrī comments that all other Shaykhs agree with Summūn in this matter, though they may use a different terminology out of prudence.

Among the Baghdādī Sufis, Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) also placed a particular emphasis on love as a quality of God, with what some have perceived as a philosophical emphasis.\textsuperscript{19} Louis Massignon pointed out that Ḥallāj, in a passage recorded by Sulamī, had described a list of psychological states and stages in which the final items are clearly related to love; this list is evidently based on Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s list of ‘constellations of the heart,’ described above. In this passage, Ḥallāj proposes a test for the sincerity of spiritual claims, juxtaposing each moment (waqīt) of inner experience with

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 20-21.
\textsuperscript{19} I have briefly discussed this problem in Rābi‘bān Bāqī on Love as ‘Essential Desire’,” in God is Beautiful and Loves Beauty: Essays presented to Annemarie Schimmel, ed. J.-C. Bürkel and Alma Giere (Leiden: Peter Lang 1994).
the practices and qualities that are required of one who claims it:

And among their manners is striving in the gnosia of claims (da‘wā) and seeking [to attain] every moment with the manners [of the state] announced by the one who claims that moment. Ḥusayn ibn Mašūr said,

1. One who claims (dā‘i) faith (imān) needs (yadū tīla) guidance (risšid).
2. One who claims submission (islām) needs morals (akhlāq).
3. One who claims beneficence (iḥsān) needs witnessing (mushāhada).
4. One who claims understanding (fahm) needs abundance (ziyāda).
5. One who claims intellect (‘aql) needs taste (madhāq).
6. One who claims learning (‘ilm) needs audation (sama‘).
7. One who claims gnosia (ma‘rifah) needs spirit, peace, and fragrance (al-rūḥ wa al-rāḥa wa al-rā‘īha).
8. One who claims the soul (nafs) needs worship (‘ibāda).
9. One who claims trust in God (tawakkul) needs confidence (thiqā).
10. One who claims fear (khawf) needs agitation (inzi‘āj).
11. One who claims hope (raja‘) needs quietude (tama‘nīnā).
12. One who claims love (mahābba) needs longing (shawq).
13. One who claims longing (shawq) needs ravishing (walāh).
14. One who claims ravishing (walāh) needs God (allāh).

And one who has nothing remaining (dā‘iyya) from these claims will fail; he is among those who roam in the deserts of astonishment. And God is with the one who does not worry.21

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Massignon rightly observed that Ja‘far al-Ṣadiq’s list partially duplicates that of Ḥallāj; the last six terms in both lists are identical, and the first six terms in Ja‘far’s list are (with one exception) duplicated in a different order in Ḥallāj’s list.22 In comparing the lists of Ja‘far’s constellations and Ḥallāj’s spiritual claims, one may ask how similar their purposes are. In terms of Sufi terminology, both lists belong largely to the category of states (al-wāl) rather than stations (maqāmān).23 Ḥallāj’s list seems more clearly to represent an ascending series, since it culminates in God. It complicates the basic list of states by making each state that one claims dependent on other attainments. The last terms in the series link up, so that the twelfth, mahābba, depends on the thirteenth, shawq, which in turn depends on the fourteenth, walāh. In contrast, Ja‘far’s list of states is structured in a simpler form in terms of the zodiacal signs. Each of these states is a constellation in the heaven of the heart, and forms a mode of relation to God. The states are essentially unlimited, since the object to which they are related (God) is unlimited. Like the zodiacal constellations in heaven, the states of the heart are the means of regulating order, in this case in the psychic microcosm, conceived of as orbiting around God. Ḥallāj’s fourteen spiritual claims appear to be a kind of commentary and expansion on the earlier list, explaining the human efforts or divine gifts that are prerequisites for these spiritual states. The two categories that he added to Ja‘far al-Ṣadiq’s list are ‘ilm and fahm, religious knowledge and understanding, both of which pertain to the realm of knowledge. But Ḥallāj recognized the extraordinary character of the last three stages relating to love; they are linked together, and the last stage, ravishing (walāh), depends only on God. In this articulation of the stages of love, Ḥallāj adapted the scripturally based formulation of Ja‘far al-Ṣadiq to illustrate and further emphasize the supreme position that love holds among the spiritual degrees.

20. The term da‘wā has been defined as follows: “The claim (da‘wā) is the relationship of the soul with something that is not its station. But in reality, it is the manifestation of boldness (jur an) with the quality of discovering reality.” (Rūzbihān Bağl Shirāzī, *Shāh-i shabtibyāt*, ed. Henry Corbin, Bibliothèque Iranienne 12 [Tehran: Département d’iranologie de l’Institut Franco-iranien 1966], p. 572).

22. If the Berlin variant is followed, all of the first six terms in Ja‘far’s list occur in that of Ḥallāj.
of love, such as maḥabba, uns, and wałah, and he has also put the hitherto controversial term 'işhq at the heart of the discussion. Daylamí in fact credits Ḥallaj with being the Sufi who was closest to the philosophers in speaking of 'işhq as being the essence of God. Another spirit breathes through this classification, however, recalling the court poetry of the ‘Abbásid age; not only are some of the terms unfamiliar in Sufi contexts, but in every instance, Daylamí also gives learned etymologies and specimen from classical Arabic poetry, including several attributed to Majnûn, to illustrate the overtones of each of the ten terms. The title of his treatise, with its learned reference to the calligraphic properties of the letters alif and lâm, further indicates the literary character of his approach. In addition, by separating the stations of love from the rest of the spiritual stations, Daylamí has removed love from its Sufi context. His list of definitions and categorizations of love resembles instead the learned discussions that commonly took place in philosophical circles. While this admittedly eclectic and partially secular work does not appear at first sight central to Persian Sufism, its sections on Sufi attitudes to love preserve some important testimonies, and it survived in the Shiraz tradition and was appropriated by Rûzbihân Baqli, as we shall see. The significance of Daylamí’s arrangement is as a systematic classification of love uniting the tendencies of Sufism, philosophy, and court culture. The important apologetic works and instruction manuals of Iranian Sufis in the fifth/eleventh century continued to elaborate on love in terms of the states and stations. Abû al-Qâsim al-Qushayrî (d. 465/1072), in his famous handbook on Sufism, listed love (maḥabba) and longing (şawq) as the forty-ninth and fiftieth of his fifty stations. Quṣayrî’s understanding of longing was complex;

26. Daylamî, op. cit., p. 25. See my previously cited article (above, n. 19) for more on this topic.
28. See especially Daylamî, pp. 32-36, 42-45, 68-71, 84-88 for quotations from Sufi authorities on love.
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it was not simply a deprivation from the presence of the beloved. Longing for the vision of the divine countenance, in his view, was so intense that it could only continue in the encounter with God. 

'Abdullāh Anšārī (d. 481/1089), in his early Persian work Šād maydān (One Hundred Fields), regarded love as the comprehensive principle of spiritual progress. He concluded that “These one hundred ‘fields’ are all submerged in the field of love (maḥabbah).” Love itself was divided into the three degrees of uprightness (rāsī), intoxication (mastā), and nothingness (nīṣṭā). In his later treatise on one hundred stations, Manāzīl al-sāʿīrīn (Abodes of the Wayfarers), he downgraded the stations of love somewhat, for the purpose of instruction; love (maḥabbah) was now number sixty-one, longing (shawq) was number sixty-three, and bewilderment (hayamān) number sixty-eight. This shift of emphasis has been convincingly explained as a result of Anšārī’s strong insistence that the beginner focus on the annihilation (fanā’) of the ego and the incomparability of the divine unity (tawḥīd). Love and longing are stages which still imply the existence of the lover, at least as far as the novice is concerned. For the elite, however, “their love is their annihilation in the love of the Real, because all loves become invisible in the love of God, by His loving (iḥbāb).”

The Seljuk era also saw the emergence of treatises especially devoted to love or placing great emphasis on it, although these works were often poetic and diffuse, in contrast to the more systematic Sufi handbooks. The best-known of these is the Sawānīth of Ahmad Ghazāli (d. 520/1126), a brother of the famous theologian. Ritter described this as one of the most original writings on love produced in the Islamic world, yet he also confessed that its content was remarkably obscure. Pourjavady, who translated and commented on this text, remarked with some understatement that Ghazāli “does not express his ideas in a very systematic fashion.” The Sawānīth is in fact of a highly refined and allusive character, intended for a restricted audience, and it makes no attempt to analyze love in terms of a system of stages. It is, rather, a kind of phenomenology and psychology of the human-divine love relationship, expressing that love with a rich symbolism; it presupposes the density of the Sufi literary and mystical tradition, but without ostentation.

Ghazāli’s disciple ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt Hamadhāni (d. 525/1131), the Sufi martyr, devoted several memorable passages in the sixth chapter of his Tamhidat to meditations on love, which are worth noting as an example of this freer style of expression. He identifies love as a religious requirement (fard), since it brings humanity to God. Like earlier Sufis, he makes a distinction between seeking heaven and seeking the love of God. He maintains that heaven as a separate state is a prison for the spiritual elite; properly speaking, God is himself the highest heaven. Not a systematizer, ‘Ayn al-Quṭāt divides love (‘ishq) into only three categories:

1. the lesser love (‘ishq-i šaghir), which is our love for God;
2. the greater love, (‘ishq-i kabir), which is God’s love for Himself—it has no trace by which it can be recognized, and because of its surpassing beauty it is describable only by cypher and parable (ba-ramūz wa mithlāh).

30. Ibid., II, 627.
31. A translation of this section of Anšārī’s work is given in A.G. Ravān Farhādī’s essay in this volume, above, p. 399. —Ed.
33. Anšārī clarified this point in his Ital al-maqaṣmāt (“The Flaws of the Stations”), a text written in response to questions concerning the Manāzīl al-sāʿīrīn, pp. 413-14, and Bel, pp. 171-72.
34. Farhādī describes this passage as “from the end of the treatise about love,” cf. Manāzīl al-sāʿīrīn, p. 415, remark no. 4 (appended to the Persian translation of the section on maḥabbah from ‘Ital al-maqaṣmāt).

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3. the in-between or mutual love (‘ishq-i miyāna), which he also despairs of describing—in it one at first finds a difference between witnesser and witnessed, until it reaches the limit, when they become one.41

The various manifestations of the beloved’s face, symbolized by Koranic passages, should be considered as many stations, not one.42 But ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt is not interested in giving a detailed account of these stations. He only mentions that the first station of love is astonishment (taḥayyur).43 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s main concern is the state of mutual love between God and human, when the Koranic phrase “He loves them and they love Him” (yuḥḥibuhum wa yuḥḥibūnahū, Koran, V: 54) becomes fulfilled. Experiencing this mutuality of love is like basking in the splendor of the cosmic sun, which is revealed in Koranic phrases that become seclusion retreats for the meditating soul.44 At that point the essence of the intimate relationship between God and the soul is revealed to be love: “Did you know that the unique Essence of Might has a characteristic, and that characteristic (‘arad) is nothing but passionate love? ... God’s love becomes the substance (jawhār) of the [human] soul, and our love becomes the characteristic of His existence.”45

But it is with Rūzbihān Baqīlī (d. 606/1209) that we meet perhaps the most striking articulation of the stages of love in early Persian Sufism. Rūzbihān composed his Persian treatise The Jasmine of the Lovers (‘Abhar al-ʿāshiqīn) at the request of a female interlocutor, to decide the question of whether it is legitimate to describe God in terms of passionate love (‘ishq); modern scholars like Corbin have speculated that this woman may have been the beautiful singer with whom Rūzbihān is supposed to have fallen in love during a sojourn in Mecca.46 There are many aspects of this treatise deserving of comment and analysis, but for purposes of this discussion, two passages stand out. The first is Rūzbihān’s brief recapitulation of Daylamī’s list of the stages of love, with some alterations; the second section is the lengthy description of Rūzbihān’s own list of the stations of love. As Takeshita has shown, Rūzbihān incorporated a little less than one-sixth of Daylamī’s ‘Afī al-ʿalīf into the ‘Abhar al-ʿāshiqīn, and this list of ten stations occupies a couple of pages in Rūzbihān’s sixth chapter, on the nature of human love.47 Actually Rūzbihān has abridged Daylamī’s list considerably, leaving out the samples of Arabic poetry for six of the ten terms, and omitting one term (istihār) altogether. Then, almost as an afterthought, he has added, with minimal explanation, three extra terms not employed by Daylamī: ḥayājān or agitation, ‘atsh or thirst, and shawq or longing. As we have already seen, Daylamī’s list of ten terms belongs more to the philosophical and courtly tradition than to Sufism. What is the significance of its presence here, in this form? The context indicates that Rūzbihān is using Daylamī’s list to illustrate the character of mundane human love.

The list of the stages of love follows on a somewhat obscure cosmological discussion, in which Rūzbihān describes four principles of love analogous to the four elements of nature. These principles appear to be:48

1) the natural capacity of the body to receive spiritual influence;
2) uniting with the spiritual light;
3) love being constituted as the capacity of the lover to perceive beauty; and

48. ‘Abhar, pp. 38-39. Although Takeshita remarks that Rūzbihān does not name these four “elements” in this admittedly obscure passage, the anonymous Persian commentary (‘Abhar, p. 154) helps to clarify it along the lines suggested here.
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4) beauty coming into actual relation with the lover’s eye to create the unity of love, differentiated into lover and beloved.

The result of these four principles is that the lover seeks the beloved through the senses and then slowly ascends through the stations of love until reaching perfection. Now, the eleven stations of love that Rūzbihān has elaborated on the basis of Daylamī’s are only the beginning of the lover’s progress; Rūzbihān describes them as rivulets leading to the sea of love. Then comes presence and absence, sobriety and intoxication, and a multitude of qualities for which love is the overarching rubric. But all this is still in the realm of human love, contemplating the works of the Creator, in the beginning of love. The philosophical categories of love borrowed from Daylamī are still unpurified and contain the flaws (‘īlāl) of the carnal self. Natural love, the lowest form, can nonetheless be first spiritualized and then divinized.49 The context indicates that Rūzbihān has reinserted Daylamī’s philosophical categories into a Sufi teaching.50 Like Platonic eros, philosophical ‘ishq provides the energy that can transformed and purified by the spiritual path. But that will come later.

In the last quarter of the ‘Abhar al-‘āshiqīn, from chapters nineteen to thirty-two, Rūzbihān describes the mystical ascent to perfect love. This progress consists of twelve stations:

1. ‘ubūdiyyat or servanthood
2. wilāyat or sainthood
3. muraqqabat or meditation
4. khawf or fear
5. rajá‘ or hope
6. wajd or finding
7. yaqīn or certainty
8. qurban or nearness
9. mukāshafat or unveiling
10. mushāhada or witnessing
11. mahabbat or love
12. shawq or longing

These twelve stations are followed by “the highest rank, universal love (‘ishq-i kullī), which is the goal of the spirit.”51 Rūzbihān has elaborated on the meaning of each station in a comprehensive and even practical way, although he often complicates his points with his distinctive style of metaphoric overflow. His explanations invoke specific Koranic verses that are seen as the loci of particular spiritual experiences. We may briefly summarize his descriptions of these stations as follows. Servanthood consists of the practices of spiritual discipline such as dhikr, prayer, silence, and fasting, in order to purify one’s character. Sainthood includes such qualities as repentance (tawba), piety (wara‘), and asceticism (zuhd). Meditation is based on control of random thoughts and seeing one’s true nature. Fear is a kind of purifying fire that instills the manners of the prophets, although it is a deception if it alienates one from the beloved. Then hope is the cure, leading to the springtime of the soul. Finding is encountering the nearness of the beloved (Rūzbihān notes that he has explained its varieties in a work for novices, the Risālat al-‘udr or ‘ Treatise on the Holy’). The certainty of the elite is something beyond the unshakeable faith that is the certainty of the ordinary person; it is a direct perception of divine attributes in the heart. Nearness is an ascent to the divine presence in an increasingly intensive transcendence, which Rūzbihān describes in a characteristic image as the burning of the wings of a bird in flight.52 Unveiling operates on the levels of intellect, heart, and spirit to reveal the different forms of love; it joins love and beauty in the soul and reveals divine lordship as the wine of love. Witnessing is a category that Rūzbihān divides into two parts corresponding to sobriety and in-

49. ‘Abhar, pp. 42–43.
50. Rūzbihān has appropriated philosophic views on love from Daylamī into another of his writings. In his treatise on one thousand and one spiritual states, Rūzbihān quoted the pre-Socratic philosopher Heractitus (via Daylamī) on the nature of ‘ishq: “The Creator makes space for the souls in all creation so that they gaze on His pure light, which emerges from the substance of the Real. And at that time their passionate love (‘ishq) and longing becomes intense and does not ever cease.” Cf. Abū Muhammad Rūzbihān al-‘Bu‘lī al-Shirazi, Kitāb mashrāb al-‘arwāb, ed. Na‘īf Hoca (İstanbul: Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, no. 1876, Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası 1974), p. 135, corrected according to Daylamī, ‘Afs, p. 25.

51. ‘Abhar, p. 100. The stations are described on pp. 101–48.
52. I have translated a section of this passage in “The Symbolism of Birds and Flight in the Writings of Rūzbihān Baqī,” in The Heritage of Sufism II, p. 363.
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toxication (a division that can be made in every station); the sober part of witnessing is clothing with divinity (ilthás), a trait of Abraham, while the intoxicated part is effacement (maláh), a characteristic of Moses—yet Muhammád unitied both experiences in his witnessing. 53

After the ten stations just described, Rûzbihân expands on the nature of the eleventh, love (mahábbá). This love can naturally be divided into two phases corresponding to the common folk and the elite. The love of the common folk is based on the manifestation of beauty in creation, and while it is indeed miraculous, its degrees are those of faith rather than direct witnessing. The elite love is based on three kinds of witnessing. The first of these occurred in the preclinical state, when the disembodied spirits of humanity made a covenant with God by acknowledging Him as their Lord (Koran, VII: 171).

They asked the Real for beauty, so that gnosis would be perfect. The Real removed the veil of might, and showed them the beauty of majesty’s essence. The spirits of the prophets and saints became intoxicated from the influence of hearing [the divine speech and seeing] the beauty of majesty. They fell in love with the eternal beloved, with no trace of temporality. From that stage, their love began to increase with degrees of divine improvement, because when the holy spirits entered earthly form, from their prior melancholy they all began to say “Show me!” (Koran, VII:143). They found the locus of delight, so that whatever they saw in this world, they saw all as Him. 54

This is followed by a second stage of witnessing in which the substance of the spirit is not veiled at all by human characteristics, and the divine beloved is encountered without any intervening me-

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dium. The third stage of witnessing perfects the second, as the unimpeded vision of God takes place in eternity. Each attribute of the beloved inspires a different kind of love, and the lover is transformed into a mirror of God, so that whoever looks upon the lover becomes in turn a lover of God. Even at this level of love, there are additional distinctions, depending on the degree of knowledge of the divine unity.

With the twelfth stage, longing (shawq), Rûzbihân brings us so close to the divine unity that the distinctions implied by love and longing become paradoxical. He connects longing to prayers of Muhammád that ask for “the pleasure of gazing on your face, and the longing for meeting with you.” He describes longing as a fire that burns away all thoughts, desires, and veils from the heart. Yet when the lover is united with the beloved, “for whom is there longing, for whom is there love if not oneself?” 55 The language of love still implies duality. If love and longing reach unity, they will no longer exist.

In the thirteenth and final section on the perfection of love, Rûzbihân resumes his theme by equating God with love. Since passionate love (‘ishq) is a divine attribute, God loves himself; God is love, lover, and beloved. The perfection of ‘ishq is identical with divine mahábbá. This does not imply any distinction within the divine essence; God’s multiple attributes are simply aspects of his beauty that he revealed to the spirits of humanity. Love remains an eternal quality. Rûzbihân calls it “the ivy of the ground of eternity, which has twined around the tree of the lover’s soul. It is a sword that cuts off the head of temporality from the lover. It is the peak of the mountains of the attributes, where the soul of the lover who arrives there becomes the prisoner of love.” 56 When lover and beloved become one, there is a complete transformation: “Then the lover becomes the ruler in the kingdom of the Real. When the Real overpowers him, his bodily form becomes heavenly, his soul becomes spiritual, his life becomes divine. He becomes the beloved of the beloved, the desired of the desired.” 57 Many paradoxes follow. From one point

53. At the beginning phase of witnessing, Rûzbihân invokes some terms from Daylani’s list of the stations of love: “In the beginning, in witnessing the soul experiences no duration, because the assaults of the Essence violently cast it into universal intoxication from the vision [of God]. In that ravishing (waláh), the eye has no power to see. When it reaches the witnessing of knowledge and union, it remains long in witnessing, but the bewilderment (hayyáh) and agitation (hayáh) of its ecstasy (wajh) disturb it from the sweetness of beauty.” (‘Abhar, p. 130).
54. Ibid., p. 132. The Koranic reference (VII: 143) is to Moses’ demand to see God face to face.
55. Ibid., p. 136.
56. Ibid., p. 139.
57. Ibid.
of view, love cannot be perfect, since the beloved has no limit. Yet the perfection of love is the essence of perfection. Love is also annihilation (fana‘); when beauty is fully revealed, neither lover nor beloved remains. Lovers who find their life in the love of God cannot be said to die; they are like martyrs, always alive in God. Lovers become like angelic spirits, flying in the highest heaven with peacock angels, like Khidr, Ilyas, Idris, and Jesus. The world becomes submerged by them, and they reveal themselves wherever they wish; this was the case with Abraham, Moses, Aaron, and Muhammad. Some take earthly form, like the Sufi saints, or discard their bodies like veils. Ultimately, the limit of love is defined by the two stations of gnosis (ma‘rifat) and unity (tawhid). It is characterized by the final stages of annihilation and subsistence. But the perfection of love is the end of love; at its highest stage it no longer exists. It is at this point that it becomes appropriate to speak in terms of ecstatic expressions (shaqhiyya‘), such as Abū Yazīd’s “Glory be to me,” or Hallaj’s “I am the Real.” The lover’s experience of unity with God goes beyond all other modes of expression.

In their meditations on the nature of love, Persian Sufis showed a remarkable consistency. The terms of the analysis multiplied over time, which is the natural tendency in the development of a tradition. Each generation refined on the insights it inherited, as individuals contributed their own nuances to the collective understanding. But the fundamental framework was the same. Love, together with its allied states, was conceived of as the ultimate form of the divine-human relationship. The principal factor that elevated this love above the mundane was recognized as early as Râbi‘a: divinized love goes beyond the desires of the ego (it is precisely on the point that the Sufis differed most profoundly from the profane love theorists, who rejected any possibility of selfless or mystical love). The Sufis conveyed this understanding of love through the characteristic analysis of inner experience into spiritual states and stations, and the richness of their psychological analysis is what distinguishes their view of love. The number and sequence of these stations might differ from one author to another, or might show different emphases in separate works by the same author, according to the requirements of the audience. Yet the comparison of the lists of the stations of love has shown significant consistencies throughout. The impulse to categorize and define love at times took on a rationalistic character, as in the semi-philosophical presentation of Daylamî. Sufis such as Rûzbihân, however, were able to reconnect their classifications to the mystical understanding of love and the annihilation of the ego. In the end, however, even the most ingenious explanations of the nuances of love were less than satisfactory. If writing on the stations of love was connected to a mystical teaching, its purpose seems to have been to indicate the sense of progression towards a goal of union with God. Yet as so many authors insisted, attainment of that goal makes the language of love an unacceptable dualism. It was the genius of these Sufi writers to express all the delicate shades of spiritual progress while at same time indicating the inadequacy of their explanations, thus pointing to what lay beyond. As Summûn ‘the Lover’ put it, “Nothing explains a thing except something that is subtler, and there is nothing subtler than love, so what can explain it?”

58. Ibid., p. 145. It may be asked why Rûzbihân, in his treatise on 1001 stations, places the stations of love in a relatively low position; out of the twenty chapters of fifty stations each, the stations of the lovers (muhibbîn), those filled with longing (mashtâqîn), and the passionate lovers (‘âshîqîn) occupy the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters, while the later chapters are reserved for the higher ranks of the spiritual hierarchy. The apparent discrepancy between this arrangement and the thrust of the ‘Abhar al-‘âshîqîn may be explained by the fact that the description of 1001 stations is intended for spiritual novices (Ma‘shrûb al-arwâh, pp. 3-4), while the ‘Abhar al-‘âshîqîn (like other treatises dedicated to love) is reserved for the elite. The same difference of emphasis can be observed in the works of Ansûrî, mentioned above.
