

## Between the Lover and the Beloved: An Inter-Cosmic Love Story

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### Abstract

*In the Sufi tradition, the love story between the Lover and the Beloved, narrated by countless Sufis as a metaphor of the divine love between God and humans, alludes to a deep ontological structure that the whole creation is based upon known as the Divine Presences (al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyya) through which God discloses Himself starting from the Muḥammadan (pbuh) Reality to the corporeal world and the perfect human (insān al-kāmil) namely the all-comprehensive entity that unites all the Divine Presences and the realizer of the union with the Beloved. As a result of God's love to be known, He created the creatures as the manifestations of His beautiful names and attributes to worship, recognize, and eventually love Him. This divine love of God leads humans to search for the ways of union with the Eternal Beloved. Prophets (pbuh), scriptures, and the perfect humans following prophets' footsteps are those that God has sent to guide people along the path to the Beloved. According to their understanding of this guidance, some people tend to develop an intimate divine love relationship with God which can be named as the religion of love. In this paper, it's aimed at approaching the inter-cosmic love relationship between the Lover ('āshiq) and the Beloved (ma'shūq) as an explanation of the Divine Presences between God and humans, as well as emphasizing the importance of the guidance of God results in living the religion of love, along with the passages from the members of the School of Love throughout the history of Sufism.*

### Keywords

Divine Love, Divine Presences, Perfect Human, School of Love, Religion of Love.

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## 1. Ontology of Love: Divine Presences between the Lover and the Beloved

In the year 1182 in Cordoba, young Ibn ‘Arabī, who recently came out of spiritual retreat (*khalwa*), has a momentous encounter with the great philosopher and chief justice Ibn Rushd. Ibn Rushd -known as Averroes in the west- asked him whether the unveiling and divine effusion he gained in the retreat is identical to the understanding that the rational consideration (*al-naẓar*) gives to the philosophers. Ibn ‘Arabī first says:

“Yes.” Then adds: “No. And between these two, spirits fly from their matter and heads from their bodies” (Chittick, *The Sufi Path* xiii). There were countless interpretations of this encounter in the history of Sufism and Sufi studies one of which is that its indication to Ibn ‘Arabī’s well-known He/not He (*Huwa/lā Huwa*) concept that underlies in the heart of the Islamic understanding of the cosmos and the creation situated between the incomparability (*tanzīh*) and similarity (*tashbīh*), unity and separation, spiritual and corporeal, intelligible and sensory, meaning and form that shows itself in the narration of the inter-cosmic love story between the Lover and the Beloved which is an excellent illustration of the Divine Presences and the most beautiful and poetic way of explaining the relationship between Divine and humans. This relationship usually takes its Quranic root from the two clauses of the 54th verse of the Surah *al-Mā’ida* on the mutual love relationship of the Divine and humans: “He loves them, and they love Him.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, in this relationship, the roles of the Lover and the Beloved are inter-changeable as God’s name *Al-wadūd* means both the Lover and the Beloved (Chittick, *The Pivotal* 262-267). One of the great Sufis from the School of Love. Ahmad Ghazālī states these indefinite roles in his *Sawānīh* as such:

In the place of our Heart- taker’s beauty and loveliness,  
We are not suited for Him— He is suited for us (Ghazālī 316).

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<sup>2</sup> Quran, 5:54: “O you who have believed, whoever of you should revert from his religion - Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him [who are] humble toward the believers, powerful against the disbelievers; they strive in the cause of Allah and do not fear the blame of a critic. That is the favor of Allah; He bestows it upon whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.”

But I do not know which is lover and which beloved. This is a great mystery, for it may be that at first it was His pull, and then this result. Here the realities are reversed. ‘You will not will unless God wills’ [76:30]. Inescapably, He loves them comes before they love Him. Abu Yazid said,

For a long time I fancied that I wanted Him. In fact, He first wanted me” (Ghazâlî 316).

According to Ibn ‘Arabî, this relationship between the Lover and the Beloved is considered the root cause of the creation. God starts loving the reality of His Beloved, namely the Muḥammadan Reality as the Lover from which the other creatures’ realities were created. From this point of view, “He loves them” corresponds to the engendering command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), which means he created them out of His love in order for them to be (Chittick, Themes of Love 165). This reality continues to descend to manifest itself in other Presences until the manifestation in the noble heart of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), namely the most perfect human (*akmal*) and the other perfect humans’ hearts following his steps. At this point, the perfect human becomes the Lover who is in love with the everlasting beauty of God as the Beloved where the prescriptive command (*al-amr al-taklīfī*) shows itself as the Lover’s eternal desire to be reunited with the Beloved. So, the reality inside the human attracted by his homeland and longs for union with the Beloved and the ocean of love that once he had separated from. By fulfilling the states and stations along the way, it’s hoped that the realities of ending up where they had descended from, annihilated in the Beloved’s love and beauty.

The Divine Presences are the most possible places of manifestation in the creation where God’s self-disclosure can be realized. It’s also the scene for this inter-cosmic love story between the Lover and the Beloved. The narration of the story starts with the famous ḥadīth qudsī of the hidden treasure (*kanz makhfī*). In the conversation that is attributed to happen between Prophet David and God, God says:

I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be recognized, so I created the creatures so that they might recognize Me (‘Arabî, *Futūḥāt*, II 399.28).

Here, the hidden treasure alludes to the Essence of God that no one can know or even think about where there is no self-disclosure, no stations, no determination, no separation, or form of any kind. Anṣārī beautifully describes this pre-entification (*lā ta'ayyun*) state in his treatise on love, *Maḥabbat-nāma*:

In those days, there was neither father nor mother; in those times, the children were missing. In what preceded all precedents, before the togetherness and difference that were hidden and not yet apparent, there was neither before nor after, neither wretchedness nor felicity. There were no way stations or stations in love, no travelers on the road, no disparity in footsteps, none of the darkness of blight and distance, none of the clouds of presences and absence, no ascending traces or descending imagination. The bazaar of union was stagnant, and the edict of separation was void, for there was no trace of the images of creation. The beauty of he loves them had no use for the mole they love Him.<sup>3</sup>

When the hidden treasure namely God loved to be known, the very first thing that He had created from his Essence is His Beloved's Reality as a manifestation of love within the Essence which is the Muḥammadan Reality, in other words, the Pen, or the Universal Intellect which later will be named as the first entification (*ta'ayyun al-awwal*) or Exclusive Unity (*aḥadiyya*) that is the first Divine Presences God's self-disclosure had manifested (Chittick, *The Five Divine Presences* 116). After the creation of the Muḥammadan Reality, other creatures' realities created from the Muḥammadan Reality as manifestations of names and attributes named as the second entification (*ta'ayyun al-thānī*) or Inclusive Unity (*waḥdāniyya*), or the Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*). At this Presences, the unified realities at the first Presences are separated from each other and enlightened by the divine light of Muḥammad (pbuh). This is also named as the Presences of the immutable entities (*al-'ayān al-thābita*) where each entity's reality and destiny had been written upon the Preserved Tablet by the Pen. Anṣārī's beautiful descriptions on the creation in *Maḥabbat-nāma* continues as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> Anṣārī, *Maḥabbat-nāma*, 337-339; tr. Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 310.

He wanted to make apparent the hidden pearls of love's oyster and to pick out some of the gems. Thus it was that He made everyone's hard cash apparent and separated the elect from the commoners. The divine desire and glorious solicitude decreed that the sun of He loves them would shine and that the rose of they love Him would bloom. All beings would then seek refuge in the sun's brightness, and each would find the road to its own destination.<sup>4</sup>

Here the hidden pearl alludes to the Hidden Treasure and the gems to the creatures' realities namely God's names and attributes. As mentioned above, God's first manifestation is the Muḥammadan Reality and the Muḥammadan Light, the radiant and enlightening nature of the Muḥammadan Reality. He created the reality of His beloved's Muḥammad (pbuh) to love Him back, and the divine light of this love gives other creatures light, consciousness, and being.

After this divine Presences, the realities of the creatures descended to the world of the spirits (*'ālam al-arwāh*) where the famous gathering of Alast (*bazm al-Alast*) had taken place in which the children of Adam were asked:

Am I not your Lord?" and they answered: "Yes, indeed, we bear witness.

In the history of Sufism, Junayd Baghdādī is the one who first mentioned to the allusion of the covenant of Alast concept, which is rooted in the 172nd verse of the Surah al-A'rāf.<sup>5</sup> He interprets this gathering as the first circle of remembrance (*ḥalaqa al-dhikr*) in which the spirits were intoxicated by the taste of their Lord's addressing them<sup>6</sup> while they had circled the center in rows. The last part of the narration on the creation of Anṣārī in Maḥabbat-nāma tells us about the spiritual world coming just before the world of imagination:

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<sup>4</sup> Anṣārī, *Maḥabbat-nāma*, 337-339; Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 310.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an, Araf, 172; And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we have testified." [This] - lest you should say on the day of Resurrection, "Indeed, we were of this unaware."

<sup>6</sup> cf. Attar, *Tadhkirāt al-awliyā*, p. 446.

From the sphere of love, the sun of unification shone on the world of the realities and meanings. In conjunction with the sun, they saw the seeable. The folk of the attributes gazed at the sun with the eye of imagination. The sun's felicity had raised the banner of brightness and left nothing concealed. This was at the time when He said, "And We made covenant with Adam before" [20:115].

It was not yet the moment for the masters of allusion, nor yet the days for the lords of expression.

When the spirit became spirits and the individual individuals, some were commoners and some elect. The folk of the realities and meanings, who had the edict of friendship from that sun's effusion, were placed under the sun's guardianship. They took up residence in the field of face- to- face vision, far from union and separation."<sup>7</sup>

After the world of the spirits, the reality descends to the world of imagination (*'ālam mithāl*). This realm is where all the dreams and the creative works of the corporeal world are inspired and all the beautiful allusions, poetry, and tales of love spring from as *Anṣārī* stated in the earlier quotation, which is also the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the corporeal world and the higher worlds and realities.

Imagery, poetry, allusions, and story-telling are the tools that Sufis commonly use to explain the most complex ontological issues in a smooth, coherent, and narrative way which directly connects the human with the higher worlds and realities as stated in the famous saying: "The metaphor is the bridge to the reality (*al-majāz qantarāt al-haqīqa*)". Ahmad Ghazālī in *Apparitions (Sawānih)* explains the function of allusion and imagination and how every feature of the Beloved indicates a state of the love relationship between the Lover and the Beloved.

The reality of love will mount only on the steed of the spirit. The heart is the locus of its attributes, but love itself stays inaccessible in the veils of exaltedness. What does anyone know of its essence and attributes? One of its fine points may show its face to the eye

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<sup>7</sup> Anṣārī, *Maḥabbat-nāma*, 337-339; tr. Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 311.

of knowledge, but no more explanation or mark of it can be given to the tablet of the heart. When it does show its face in the World of Imagination, sometimes it has a specific mark, and sometimes it does not. [...] In the same way, the path of love's perspicacity finds in each of these marks the explanation of a spiritual or corporeal seeking in the lover, or a defect, or a fault. This is because love has a mark in every one of the inner curtains, and these meanings are its marks on the curtain of imagination. Hence, its marks explain the level of love (Ghazâlî 318).

Finally, after the world of imagination, the divine reality descends to the world of the corporeal bodies where the perfect human, namely the all-comprehensive being of all the other Presences lives. It's understood that inwardly the perfect human carries all the divine Presences while bodily living in this corporeal world as an embodiment of the Divine. As God said to his Beloved Prophet Muḥammad:

But for thee, I wouldn't have created the celestial spheres.<sup>8</sup>

Being one of the greatest Anatolian members of the School of Love, Yūnus Emre (d. 1320) beautifully poeticized this notion in one couplet of his countless divine poems:

The Real created the universes for the love of Muḥammad  
Created the Moon and the Sun for the yearning of Muḥammad  
(Kaçar 52).

From the universes to the planets, particularly the planet Earth, had been created for the sake of the manifestation of Prophet Muḥammad's (pbuh) noble body carrying the Muḥammadan Reality as a secret core which is the first thing that God had created from His love. From this point of view, the noble heart of the most perfect human Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) and the hearts of the other perfect humans, namely the Muḥammadan inheritors, are the places where the gap between the Lover and the Beloved dissolves and the union (*wiṣāl*) occurs. God says in a *ḥadīth qudsī*: "My heavens and my earth embrace me not, but the heart of my faithful servant

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<sup>8</sup> Hakīm, al Mustadrāk, II: 615.

does.” Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī<sup>9</sup> (d.1950) also expresses the importance of the heart of a perfect human in one of his divine poems:

It’s the heart of a perfect human where the Sun of the Muḥammad rises

Locus of manifestation of the essence and attributes is the heart of a perfect human

The coy divine love of God is in his/her pure heart

Everyone's hope is just the heart of a perfect human

I’m content with being close to this earth rather than being in the heavens

In this ground; being the place for the manifestation of the evident divine love

For Ken‘ān, better than the blessings and beauty of the paradise

Being safe and full of joy here, in the heart of a perfect human (Rifā‘ī 124).

## 2. Epistemology of Love: Prophets, Quran, and Guidance

Starting from Prophet Adam, each prophet represents a specific name and attribute of God as Ibn ‘Arabī wonderfully manifested throughout his monumental work *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. As being the most perfect human and the one who is given the all-comprehensive words (*jawāmi‘ al-kalim*), Prophet Muḥammad unites all the names and attributes of God in his annihilated being and manifests the wisdom of the oddness (*farḍiyya*).

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<sup>9</sup> Ken‘ān Rifā‘ī is a ṣūfī master in the early 20th century, born in Thessaloniki in 1867. He witnessed the transition period from the Ottoman Empire to the newly born Republic of Turkey in 1925; closed his dervish lodge and continued working as an educator, saying that: “Now, under the sky is my lodge and my heart is my station (maqam)”. Along with his great biographical work on Sayyīd Ahmad al- Rifā‘ī’s life and teachings, he has a commentary on Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* called *Listen: Commentary on the Spiritual Couplets of Mawlānā Rūmī* which was translated into English by Victoria Holbrook and published in 2011. His insight suggesting: “One day, sufism will be taught academically” was realized by the initiatives of Meṣkūre and Cemālnūr Sargut via four professorships around the world: The Kenan Rifai Distinguished Professorship of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina in 2009, again with the same name at Peking University in 2010, Institute for Sufi Studies at Uskudar University, Istanbul in 2014, and Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies at ASAFAS, Kyoto University, Japan in 2016.

Rūmī expresses Prophet Muḥammad's (pbuh) guidance through the path in his *Fīhi mā Fīh*:

The road to the Real was horrifying, closed and covered with snow. He did the first chevalierance. Ride his horse and paved the way. Anyone who follows this path is because of his guidance and grace. As he revealed the way. He marked near and far, set the pillars, and said “This way, don't go to the other way. If you go to the other way you will perish. (Rūmī)

Other human beings as being the potential representatives of God and the carriers of the Trust on earth, should follow the path that the prophets had suggested and the books revealed to them. As God says in the Quran:

Say [O Muḥammad!]: “If you love God, follow me; God will love you” (3:31).

As rising upon the states and stations, it's expected from the follower of the Muḥammadan path to reach the Muḥammadan station of no station that unites all the states and stations along the way without attaching to any specific one of them.

After Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), the perfect humans following his footsteps (*‘alā qadam Muḥammad*) -and in certain situations upon the heart of Muḥammad (*‘alā qalb Muḥammad*)- continue this function of being the perfect living representatives of God's names and attributes on Earth. As being one of the greatest of them, Shaykh al-Akbar Muḥī al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī says:

...So I learned that I'm the totality of the prophets that's being mentioned to me. With this good news, I understand that I'm on the heart of the Muḥammad and the inheritor of all-comprehensiveness of Haḍrat Muḥammad. Because he is the last prophet and the last person that is sent the revelation. God gave him the property of the all-comprehensive word (Al-Ḥakīm 270).

According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the all-comprehensive word that is given to Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) is the Quran (Chittick, *The Sufi Path* 239). The Quran is the last of the books that God had sent down to guide the ones He had created out of His love in order to recognize themselves,

transform their souls, and eventually recognize their Lord. God does not just create and leave the ones He created alone, but He guides them with His Speech, namely His words embodied through the prophets and the scriptures revealed to them as a result of His love for His creatures. Being one of the outstanding realizers of this love, Shams Tabrīzī remarks on the importance of reading the Quran as if it's a love letter from God while gazing upon Him with love. He says:

For the travelers and the wayfarers, each verse of the Koran is like a message and a love-letter ( *‘ishq-nama*) they know the Koran. He presents and discloses the beauty of the Koran to them (Chittick, *The Koran* 67).

Therefore, the prophets, scriptures, and perfect humans are the guides reminding human beings of the union once they had been in, where their realities belong, to whom their longings and love for. Being separated from the Real Self, living in this metaphorical realm with this guidance, souls start to search for the way back home and long for the time of union with the Beloved as Rūmī poetized beautifully in the opening of his *Mathnawī*:

Listen to the reed as it complains  
telling the tales of separation  
Saying, “Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed,  
my lament has caused man and woman to moan.  
I want a bosom torn by severance,  
that I may unfold the pain of love-desire.  
Everyone who is left far from his source  
wishes back the time when he was united with it. (Nicholson 40)

### **3. Religion of Love: On the Way to Union**

Up to this point, the aim was to cover “He loves them” part of the phrase, the engendering command and the descending arc (*qaws al-nuzūl*), and how God guides His creatures through the prophets, the scriptures, and the perfect humans. As a result of this guidance, creatures are encouraged to reach union with God and taught the ways of this union,

namely the ascending arc (*qaws al- 'urūj*), the prescriptive command, and 'They love him' part of the phrase.

In the Quran, God shows the way of being loved by Him as following His beloved Prophet by the verse: "Say [O Muḥammad!]: "If you love God, follow me; God will love you (3:31)." Like every other verse and concept, following the Prophet can be understood and realized at different levels like the stages of the journey to God, all of which should be achieved to reach a complete union with the Beloved. The first level is following the Prophet by affirming the law (Shariah) revealed to him from God through Gabriel namely the Quran, as well as the actions and life-style of the Prophet (*Sunnah*) in order to learn the embodiment of the Quranic verses.

In another context and leveling, in the hadith of Gabriel, Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) explains the three dimensions of the religion, first of which is submission (*Islam*), namely the practice of the five pillars. As the body, soul, and spirit are the integral parts of a human, it's expected that these practices would carry people to the deeper levels of their existence and understanding. The second dimension of the religion is faith (*Īmān*), which includes three principles: unity (*tawḥīd*), prophecy (nabuwwa), and the return (*ma 'ād*). At this point, the sincere belief of "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is His servant and His Messenger," should be achieved besides acceptance of the prophets, scriptures, angels, predestination, and the last day as a return to God. This return can be a compulsory return when the death comes or a voluntary return if one's longing for the Beloved becomes evident in this realm. Lastly, the third dimension of the religion is beautiful doing (*Iḥsān*) which Maybudī explains in the *Kashf al-asrār* as such by quoting the *Iḥsān* part of the hadith of Gabriel<sup>10</sup>:

And do what is beautiful! Surely God loves the beautiful- doers [2:195]. Mustafa said, "Doing the beautiful is that you worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, surely He sees you.

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<sup>10</sup> Muslim, Iman 1; Bukhari, Iman 37.

Doing the beautiful is that you worship God in wakefulness and awareness as if you are gazing upon Him, and you serve Him as if you are seeing Him.

This hadith is an allusion to the heart's encounter with the Real, the secret core's convergence with the Unseen, and the spirit's contemplation of the Protector. It is an incitement to sincerity in acts, letting go of wishes, and loyalty to what was accepted on the First Day.

What was accepted on the First Day? Hearing Am I not your Lord and saying Yes indeed [7:172]. What is loyalty to what was accepted? Serving the Protector. How does one let go of wishes? In "As if you see Him." Where is sincerity in acts? In "He sees you."

When an eye has seen Him, how can it busy itself with glancing at others? When a spirit has found companionship with Him, how will it make do with water and dust? The word "Return!" [89:28] is addressed to the pure spirit. How will it make its home in the frame of water and dust? When someone has become accustomed to that Presences, how long will he put up with the abasement of the veil? How can the ruler of a city pass his life in exile?

The attribute of the spirit is subsistence, and water and dust undergo annihilation. He who lives in the Real is not like him who lives in this world. The realizer is aware of the secret of the Real: the Real is seeable. "As if you see Him" in the report bears witness to this."<sup>11</sup>

Along with the countless important insights that can be gained from the explanation of *Iḥsān*, two of them are aimed to be mentioned in this paper. The first one is the channeling aspect of this statement of humans with the imaginative power of their soul, the world of imagination ('Arabī, *Futūḥāt* II 320.31) and eventually to see the whole creation as images of the Real. Because, as being the different levels of the isthmus (*barzakh*); human soul (*nafs*), the world of imagination, and the whole creation are important doors for humans to reach the higher realms of their selves and the

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<sup>11</sup> Maybudi, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:522; tr. Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 214

Existence (*waujūd*). Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d.1289) indicates the in-betweenness of the whole creation with a beautiful image in his *Lam‘aāt*:

“Suppose that lover and Beloved are a circle cut in half by a line, the circle becoming manifest as two arcs. If this line that appears to be, but is not, should be discarded from the midst at the time of a Mutual Descent, the circle will appear one as it is. The secret of Two Arcs’ Length will come forth.

The world appears to be though it’s nothing more  
than a line between light and darkness.

If you read this imaginary line  
you will distinguish new arrival from eternity.

Anyone who reads this line as it is will know for certain that

All are nothing, nothing—it is He that is He.”(Irāqī 14<sup>th</sup> flash)

The second insight is “He is seeing you anyway,” half of the expression emphasizing God’s seeing the creation of each renewed moment by giving it existence, light, and consciousness, which also has moral and ontological aspects. From the moral aspect, the realization of God’s seeing His creatures in every act, state, and moment leads Sufis to develop a lifestyle based on this awareness in which they try to act beautifully in all of their encounters with the creatures, namely being characterized by the beautiful character traits of the Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) as the most perfect embodiment of the beautiful names of God. Since God mentions in the Quran the types of people and the acts He likes, Sufis try to live up to those criteria to be honored by God’s love. Some of these acts and qualities, that God loves, prescribed in the Quran are following the Prophet (3:31), being repentant and purified (2:222), patience (3:146), thankfulness (2:158), doing good deeds (2:195), struggling in the path of God (61:4) and beauty of any kind as God is beautiful and He loves beauty.<sup>12</sup>

If we return to the first leveling of the stages of the journey to God, the dimension of *iḥsān* leads one to the level of the *ṭarīqa* in which the

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<sup>12</sup> Muslim, Īmān 147; Ibn Māja, Du‘ā 10.

wayfarer begins to follow a spiritual discipline and path with the guidance of a *shaykh* (*murshid*) who passed the same way before. The *ḥaqīqah* is the third level where the wayfarer reached the reality of his being and ultimately to the Real. And the fourth level is the *maʿrifah*<sup>13</sup> which is the return to the creatures with the recognition of the Real while giving each, their rightful due and respect them for the sake of the Creator as well as the complete inner union with the Beloved. Maybudī summarizes these levels in the *Kashf al-asrār* as follows:

The brightness of submission is found in the light of sincerity, the brightness of faith in the light of truthfulness, and the brightness of beautiful-doing in the light of certainty. These are the way stations of the *shariah*'s road and the stations of the common people among the faithful. Then the folk of the *ḥaqīqah* and the chevaliers of the *tariqah* have another light and another state. They have the light of perspicacity and, along with it, the light of unveiling; the light of straightness and, along with it, the light of contemplation; and the light of *tawhid* and, along with it, the light of proximity in the Presences of At-ness.<sup>14</sup>

In realizing the *ḥaqīqah*, Sufis talk about three levels of certainty (*yaqīn*). The first one is the knowledge of certainty (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*) in which the wayfarer learns about God and religion by hearsay and trying to imitate (*taqlīd*) what is learned. The second one is the eye of certainty (*ʿayn al-yaqīn*), which is the direct seeing of what is learned by firsthand. The third one is the reality of certainty (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*) which is being the embodiment of that knowledge through the union with the Real (Chittick, *The Sword* 15).

If we return to the ontological aspect, as God created the universe by the longing breath of His love towards to be known, this knowledge leads Sufis to a state that they see nothing other than God's love in His creation and they start to live a relationship based on the divine love with the Beloved that can be named as the religion of love. As being stated by Ibn

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<sup>13</sup> This level is sometimes included in the level of *Ḥaqīqa* and sometimes evaluated as an independent level.

<sup>14</sup> Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 6:542-43; tr. Chittick, *Divine Love*, p. 202.

‘Arabī ‘practicing the religion of love’ means nothing but following the footstep of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as God declared him as His lover and beloved (*ḥabīb*) (Chittick, The Religion of Love 53-54). “I practice the religion of love, wherever its camels turn their faces. This religion is my religion and my faith” (Chittick, The Religion of Love 53).

In the history of Sufism, we see the earliest example of this kind of intimate love relationship with God in Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīyya (d. 800); the great Sufi who lived her life based on the extreme love (‘*ishq*) of God in which she had seen nothing other than God from the time without beginning (*azal*) to the endless (*abad*).

The famous illustration showing her carrying a pot of water to extinguish the fire of hell and a torch to set the paradise on fire provides great insights into her understanding of the religion, which can be summarized as worshiping sincerely to God, not for the bounties of paradise or out of the fear of hell but worshiping just for the sake of God out of the divine love. This denotes a station beyond all the dualities of the created things and attributes, including paradise and hell, in which Sufis focus only on the Eternal Beloved. ‘Irāqī points out this state in his Lam‘aāt:

Light does not burn light but it is included within it, so the folk of unity have neither fear nor hope, bliss nor hellfire.

Abū Yazīd was asked, “How was your morning?”

He said, “For me there is no morning or evening.”

Here where I am there’s no morning or evening,

no fear, no hope, no state, no station.

“Morning and evening pertain to those who become delimited by attributes, but I have no attributes.

Having no essence how can I have attributes?” (Irāqī 10<sup>th</sup> flash) Likewise, Rābi‘a gives some money to a man to buy a piece of cloth. After a few steps, man turns and asks: “What color you prefer?” Rābi‘a answers:

Give the money back for asking a question on the color.” And she throws the money into the river. (Smith 131)

“He who painted the world a thousand colors—

how can my color and yours take us to Him, O poor man!

All these colors are folly and fancy.

He has no color—that's the color we must have. (Irāqī 10<sup>th</sup> flash)

“Once they ask Rābi‘a:

Are you in love?” She says: “Yes.” “Do you see Satan as an enemy?” She says: “No. My love for God leaves no room for me to hate Satan.” Seeing nothing other than God, the realizers do not differentiate among the names, recognize and respect them all. They even don't see the creation, namely the names and attributes at all, because they are completely concerned with the Beloved with a direct connection from their hearts that can be felt in each renewing moment. She continues: “Once I saw the Prophet in my dream. He asked me: “Rābi‘a, do you love me?” I said: “Oh, Messenger of God, who does not love you? But God's love invaded me so much that there is no room left for friendship or hostility. (Smith 131)

Here, one can remember the hadith of the Prophet (pbuh): “I have a moment with God embraced by no proximate angel or sent prophet,”<sup>15</sup> along with another hadith: “I am not like any of you— I spend the night with my Lord, and He gives me to eat and drink,”<sup>16</sup> both of which show the direct nourishment and intimacy (*uns*) with God without gazing anything else like the Prophet's state in the ascension (*mi‘rāj*) narrated in the Surah al-Najm: “The eyesight did not swerve, nor did it trespass (53:17).”

The Beloved's jealousy demands the lover not to love anyone or need anything other than Him. (Irāqī 4<sup>th</sup> flash) In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī regards Beloved's jealousy as an attribute of love. He states that love rules so much over its owner that it makes the lover deaf to any voice other than his Beloved's speech, blind to any sight other than his Beloved's face, and dumb to any speech, other than the remembrance of his Beloved and the one who loves his Beloved. Then He seals his heart, and nothing other

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<sup>15</sup> Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:269, 683; 2:328.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 7;397-98.

than his Beloved's love enters in it. He throws its lock to His treasury of imagination that he does not imagine other than his Beloved's image. Ibn 'Arabī tells about his own experience in the *Futūḥāt* as such:

The power of imagination carried me to the point that, my love visualized my Beloved's image for me in a tangible form like Gabriel's embodiment for the Prophet (pbuh). I couldn't look at Him. He was addressing me, and I was listening and understanding Him. Sometimes He was abandoning me for days, I couldn't eat. Whenever a table came, my Beloved was coming to the edge of it, looking at me and speak to me with a language that I could hear with my ears: 'Will you eat while witnessing Me.' And I was turning away from eating and wasn't feel any hunger, feeling full. Such that I got fat and gained weight by looking at Him. This was like nourishment for me. (Arabī, *Futūḥāt* II 399.28)

In the beginning of his Banquets of Recognition (*Mawā'id al-'irfān*), Niyāzī Mısrī<sup>17</sup> (d. 1694) explains how he started to write this book by asking God to reveal these banquets of knowledge to his heart as a feast for anyone who reads to nourish, with an allusion to the 114th verse of Surah *al-Mā'ida*<sup>18</sup>. He alludes to a state in which Sufis gain direct knowledge and inspiration into their purified and enlightened hearts from God. Just as Ibn 'Arabī opens his magnum opus *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* with a great praise to God:

...who sends down wisdom upon the hearts of the Words in a unique and directed way from the Station of Eternity. (Al-Qaysarī 96)

Ibn 'Arabī points out the importance of reading the Quran as if it's revealing to the reciter at the time of the reading. He says, otherwise, it does not go beyond the reciter's throat, and that person is veiled from the meaning of the words that he is reciting. And Ibn 'Arabī adds, in this case:

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<sup>17</sup> Niyāzī Mısrī is an Ottoman Turkish Sufi who lived in the 17th century and a member of the School of Love and a follower of the School of Ibn 'Arabī.

<sup>18</sup> Quran, 5:114; "Said Jesus, the son of Mary, "O Allah, our Lord, send down to us a table [spread with food] from the heaven to be for us a festival for the first of us and the last of us and a sign from You. And provide for us, and You are the best of providers."

May God have mercy on him.”(Chodkiewicz 27) Moreover, Rūmī says: “Quran is like a bride, and to see her beautiful face, one should stop pulling at her veil, seek her good pleasure, serve and try to please her. Only after that, she will show her face (Rūmī 229).

In the middle of the night, Rābi‘a falls asleep; her friend Hayyūna wakes her up and says:

Wake up, groom of the ones guided to the straight path came. The ornament of the brides is the divine light of the night prayer (Smith 63).

In one of her prayers, Rābi‘a says:

My Lord. Stars are shining. People's eyes are asleep, sultans have closed their doors. Every lover is alone with his beloved. I'm here alone with You.” Also, she says: “Oh, God! I wish that the days would be the nights for me to be close to You (Smith 61).

What pleases the Beloved is to annihilate one's self to reach the complete union with the Beloved. If a person dies before the natural death for the sake of uniting with the Beloved, then God manifests through that person. It is also stated in the *ḥadīth qudsī* that explains the state of the person who draws near to God with voluntary servanthood and the nearness of supererogatory works (*qurb al-nawāfil*) and wins God's love and affection as such:

My servant draws near to Me through nothing I love more than that which I have made obligatory for him. My servant never ceases drawing near to Me through supererogatory works until I love him. Then, when I love him, I am his hearing through which he hears, his sight through which he sees, his hand through which he grasps, and his foot through which he walks (Chittick, *The Sufi Path* 325)

So, when the lover completely annihilated from the self, Beloved's image reflects perfectly in this purified heart and nothing left from the created attributes but the Beloved's manifestation acting through that person. In the Divine Flashes (*Lam ‘aāt*), ‘Irāqī points out this oneness as such:

When you see a lover seeing the Beloved's form in the mirror of his own essence, that is the Beloved seeing His form in his mirror. For the lover witnesses with eyesight— and his eyesight, in keeping with “I am his hearing, his eyesight, his hand, and his tongue”—is identical with the Beloved. All that the lover sees, knows, says, and hears along with all through which he sees, knows, says, and hears are identical with the Beloved. (Irāqī 7<sup>th</sup> flash)

So in terms of manifestation the lover and the Beloved, the seeker and the Sought, are one. But not everyone's understanding reaches and perceives this place.

As the lover is annihilated (*fanā* ' ) from attributes of self, she gains subsistence (*baqā* ' ) in the Beloved and realizes the station of no station which is the manifestation of the following verse: “Truth has come, and falsehood has departed. Indeed, is falsehood, ever bound to depart (17:81).” At this point, the all-comprehensive heart of the Lover becomes a mirror where the beauty of the face of God can be seen from all directions, which is the state that Ibn ‘Arabī alludes in his poem:

My heart has become the receptacle for every form,  
a pasture for gazelles, a monastery for monks,  
A house of idols, a Ka‘ba for the circumambulator,  
tablets for the Torah, a volume for the Quran (Chittick, The Religion of Love 57).

Then the difference between the Lover and the Beloved disappears, everything becomes One, and the secret of “Wherever you look, there is the face of God” (2:11) manifests. “He looks in himself and finds all of himself to be He. He says, I am the one I love, the one I love is I”.

At whatever he looks, he sees the face of the Friend. He comes to know the sense of “Everything is perishing but His face” [28:88] and why it is appropriate that “His face” be read “its face” in reference to the thing, for each thing perishes in terms of form but subsists in terms of meaning; and in what sense the meaning of the face is the manifestation of the Real. “And the face of thy Lord subsists” [55:27]. O friend, since you have come

to know that the meaning and reality of things is His face, say “O Lord, show us things as they are!” Then you will see face-to-face that,

In everything there is a sign  
signifying that He is one”( Irāqī 28<sup>th</sup> flash)

#### **4. Conclusion**

God says: “I was a Hidden Treasure, I loved to be recognized, so I created the creatures so they might recognize...” (Arabī, *Futūḥāt* II 399.28) As one can see from this *ḥadīth qudsī*, the underlying force of creation is God's love to be recognized by His creatures. “He loves them” in order to create them as the manifestations of His names and attributes, namely nothing other than Him as His lovers. So, the Lover and the Beloved is God alone manifesting Himself, simultaneously in different Divine Presences. He separated his names and attributes from the ocean of His unity like the fish out of water, so with the pain and longing of the separation, they started to search for their homeland and the reality of their ambiguous beings. Then He guided them to His path with His prophets, scriptures, and perfect humans, each showing them their way back home. Thus, they remember where they were coming from, who they are longing for, and where they are headed to. “They love Him” so much that they annihilated themselves for the Beloved to manifest perfectly in them, separation to end, and the union to occur. They return the ocean of love with full recognition, where there is no other but the joy of love.

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