

ABSTRACT

Title: <u>Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī:</u> <u>His Life and Doctrines</u>	Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
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This dissertation attempts at a systematic study of the life, personality and thought of the second-third/eighth-ninth century Persian Ṣūfī (Muslim Mystic) Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī. Having first described and evaluated the source material, it discusses his life, personality and mystical doctrines such as zuhd (asceticism), fanā' (self-annihilation), tawḥīd (unification) and ma'rifah ("knowledge"). It also examines the question of possible Indian influence on him.

The study has shown that Abū Yazīd was an unusual personality. There existed in his mind a tension which manifested itself in his peculiar style of expressions and actions.

Abū Yazīd elaborated on some of the existing Ṣūfī ideas, and introduced into Ṣūfism some concepts, imageries and metaphors. All this helped the development of the Ṣūfī tradition. Although there is no evidence to indicate any direct influence of Indian thought on Abū Yazīd, probably he was influenced by Indian systems in an indirect way.

M. 'ABDU-R-RABB. ABŪ YAZĪD AL-BISTĀMĪ: HIS LIFE AND DOCTRINES.

ABŪ YAZĪD AL-BISṬĀMĪ
His Life and Doctrines

by
Muḥammad 'Abdu-r-Rabb

A thesis submitted to the faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research
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Institute of Islamic Studies
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Montreal

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ABŪ YAZĪD AL-BIṢṬĀMĪ: HIS LIFE AND DOCTRINES

DEDICATION

It was with considerable grief that the author learnt, after the dissertation was typed, that his "Spiritual Mentor", Prof. A.J. Arberry, had passed away. The inspiration and stimuli for many of the ideas in the thesis came from a perusal of this great man's works, and though the author never met him, it is his humble desire that this dissertation may be dedicated as a tribute to the memory of one whose entire, active academic life was devoted to giving life and meaning to the study of Ṣūfīsm.

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The preparation of this dissertation has left me indebted to many persons. To Professor H. Landolt of McGill, my advisor in this project, I owe a scholarly introduction to the experience and the literature of the Ṣūfī tradition. He has read the entire manuscript with care and expert knowledge and has provided invaluable comments at various stages of my research. The manuscript was also read, with much benefit to the author, by Dr. Charles J. Adams, Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies. I am especially grateful to him for the valuable comments and suggestions which he offered in spite of the pressures of his teaching and administrative responsibilities. My family and I owe him a great debt for his sympathetic concern and his generous assistance during our years in Montreal. I was very fortunate to have the counsel of Dr. M. Ḥā'irī, a scholar and one who stands within the Ṣūfī tradition. He was very helpful in leading me through particular problems which arose in connection with an understanding of the mystical teachings of Abū Yazīd.

Specific chapters received the careful scrutiny of several other members of the faculty of the Institute. I wish to express thanks to Dr. N. Shehābī, Dr. I.K. Poonawala and Dr. D. Little for their constructive assistance.

Several friends were generous with their time and advice. Mr. K. Mas'ūd has been a constant source of help to me in many ways. I read many Arabic and Persian texts with him. He also read the thesis in manuscript and did the proof-reading. I read the major part of the Kitāb al-Nūr with Mr. E. Sharqāwī. Mr. J. Fiegenbaum and Mrs. E. Wood were very helpful with problems of English grammar and expression. Mr. A. Nanjī and Mr. T. Aḥmad 'Alī offered assistance by proof-reading the manuscript, and Mr. A. Aḥmad by comparing the quotations with their original.

I am also grateful to Mr. M. 'Alī, Librarian of the Institute, and to members of his staff, Miss S. Ferahian and Mrs. E. Steggerda, for library facilities and for courtesies in connection with my work.

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of graduate study. In addition, she has typed the manuscript and has worked patiently and carefully on it during the tedious process of revision.

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ABBREVIATIONS OF FREQUENTLY USED SOURCES

"Bisṭāmiāna" : "Bisṭāmiāna" by Arberry in the BSOAS
Journal

E.I. : The Encyclopaedia of Islām

Essai : Essai sur les origines du lexique technique
mystique musulmane by Massignon

Hilyah : Hilyat al-Awliyā' by Abū Nu'aym

HMM : Hindu and Muslim Mysticism by Zaehner

Kashf : Kashf al-Mahjūb by al-Hujwīrī

Luma' : Kitāb al-Luma' by al-Sarrāj

Mir'āt : Mir'āt al-Zamān by Ibn al-Jawzī

Nafahāt : Nafahāt al-Uns by Jāmī

Nūr : Kitāb al-Nūr fī Kalimāt Abī Tayfūr by al-Sahlagī

Kawākib : Al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah by al-Munāwī

Risālah : Risālat al-Qushayriyyah by al-Qushayrī

Shaṭḥīyāt : Sharḥ Shaṭḥīyāt by Baqlī

Ta'arruf : Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf by al-
Kalābādhi

Tabaqāt (Anṣārī) : Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah by al-Anṣārī

Tabaqāt (Sulamī) : Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah by al-Sulamī

Tabaqāt al-Kubrā : Tabaqāt al-Kubrā by al-Sha'rānī

Tadhkirat : Tadhkirat al-Awliyā' by 'Aṭṭār

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Consonants: ' initial: unexpressed ' medial and final: '

Arabic	Persian	Turkish	Urdu	Arabic	Persian	Turkish	Urdu
ب b	b	b	b	ص s	s	s	s
پ	p	p	p	ض d	z	z	z
ت t	t	t	t	ط t	t	t	t
ث			t	ظ z	z	z	z
ث th	s	s	s	ع '	'	'	'
ج j	j	c	j	غ gh	gh	ğ	gh
چ	ch	ç	ch	ف f	f	f	f
ح h	h	h	h	ق q	q	k	q
خ kh	kh	h	kh	ك k	k	k	k
د d	d	d	d	گ	g	g	g
ذ			d	ث		n	
ذ dh	z	z	z	ل l	l	l	l
ر r	r	r	r	م m	m	m	m
ز			r	ن n	n	n	n
ز z	z	z	z	و			p
ژ	zh	zh	zh	ه h	h	h	h
س s	s	s	s	و w	v	v	v
ش sh	sh	ş	sh	ی y	y	y	y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc. (For Ottoman Turkish vowels etc. see separate memorandum.)

short: َ a; ِ i; ُ u.

long: ِ ā; ُو ū, and in Persian and Urdu also rendered ō; ِ ī, and in Urdu also rendered by ē; ِ (in Urdu) ē.

alif maqṣūrah: ِ ā.

diphthongs: ِ ay; ِ aw.

long with tashdīd: ِ īya; ِ ūwa.

tā' marbūṭah: ِ ah; in idāfah: at.

INTRODUCTION

In "The Sir 'Abd Allāh Suhrawardī Lectures for 1942", A.J. Arberry, a living and brilliant British scholar of Ṣūfīsm (Islāmic mysticism), has directed our attention to the main task of the students of Ṣūfīsm to-day: "the description and analysis of Ṣūfī doctrine and practice on the basis of Islāmic sources"¹ as a prerequisite for writing a complete history of Ṣūfīsm.²

¹A.J. Arberry, An Introduction to the History of Ṣūfīsm (London: Longmans, Green & Co.[1943]), p. 19.

This work presents three lectures by Arberry on the study of Ṣūfīsm written at the request of the Sir 'Abd Allāh Suhrawardī Foundation, and an introduction by Ḥasan Suhrawardī, brother of Sir 'Abd Allāh Suhrawardī (d. 1935) and founder of "The Sir 'Abd Allāh Suhrawardī Lectureship at the University of Calcutta."

These lectures do not trace the history of the origin and development of Ṣūfīsm as the title History of Ṣūfīsm suggests, but they "form a history of the progress of Ṣūfī studies in Europe since the end of the eighteenth century and lay down a programme for future work" (Ḥasan Suhrawardī's Introduction, p. i).

²For Arberry's outline of the form which the future history of Ṣūfīsm should take, see his History of Ṣūfīsm, pp. 78-79.

While commenting on Arberry's lectures, R.A. Nicholson, Arberry's murshid (Ṣūfī master; Arberry calls his teacher murshid perhaps as a mark of respect for

Arberry was skeptical about the possibility of writing a complete history sooner than 2021, the year of the bicentenary of the publication of Ssufismus sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica¹ by F.A.D. Tholuck,² who was the first among European scholars to have taken the study of Ṣūfīsm seriously.³ The basis for Arberry's skepticism has not changed significantly. Although almost thirty years have passed since Arberry laid down a programme of future research, not much has been done in the field yet. "Too many gaps remain in our knowledge; too many Ṣūfī writings are unexplored, and too many mystics of enormous influence are all but unknown."⁴ This present work which aims at the study of

him) says, in agreement with his pupil, that "future research should concentrate... on providing full scientific materials for studying the actual process of development [of Ṣūfīsm]: the marshalling of facts, and the establishment of their relations to each other..." (Arberry's Preface, p. xx).

¹F.A.D. Tholuck, Ssufismus sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheistica (Berlin: Duemmleri, 1821).

²Arberry, History of Ṣūfīsm, p. 78.

³Infra, p. 299.

⁴C.J. Adams in his Foreword to Muḥammad 'Abdu-r-Rabb's Al-Junayd's Doctrine of Tawḥīd: an Analysis of his Understanding of Islāmic Monotheism (unpublished Master's dissertation, the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1967), p. ii.

the life and doctrines of the second-third (eighth-ninth) century Persian Ṣūfī (Muslim mystic), Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, is an humble attempt at a partial fulfilment of the task which our [my] murshid Arberry¹ has set before us.²

One may ask: "Why have you chosen to study Abū Yazīd in particular?"

What Arberry said about the prerequisite for writing a complete history of Ṣūfīsm is especially true in regard to Ṣūfīsm in the second and third (eighth and ninth) centuries . This was the formative period in the development of Ṣūfīsm, and an understanding of Ṣūfīsm in its religious as well as its historical dimensions

¹The author of this work has never had the honour of meeting Arberry personally, but contact through ideas is sometime more important than personal contact. The Ṣūfī whom we study in this work once said, "Perhaps someone who is near us is (really) far from us, and perhaps someone who is far from us is (really) near us" (Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Sahlaḡī, Al-Nūr min Kalimāt Abī Tayfūr, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī in his Shaṭṭaḡat al-Ṣufiyyah [Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḡat al-Miṣriyyah, 1949], p. 65). Arberry lives on the other side of the Atlantic, but he is very near to the author through his works. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to this great man for what he has taught the author of Ṣūfīsm.

²Our previous study on Al-Junayd (supra, p.x,n.4) was also intended as a contribution to the same end.

necessitates an understanding of the basic concepts and modes of thought by which the early Ṣūfīs expressed their inner experience. The need for a study of Abū Yazīd, therefore, can hardly be exaggerated. He was without doubt one of the most important Ṣūfīs of the early period and, considering his influence on later Ṣūfīs, he was, if we may venture to say, the greatest Ṣūfī upto his time. Since we have discussed the historical importance of Abū Yazīd in the concluding chapter of this work, we shall not elaborate it any further here.

Moreover, Abū Yazīd is a very unusual personality and thus very interesting. Some of his sayings and deeds are so extreme that they appear, at first sight at least, very shocking to anyone with a religious belief. Once, for example, having heard someone reciting the Qur'ānic verse "Verily the grip (baṭsh) of your Lord is strong",¹ Abū Yazīd shouted saying, "Indeed, my grip is stronger than His."²

What is even more interesting is another aspect of Abū Yazīd which goes to the other extreme. It was

¹Qur'ān, 85:12.

²Nūr, p. 111.

the same Abū Yazīd whose fear of God's majesty was so great that sometimes he failed to raise his hands in prayer for takbīr (recitation of the formula "Allāh akbar") and his shoulders moved so convulsively that people near him could hear the crackling noise of his shoulder-bones.¹

These two extremes do not represent two distinct periods in the development of Abū Yazīd's personality; rather, they exist side by side in him. The conjunction of opposites, which produced in him a great psychological tension, makes him especially interesting. This is also a sign of his greatness; for, most of us see things either as black or white which is easy to do, but there are some who can see both colourings and yet keep standing in between. The ability to reconcile opposites in themselves shows them to be more subtle in their thinking than others. Abū Yazīd certainly belongs to this group of more subtle thinkers.

One may perhaps ask further: "Why have you chosen to study the life and thought of Abū Yazīd as a whole?"

¹ Sibt Ibn al-Jawzī, Mir'āt al Zamān, in Badawī's Shatahāt, p.161.

Abū Yazīd is such a vast and complex personality that the study of one important aspect of his thought, that of shatahāt (mystical paradoxes), for example, would alone be enough for a doctoral dissertation. To have chosen one aspect would have been easier than attempting to study the whole of his life and thought. We have, nevertheless, chosen the latter alternative because, although, as it can be seen from our survey of the minor sources, there are brief discussions or at least references to Abū Yazīd in almost every book on Ṣūfīsm, no one has yet attempted to make a thorough and systematic study of this great personality.¹ We have, therefore, tried to draw an outline of

¹It is really surprising that Abū Yazīd did not attract the serious attention of any student of Ṣūfīsm even after the publication of two important source books on him: al-Sahlagī's Nūr in 1949 and Ruzbehān Baqlī's Sharḥ Shathīyāt, ed. H. Corbin (Paris: L'Institut d'Etudes Iraniennes de l'Université de Paris) in 1966. Prof. H. Landolt, the advisor of this study, found it almost unbelievable that there would be no major work underway on the life and thought of Abū Yazīd. Hence, before embarking upon this project, the author followed the advice of his advisor and searched all the recent issues of the important journals and periodicals in the field of Islāmic Studies to make sure that no one has taken up this project already. No evidence was found of any other scholarly activity on Abū Yazīd.

We are especially indebted to Badawī for his edition of Nūr. The printed edition of this book contains errors of which, we have been told by a pupil of Badawī, the editor himself is aware. Nevertheless, but for Badawī's edition of Nūr, our work on Abū Yazīd would not have been possible at all.

his life and thought and to point out some problems arising out of the study so that later students of Ṣūfīsm, including ourselves, might be able to take up specific aspects of Abū Yazīd's thought, study these more thoroughly and try to solve the problems raised in this work.

The following are a few general remarks in connection with the work we have done:

1. In our attempt to study Abū Yazīd's mystical doctrines, we have dealt with his mystical experience. But since mystical experience is of the nature of feeling, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, for our intellect to understand it adequately. In order to 'know' what this experience really is, one needs to taste it himself. It was this realization that caused the famous theologian and Ṣūfī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), to retire from his active public life and to live in solitude according to the Ṣūfī path (ṭarīqah). It was some ten years before he 'tasted' mystical experience.¹

¹Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjalū al-Miṣriyyah, 1955), pp. 126-127 and 130.

Once having been asked why he was shaking, Abū Yazīd said that one should walk between twenty and thirty years on the path of truth (ṣidq) if one wished to know what causes people to shake (Nūr, p. 94).

It is also exceedingly difficult adequately to describe mystical experience; for, description involves language, and language is the vehicle of rational concepts. Rational concepts are incapable of describing adequately with what is essentially non-rational. Hence the Baghdādī Ṣūfī Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. ca. 298/910) says in a letter to one of his fellow Ṣūfīs:

There the intellects of the intellectuals lose their way, the learnings of the learned halt and the achievements of the wisdom of the wise come to an end. This is the limit of what can be described; this is the point where all descriptions come to an end. Beyond this there is a barrier till the Day of Resurrection.¹

Ṣūfīs, nevertheless, try to express their experiences; for, they feel that they are called upon to do so; it is their duty to reach the people and to guide them on the right path. But since, in doing this, they realize the inadequacy of language, they resort to the use of symbols.² But these symbols can only provide a stimulus to arouse a mystical experience in

¹Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd, Rasā'il, ed. A.H. 'Abd al-Qādir in The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd (London: Luzac & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 3.

²R.A. Nicholson, The Mystics of Islām (London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1914), p. 103.

a person who has had a similar experience already. In another letter to a friend, al-Junayd says,

This is an indication of something which cannot be further explained. (Then) this cannot be understood by any kind of indication, but only through the very experience which has been described. I have wrapped up what this (letter) contains and have not explained it clearly. Take this (letter) (keeping in mind that) it (the truth) cannot be obtained except through experience.¹

Hence symbolical expressions also "are little better than leaps in the dark."²

In view of the difficulties mentioned above, how is it at all possible for us to understand Abū Yazīd's experience since we do not claim to be Sūfīs ourselves? Our answer is that it is possible for us, with the help of sympathetic imagination, to gain at least some measure of insight into mystical experience. Therefore, we have proceeded in our task of understanding, analysing and describing Abū Yazīd's mystical experience as carefully as possible. We would, nevertheless, emphasise that this is our understanding, our analysis and our description of the same at second hand

¹Al-Junayd, Rasā'il, p. 45.

²Nicholson, Mystics, p. 148.

and thus may fall short of the reality.

2. We have used the expression 'Abū Yazīd's thought' and have characterised Abū Yazīd as a 'thinker'. We have also discussed his 'doctrines' in this work. But Abū Yazīd was not a thinker in the sense of a logical systematic thinker, nor did he ever consciously formulate a doctrine as a theoretician of Ṣūfīsm does. As far as we know, he did not write a treatise of any kind. In fact, it is quite possible that Abū Yazīd would not understand what is meant by the doctrine of shatāḥāt, for example, under which later writers on Ṣūfīsm as well as ourselves have classified his strange utterances. What we have termed as Abū Yazīd's 'thought' and 'doctrines' are our own deductions on the basis of our understanding of his sayings and the reports of his deeds collected from various sources.

We have, moreover, used expressions such as 'Abū Yazīd achieved tawḥīd (unification)', 'Abū Yazīd attained ma'rifah ("knowledge")', and the like. From a strictly Ṣūfī point of view, these expressions are not quite correct. Many Ṣūfīs, including Abū Yazīd, say that a Ṣūfī does not 'achieve' tawḥīd or 'attain' ma'rifah by his own efforts, but that these are God's

gifts given by Him to His chosen ones. We have, nevertheless, used these expressions merely for the sake of convenience.

3. We are conscious of some of the shortcomings of this dissertation. We are aware, for example, that there is so much to discuss concerning Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj (spiritual ascension) and his notion of ma'rifah that we might have treated these topics more thoroughly in separate chapters rather than putting them together in the chapter on Tawhīd. Abū Yazīd also had something to say about many other Ṣūfī doctrines that we have not dealt with in the thesis, e.g., the doctrines of maḥabbah (love) and tawakkul (trust), etc. We have done no more than merely mention some of these in this work.

There is another shortcoming of which we are aware. We have shown in most cases and as exhaustively as possible the existence of the same or variant readings in some other text or texts than in the one cited first. But we have not been able to do this in some cases, despite the fact that we have knowledge of the existence of the same or variant readings for these elsewhere.

The author promises to correct these deficiencies when, soon after his return to his country, he will begin revising his work with a view to making it available in printed form to students of Ṣūfīsm as well as to others.

4. In most cases, the translations of Arabic and Persian texts quoted in this work are ours. In a few cases we have used the translation of another but only after we checked and found it satisfactory.

In translating texts, we have tried to keep as close to their literal meanings as possible.

5. We have used some important terms and expressions, e.g., ma'rifah, tawhīd, etc. in their original Arabic forms. We have either translated or explained these terms at least once when they first occur.

6. Whenever necessary, we have indicated dates according to the Islāmic and the Christian calendars. The first of these represents the Islāmic era (A.H.) and the second the Christian era (A.D.). In many cases,

we have depended on H. Ritter¹ for these dates. In other cases where we have depended on Arabic and Persian sources, we have used Sir W. Haig's tables² in converting the Islāmic dates to Christian dates.

7. We have followed the transliteration system of the Institute of Islāmic Studies, McGill University. We are attaching herewith a copy of this system.

¹H. Ritter, Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariduddin 'Attar (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1955), "Analytischer Index", pp.672-777.

²Lt. Col. Sir W. Haig, Comparative Tables of Muhammadan [sic] and Christian Dates (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.).

PART ONE

Chapter I

SURVEY OF SOURCES

In our attempt to study the life and teachings of Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. 'Īsá b. Sharūshān al-Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848),¹ we are faced with the problem of the authenticity of the source material. As far as we know, Abū Yazīd did not write anything himself; nor are we aware of any writing by anyone who, having been associated with him directly, witnessed his sayings and deeds. Later authors of Ṣūfī literature have preserved, in a scattered form, Abū Yazīd's sayings and the reports of his deeds; these were received, either directly or indirectly, as oral traditions from his disciples, friends and visitors.² But oral traditions, by their very nature, are more susceptible to fabrication and thus less dependable as a source than written material. Moreover, there was a time-gap that existed between the period when Abū Yazīd lived and the period when many

¹For more on the date of his death, infra, pp. 47-49.

²For information on some of them, infra, pp. 99-108.

of his traditions were recorded for the first time. Hence we should be aware that there exists a problem regarding the reliability of the material.

However, this problem is not an insurmountable one. As we shall soon see, factors such as the honesty and trustworthiness of most of the early Ṣūfī authors, the proximity of some of them to Abū Yazīd's time, and both the internal consistency of the meanings of the traditions in each work and the consistency of the picture of Abū Yazīd's personality given by all the works,¹ give credibility to most of their material.

We shall now describe and evaluate briefly, under two categories, the important sources from which we have derived information for this dissertation. The first of these will include the works of Muslim authors who were either Ṣūfīs themselves or lived in a Ṣūfī atmosphere. These works constitute the main source of information on Abū Yazīd but cannot be called 'primary sources' which, in the usually accepted sense, would refer to Abū Yazīd's own writing or to the writing of someone who had witnessed his sayings and deeds. Hence

¹Henceforth, in this chapter, we shall use the word 'consistency' in both these senses.

we shall designate these works as 'major sources.' The second category will include studies on Abū Yazīd by modern scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and shall be designated as 'minor sources'.

1. Major Sources

i) Al-Junayd

The great Baghdādī Ṣūfī and the author of several works on Ṣūfism, Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. ca., 298/910),¹ has quoted and written commentaries on some of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt. Fragments of these have been preserved in the Kitāb al-Luma'² by Abū Naṣr 'Abd Allāh

¹For al-Junayd's life, personality, works and teachings, see 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, and 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd. Since 'Abd al-Qādir's work contains many errors, one should read it with great caution. His translation of al-Junayd's Rasā'il, which constitutes a part of this book, is especially defective. R.C. Zaehner has retranslated one of these Rasā'il in his Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (London: The University of London, 1960), pp. 218-224). 'Abd al-Qādir lists the works written by and wrongly attributed to, al-Junayd (al-Junayd, pp.59-63).

²Abū Naṣr 'Abd Allāh al-Sarrāj, Kitāb al-Luma' fī al-Taṣawwuf, ed. R.A. Nicholson (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1914), pp. 380-390.

Students of Ṣūfism will ever remain grateful to Nicholson for this excellent edition of the work, and to A.J. Arberry, Nicholson's pupil, for his edition of a newly discovered section of the book (Pages from the Kitāb al-Luma' [London: Luzac & Co., 1947]).

To distinguish between Nicholson's edition of Luma' and Arberry's edition of its newly discovered section, we shall refer to the former as Luma' and to the latter as Pages.

al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988). Al-Junayd became acquainted with Abū Yazīd's teachings within some thirty years of the latter's death. He learnt of these teachings from his own uncle and master Sarī al-Saqatī (d. ca. 251/865), the founder of the Baghdād school of Ṣūfīsm, who may have met Abū Yazīd personally,¹ and from two celebrated Ṣūfīs of Khurāsān, Yaḥyá b. Mu'ādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) and Abū Ḥafṣ al-Ḥaddād (d. ca. 267/880), who were friends and associates of both Abū Yazīd and al-Junayd.² These three personalities all died within some thirty years of Abū Yazīd's death.

We do not know exactly when al-Junayd recorded and commented on some of Abū Yazīd's shayḥāt. It is possible that al-Junayd wrote part of the commentaries in the last decade of his (al-Junayd's) life and part at an earlier period.³

¹Infra, p. 48, and n. 3 of the same page.

²Infra, pp. 104-105; 140, n. 2, and 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, pp. 29-31.

Al-Junayd may have learned Abū Yazīd's teachings from other common friends and associates also.

³Infra, pp. 284-285.

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Some of al-Junayd's commentaries on Abū Yazīd's shataḥāt may have been influenced by the situation of crisis in which Ṣūfīsm found itself during the latter part of al-Junayd's life.¹ But al-Junayd, a reputable Ṣūfī and a respected scholar, had come to know Abū Yazīd's teachings, shortly after the latter's death, directly from respectable Ṣūfīs who had been associated with Abū Yazīd; he then wrote a book, or treatises, from which al-Sarrāj has quoted. All this shows that al-Junayd is a valuable and dependable source of information on Abū Yazīd's teachings.

ii) Al-Sarrāj

The oldest systematic work available to us on the doctrines and practices of the early Ṣūfīs is Kitāb al-Luma'² by Abū Naṣr 'Abd Allāh al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) of Ṭūs, surnamed the "Peacock of the Poor" (ṭā'ūs

learned Abū Yazīd's teachings from his books (al-Junayd, p. 31); for, Abū Yazīd, as far as we know, did not himself write any book.

¹Infra, p. 281.

²Supra, p. 3, n. 2.

al-fuqarā'.¹

Born in a family of Ṭūs noted for asceticism, al-Sarrāj was a Ṣūfī himself and Ṣūfī masters have regarded him as an authoritative exponent of their doctrines and practices. Moreover, his Luma' is a very well-documented work. He has drawn his material from written works as well as from oral traditions. When he quotes from a book, and there were many books available to him,² he cites the name of the author and the title of the work. As for the oral traditions contained in the Luma', forty names are cited as first hand authorities for these traditions.³ Many of these authorities,

¹Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, Nafahāt al-Uns min Haqarāt al-Quds, ed. Mahdī Tawhīdī Pur (Tehrān: Ketāb Furūshī Sa'dī 1918), p. 283; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī, Kashf al-Mahjūb, ed. V. Zuhkofski (Tehrān: Mu'assasat-i Maṭbū'at-i Amir Kabir, 1957), p. 417 (Nicholson has translated this work into English in a slightly abridged form [Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1911]); Fārīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, Tadhkirat al-Awliyā', ed. R.A. Nicholson (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1905), II, 182 (A.J. Arberry has translated selections from the Tadhkirat in Muslim Saints and Mystics [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966]. Claud Field also has translated parts of the Tadhkirat in his Mystics and Saints of Islām [London: Francis Griffiths, 1916]).

²For a list of books from which al-Sarrāj drew his material, see Nicholson's Introduction to Luma', pp. xi-xii. We should mention, however, that al-Sarrāj's information about his sources, as shown by Nicholson, is not complete (ibid., p. xi).

³For a list of these names with a brief notice on each, see ibid., pp. xiii-xxii.

e.g., Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Khuldī (d. 348/959)¹ and Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad ibn Sālīm (d. 360/970), were eminent men. Further, in order to verify the authenticity of some traditions, al-Sarrāj sometimes travelled to distant places and made enquiries from the people of the locality about these traditions. This shows that he was very cautious in the selection of

¹Al-Sarrāj must also have read al-Khuldī's Hikāyāt al-Awliyā' (on this work, see 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, pp. xii-xiii). The same can be said of Abū Sa'īd b. A'rābī's (d. 341/952) Ṭabaqāt al-Nussāk (see ibid., pp. x-xiii).

These two valuable books on early Ṣūfīsm by two of al-Junayd's disciples have unfortunately been lost. But all the later authors of Ṣūfī literature drew their material from these sources directly or indirectly. Al-Sarrāj, who also belongs to the Junaydian tradition of Ṣūfīsm, does not mention these two works by name, although he cites Kitāb al-Wajd, another work of Ibn A'rābī (Luma', pp. 308, 310 and 314). In any case, he does not, as we have seen already (supra, p.6,n.2), cite all his sources of information.

Al-Sarrāj may have had access to a book on Abū Yazīd's teachings (manāqib). We know that this book was written before 395/1005. The author of Qaṣd ilā Allāh, written on or after the above date (Nicholson, "An Early Arabic Version of the Mi'rāj of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī", Islāmica, II [1926-1927], p. 402. In this article, Nicholson has edited and translated Ru'ya Abī Yazīd fī Qaṣd 'ilā Allāh Ta'ālā wa Bayān Qiṣṣatihi which is the ninth chapter of Qaṣd) read the book on Abū Yazīd's teachings (ibid., p. 403). We are not sure, however, who wrote the book and when exactly it was written. On the basis of Massignon's reference to 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qannād (d. ca. 340/951) as a source of information on Abū Yazīd (L. Massignon, Essai sur les origines du lexique technique mystique musulmane [Paris: Librairie Philosophique, J. Vrin, 1954], p. 274. Massignon does not mention any evidence to support his statement), Nicholson says that Kitāb Manāqib Abī Yazīd [sic] may have been compiled by al-Qannād. But Ḥājji Khalīfah (d. 1068/1657) mentions this book as Manāqib Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī li-Yūsuf

traditions for his work. Aside from quoting traditions from Ṣūfīs, either from written works or from oral sources, in connection with any particular subject, al-Sarrāj also gives his own opinion on matters. But he does not leave any doubt for the reader as to when he is quoting and when he is giving his own opinion.

Luma' is of special importance as a source-book on Abū Yazīd. Al-Sarrāj lived in a period of crisis of Ṣūfīsm.¹ The attitude of orthodox² Muslims, especially

b. Muḥammad wa huwa Kitāb Fārisī (see his Kashf al-Zunūn 'an Asāmi al-Kutub wa al-Funūn [Istanbul: Maṭba' Ma'ārif, 1943], II, 1841). This shows that Manāqib was a Persian work by one Yūsuf b. Muḥammad. From this it is also clear that Manāqib was not Kitāb al-Nūr. Ḥājji Khalīfah mentions Nur as Kitāb al-Nūr. Abī Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī probably to describe the contents of Nur. This argument is further supported by the fact that Ḥājji Khalīfah puts a dash sign between Kitāb al-Nūr and fī manāqib Abī Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and that the author of Ru'yā, refers to Manāqib as kitāb fīhī manāqib Abī Yazīd (Ru'yā, p. 403).

¹Pages, pp. 7-10.

²Orthodoxy means a common voice. To speak with a common voice necessitates the existence of an authority, e.g., the Pope of Catholic Christianity. But since there is no such authority in Islām, strictly speaking we cannot speak of Islamic orthodoxy. Nevertheless, in the absence of a better terminology, we shall refer to Sunnī Muslims as orthodox, although the Shī'ah are perhaps more orthodox than the Sunnī in the sense we have defined orthodoxy.

of the 'ulamā' (pl. of 'ālim, one learned in religious sciences) of the time to Ṣūfīsm, was one of suspicion and hostility.¹ This situation led to the rise of a number of apologists for Ṣūfīsm of whom al-Sarrāj was one. To meet the need of the time, al-Sarrāj tried

to set forth the true principles of Ṣūfīsm and to show by argument that they agree with, and are confirmed by, the doctrines of the Koran and the Apostolic traditions; that they involve imitation of the Prophet and his Companions as well as conformity with the religious practice of pious Moslems.²

Now, since in most cases the shatahāt of the Ṣūfīs were misunderstood and thus became a source of trouble, al-Sarrāj has devoted chapters to the explanation of what the shatahāt mean and how these can be made compatible with the teachings of Sharī'ah (Islāmic Law). Naturally, therefore, he talks a great deal about the shatahāt of Abū Yazīd;³ for, his shatahāt were the most daring of all and thus became a subject of controversy among both Ṣūfīs and non-Ṣūfīs. In addition to quoting

¹For more on this, infra, pp. 280-281.

²Nicholson's Introduction to Luma', p. v.

³We have discussed these in Chapter V, pp. 275-299.

some of the shatahāt and their interpretations by al-Junayd and adding his own interpretations to these, al-Sarrāj quotes from his debate with Ibn Sālīm in an assembly in Baṣrah¹ on the shatahāt of Abū Yazīd. He even took the trouble of visiting Bistām with a view to verifying the authenticity of some of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt.² Apart from the shatahāt, Luma' also mentions many traditions concerning Abū Yazīd in connection with different subjects.

On the basis of the above discussion, we may conclude that, as in the case of al-Junayd, al-Sarrāj's interpretations of some of the shatahāt of Abū Yazīd may have been influenced by his desire to defend Abū Yazīd against orthodox attack. But the fact that al-Sarrāj was himself a respected Ṣūfī, that he was accepted by Ṣūfīs as an authoritative exponent of their doctrines and practices, that he quotes from written sources and, in most cases, cites the sources from which he quotes, and that he exhibits great caution in determining the authenticity of traditions included in

¹Luma', pp. 390-395.

²Ibid., p. 391

We should note, however, that his motive was to show the compatibility of Ṣūfī teachings with orthodox Islām, but this does not affect the authenticity of the shatahāt contained in the Luma'.

his work, favour the credibility of the material in Luma'. Allowing for the natural weaknesses of its oral traditions, especially because al-Sarrāj was removed from Abū Yazīd's time by more than one hundred years, we accept Luma' as an important and dependable source of information on Abū Yazīd.

iii) Al-Kalābādhī

Another small but very important book on early Ṣūfīsm is Kitāb al-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf¹ of Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī (d. 385/995), a native of Bukhārā. He wrote this compendium with the same purpose of defending Ṣūfīsm against the attack of orthodox Muslims.²

¹Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī, Kitāb al-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1960).

A.J. Arberry has translated this book into English as The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs (Cambridge: The University Press, 1935).

²In the beginning of the book, he takes up the essential points of Islāmic theology one by one and shows that Ṣūfīs have accepted each one of these. As a proof of this he cites the sayings of Ṣūfīs at every instance. After having done this, he describes briefly the characteristic Ṣūfī doctrines section by section.

Al-Kalābādhī drew the material for Ta'arruf primarily from written works. He had access to a vast amount of Ṣūfī literature, which is indicated by his long list of the Ṣūfīs¹ who wrote books and treatises on Ṣūfīsm. He not only read all the works available to him, but also discussed mystical matters with some of their authors. He says that he wrote Ta'arruf "having first thoroughly studied the writings of those who are versed in this matter, and sifted the stories of those who have attained a true realization of it: moreover I have associated with such men, and questioned them."² Furthermore, al-Kalābādhī was a very honest and trustworthy author³ so that Ṣūfīs held Ta'arruf in high esteem and regarded it as an authoritative text book on their doctrines. The oft-quoted saying of the eminent Ṣūfī Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. 587/1191), "But for the Ta'arruf we should not have known Ṣūfīsm",⁴ is a clear indication of this. The esteem in which Ta'arruf was held is also shown by the fact that several

¹Ta'arruf, pp. 30-32.

²Ibid., p. 20; trans. Arberry, Doctrine, p. 4.

³We do not know much about his life. But it is possible that he was a Ṣūfī.

⁴Arberry's Introduction to Doctrine, p. xii.

commentaries were written on this work.¹ In view of this evidence, we can accept Ta'arruf as a valuable and dependable source of information on early Ṣūfīsm.

It is disappointing to note that Ta'arruf does not contain much information on Abū Yazīd. Al-Kalābādhī mentions Abū Yazīd only five times: once when he lists the names of the famous Ṣūfīs,² thrice in connection with the Ṣūfī sayings concerning angels and prophets³ and once when he talks about Ṣūfīs being at ease with God.⁴ Badawī explains al-Kalābādhī's relative silence on Abū Yazīd by saying that the problem of shaṭaḥāt was no longer in the forefront during the last quarter of the fourth century A.H.⁵ We cannot agree with Badawī for several reasons. Al-Sarrāj and al-Kalābādhī were contemporaries. Although it is true that al-Sarrāj was some ten years younger and that Luma' might have been written a few years before Ta'arruf, both lived and

¹Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

²Ta'arruf, p. 29.

³Ibid., pp. 69 and 70.

⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁵Badawī, Shaṭaḥāt, p. 17.

wrote in more or less the same atmosphere. Hence it seems incorrect to say that al-Sarrāj deals with the problem of shatahāt at length because this problem was in the forefront when he wrote Luma' and that al-Kalābādhī is silent about it because the problem had lost its strength during his time.

Moreover, al-Kalābādhī himself has discussed many poems of al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), although the author, as shown by Massignon,¹ refers to him only as "one of the great Ṣūfīs", and not by name. We can also argue that shatahāt constitute only one aspect of Abū Yazīd's teachings. He spoke on zuhd (asceticism), ma'rifah, maḥabbah etc., and al-Kalābādhī does not mention him even in connection with these subjects.

How then can we explain al-Kalābādhī's silence about Abū Yazīd's utterances which were even more extreme than those of al-Ḥallāj? Perhaps al-Kalābādhī feared that incorporating these might defeat the purpose of writing Ta'arruf, viz., the defence of Ṣūfīsm against the attack of orthodox Muslims. The very fact that he does not mention al-Ḥallāj by name indicates the

¹Essai (Textes Ḥallājiens), pp. 346-358.

presence of this fear in his mind. Or, it might be that since al-Kalābādhī was a representative of the Ḥallājīan tradition of mysticism¹ just as al-Sahlagī was an adherent of the Ṭayfūrī tradition,² he did not have good reasons for bringing Abū Yazīd to the forefront.

iv) Al-Sulamī

Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah³ by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) of Naysābūr is one of the earliest biographies of Ṣūfīs. It contains a number of narratives about Abū Yazīd's life and thought.

A disciple of al-Sarrāj,⁴ al-Sulamī drew his material from the works on Ṣūfīsm available to him as well as from oral traditions. He read books such as

¹Cf. G.C. Anawati and L. Gardet, Mystique musulmane; aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques (Paris: J. Vrin, 1961), p. 136.

²Infra, p.25, n.

³Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad al-Sulamī, Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah, ed. J. Pedersen (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1960).

Al-Sulamī wrote other books on Ṣūfīsm. His small work Risālat al-Malāmatiyyah, ed. Abū al-'Alā 'Afīfī (Cairo: Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1945), is our best source of information on the doctrines and practices of the Malāmatiyyah sect of Ṣūfīs.

⁴Pedersen's Introduction to Ṭabaqāt, p. 23.

Luma', and travelled extensively in the Islāmic world to collect and verify the material of his work.¹ Some of the sources of his oral traditions were such eminent men as al-Sarrāj and 'Abd Allāh Rudhbārī (d. ca. 367/999).² A Ṣūfī himself,³ al-Sulamī's Ṭabaqāt came to be accepted as an established authority on the life and thought of the early Ṣūfīs and became an important source for many later writers on the subject. In particular, it formed the basis of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī's (d. 481/1089) Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah⁴ written in the Persian dialect of Herāt and this, in turn, became one of the main sources of the famous Nafahāt of Jāmī. In view of all this, we can say of Ṭabaqāt basically the same as we have said of Luma' : to wit, that allowing for the weaknesses of its oral traditions -- and in this case there are greater weaknesses because al-Sulamī was farther removed in time from Abū Yazīd than al-Sarrāj -- we can accept Ṭabaqāt

¹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

²Ibid., pp. 76 and 78.

For a list of the direct transmission of traditions to al-Sulamī, see ibid., pp. 74-89.

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah (Kābul: The Historical Society of Afghanistan, 1962).

as dependable source material on Abū Yazīd's life and teachings.

v) Abū Nu'aym

Another important work on the lives and teachings of early Ṣūfīs written in the pattern of al-Sulamī's Ṭabaqāt is Abū Nu'aym Aḥmad al-Iṣbahānī's (d. 430/1038) Hilyat al-Awliyā'. This is a valuable encyclopaedic work printed in ten volumes.¹ There are many references to Abū Yazīd in this book; volume X is especially valuable for our purpose.

Abū Nu'aym's Hilyah is perhaps the most valuable work on Ṣūfī biography and thought up to his time. Volumes IX and X contain very well-documented information on the Ṣūfīs of the third and fourth/ninth and tenth centuries. He quotes from many authors of Ṣūfī literature as well as from oral traditions. At the end of the chapter on Abū Yazīd, he asks the reader to consult al-Sulamī's Ṭabaqāt for more information.² Abū Yazīd's traditions in Hilyah both agree with and vary from those

¹Abū Nu'aym Aḥmad al-Iṣbahānī, Hilyat al-Awliyā' wa Ṭabaqāt al-Aṣfiyā' (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānajī and Maṭba'at al-Sa'ādah, 1932-1938).

²Hilyah, X. . 41-42.

of the other works mentioned above; however, since they give us a consistent picture of his personality, we accept Hilyah as a dependable source of information on Abū Yazīd.

vi) Al-Qushayrī

Perhaps the most esteemed and most popular work ever written on Ṣūfīsm in Arabic is the Risālah¹ of Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. in Tūs, 465/1072) of Naysābūr. This work quotes Abū Yazīd's traditions in connection with several Ṣūfī doctrines and practices.

A disciple of Sulamī,² al-Qushayrī was a very conscientious author. He documents his information carefully. When he quotes from written works, he cites his authorities,³ and when he narrates oral traditions, he

¹Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, Al-Risālat al-Qushayriyyah (Cairo: Maṭba' Muṣṭafā al-Bābī, 1959).

A Persian version of this work is now available to us in print (Badī' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, Tarjumeyé Risāleyé Qushayriyé [Tehrān: Bangāhé Tarjumé wa Nashré Ketāb, 1967]).

²Pedersen's Introduction to Tabaqāt, p. 23.

³As one of his sources, al-Qushayrī used al-Sulamī's Tārīkh al-Ṣūfiyyah which is no longer extant (Massignou, "Anā al-Ḥaqq", Der Islām, III [1912], p. 248, n. 2a.

gives the complete chain of narrators going back to the original witness. Risālah was held in high esteem and became a 'must' for the study of all later scholars on Ṣūfīsm. Many commentaries were written on this work.¹ Although Abū Yazīd's traditions in Risālah do not always agree with those of other works such as Luma', Tabaqāt and Hilyah, they give us a consistent picture of Abū Yazīd's personality. On the basis of this evidence, we consider Risālah a dependable source material on Abū Yazīd's life and thought.

vii) Al-Hujwīrī

One of the oldest and most celebrated treatises on Ṣūfīsm in Persian is Kashf al-Mahjūb² by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī (d. ca. 469/1076). A contemporary of al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwīrī was born in Ghazna in Afghanistan and travelled extensively in the Muslim world. During his travels, he met many important Ṣūfīs, one of whom was al-Sahlagī in Bistām.³ He died in Lahore, in today's Pakistan, where his tomb still exists.

¹One such comentary was written by the celebrated Zakariyā' al-Anṣārī (d.ca.916/1511) of Cairo.

²Supra, p. 6, n. 1.

For the date of al-Hujwīrī's death, see Nicholson's Preface to Kashf, pp. xviii-xix.

³Kashf, p. 205.

References to Abū Yazīd in Kashf are plentiful. In his very important chapter, "Concerning the Doctrines of the Sects of Ṣūfīs", al-Hujwīrī has devoted a long section to the discussion of the Ṭayfūrīs i.e., Abū Yazīd's followers.¹

Al-Hujwīrī was himself a Ṣūfī. Whenever he discusses a problem of Ṣūfīsm, he, like al-Sarrāj, concludes with his own views based on his own personal experiences as a Ṣūfī. In this respect, Kashf is much more interesting than Risālah. As for the source material for his Kashf, al-Hujwīrī used such works as Luma', Ṭabaqāt and Risālah, as well as oral traditions. Although al-Hujwīrī was quite far removed from Abū Yazīd's time, his reputation as a Ṣūfī and as an author, his use of such works as Luma', Ṭabaqāt and Risālah, and the consistency of Abū Yazīd's traditions quoted in Kashf support the dependability of Kashf as a source material on Abū Yazīd. But here again we should remember the weaknesses of oral traditions which also constituted a source of al-Hujwīrī's information.

Before we proceed to consider other important works, we would like to say that all later works on

¹Infra, p. 109.

Şūfīsm have drawn their information on Abū Yazīd from such works as Luma', Ta'arruf, Tabaqāt, Hilyah, Risālah and Kashf and thus are derived sources. From now on, therefore, with the exception of two very important sources -- Nūr and Tadhkirat -- we shall only briefly describe the works and their relevance as source material on Abū Yazīd, and not discuss the question of their dependability.

viii) Al-Anṣārī

We have already mentioned Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī's (d. 481/1089) Tabaqāt al-Şūfiyyah.¹ This was compiled in the Herātī dialect of Persian by one of his disciples from notes which he took during his master's lectures which were based on the Tabaqāt of al-Sulamī. As a Şūfī himself, al-Anṣārī added his own observations in the course of the lectures. We find several notices of Abū Yazīd in this work.

ix) Al-Sahlagī

Our most complete source of information on Abū Yazīd is Kitāb al-Nūr min Kalimāt Abī Tayfūr² of Abū

¹Supra, p. 16, n. 4.

²Supra, p. xi, n. 1.

Badawī has prepared this edition of Nūr on the basis

al-Faḍl Muḥammad al-Sahlagī (ca. 389/998 —

of two manuscripts: No. 6784 of the Maktabat al-Awqāf in Baghdād and a private manuscript belonging to L. Massignon at Arles in France which is itself a copy of Takīyyat al-Mawlawiyyah in Tripoli (Badawī, Shaṭaḥāt, p. 39). For more on these manuscripts, see ibid., pp. 40-43.

The editor does not doubt the authenticity of the title of the book, but he is not sure about the name of its author (ibid., p. 39). He says, "Perhaps he is an unknown author who collected the scattered information about Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī" (ibid., p. 40). We think, however, that there is hardly any room for doubt about the name of the author. Badawī himself has pointed out that al-Sahlagī is given as the author's name in the Arles manuscript and that Prof. Massignon has drawn our attention to this fact (ibid.). The manuscript mentions the name of al-Sahlagī in the following way: Kitab al-Nūr li-l-Sahlagī fī Kalimat al-Bisṭāmī). We have further evidence to prove the authorship of al-Sahlagī. In his Tadhkirat, Aṭṭār quotes al-Sahlagī by name in the following way:

'Isā of Bisṭām says, "I associated with the master (Abū Yazīd) for thirty years, but I never heard him utter a single word. This was his habit. He used to put his head on his knees, and when he raised it, he would sigh and then would return to the previous condition." It is reported that al-Sahlagī said that this happened in a state of contraction (qabḍ). Otherwise, on days when he was in a state of expansion (bast), everyone would derive great benefit from him (i.e., from his actions and speech) (Tadhkirat, I, 140).

This is almost an exact translation into the Persian of what we find in Nūr (p. 141). Hence we can safely conclude that al-Sahlagī is the author of the book in question (R.C. Zaehner arrives at the same conclusion in his "Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām: A Turning Point in Islāmic Mysticism", Indo-Iranian Journal, I [1957], 290-291, n. 14).

Aside from Nūr, Shaṭaḥāt includes narratives about Abū Yazīd as contained in Mir'āt al-Zamān of Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī (d. 655/1257), Nafaḥāt of Jāmī (not the Persian original of Nafaḥāt, but an Arabic translation of it by Tāj al-Dīn Zakariyā al-'Uthmānī) and Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah of al-Sulamī. In the introduction of this book, Badawī has also discussed the problem of shaṭaḥāt in Ṣūfism.

486/1093).¹ In view of the importance of Nūr for our work and since its author is not well known, we shall talk of him and of his work in some detail.

A native of Bistām,² al-Sahlagī was a contemporary of al-Qushayrī and al-Hujwīrī. In fact al-Hujwīrī personally met al-Sahlagī and heard traditions from him.³

Al-Sahlagī travelled extensively and heard traditions from many Sūfī masters and narrators of Prophetic Traditions. He was a vastly learned man and the author of several works.⁴

¹ Abd al-Karīm al-Sam'ānī, Kitāb al-Ansāb (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1912), fol. 81 b.

Kitāb al-Ansāb mentions 476 as the year of al-Sahlagī's death and 389 as the year of his birth. One of these two figures must be incorrect, for Sam'ānī mentions in words that al-Sahlagī lived for 97 years (ibid.). Hence, either he was born in 389 and died in 486, or he was born in 379 and died in 476. It is easy for the copier of an Arabic manuscript to make a mistake in writing 7 (V) in place of 8 (Λ) and vice versa, for Arabic 8 is only an up-side down position of Arabic 7.

² Ibid.

³ Supra, p. 19.

⁴ Al-Sam'ānī, Ansāb, for. 81. b.

We do not know the title of any other of his works except Nūr.

He was himself an important Ṣūfī of his time. We are told by al-Hujwīrī that al-Sahlagī was the imām (leader) of the Ṣūfīs of the region.¹ A disciple and the able successor of the well-known Ṣūfī Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Dāsītānī (d. 417/1026),² al-Sahlagī refers to his master as shaykh al-mashāyikh (the master of masters) and relates a large number of traditions from him.³

That al-Sahlagī was a man endowed with mystical experience is shown by some of his own statements in Nūr. While talking about the narrators of Abū Yazīd's traditions, he says that he has been able to determine the authenticity of these narratives on the basis of a mystical "taste" (munāzalah).⁴ Without this "taste",

¹Kashf, p. 205.

²Al-Sam'ānī, Ansāb, for. 81, b.

³Ibid.; Nūr, pp. 46, 50, 51, etc.

According to Massignon, al-Dāsītānī dictated the elements of Nūr to al-Sahlagī (Essai, p. 274). This is at least an exaggeration, if not completely incorrect. Neither al-Sam'ānī nor al-Hujwīrī, to both of whom Massignon refers, tells us that this was the case. Moreover, even a casual glance at Nūr will show that many of the traditions narrated in this book have been derived by al-Sahlagī directly from persons other than al-Dāsītānī.

⁴Nūr, p. 62.

Here is a good example of munāzalah, meaning mystical "taste". This word has been used in the same sense

says he, it would be impossible to distinguish between the transmissions of the authentic narrators and those of the doubtful narrators of Abū Yazīd's traditions.¹ Again, while showing the superiority of the ranks of Abū Yazīd and of his followers to those of one Dāwūd and of his successors, he says, "This is one of God's secrets revealed to me and not to anyone else."²

The question arises as to the date of writing Nūr. Al-Hujwīrī who, as we have seen,³ met the author, is completely silent about the book. It is likely, therefore, that al-Sahlagī wrote Nūr in the latter part of his life after the completion of al-Hujwīrī's Kashf.

As it was customary among many early Muslim scholars to explain to the reader the factor or factors

by al-Sarrāj in his Luma' (Glossary, p. 151).

This idea, that al-Sahlagī determines the authenticity of the narratives of Abū Yazīd on the basis of mystical "taste", has a parallel in Shī'ī thought. According to some Shī'ī scholars, the authenticity of the Prophetic Traditions can be determined by a sort of "smell".

The fact that al-Sahlagī claims a monopoly to the authentic traditions of Abū Yazīd shows that he was one of the Ṭayfūrīs .

¹Nūr, p. 62.

²Ibid.

³Supra, p. 19.

motivating them to write a book,¹ al-Sahlagī justifies the writing of Nūr by saying that he was asked, possibly by his friends or disciples, to enlighten them with information on Abū Yazīd and his mystical state (ḥāl); to explain some of his difficult sayings, and to specify his true followers. Hence he felt obliged to write Nūr in which he clarified the positions of Abū Yazīd and of his followers, and explained clearly some of their teachings to make them understandable to the people. He mentions, however, that he has excluded some of their teachings because "knowledge of the secret (sirr) depends on the secret (sirr); it cannot be explained and expressed. If its hidden meanings are revealed and the secrets exposed, its beauty, light, freshness and sweetness disappear."²

Many of the narratives contained in al-Sahlagī's work are written in the form of Prophetic Traditions: the text of each narrative is authenticated by a chain of transmitters (isnād) whose names are cited, and this chain goes back to the person who is the source of the

¹An instruction in dream or a request from friends, disciples or others was usually cited as a motivating factor.

²Nūr, p. 45.

narrative.¹ Here is an example:

I (al-Sahlagī) heard Abū Muḥammad saying: I heard Abu Ṭāhir al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad al-Ṣūfī saying: I heard Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣūfī saying: I heard 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī saying: I heard Ṭayfūr al-Bisṭāmī saying: I heard Mūsā b. 'Isā saying: My father said that Abū Yazīd said, "If you see a man who has been given miracles so that he can fly in the air, do not be deceived by him until you consider how you find him (behaving) in respect of (God's) commands and prohibitions (al-amr wa al-nahiy), of keeping within limits and of the fulfilment of Sharī'ah."²

Most of the direct transmitters of these traditions were either members of Abū Yazīd's family,³ or his disciples or visitors.⁴ There are, however, many other traditions in Nūr which do not have an isnād.

Now comes the crucial question of the reliability of the material contained in Nūr. First we shall

¹The oral traditions of Luma', Tabaqāt (Sulamī), Hilyah and Risālah are also recorded in the same form (infra, pp.28-29).

²Nūr, pp. 69 and 126.

The texts occurring at both these places are the same, but their isnāds vary. We are reproducing here the isnād as given on p. 69.

³The traditions just cited is an example of this.

⁴For information on some of them infra, pp. 61-65 and 99-108.

consider its oral traditions. Even a casual glance at the footnotes of our work will show that many of these traditions also occur in such works as Luma', Tabaqāt (Sulamī), Hilyah, Risālah and Kashf. One example is the tradition we have just cited. The following are the Arabic texts:

Nūr, pp. 69 and 126:

لو نظرتُم الى رجل اعطى من الكرامات حتى
ترْبِع في الهواء فلا تغتروا به حتى تنظروا كيف تجدونه
عند الامر والنهي وحفظ الحدود و اداء الشريعة

Risālah, p. 15:

لو نظرتُم الى رجل اعطى من الكرامات حتى يرتقي في
الهواء فلا تغتروا به حتى تنظروا كيف تجدونه عند الامر
والنهي وحفظ الحدود و اداء الشريعة

Hilyah, X, 40:

لو نظرتُم الى رجل اعطى من الكرامات حتى يرفع في
الهواء فلا تغتروا به حتى تنظروا كيف تجدونه عند الامر
والنهي وحفظ الحدود و اداء الشريعة

Luma', p. 324:

لو ان رجلا بسط مصلاة على الماء و ترْبِع في
الهواء فلا تغتروا به حتى تنظروا كيف تجدونه
في الامر والنهي

A comparison of these texts shows that they all agree, with slight variations. If we leave aside

the variations of the word ترجع which might be due to different readings of the editors, the texts in Nūr, Risālah and Hilyah are exactly the same. The text of Luma', however, varies in some respects¹ from the other

¹The spreading of the prayer-rug on water as mentioned in the beginning of the text in Luma' is only an example of the miracles (karamāt) referred to in the beginning of the other three texts. As for the part missing from the end of Luma''s text, we can say that al-Sarrāj often suppresses the isnāds and abbreviates the text of traditions. Referring to this fact, Nicholson rightly says, "Considering the variety of topics which the author has managed to include in a comparatively short treatise, we can easily forgive him for having often suppressed the isnāds and abbreviated the text of traditions and anecdotes...." (Nicholson's Introduction to Luma', p. viii).

The following are the isnāds of the same tradition as given in the works mentioned above:

Nūr: (1) Al-Sahlagī ← (2) Abū Muḥammad ← (3) Abū Ṭāhir al-Ṭayyib b. Muḥammad al-Ṣūfī ← (4) Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ṣūfī ← (5) 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī ← (6) Ṭayfūr al-Bisṭāmī ← (7) Mūsā b. 'Isā ← (8) His father ← (9) Abū Yazīd.

Risālah: Al-Qushayrī ← (4) Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn ← (5) 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī ← (7) Mūsā b. 'Isā ← (8) His father ← (9) Abū Yazīd.

Hilyah: Abū Nu'aym ← (4) Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn ← (5) 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh ← (6) Ṭayfūr al-Bisṭāmī ← (7) Mūsā b. 'Isā ← (8) His father ← (9) Abū Yazīd.

Luma': Al-Sarrāj ← (6) Ṭayfūr b. 'Isā ← (7) Mūsā b. 'Isā ← (8) His father ← (9) Abū Yazīd.

Several points come out of a comparison of these isnāds. The isnād in Luma' is the shortest, naturally, because al-Sarrāj was the earliest of the four authors. It is quite possible that al-Qushayrī received the

three, but the central meaning of the tradition in all these texts is the same. It is possible that al-Sahlagī received this tradition from one or more of the other three sources in which it occurs, or it may have occurred in Nūr quite independently. In any case, we have to accept this tradition as authentic because we have accepted the other three sources as dependable. What is true of this particular tradition is also true of many other traditions in Nūr. That is to say, many other oral traditions in Nūr are in agreement with those in the earlier dependable sources; we therefore accept these too as authentic.

There are, however, other oral traditions which occur only in Nūr and in no other earlier source available to us. This might be expected because Luma', Tabaqāt (Sulamī), Hilyah, Risālah and Kashf are compact general and systematic works on early Ṣūfīsm, whereas Nūr is a hagiographical work, and, in fact, one of the earliest of this type, devoted exclusively to the life and teachings of Abū Yazīd. Naturally, therefore, al-Sahlagī includes in Nūr much more material on Abū Yazīd

tradition from Hilyah; for, although No. (5) in the isnād is transposed and No. (6) is missing from the isnād of Risālah, both al-Qushayrī and Abū Nu'aym could possibly not have heard this tradition from the same Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn. The isnād in Nūr, however, is the most complete.

than any of the other authors do. An internal criticism of the traditions which occur independently in Nūr shows that they are authentic traditions of Abū Yazīd. The ideas contained in these traditions are quite consistent with those contained in the other traditions which we have judged authentic. That is to say, there is a consistency of meanings among all these tradition giving a unique picture of Abū Yazīd's personality. Hence we can accept these independent traditions as authentic since they are borne out by the other available material on Abū Yazīd.

Apart from the oral traditions, Nūr contains a large number of traditions quoted as such without any isnād attached to them.¹ Many of these traditions without isnād are also contained in the earlier sources. We can then reasonably say that al-Sahlagī received these from the works of his predecessors. For, otherwise, why should he not have mentioned the isnāds? In fact, it is difficult to think that al-Sahlagī, who was an outstanding scholar with several works to his credit and did a great deal of travelling in order to verify the authenticity of traditions, and met scholars such as al-Hujwīrī, did not know the works of his predecessors which

¹For examples, see Nūr, pp. 109-114.

were available at that time. It is possible that he may even have used Manāqib Abū Yazīd¹ as a source for his work. The manuscripts of Nūr mention Manāqib Abū Yazīd in the beginning of Nūr.² We have seen that Manāqib could not be the title of Nūr,³ but the fact that the manuscripts mention Manāqib shows that there might have been some connection between the two. Of the several possibilities we can think of, one is that al-Sahlagī might have used Manāqib as a source of Nūr.⁴

To sum up, al-Sahlagī's reputation as a Ṣūfī and a vastly learned man; his unique position as a Ṣūfī and scholar who lived in Bisṭām, belonged to the Ṭayfūrī tradition of Ṣūfīsm and claimed to have a mystical "taste" on the basis of which he could determine the authenticity of Abū Yazīd's traditions; the possibility that he may have had access to many works on early

¹Supra, p. 7 (and 8), n. 1.

²Nūr, p. 44.

³Supra, p. 7 (and 8), n. 1.

⁴Another possibility may be that the copier described the book as the Manāqib (virtuous acts) of Abū Yazīd. The third possibility is that the copier mistook the text of Nūr as that of Manāqib Abū Yazīd.

Šūfīsm available at his time; the agreement of many traditions of Nūr with those of earlier works which we have accepted as dependable; and most important, the internal consistency of the traditions not only among themselves but also with those occurring in other works; all these factors give us a basis to conclude that the material in Nūr is dependable as a source of information on Abū Yazīd. But we should remember, nevertheless, that the oral traditions of Nūr are after all oral traditions suffering from their natural weaknesses.

x) Ibn Munawwar

Muḥammad Ibn Munawwar's (d. 600/1203) famous Persian work Asrār al-Tawḥīd fī Maqāmāt al-Shaykh Abī Sa'īd¹ which contains an account of the life and teachings of the great Šūfī Abū Sa'īd b. Abī al-Khayr (d. 441/1049), the author's great grand-father, has a few references to Abū Yazīd's life and teachings.

¹Muḥammad b. Munawwar, Asrār al-Tawḥīd fī Maqāmāt al-Shaykh Abī Sa'īd (Tehran: Mu'assasat-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1332 [shamsī]).

xi) Baqlī

One very important book for our understanding of shatahāt is Sharḥ Shathīyāt¹ by Rūzbehān Baqlī of Shīrāz (d. 606/1209). This was first written in Arabic. Later, on the request of one of his disciples, Baqlī rewrote the book in Persian in a much larger volume.

Shathīyāt contains most of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt and an interpretation of them by Baqlī. We should note, however, that Baqlī has done this interpretation in the light of the developed theosophical Ṣūfīsm of his time.

xii) 'Aṭṭār

By far the most complete biographical work on Ṣūfīsm is the celebrated Persian work Tadhkirat al-Awliyā² by Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār (d. 626/1229) of Naysābūr. A druggist ('aṭṭār) by profession in the beginning of his life, he later devoted himself to literary work and may have become a Ṣūfī. In his attempts at making the biographies of Ṣūfīs as complete as possible, he drew the material for the Tadhkirat from as many sources as he could lay his hands on. Aside

¹Supra, p. xiv.

²Supra, p. 6, n. 1.

from Hikāyāt al-Awliyā',¹ Luma', Tabaqāt (Sulamī), Hilyah, Risālah and Kashf, 'Aṭṭār had access to monographs on Ṣūfī lives and teachings, e.g., Nūr from which he quotes extensively,² and also perhaps to some writings of Ṣūfīs themselves.³ Tadhkirat devotes a long chapter to the life and teachings of Abū Yazīd.

'Aṭṭār, however, is not very careful in quoting material from the sources he used. Motivated by a desire to present the life and thought of the Ṣūfīs in clear intelligible language to the reader, and perhaps he had also the common man in mind, he does not always bother to quote the traditions word for word. Sometimes he elaborates and explains the text,⁴ and other times he summarizes and omits from it difficult words and phrases.⁵

¹Supra, p. 7, n. 1.

²For an example of 'Aṭṭār's quotation from Nūr, supra, p. 22, n.

³Arberry, Muslim Saints, pp. 13-14.

⁴This is very clearly exemplified in the tradition quoted on p.152

⁵Judged by modern standards, this is not a very scholarly approach. Yet, herein perhaps lies a great value of 'Aṭṭār's work. His interpretation and elaboration help us to understand some of the Ṣūfī traditions which are otherwise very obscure (the example on pp.169-170 is a case in point). And we can accept most of

Moreover, by 'Aṭṭār's time, numerous legends and stories of miracles had grown up around the lives of the Ṣūfīs, and the author seems to have incorporated a number of them into his book.

In spite of all this, we consider 'Aṭṭār's Tadhkirat as a dependable source of information on Abū Yazīd's life and thought. The fact that he may have been a Ṣūfī himself, his reputation as a great scholar of Ṣūfīsm, his use of all the works on Ṣūfīsm, including Nūr, which were available to him, and most important, as in the case of the material in Nūr, the consistency of the traditions in Tadhkirat, are points in favour of our argument. We should, nevertheless, read this work carefully; we should allow for the weaknesses that may have resulted from 'Aṭṭār's interpretations, elaboration etc., of traditions and from his incorporation of some traditions which may have arisen due to the pious invention of the people and thus would reflect more the ideas of the people of 'Aṭṭār's time about Abū Yazīd than of the historical Abū Yazīd.

his interpretations. Perhaps a Ṣūfī himself, he was a great scholar, lived in a Ṣūfī atmosphere and at a period much nearer to the time of the early Ṣūfīs than ours. Hence he was in a better position to understand their teachings than we.

xiii) Jāmī

A short account of Abū Yazīd's life and teachings is also contained in the famous Persian work Nafahāt al-Uns¹ by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) of Khurāsān. As we have mentioned before,² one of the main sources of this work was Anṣārī's Tabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah which, in turn, was founded on al-Sulamī's Tabaqāt.

xiv) Al-Sha' rānī

One of the later works on Ṣūfīsm is Tabaqāt al-Kubrā³ by 'Abd al-Waḥhāb al-Sha' rānī (al-Sha' rāwī) (d. 973/1565) of Egypt who was himself the founder of the Ṣūfī order called al-Tarīqat al-Sha' rāwiyyah. The small section of Tabaqāt which the author devotes to Abū Yazīd does not inform us anything new about the Ṣūfī.

xv) Al-Munāwī

Although written quite late, al-Kawākib

¹Supra, p. 6, n. 1.

²Supra, p. 16.

³'Abd al-Waḥhāb al-Sha' rānī, Tabaqāt al-Kubrā (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-'Āmirat al-Uthmāniyyah, 1898).

al-Durriyyah¹ by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1032/1622) of Cairo gives us a good critical account of Ṣūfī teachings. This work devotes a small section to Abū Yazīd.

To sum up our description and evaluation of the major sources of information on Abū Yazīd's life and thought, we do not have any primary source material in its usually accepted sense. The authors who first recorded Abū Yazīd's traditions received them from oral sources. Nevertheless, we can accept most of these traditions as authentic. Some of the authors mentioned above were not far removed from Abū Yazīd's time. Al-Junayd, for example, recorded Abū Yazīd's traditions within some thirty years of his death. Moreover, some of the direct transmitters of traditions to al-Junayd were respected Ṣūfīs, and associates and friends of both al-Junayd and of Abū Yazīd. Further, most of the authors of Ṣūfī literature who quoted Abū Yazīd's traditions were reputed Ṣūfīs and recognized scholars. We do not know of any ulterior motive on their part which would make us suspect their honesty. It is true that

¹ 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Munāwī, al-Kawākib al-Durriyyah fī Tarājim al-Sādat al-Ṣūfiyyah (Cairo: Dawrsat Tajlīd al-Anwār, 1938).

some authors tried to defend Abū Yazīd against orthodox attack, but this does not mean that they distorted or corrupted his traditions. What is more important is that we do not find any discordant elements in these sources; they give us a truly consistent picture of Abū Yazīd's personality. All this supports our contention that most of the information available to us is dependable as source material. We should point out that the sources contain oral traditions which are not as dependable as primary source material, but we have no solution to this problem because we do not have any primary material on Abū Yazīd's life and thought. In these circumstances, all that we can do is to read these sources carefully and somewhat skeptically and to make use of them as best as we can. We should take extra caution in reading the biographical material in the sources because this material came to be linked up with legends and anecdotes which are more indicative of the esteem in which others held a Ṣūfī than they are of sober, historical fact. Any work on early Ṣūfism is bound to depend on these sources, and our work is no exception.

2. Minor Sources

i) Massignon

In his Essai¹ published in 1922, L. Massignon devotes a small section of a chapter to Abū Yazīd.² In this section he makes a brief but critical survey of the source material on Abū Yazīd, and of his life and thought. Massignon also makes a comparison between Abū Yazīd and al-Ḥallāj in which, naturally,³ Abū Yazīd comes off short.

ii) Horten

Max Horten was one of the earliest proponents of the theory of the Indian origin of Ṣūfīsm. In the first of his two articles published under the general title "Indische Strömungen in der islamischen Mystik" in the Materialien zur Kunde des Buddhismus in 1927 and 1928, he analyses the doctrines of Abū Yazīd⁴ along with

¹Supra, p. 7, n. 1.

²Essai, pp. 273-286.

³Because Massignon is a great admirer of al-Ḥallāj.

⁴M. Horten, "Indische Strömungen in der islamischen Mystik" I, Materialien zur Kunde des Buddhismus (Heidelberg, 1927), pp. 17-25.

those of al-Junayd and of al-Ḥallāj, and tries diligently to show that Ṣūfīsm of the third century of the Islāmic era was thoroughly permeated by Indian thought.

iii) Dermenghem

In his Vies des saints musulmans,¹ E. Dermenghem has devoted a relatively long chapter to a discussion of the life and thought of Abū Yazīd, and has listed a bibliography on him.

iv) Ritter

H. Ritter has drawn a sketch of the life and teachings of Abū Yazīd in his "Die Aussprüche des Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī..."² A summarised version of this appears in the Encyclopaedia of Islām.³

¹E. Dermenghem, Vies des saints musulmans (Alger: [probably published in 1930's]), pp. 197-245.

²H. Ritter, "Die Aussprüche des Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī...", Festschrift Tschudi (= Westöstliche Abhandlungen), ed. F. Meier, Wiesbaden (1954), pp. 213-243.

³H. Ritter, "Abū Yazīd", E.I., new ed., I, 162-163.

v) Arberry

In one of the chapters of his Revelation and Reason in Islām, A.J. Arberry examines the life and sayings of Abū Yazīd¹ in particular as an illustration of the Ṣūfī path "by which the earnest believer might hope to reach his journey's end, the way of spiritual discipline and if might be, personal communion with the Creator."²

Regarding the question of possible Indian influence on Abū Yazīd, Arberry holds a view opposite to that of Zaehner. He has attempted to refute Zaehner's thesis, point by point, in his article "Bisṭāmīāna".³

Arberry has also introduced a short notice to the story of Abū Yazīd's conversation with the monks of a Christian monastery in his "A Bisṭāmī Legend" in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.⁴

¹A.J. Arberry, Revelation and Reason in Islām, the Forward Lectures for 1956 delivered in the University of Liverpool (London, 1957), pp. 89-108.

²Ibid., p. 89.

³A.J. Arberry, "Bisṭāmīāna", Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies. (London: University of London, XXV [1962]), 28-37.

⁴A.J. Arberry, "A Bisṭāmī Legend", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1938), pp. 89-91.

vi) Zaehner

R.C. Zaehner thinks that Abū Yazīd was responsible for introducing Indian Vedantic ideas to Ṣūfīsm.¹ He bases his view on the parallelism that he finds between the shataḥāt of Abū Yazīd and the Indian sources. The Oxford professor attempts to prove this thesis in his article "Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām: a Turning Point in Islāmic Mysticism"² and in his book Hindu and Muslim Mysticism.³

vii) Anawatī and Gardet

A brief account of Abū Yazīd and of his teachings, based primarily on Massignon's Essai, is contained in Mystique musulmane: aspects et tendances, expériences et techniques by G.C. Anawatī and L. Gardet.⁴

viii) Deladrière

R. Deladrière's article "Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī et son Enseignement Spirituel" in

¹For a discussion of this problem, infra, pp.299-351.

²Supra, p. 22, n.

³Supra, p. 3, n. 1.

⁴Anawatī and Gardet, Mystique, pp. 32-33 and 110-115.

Arabica¹ briefly surveys Abū Yazīd's life and teachings.

ix) Al-Sāmarrā'ī

In his recently published doctoral dissertation, The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings, Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī discusses Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj² and the question of possible Indian influence on his doctrine of fanā' (self-annihilation). Arberry's pupil and a Muslim, the author agrees with his teacher in the controversy regarding the Indian influence on Abū Yazīd. Al-Sāmarrā'ī also briefly discusses the question as to whether or not Abū Yazīd was a pantheist.³

Aside from the works mentioned above,⁴ both

¹R. Deladrière, "Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī et son enseignement spirituel", Arabica, XIV (1967), Part I, 76-89.

²Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī, The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings (Baghdād: The National Printing and Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 232-240.

³Ibid., pp. 241-244.

⁴Mention should also be made of a brief account of Abū Yazīd in Ibn Khallikān's (d. 681/1282) Kitāb Wafayāt al-A'yān (trans. into English by B.G. Slane, Biographical Dictionary [4 vols.; London: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland (printed in Paris), 1843-1871], I, 662). An account of Bisṭām where Abū Yazīd lived is found in the famous

under major and minor sources, references to Abū Yazīd are found in almost every other book on Ṣūfism.

geographical dictionary, Mu'jam al-Buldān [5 vols.; Beirut: Dār Ṣādir wa Dār Bayrūt, 1955-1957], I, 421-422), by the Greek born (later converted to Islām) geographer Shihāb al-Dīn Yāqūt (d. 627/1957) and in many other geographical works. In his enclopaedia article, "Bisṭām" (E.I. , new ed., I, 1247), R.N. Frye gives a very brief account of and lists a bibliography on the town of Bisṭām. There is a description of this town also in J.B. Fraser's Narrative of a Journey into Khurāsān in the Years 1821 and 1822 ([London: Longman, 1825], pp. 336-340).

Chapter II

ABŪ YAZĪD'S LIFE AND PERSONALITY

Although the sources contain a great deal of material on the teaching of Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. 'Īsā b. Sharūshān al-Bisṭāmī,¹ information on his life and personality is relatively sparse. Nevertheless, in so far as it is possible, we shall attempt to construct a biography of Abū Yazīd from the information which is available. Of all the sources, al-Sahlagī's *Nūr* is the most helpful. We should, however, proceed with great caution, for, as we have hinted previously,² the material on the biographies of the early Ṣūfīs came to be linked up with legends and anecdotes which are more indicative of the esteem in which others held a Ṣūfī than they are of sober, historical fact.

¹Al-Sahlagī tells us that three important persons bore the name Abū Yazīd, but the most important of them was Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr b. 'Īsā b. Sharūshān (*Nūr*, pp. 45-46).

²Supra, p. 39.

1. The Dates of Abū Yazīd's Birth and Death

Abū Yazīd died in 234/848 at the age of seventy-three.¹ The year of his birth, then, would be 161/777.

According to al-Sulamī, Abū Yazīd died either in 234/848 or in 261/874.² Although al-Sulamī belonged to a period earlier than that of al-Sahlagī, we can presume that the latter knew much more about Abū Yazīd; for, as we have seen previously,³ he lived in Bistām, belonged to Abū Yazīd's tradition of Ṣūfīsm and devoted a complete work to Abū Yazīd. None of these is true of al-Sulamī. Hence, in the matter of the date of Abū Yazīd's death, we consider al-Sahlagī more likely to be accurate than al-Sulamī. Moreover, Abū Yazīd had contact, either through visits or through correspondence, with most of the important Ṣūfīs of the time e.g., Dhū al-Nūn of Egypt (d. 245/860), Yaḥyá b. Mu'ādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/872) and others.⁴ But there is no indication to show that he had any contact with the great Baghdādī Ṣūfī al-Junayd. If Abū Yazīd had died in

¹Nūr, p. 63.

²Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 60.

³Supra, pp. 23, 25 and 30.

⁴Infra, pp. 99-108.

261 -- and al-Junayd would have been some forty-five years old at that time¹ -- we could reasonably expect some contact between them. Al-Junayd, as we have seen,² heard traditions of Abū Yazīd from his uncle and master Sarī al-Saqāṭī who might have met Abū Yazīd³ as well as from others who associated both al-Junayd and Abū Yazīd.

What is even more important is that Abū 'Alī Shāqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/810) met Abū Yazīd as a Ṣūfī.⁴ This would have been impossible if Abū Yazīd

¹He was born about the year 215/830 ('Abd al-Qādir al-Junayd, p. 2).

²Supra, p. 4.

³Nūr, p. 81.

Al-Saqāṭī refers to Abū Yazīd as "my brother" (akhī). This shows that their relationship was an intimate one, either through correspondence or even perhaps through personal meeting. This again could be taken as a further evidence to support our contention about the date of Abū Yazīd's death. Had al-Junayd been old enough at the time Abū Yazīd and al-Saqāṭī were in contact with each other, one might expect that there would have been some contact between al-Junayd and Abū Yazīd also.

⁴Nūr, p. 91; Mir'āt, p. 163; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 93.

Al-Balkhī seems to have met Abū Yazīd also when the latter was a young boy (Nūr, p. 95). Aside from this, al-Balkhī corresponded with Abū Yazīd through a messenger (Tadhkirat, I, 147-148).

died in 261; for, in this case Abū Yazīd would have been a mere lad of six in the year of Shaqīq's death.

2. The Place of his Birth

As his surname 'al-Bisṭāmī' shows, Abū Yazīd belonged to Bisṭām (also Basṭām and Bosṭām). A town enclosed by a wall with many round towers,¹ Bisṭām is situated in an open valley² surrounded by hills in the Elburz Mountains range. It is on the highway to Naysābūr (half-way between Tehrān and Naysābūr) three miles and a half north-east of Shāhrūd at 55 E. Long. (Greenw.) and 36.30 N. Lat.³ A stream which originates from the Elburz and runs through Bisṭām has made the valley cultivable.⁴ It has a population of about 4,000 people (1950).⁵ Its winter is harsh. On Jan. 5, 1821, Fraser saw hills covered with snow and a great deal of snow lying on the plain of Bisṭām.⁶ Aside from

¹Fraser, Narrative, p. 336

²Ibid., p. 342.

³Frye, "Bisṭām", p. 1247.

⁴Yāqūt, Buldān, I, 421; Fraser, Narrative, p. 336.

⁵Frye, "Bisṭām", p. 1247.

⁶Fraser, Narrative, p. 343.

Abū Yazīd's tomb and sanctuary which are located in the middle of the town, there are ruins of many monuments in Bistām.¹ Near the tomb, Fraser saw a ruined square at the entrance to which was a gate built of brick.² It is possible that this gate is the Bāb-i Nawhān to which reference will be made later.³

Founded, perhaps, by Khusraw II Parwiz's governor, Bistām, about the year 590 A.D.,⁴ Bistām fell to the Muslim general Suwayd b. Muqarrin in 18/639 or in 19/640 during the caliphate of 'Umar.⁵

The famous Muslim geographer-traveller Yāqūt visited Bistām on the eve of the Mongol invasion. He described it as a fair-sized town with many market places and with modest, low-roofed houses. From his account, we also know that Bistām was swarming with bugs, flies and small snakes, but it produced rosy

¹Ibid., pp. 336 ff ; Frye, "Bistām", p. 1247.

²Fraser, Narrative, pp. 339 and 340

³Infra, p. 61.

⁴Frye, "Bistām", p. 1247.

⁵Yāqūt, Buldān, I, 422.

Cf. Frye, "Bistām", p. 1247.

i) His Grandfather

Abū Yazīd's grandfather Sharūshān was first a Magian and then was converted to Islām by one Ibn Ibrāhīm.¹ He became a pious Muslim thereafter.²

Al-Sahlagī relates the following story of Sharūshān's acceptance of Islām: Sharūshān used to be associated with Ibn Ibrāhīm. Sharūshān's father objected to his son's association with a non-Magian. The son tried to convince his father of the good qualities, such as generosity and trustworthiness, of Ibn Ibrāhīm. To verify what Sharūshān was saying, the father wanted to meet Ibn Ibrāhīm. Accordingly, he invited Ibn Ibrāhīm to his house. When Sharūshān brought food before the guest, the latter refused to eat unless the former accepted Islām. Unable to disoblige the guest, Sharūshān became a Muslim.³

It appears from the story that Sharūshān was already prepared to accept Islām. But he needed a pretext to do it, and this pretext was provided by

¹Nūr, p. 46.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Ibn Ibrāhīm's refusal to eat the food.

Probably, Sharūshān belonged to the first generation of Muslims in Bistām, for Ibn Ibrāhīm came to the town from elsewhere when the spread of Islām in this area had just begun.¹ We are, however, sure that there was no wholesale conversion to Islām in Bistām. For, we find that there were many Zoroastrians living in the town during Abū Yazīd's time. In fact, there were Zoroastrian families in Abū Yazīd's immediate neighbourhood² and he was very much aware of their presence. He often spoke of the Magian girdle (zunnār)³ in a metaphorical sense to represent infidelity, and this became a favourite metaphor for many later Ṣūfīs. As far as we know, Abū Yazīd was responsible for introducing this metaphor into Ṣūfīsm, and this could very well have been due to his encounter with Magians in the vicinity in which he lived.

ii) His Father

It seems that Abū Yazīd's father 'Īsā was an extraordinarily pious Muslim. According to a tradition,

¹Ibid.

²Infra, pp. 74-75.

³Infra, pp. 172; 233, n. 4.

he did not consummate his marriage until forty days after the wedding to make sure that at the time of consummation the digestive tract of his wife did not contain any trace of forbidden food which she might have eaten at her father's house.¹ We are also told that 'Īsá was one of the prominent men in Bistām.² He died when Abū Yazīd was a young boy.³

iii) Abū Yazīd's Mother and his Relationship with her

Although we do not know much about Abū Yazīd's father, our sources contain a number of traditions about his mother and her relationship with Abū Yazīd. Al-Sahlagī tells us that Abū Yazīd's mother was a rare woman of humility (tawādu'), shyness (hayā'), fear (khawf) and hope (rajā'); she was an ascetic assiduous at fasting and a noble woman with whom everyone was pleased.⁴ If al-Sahlagī's description is correct, she was also a Ṣūfī of some standing. According to the

¹Nūr, p. 47.

²Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt, trans. Slane, I, 662; Tadhkirat, I, 135.

³Infra, pp. 59 and 67.

⁴Nūr, p. 47.

same author, when Abū Yazīd was troubled in his mind by his master Ja'far's¹ prediction concerning his spiritual destiny, he came to his mother and one word from her was sufficient to restore his peace of mind.² This further shows that the mother played an important role in the development of Abū Yazīd's spiritual life.

The story is told that when Abū Yazīd was in his mother's womb, he used to cause stirring in the womb every time she would eat some forbidden food.³

This and many similar stories which we shall come across should be taken for what they are worth. As we have mentioned before,⁴ they tell us more of how the people thought about Abū Yazīd than of the real historical Abū Yazīd. This is true of a great deal of biographical literature on important personalities of

¹For a discussion on Abū Yazīd's relationship with Ja'far, infra, pp. 68-70.

²Nūr, p. 47.

³Tadhkirat, I, 135.

According to another tradition, when the mother was pregnant with Abū Yazīd, her hands would withdraw whenever she approached any forbidden food (Nūr, p. 142; Mir'āt, p. 168).

⁴Supra, p. 39.

Islām. Some aspects of the portrayal of the life of the Prophet Muḥammad provide a good example. Many pious Muslims could not imagine that such an extraordinary person could have come into this world in an ordinary way. Hence many miraculous stories were invented and associated with the event of his birth. Historically speaking, these stories do not have much value. Nevertheless, they are important in so far as they inform us of the people's estimation of these personalities.

It is certain that Abū Yazīd was very obedient to his mother, although it was difficult to please her.¹ The following story may contain some exaggeration, but it indicates how obedient Abū Yazīd was to his mother. One night the mother asked Abū Yazīd to bring her a drink of water. Thereupon he went out to look for water. Later he returned with a mug of water. Finding his mother asleep, he waited with the mug in his hand until she awoke. In the meantime, due to the excessively low temperature, a piece of skin from one of his fingers was frozen to the edge of the mug. Asked by his mother what it was, Abū Yazīd replied, "This is the skin of my finger. I thought to myself that if I should put the

¹Tadhkirat, I, 138.

mug down and go to sleep, perhaps you would want the water and not be able to find it. Besides, you did not order me to put it down. So I held it (in my hands) in order to please you and to obey your order."¹ 'Aṭṭār adds that the mother then asked Abū Yazīd to keep the door (of the house or of her room) half-open, and he watched the door until day-break to make sure that the door remained exactly the way his mother wanted it.²

Abū Yazīd recalled that he disobeyed his mother only twice, and on both these occasions evil consequences followed. He believed that these consequences were the direct and immediate result of his disobedience. He said,

Once I was throwing wormwood (shīḥ) from the roof to the bottom of the house. While I was doing this, she said, "Stop". But I was (already) in the process of throwing one part of it. To obey her and to follow her order I attempted to catch hold of it. But I fell from the roof and broke my nose. I realized that this wound was the result of my disobeying her and ignoring (lit. abandoning) her order. And once she ordered me to bring water and said, "Carry the pitcher." But I carried two pitchers. When I came out (of the house), a drunken man came, beat me up and broke one of the

¹Nūr, p. 71; Tadhkirat, I, 138; Kawākib, p. 249.

²Tadhkirat, I, 138.

Abū Yazīd obeyed his mother in accordance with the instructions of the Sharī'ah (Kawākib, p. 249).

pitchers. I realized that this was (also) due to my disobeying her order.¹

In spite of these acts of disobedience for which, he thought, he had received punishment, Abū Yazīd believed that his mother was satisfied with him. In fact, he regarded his mystical achievement to be the result of her satisfaction. Once, when asked how he had achieved his goal, Abū Yazīd replied, "You say what you will,² but I see this as the result of my mother's satisfaction."³

¹Nūr, pp. 70-71.

Abū Yazīd's disobedience of his mother on the second occasion may appear strange to us. He had carried the water containers correctly according to the mother's order. But, from Abū Yazīd's point of view, he had been disobedient because his mother had asked him to carry only one pitcher and not two.

It is interesting to notice here that the wounds on the nose and the beating by the drunken man need not be understood as being the results of Abū Yazīd's disobedience of his mother; for, these incidents could be sufficiently explained with reference to natural causes. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that he looked at these incidents as being the results of disobedience, and for that reason they were important to him.

²That is, you may interpret this in any way you like.

³Nūr, pp. 71-72.

The mother was responsible for the care of the young Abū Yazīd. As we shall see later, it was she (and not her husband) who sent him to the school.¹ This evidence begins to suggest that 'Īsá died when Abū Yazīd was a young boy. The conclusion is further supported by the fact that after having heard the interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse "Be thankful to Me and to your parents,"² Abū Yazīd told his mother of the impossibility of serving God and "her" at the same time. The "mother" then relieved him of the service to her and Abū Yazīd left home.³ If the father were alive at that time, Abū Yazīd would definitely have mentioned both the father and the mother in this connection, for the Qur'ānic verse refers to both. The mother lived long. She was still alive when Abū Yazīd came back home thirty years after he had left Bistām.⁴

¹Infra, p. 67.

²Qur'ān, 31:14.

³Infra, p. 67.

⁴Infra, pp 68-69.

iv) Other Members of his Family

a) His brothers and sisters: As far as the other members of his family¹ are concerned, we know that Abū Yazīd had two brothers and two sisters. Among the brothers, Ādam was the eldest, 'Alī the youngest and Abū Yazīd was the intermediate one.² Both Ādam and 'Alī were devoted worshippers and ascetics.³ We do not know anything about the sisters except that one of them was married.⁴

Both Ādam and 'Alī left behind sons and grandsons. Unlike the descendants of 'Alī, the descendants of Ādam inherited Abū Yazīd's spirituality⁵ and became

¹We are taking this term in the sense of an extended family of the East.

²Nūr, p. 50.

³Ibn Khallīkān, Wafayāt, trans. Slane, 1, 662.

⁴Infra, p. 113.

⁵There is no word corresponding to 'spirituality' in the text. Yet, this is what the context implies. The text goes like this: "The descendants of 'Alī, one of the brothers of Abū Yazīd, did not inherit what his (i.e., Ādam's) descendants did..." (Nūr, p. 54).

famous men.¹ They were responsible for transmitting to following generations a large number of traditions about Abū Yazīd. The most important of them was Abū Mūsá.

b) Abū Mūsá: Son of Ādam, Abū Mūsá was the servant (khādim), closest disciple and the constant companion of Abū Yazīd. One of his duties was to take care of Abū Yazīd's prayer times. For the morning prayer he used to go to the gate of Nawḥān (Bāb-i Nawḥān), an open place from which the approach of dawn could be clearly seen. When the dawn approached, he used to come to Abū Yazīd's cell (ṣawma'ah)² and inform him accordingly.³ On one such morning when Abū Mūsá came to inform his master of the prayer time, he found him dead in the cell.⁴

Abū Mūsá had a tremendous respect for the master. Having been asked about respect for one's teacher, he once said,

¹Ibid.

²Infra, p. 73.

³Nūr, p. 50.

⁴Ibid.

If God had opened on the servant something brighter than the sun and then the teacher called him to do a trivial act pertaining to this world, and (as a result) he left that (sun) and turned to what he was asked to do by the teacher, (even then) this would have been a very trivial sign of respect.¹

It is out of respect again that he never called Abū Yazīd by his name except on the day the latter died.² For the same reason Abū Mūsá ordered that his grave be dug deeper than that of Abū Yazīd so that his body would rest at a level lower than Abū Yazīd's.³

Abū Yazīd also had a high opinion of Abū Mūsá. He said to someone, "You should have a heart like Abū Mūsá."⁴

We do not know if Abū Mūsá was literate in respect to exoteric knowledge ('ilm), but he achieved a very high spiritual rank.⁵ He was responsible for

¹Ibid., pp. 50-51.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 51.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., pp. 51-52.

According to al-Sahlagī, Abū Mūsá reached such a high stage that he could view all that was happening in Abū Yazīd's heart (ibid., p. 51).

the transmission of a large number of traditions about the master and his teachings. Al-Sahlagī tells us that Abū Mūsá took with him to the grave four hundred of these traditions; for, during his life-time he did not find any worthy person to whom he could reveal these traditions.¹

c) 'Umayy Mūsá and Abū Yazīd II: Abū Mūsá had four sons² of whom we know the names of two: 'Umayy Mūsá³ and Abū Yazīd II (al-thānī).⁴ Although illiterate (ummiyy) in exoteric knowledge, 'Umayy Mūsá attained a high mystical rank. He was so much absorbed in the contemplation of God that sometimes he could not distinguish his children and grandchildren from those of others.⁵ He was one of the two disciples of

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 52.

³Badawī vocalizes 'Umayy as 'Ammī (ibid., p. 53), whereas Massignon reads this as 'Umayy. (Massignon, Essai, p. 274).

⁴Abū Yazīd is believed to have predicted the birth of 'Umayy Mūsá and of Abū Yazīd II (Nūr, p. 53).

⁵Ibid., p. 52.

Abū Yazīd who received the nickname (kuniyah) Abū 'Abd Allāh.¹ During the life-time and after the death of Abū Yazīd, he acted as the deputy of the master in propagating his ideas and beliefs.² He lived a long life. We find him alive even in the year 300/912.³

As for Abū Yazīd II, he seems to have been an 'ālim in the exoteric sense; for, he worked as a judge (qāḍī) for some time in Bistām. But he was also a Ṣūfī at the same time. According to one tradition, he left behind four-hundred sayings on ma'rifah.⁴

¹We do not know who the other recipient of this nickname was. As we have seen before (supra, p. 24), Muḥammad al-Dāsītānī, al-Sahlagī's master, also bore this nickname. Al-Dāsītānī died in 417/1026. So he could not have been a direct disciple of Abū Yazīd.

It seems that this nickname would be given as an honorific title to the people of high spiritual rank. This may be the so-called empty kuniyah as possibly was the case with Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 618/1221). (F. Meier, Die Fawā'id al-Jalāl wa Fawā'id al-Jalāl des Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā [Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1957], p. 10. Meier refers to J. Wellhausen, Muḥammad in Medina [Berlin: 1882], p. 123).

²Nūr, p. 53.

We do not know why Massignon makes 'Umayy Mūsá an indirect disciple of Abū Yazīd (Massignon, Essai, p. 274).

³Infra, p. 73.

⁴Nūr, p. 52.

It is interesting to notice that many of the members of Abū Yazīd's family were named after prophets.

4. Did Abū Yazīd have a Wife and Children?

We come back to the life of Abū Yazīd himself. Was he married? Our sources are almost completely silent on this question. It is only in Abū Nu'aym's Hilyah that we find Abū Yazīd's wife narrating two traditions from her husband.¹ There are, however, other indications which help us arrive at a more or less definite conclusion. The nickname Abū Yazīd (the father of Yazīd) may indicate that he had a son.² Further, as

¹Hilyah, X, 36.

The Tripoli manuscript of Nūr includes these two traditions from Abū Nu'aym's Hilyah as an addition to the original manuscript of al-Sahlagī (Nūr, pp. 147-148).

²This nickname does not necessarily mean that he had a son. As we have seen above (supra, pp. 24 & 64), the nickname Abū 'Abd Allāh, for example, was given to two disciples of Abū Yazīd not because they had sons named 'Abd Allāh, but because they achieved a certain spiritual rank. But again we should point out that Abū 'Abd Allāh and Abū Yazīd have very different implications. Abū 'Abd Allāh means the father of the worshipper of God, and this could very logically be applied to a devoted worshipper. But it is quite unlikely that the name Abū Yazīd, meaning the father of Yazīd, would be applied as a nickname in the same sense. In fact, sometimes Abū Yazīd and Yazīd are taken to represent two extremes (See 'Aṭṭār, Elāhī Nāmeḥ, ed. H. Ritter [Istanbul: Maṭba'at Ma'ārif, 1940], p. 95).

a pious Muslim, Abū Yazīd, like most other Ṣūfīs, would not have violated the sunnah (way) of the Prophet regarding marriage. In fact, there is a tradition which has specific reference to this issue. Once Abū Yazīd wanted to ask God to free him from the desire of women. But it occurred to him at once that it was wrong for him to do so because the Prophet Himself did not want it.¹ On the basis of all this we can more or less safely conclude that Abū Yazīd was married and perhaps had one son. Because we do not hear anything about Yazīd, possibly he died as an infant or grew up as a man of no importance.

5. His Early Life and Conversion to Ṣūfīsm

Our knowledge of Abū Yazīd's early life is extremely meagre. Most of the stories that have come down to us in this respect are somehow or other connected with his relationship with his mother. The stories with regard to obedience to his mother, which we have cited above,² probably relate to his early life.³

¹Infra, p. 145.

²Supra, pp. 56-59.

³When still a young boy, Abū Yazīd is believed to have given a highly mystical answer to the question of a traditionist (ahl al-ḥadīth): How do you perform your prayer? (Nūr, p. 76).

The mother sent the young Abū Yazīd to school (dabīristān) where he learned the Qur'ān up to the chapter of Lugmān. Once when the teacher was explaining a verse of this chapter to him -- "Be thankful to Me and to your parents",¹ he was moved in his heart and said to the teacher, "Please permit me to go home and talk to my mother." The teacher agreed to his request and Abū Yazīd went home. He said to his mother, "I reached a verse in which God commands me to serve Him and you (tū). I cannot work as a manager in two houses.... Either you (tū) request me from God so that I may be wholly for you, or leave me to the service of God so that I may be wholly with Him."² The mother released him from responsibility to her. Accordingly, Abū Yazīd devoted himself wholly to God. This story is important in relation to his conversion to the Ṣūfī way of life.

6. His Life outside Bistām and Service to Ṣūfī Masters

After Abū Yazīd left Bistām, he wandered from place to place for thirty years, disciplining himself

¹Supra, p. 59.

²Tadhkirat, I, 135-136.

with ascetic practices. We are told that during this period he served three hundred and thirteen masters.¹ He is believed to have served the last master, Ja'far, in the capacity of a water-carrier. This is why, says al-Sahlagī, Abū Yazīd received the surname Ṭayfūr al-Saqqā (water carrier).² 'Aṭṭār tells us that once when this Ja'far asked Abū Yazīd to take a book from a vaulted niche (ṭāq), he said, "Which niche?" The master said, "You have been coming (here) for such a long time and (yet) you have not seen the niche?" Hereupon Abū Yazīd replied, "No! what have I to do with that niche? When I am before you, I withdraw my attention from everything else. I have not come to look about."³ This answer convinced the teacher that Abū Yazīd's discipleship was completed, and thus he sent him to Bistām. The master's decision put Abū Yazīd into a state of restlessness. When he came back to Bistām, his mother, having perceived this state of restlessness,

¹Nūr, p. 47.

According to 'Aṭṭār, Abū Yazīd served one hundred and thirteen masters (Tadhkirat, I, 136).

²Nūr, p. 47.

³Tadhkirat, I, 136.

said to her son, "Rest", and this restored Abū Yazīd's peace of mind.¹

Who is this Ja'far? According to al-Sahlagī, 'Aṭṭār and Ibn Munawwar, he is Ja'far al-Ṣādiq,² the sixth Shī'ī Imām. This, as it has been shown by Massignon, is chronologically impossible.³ For Ja'far

¹Nūr, p. 47.

²Ibid.; Tadhkirat, I, 136; Asrār, p. 20.

³Massignon, Essai, p. 273.

It is very difficult to understand how these authors could make Abū Yazīd the disciple of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. Sometimes, we hear of discipleship in the Uwaysī sense, i.e., in the sense Uways al-Qaranī (see Kashf, pp. 99-100) was the disciple of Muḥammad even though they never met each other. But, as it is evident from their description (supra, p. 68), this is certainly not the sense in which they use discipleship here. Again, sometimes there is a tendency on the part of some authors to give a long life to their favourite Ṣūfī. In our present case, this is not true either; for, they tell explicitly the date of Abū Yazīd's death and the length of his life. Then is it because these authors did not know the exact period to which Ja'far belonged? Probably not, because Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is an important personality in the history of Islām, and ignorance on the part of al-Sahlagī, 'Aṭṭār and Ibn Munawwar about the period to which Ja'far belonged is quite unlikely. The only explanation we can think of for the attribution of this connection between Abū Yazīd and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is that Abū Yazīd visited Madīnah (infra, p. 71) where Ja'far al-Ṣādiq lived. This fact might have led these authors to think that Abū Yazīd associated with Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, although the latter died long before Abū Yazīd visited Madīnah.

If, however, Abū Yazīd were really a disciple of Ja'far, it would show an important link between Shī'ism and Ṣūfism.

al-Ṣādiq died in 148/765 and Abū Yazīd, as we have pointed out before,¹ was born about the year 161/777. Still the question remains: which Ja'far, if any, did Abū Yazīd associate with? We find no clue in the sources which enables us to answer this question.

Concerning other masters of Abū Yazīd, we note the mention of a Kurdī, of one Abū 'Alī al-Sindī and a woman. As for the Kurdī, we know only that his grave is near Abū Yazīd's grave and that Abū Yazīd, out of great respect for him, asked his followers before his death to dig his grave lower than that of the Kurdī.² About Abū 'Alī al-Sindī, there is a great controversy among scholars of Ṣūfīsm. We shall reserve the discussion of this controversy for a later chapter.³ Abū Yazīd is believed to have met his woman teacher in a desert. At first he took her as an ordinary person. But when he discovered that her mystical station was higher than

¹Supra, p. 47.

²Nafaḥāt, p. 56; Ṭabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 88.

³Infra, pp. 334-348.

his, he put himself under her guidance.¹

7. Abū Yazīd's Return to Bisṭām

After having spent thirty years at different places devoting himself to ascetic practices and to the service of Ṣūfī masters, Abū Yazīd finally came back from Madīnah to be with his mother at Bisṭām.² The fact that he visited Madīnah shows that he very likely performed his pilgrimage (hajj) at Mecca during this period, for, according to Muslim custom, one usually visits the tomb of the Prophet at Madīnah immediately before or after performing his pilgrimage.

From now on we meet Abū Yazīd as a mature Ṣūfī settled in Bisṭām. Most of our information regarding Abū Yazīd's life pertains to his last thirty years from approximately 201/816, when he was forty, until his death.³

¹Tadhkirat, I, 152.

We also hear of an one-eyed man giving instructions to Abū Yazīd once (Nūr, p. 86; Tadhkirat, I, 141); on another occasion, we find Abū Yazīd being advised by a fat man (Nūr, pp. 146-147).

²Tadhkirat, I, 138.

³Infra, pp. 95-96.

8. His House, Mosque and Cell

Abū Yazīd's house seems to have been a large one. Otherwise, how could Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūyah (d. 240/854-855) and a large number of his (Aḥmad's) disciples who visited Abū Yazīd at Bisṭām have been accommodated in the house?¹ It had some sort of check-room called the stick-room (bayt al-‘aṣā) where visitors could put their sticks.² There was a mosque, known as the mosque of Abū al-Khinsinan (?), near his house. But he refrained from going to this mosque because the Bedouin³ who used to sit around the mosque would stand up in respect for him. He could not bear this gesture,

¹Infra, pp. 101-102.

²Nūr, p. 56.

The fact that Abū Yazīd's house had such a room and that each one of Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūyah's disciples carried a stick (ibid.) indicates that it was the custom of the Ṣūfīs, even of the early third/ninth century, to carry walking sticks with them. This confirms what the classical Ṣūfī scholars like al-Sarrāj and al-Kalābādhī of the fourth/tenth century say about this custom.

Out of respect for Abū Yazīd, his relations did not live in the house after his death. People used to visit it and perform prayers in it (Nūr, p. 48).

³These Bedouin may have been central Asian nomads.

perhaps because he feared it would produce a sense of pride in him.¹ So he used to go instead to another mosque which was a little farther from his house.² In the beginning, this was a small mosque, but it was later enlarged by one al-Wāfid who removed a straw-stack that was attached to it.³ 'Umayy Mūsá further enlarged the mosque in the year 300/912.⁴

Upon his return to Bistām, Abū Yazīd lived in the house referred to above⁵ and occasionally visited a cell (ṣawma'ah) which he had himself built. During the later part of his life he took up residence in the cell and divided most of his time between this cell and the mosque.⁶

¹Nūr, p. 47.

²Ibid.

³Nūr, pp. 47-48.

According to a story narrated by al-Sahlagī, one night Abū Yazīd wished that the mosque were larger. God caused the same idea to occur in the mind of al-Wāfid. Therefore, al-Wāfid enlarged the mosque the next day (ibid.).

⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁵Supra, p. 72.

⁶Nūr, p. 48.

9. His Neighbours and his Relationship with them

As we have seen before, there were Magians¹ and Bedouin² in his locality. In fact there were Magians in his immediate neighbourhood.³ His relationship with these neighbours was very cordial. He used to help them in times of need⁴ and to visit them when they fell sick.⁵

¹Supra, p. 53.

²Supra, p. 72.

³He could even hear the Magian children crying in their homes (Tadhkirat, I, 149).

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 149.

⁵Nūr, p. 91.

It is not only that Abū Yazīd himself helped the needy and visited the sick, but also that he advised his followers to do the same. He said, "The nearest to God are those who are most generous to His creatures" (Nūr, p. 137; Hilyah, X, 38; Kawākib, p. 247). Another time he said, "Whoever refrains from reciting the Qur'ān, performing prayers in the congregation, attending funerals and visiting the sick, and (yet) claims this (mystical) position, is a pretender" (Nūr, pp. 94-95). 'Aṭṭār also quotes this tradition [Tadhkirat, I, 154] with some variations. For example, 'funerals' in 'Aṭṭār's quotation is qualified by 'Muslim'. This is a clear example of how 'Aṭṭār adds to the material that he quotes from others. Most likely, he got the tradition from al-Sahlagī; for, it is almost an exact translation of the saying in Nūr. Yet he adds the word 'Muslim' to qualify 'funerals' probably with the pious intention of avoiding confusion on the part of the reader who might think that Abū Yazīd intended his followers to attend the funerals of both Muslims and non-Muslims).

Cf. also Abū Yazīd's saying about visiting the sick: Mir'āt, p. 166; Hilyah, X, 38.

The neighbours, in turn, had great respect for Abū Yazīd. As we have mentioned above, the Bedouin used to stand up in honour of Abū Yazīd.¹ On one occasion we find that a Magian neighbour on his death bed raised his head in honour of Abū Yazīd when the latter came to visit him.² Perhaps there was also a borrowing lending relationship between Abū Yazīd's family and the Magians; for, the neighbours from whom such items as fuel oil³ were borrowed, were probably the Magian neighbours.

Abū Yazīd's cordial relationship with the Magians is significant; for, it shows on the one hand that he was open-minded to the point that religious difference did not constitute a deterrent to neighbourliness, and that, on the other hand, he was held in high esteem even by those belonging to other faiths. His open-mindedness is also shown by the fact that once, while passing by a Christian monastery (dayr),

¹Supra, p. 72.

²Nūr, p. 91.

This man is believed to have accepted Islām at Abū Yazīd's hand shortly before his (the neighbour's) death (ibid.).

³Ibid., p. 70.

he is believed to have asked a monk if there was a clean (tāhir) place available in the monastery in which he could perform his prayers.¹ Perhaps it was in this monastery that Abū Yazīd lived for forty days, partaking of the monks' food and drink and attending a great feast.²

10. Abū Yazīd's Dress and Eating Habits

According to the Ṣūfī custom, Abū Yazīd wore patched-frock (muraqqa'ah).³ He also had a pelt.⁴ In fact, he had three sets of clothing and shoes -- one for use in the room (bayt),⁵ another for use in the washroom and the third for use in the mosque.⁶ This should not, however, give us the impression that

¹Mir'āt, p.170-171.

²Qiṣṣat Abī Yazīd, p. 173.

³Mir'āt, p. 171.

⁴Nūr, p. 142.

⁵Bayt usually signifies cell (sawma'ah). Since Abū Yazīd had a cell in which he used to spend most of the time, bayt here most probably refers to his cell.

⁶Nūr, p. 111; Tadhkirat, I, 141.

he loved luxury.¹ Wearing different clothing at different places actually signifies the extreme caution that he took in matters of ritual purification which are a necessary pre-condition of prayer. For example, to make sure that his dress and shoes were pure, he would not wear those things in the mosque which he had worn in the wash-room.

A rigorous ascetic,² Abū Yazīd did not eat or drink more than was absolutely necessary to keep him alive. Asked how he had achieved what he had achieved,³ he replied, "By an empty stomach and a naked body."⁴ "Hunger", he said, "is (like) clouds. When a man is hungry, his heart sends down the rain of wisdom."⁵ Nevertheless, we should not think that he had no concern for the quality of food he ate. According to one

¹When he died he left behind nothing except the frock he was wearing. He had borrowed this dress from someone so that after his death it was returned to its owner (Luma', p. 188).

²Infra, pp. 141-149 (especially).

³That is, how he had achieved ma'rifah.

⁴Nūr, p. 118; Mir'āt, p. 166; Risālah, pp. 14 and 156; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 66. Var. Nūr, p. 112; Kawākib, p. 247.

⁵Nūr, p. 136; Hilyah, X, 39. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 167 Kawākib, p. 247.

story, when one of his disciples bought him burnt bread, he remarked, "They (bread-sellers) believe, as it were; that the Ṣūfīs (mutaḡarribūn) will eat anything!" and asked him to return it to the owner and to get good quality bread instead.¹

11. Did he Have a Profession?

Did Abū Yazīd have a profession whereby he earned his livelihood? The sources do not tell us anything on this point. Perhaps he did not have a profession; for, we find him spending most of the time either in the cell or in the mosque. But then the question is: How did he meet his expenses?

One could answer that with the kind of asceticism that he practiced, he did not need much for his livelihood. This argument might have some merit if he had lived alone. But, as we have pointed out, he may have had a family to support.² Moreover, many disciples and visitors stayed with him on occasion, sometimes for long periods of time.³ We may reasonably expect

¹Nūr, p. 90.

²Supra, pp. 65-66.

³Infra, p. 99.

that Abū Yazīd provided food and accommodation for them. How could he manage to meet all these expenses? We may presume that he inherited wealth from his father. As a renowned man of Bisṭām, 'Īsā may have left behind some valuable property for his sons. What is certain is that some of his wealthy disciples helped him financially. We know of at least one rich disciple by the name of Ibrāhīm Mu'ādhān who used to give Abū Yazīd a great deal of help. Al-Sahlagī tells us that Ibrāhīm, an honest cloth-merchant,¹ used to send to Abū Yazīd every day all that was needed for one hundred persons or more.² For this act of great generosity, Abū Yazīd remarked, "God has a friend named Ibrāhīm;³ We too have a friend called Ibrāhīm."⁴

¹Nūr, p. 61.

He was so honest that he would not sell clothes on a cloudy day for fear that the clothes would look better on such a day and that this might deceive the customers (ibid.).

²Ibid.

³That is, Ibrāhīm khalīl Allāh (Qur'ān, 4:125).

⁴Nūr, p. 61.

12. Was he Illiterate?

As far as we know, Abū Yazīd was illiterate (ummi) in respect of exoteric knowledge ('ilm al-zāhir).¹ His childhood education consisted only in learning the interpretation of the Qur'ān up to the chapter of Luqmān.²

According to a tradition narrated by al-Sahlaḡī, an 'ālim once criticized Abū Yazīd by saying that his statements did not constitute real 'ilm (knowledge). Abū Yazīd replied, "(Go and) look on such and such page of such and such book of yours, and you will find there what I am saying." The 'ālim did what he was asked to do and found in the book something which had reference to what Abū Yazīd was saying.³

This story may be interpreted to mean that Abū Yazīd was literate, and that, therefore, our previous statement about his illiteracy is wrong. In fact, this is not the case. This story only emphasises the point that Abū Yazīd did not need books; for, the idea was

¹Ibid., p. 53.

²Supra, pp. 59 and 67.

³Nūr, p. 53.

that even without reading any book he knew all that was contained in books. This is because he was gifted with esoteric knowledge ('ilm al-bāṭin).¹

That Abu Yazīd was gifted with esoteric knowledge is clear from another conversation possibly with the same 'ālim referred to above. When the 'ālim criticized him by saying that what he was saying was no part of knowledge, Abū Yazīd asked, "Have you reached all knowledge?" The 'ālim replied in the negative. Then Abū Yazīd said, "This knowledge (I am talking about) belongs to the half (of knowledge) that you do not know."² Obviously, this half refers to esoteric knowledge. It is perhaps because of his possession of a high degree of esoteric knowledge that Abū Yazīd was given the title sultān al-'ārifīn, the "king of 'knowers'".³ Perhaps for the same reason al-Junayd remarks, "Abū Yazīd is among us like Gabriel among angels."⁴

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 147; Tadhkirat, I, 134 and 156; Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Aflākī, Manāqib al-'Ārifīn (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1959), I, 256.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 134.

Al-Junayd also has more critical remarks about Abū Yazīd. We shall discuss these later (infra, pp. 283-285).

13. Abū Yazīd as the Narrator of a Tradition

Abū Yazīd was also the narrator of a Prophetic Tradition (ḥadīth). He narrated the following Tradition through a long chain of transmitters which ultimately goes back to the Prophet:

It is due to the weaknesses of certitude (yagīn) that you satisfy people at the expense of God's resentment (sakhaṭ), praise them for the provision (rizq) given by Him, and blame them for things for which God does not punish you. God's provision cannot be drawn to you by the greed of the greedy, nor can it be prevented (from you) by the grudge (karḥ) of the grudging. Indeed, God, may He be exalted, through His wisdom and greatness, has put happiness (farḥ) and comfort (rauh) in satisfaction (riqā), and anxiety (hamm) and sorrow (huzn) in doubt and discontentment (sakhaṭ).¹

Several ideas contained in this Tradition are important to Abū Yazīd's thinking. The real believer is satisfied only with God; he has nothing to do with creatures. Herein lies the idea of renouncing creatures as an aspect of the mortification of the Self.² Moreover, the real believer considers God as the giver of all provisions according to His will. Hence he is

¹Hilyah, X, 41. Var. Nūr, p. 63; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 61.

²Infra, pp.137-156.

content with what God has given, and this brings him happiness and comfort. Here we find the ideas of trust (tawakkul)¹ and satisfaction (riqā).²

14. His School of Law (Madhhab)

There is a controversy about the school of Islāmic Law to which Abū Yazīd belonged. One group of writers³ believes that he belonged to the school (madhhab) of Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767). But Ibn Munawwar argues that this was impossible; for, according to him, Abū Yazīd accepted Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as his master and, therefore, must have belonged to the school of the master. The master did not belong to the Ḥanafī school.⁴

Ibn Munawwar's argument would be valid if Ja'far al-Ṣādiq really had been Abū Yazīd's master. But

¹Infra, p. 144, n. 3.

²On this, see Ta'arruf, pp. 102-103; Risālah, pp. 96-99, etc.

³E.g., Ibn Munawwar (Asrār, p. 20) and Anṣārī (Tabaqāt p. 88).

⁴Ibn Munawwar, Asrār, p. 20.

Abū Ḥanīfah Nu'mān b. Thābit was possibly the pupil of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (Muḥammad 'Alī Tabrizī, Rayḥanat al-Adab [n.p.: Shirkat Sihāmī Tab' Kitāb, 1653], p. 50).

we have seen previously that this was not the case.¹ Abū Yazīd's master Ja'far, if indeed Abū Yazīd had a master by this name, was not the celebrated Ja'far al-Ṣādiq but some other Ja'far who could very well have belonged to the Ḥanafī school of Law.

It is possible that Abū Yazīd belonged to the Ḥanafī school of Law. The majority of the scholars consider him a Ḥanafī,² and we find him agreeing with Abū Ḥanīfah on the question of the nature of faith (īmān). According to Abū Ḥanīfah, faith consists in verbal profession (qawl) of belief in God, etc. and in verification (taṣdīq), whereas the other three schools of

¹Supra, pp. 69-70.

Massignou describes Abū Yazīd as a former Ḥanafī with Mu'tazilah tendencies who later converted to Ṣūfīsm (Essai, p. 275). We cannot agree with Massignou on two points. First, even if Abū Yazīd were a Ḥanafī, his conversion to Ṣūfīsm does not mean that he renounced the school of Law to which he belonged. But this is what Massignou's description implies. We should keep in mind that Ṣūfīs are first Muslims and then Ṣūfīs, or better still, they are Muslim plus something extra which makes them Ṣūfīs. Hence, there is no escape for a genuine Ṣūfī from the obligations of a Muslim, and to belong to one of the four schools of Law is one such obligation. Secondly, we do not find any evidence to show that Abū Yazīd had Mu'tazilah tendencies.

²Kashf, p. 368; also supra, p. 83.

Law add action ('amal) to verbal profession and verification.¹

15. His Conscientiousness

Abū Yazīd was very conscientious about eating permissible (halāl) food and using permissible things. We have mentioned the story of how, even before his birth, he is believed to have caused stirring in the womb of his mother whenever she approached forbidden food.² In his later life he was certainly very concerned about this problem. Once, for example, when, on inquiry, his mother informed him that during his childhood she had taken a little bit of oil and of kohl (kuhl) from neighbours without their permission and used these on his head and eyes respectively, he remarked,

God will take account of the people for the measure of an atom... Do you not know (lit. see) God's saying, "Whosoever will do good in the measure of an atom will see it (i.e., be rewarded for it) and whosoever will do evil in the measure of an atom will see it (i.e., be punished for it)"?³ And this

¹Kashf, p. 368.

²Supra, p. 55.

³Qur'ān, 99:7-8.

is more than an atom. I fear that this will cut me off from my Lord.

Then he located the neighbours, sought forgiveness from them and thus freed himself and his mother from the burden.¹ On another occasion, while on his way to the mosque by a muddy road, his feet slipped, and he saved himself from falling by hanging on to a wall which belonged to a Magian. At once he realized that he had done this without the permission of the owner of the wall. Hence he went to the Magian to seek his forgiveness first and then went to the mosque for the performance of his duties to God.²

Abū Yazīd's extreme conscientiousness is best exemplified in the following story. On his way back from his pilgrimage at Mecca, he bought some seeds of

¹Nūr, pp. 108-109.

Sometimes we find Abū Yazīd perceiving a connection between his feeling of discomfort and the use of forbidden things. Once he attributed his failure to experience the joy of worship to a lick of a neighbour's food without his permission during his childhood (ibid., p. 71). On another occasion, he attributed his feeling of discomfort from the light of a lamp to his having used a borrowed bottle of burning oil twice instead of once (ibid., p. 70).

²Ibid., p. 72.

The Magian was so much impressed by this act of Abū Yazīd that he and his family are reported to have accepted Islām (ibid.).

safflower ('uṣfur) at Hamadān. When he arrived at Bistām, he discovered that he had brought some ants with the seeds. He felt that he had no right to dislocate the ants in this way. Hence he went back all the way to Hamadān and released the ants there.¹

16. Abū Yazīd's Humility

Abū Yazīd exhibited a great sense of humility (tawāqu'), a virtue considered very important by Ṣūfīs. According to him, humility is a quality which belongs to man and not to God.² He said that when he failed to reach God by various means, God ordered him to approach Him with something which He did not have. Surprised, Abū Yazīd asked, "Oh God! What is it that You do not have?" The reply came, "Humility."³ Hence we find Abū Yazīd very humble before God. In spite of a great deal

¹Risālah, p. 57; Tadhkirat, I, 139.

According to another story, Abū Yazīd, in order to dry his wet clothing, could not spread it on the vineyard because he did not get permission from its owner, nor on the tree because he thought that the branches might break due to its weight, nor even on the grass because God has made it a fodder for animals. Finally, he spread it on his back until it dried (Mir'at, p. 163).

²Tadhkirat, I, 159.

³Ibid., 155. Var. Hilyah, X, 40; Kawākib, p. 250.

of worship that he performed, he said, "If one utterance of the formula 'There is no god but God' were pure, I would not have cared for anything after that."¹ One morning, after a whole night of prayer, he asked God to count him as one of those who do not pray.² He said to his disciples, "When you stand before God, make yourself like a Magian who is willing to cut the Magian girdle in His presence."³ Once he said that for thirty years he had tried to enter the court of God, but God refused him admission because his hands did not knock at the door with humility, his tongue did not implore God with humility and his feet did not walk with humility.⁴ Before his death, Abū Yazīd felt very much ashamed of the acts of worship which he had performed throughout his life. Hence he addressed God saying,

All that is nothing ; consider it as naught. I am a Turkamān of seventy years whose hair has turned white due to pagandom (gebrī). Right now I am

¹Nūr, p. 82; Hilyah, X, 40; Kawākib, p. 247. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 171.

²Tadhkirat, I, 157.

³Hilyah, X, 40. Var. Nūr, p. 69; Kawākib, p. 247.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 159.

coming from the desert crying Tangrī, Tangrī.¹ Only now am I learning to say 'Allāh' 'Allāh'; only now am I cutting the Magian girdle; only now I step into the circle of Islām; only now I move my tongue with the attestation of faith (shahādah)...²

Abū Yazīd was also humble before God's creatures. According to him, a true worshipper considers himself the worst of all creatures. As long as a man thinks that there is anyone in this world more evil than himself, he is boasting (mutakabbir).³ Asked when a man becomes humble, he said, "When he does not find for himself any station (maqām) or state (ḥāl) and he does not find anyone in creation worse than himself."⁴ There are several instances which indicate Abū Yazīd's humility before creatures. He said,

¹This is the name of the Mongol sky god. Here Abū Yazīd meant to say that he was still a pagan crying with the name of a pagan god.

²Tadhkirat, I, 177.

According to another tradition, Abū Yazīd uttered the following words before his death, "Oh God! I never remembered You except with heedlessness and I never served You except with gaps" (Ṭabaqāt [Anṣārī], p. 90. Var. Luma', p. 210; Risālah, p. 153; Tadhkirat, I, 177).

³Nūr, p. 133; Hilyah, X, 36. Var. Kawākib, p. 247.

⁴Risālah, p. 75; Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61.

Whoever does not consider my witnessing (shāhid)¹ with the eye of harm (idtirār), my mystical moments (awqāt) with the eye of deception (istidrāj),² my speech (kalām) with the eye of deceit (iftirā'), my explanation ('ibārah) with the eye of risk (ijtirā'), and my Self (nafs) with the eye of accusation (izrā'), has been mistaken in considering me.³

One night, a drunken young man, while playing on the lute, approached Abū Yazīd. Abū Yazīd uttered the formula "La ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-Allāh al-'aliyy al-'azīm" (there is no power and strength except with God, the Great and Mighty). Thereupon the young man struck Abū Yazīd's head with the lute and wounded him. But his lute broke too. The next morning, Abū Yazīd sent the price of a lute to the young man so that he could buy a new one; he also sent some sweetmeats to remove from the young man's heart the sorrow caused by the breakage of the lute the previous night.⁴ On another occasion Abū Yazīd's walking stick ('aṣā) caused the stick of

¹Perhaps Abū Yazīd meant by this confession of the oneness of God (shahādah).

²In the Ṣūfī language, istidrāj refers to a deceptive miracle given to a sinner or an unbeliever.

³Nūr, p. 136. Var. Ḥilyah, X, 40; Ṭabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 88.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 144-145.

an old man to fall to the floor of a mosque. The old man stooped over and picked up his stick. Abū Yazīd later went to the old man's house and offered an apology for the trouble that he had caused.¹

Abū Yazīd also displayed humility in his relations with animals. Once when he was walking on a narrow road with a group of disciples, a dog came from the other direction, and he made way for the dog first.² In fact, according to 'Aṭṭār, Abū Yazīd considered himself inferior to dogs in many ways. To him, dogs were unclean only outwardly, but he was unclean inwardly; dogs shunned human company, whereas he had accepted it; and dogs did not keep a single piece of bone for the morrow, but he stored up provisions for the future.³

17. His Love for Solitude

Abū Yazīd had a great love for solitude. We are told that upon entering his cell, he used to close all

¹Ibid, 152-153; Risālah, p. 57; Mir'āt, p. 163.

Abū Yazīd was also very generous. He prayed to God saying, "Oh God! Whoever has done wrong to me, either by action or by words, shower Your blessings on him in the way the wind blows and piles up the snow in the valley" (Nur, p. 142).

²Tadhkirat, I, 145.

³Ibid.

its holes so that no sound could distract his attention.¹ He also had the habit of wandering around in graveyards.² The incident of the drunken youth's wounding Abū Yazīd's head and breaking his own lute³ took place on a night when Abū Yazīd was returning from a graveyard. Once a year he used to visit the graves of Muslim martyrs.⁴ On one occasion, we find him coming out of a forest with a water-container in his hands and an old coat under his arms.⁵ The water-container in his hands may indicate that he had stayed in the forest for a long time.

18. His Challenger

Sometimes pious Muslims became challengers (munāzi') of one another. They competed with each other in virtuous acts. These challengers usually belonged to more or less the same spiritual rank. The man who considered himself the challenger of Abū Yazīd was one

¹Ibid., p. 140.

²Ibid., p. 144.

³Supra, p. 90.

⁴Tadhkirat, II, 201.

⁵Ibid., I, 142.

Dāwūd, an ascetic from Dahistān. He said, "If Abū Yazīd performed the pilgrimage once, I did it twice, and if he visited the convent (ribāṭ) of Dahistān (once), I visited it thrice. If he did such and such, I did that and more."¹ Actually, to outdo Abū Yazīd, Dāwūd would do more and more acts of piety.² Interestingly enough, Abū Yazīd's reactions to Dāwūd were more challenging than Dāwūd's challenge to Abū Yazīd. Referring to his challenger, Abū Yazīd said, "Yes, he did what I did. But the commander of the faithful (amīr al-mu'minīn) is one. If someone came from Nikārumnū³ and said, 'I am the commander of the faithful', his neck would be cut quickly."⁴

According to al-Sahlagī, the spiritual rank of Abū Yazīd was superior to that of Dāwūd. Al-Sahlagī claims that this knowledge was revealed to him by God.⁵

¹Nūr, pp. 61-62.

²Ibid., p. 62.

³Al-Sahlagī tells us that this is an agricultural village near the town of Bistām (ibid.).

⁴Ibid., p. 62.

Cf. also Kawākib, p. 245.

⁵Nūr, p. 62.

'Aṭṭār tells us of another man, a devoted Qur'ān-reader (qarrā)¹ who offered a kind of challenge to Abū Yazīd, although the spiritual level of the former had no comparison with that of Abū Yazīd. Abū Yazīd made this remark to him, "Did you not know that the burden of elephants is never put on donkeys?"²

19. Abū Yazīd's Travels

Al-Qushayrī is right in his remark that Abū Yazīd belonged to that group of the Ṣūfīs who preferred staying in one place over travelling.³ Abū Yazīd disliked travelling and thus spent most of his time at Bistām. When asked why he disliked travelling, he replied, "My companion (i.e., God) does not travel and I live (muqīm) with Him." Then the questioner⁴ responded by way of an analogy, "Static water is impure. It is unfit for ritual purification (wuḍū)."⁵ In reply, Abū Yazīd quoted a Prophetic Tradition which states

¹This is the emphatic form of qārī'.

²Tadhkirat, I, 151.

³Risālah, p. 143.

⁴Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūyah (Nūr, p. 77; Tadhkirat, I, 148).

⁵Hilyah, X, 34. Var. Nūr, p. 77; Mir'āt, p. 165; Tadhkirat, I, 168.

that the water of the sea is pure and that it is permissible (ḥalāl) to eat its dead fish. Then he added that when the rivers flow towards the sea, they make noise. But when they reach the sea they become quiet, and the water of the sea is neither increased by their incoming nor decreased by their out-going.¹ obviously, Abū Yazīd implied here that travelling belongs to the stage of novices (sālikūn) and not to that of the Ṣūfīs who have already reached the goal.

This explains the apparent contradiction between our previous statement that he travelled from place to place serving a large number of masters² and our present statement that because of his dislike of travelling he stayed most of the time in Bistām. As a novice he travelled, but after he came back to Bistām and settled there as a Ṣūfī, he did not travel much. Roughly speaking, we can assume that the first period extended from the age of ten up to the age of forty³

¹Hilyah, X, 34-35. Var. Nūr, pp. 124 and 77; Mir'āt, p. 165; Tadhkirat, I, 148.

²Supra, pp. 67-68.

³Our calculation is based on the assumption that he left Bistām at the age of ten. For, this would perhaps be the appropriate age for attending the Qur'ānic schools in that day. Then he travelled for thirty years (supra, pp. 67-68) before he became a Ṣūfī and came back to Bistām. This assumption is further supported by the

and the second from the age of forty-one to the age of seventy three.

During this second period, he did some travelling. For, it seems that he went to Mecca for pilgrimage more than once and at least one of the pilgrimages must have taken place during this second period.¹ Also he travelled every year during his visits to the graves of the Muslim martyrs.² Moreover, he was forced to travel when he was exiled from Bistām.³

20. His Exiles

Abū Yazīd was exiled from Bistām seven times.⁴

We do not know where he lived during the periods of

significance which is attached to the fortieth year of life. The fortieth year is considered the point of reaching perfection. Muḥammad, for example, is believed to have received revelation when he was forty. In the case of Abū Yazīd too, perhaps his master declared his novitiate complete at the age of forty.

¹We have mentioned his pilgrimage which took place sometime during his life as a novice (supra, p. 71) . We also know of his journey to Mecca with his sister's husband. Probably, the second journey took place in the latter part of Abū Yazīd's life; for, he is said to have performed miracles on the way to Mecca (infra, p. 113) .

²Supra, p. 92.

³Infra, pp. 96-97.

⁴Nūr, p. 48; Tadhkirat, I, 139; Kawākib, p. 245.

exile. But we can presume that at no time was he required to stay out of Bistām for a long time and that he did not have to suffer much hardship on account of his exiles.¹ Otherwise, our sources would not have remained silent on these matters.

Why was Abū Yazīd exiled? The reason is obvious -- opposition of the 'ulāmā'. His teachings, according to them, were contrary to the principles of Sharī'ah. We are told that Abū Yazīd was exiled because the externalists (ahl-i Zāhir) were unable to understand his high spiritual teachings.² We know of several of his encounters with the 'ulāmā'. In one of these encounters, for example, he told an 'ālim that his sayings belonged to that half of knowledge which the latter did not know.³ In another encounter he told a jurist (faqīh), who happened to be the 'ālim of the region (nāhiyah), that the knowledge of the latter was gained from others through oral transmission whereas

¹For more on this, infra, pp. 275-282.

²Tadhkirat, I, 139; Kawākib, p. 245.

³Nūr, p. 53.

his own knowledge was given directly by God.¹ He cited several examples to prove that it is possible for man to receive knowledge directly from God. He said that Muḥammad had knowledge from God of which neither Gabriel nor Michael were aware; he saw God face to face;² Moses talked to God, and about this God said, "And We taught him knowledge from Us."³ Abū Bakr, the first caliph, had an intuitive knowledge (firāsah)⁴ as shown by the fact that his prediction about the birth of a girl came true, and so on.⁵

We do not know which particular 'ālim or 'ulamā' were instrumental in banishing Abū Yazīd from Bistām.

¹Another time Abū Yazīd said that others got knowledge from the dead (scholars, narrators and others) while he received it from the Living (God) (ibid., p. 77), and that others discuss about God while he spoke directly from Him (ibid., pp. 77 and 81).

²This refers to the famous Night Journey (mi'rāj) of the Prophet. For a discussion on this, infra, pp. 191 (and 192), n. 3.

³Qur'ān, 18: 65.

⁴For more on firāsah, infra, pp. 115-116.

⁵Nūr, p. 88; Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61.

Abū Yazīd also cited a reported saying of the Prophet that knowledge is of two kinds -- external knowledge ('ilm zāhir) which is God's proof (hujjah) to His creatures and hidden knowledge ('ilm baṭin) which is useful knowledge, and said that the knowledge of the jurists belonged to the first kind whereas his own knowledge belonged to the second (Nūr, pp. 87-88).

21. His Visitors, Disciples and Associates

Abū Yazīd was very hospitable. The fact that Ibrāhīm Mu'ādhān used to send him the provision for one hundred persons or more every day¹ shows that he entertained a large number of guests. He had the habit of going a distance from his house, sometimes with his disciples, to welcome visitors.² Some of his visitors stayed with him for a considerable length of time.³ This hospitable nature of Abū Yazīd and his reputation as a Ṣūfī secured for him a number of friends, associates and visitors. The following were the most important of them:

i) Abū Mūsá Daybulī

We do not know much about him. According to al-Sahlagī, he came to visit Abū Yazīd and stayed longer than he planned. During his stay, he benefited greatly from Abū Yazīd's teachings and memorized many of his

¹Supra, p. 79.

²Mir'āt, p. 163; Nūr, pp. 56 and 77.

This shows that Massignon's accusation that Abū Yazīd was solitary and rude, and thus "refused all signs of fraternal affiliation either with Ibn Ḥarb or with Miṣrī" (Essai, p. 273) is wrong.

³Abū Mūsá Daybulī, for example, stayed at Abū Yazīd's place for a month (Mir'āt, p. 168).

utterances.¹ He was the second most important narrator of Abū Yazīd's traditions.

Abū Mūsá al-Daybulī belonged to Armenia. On the eve of his departure for his native land, Abū Yazīd gave him the following advice:

Oh Abū Mūsá! You are leaving for the country of Armenia. There if you find someone talking about these (mystical) sciences, and someone else denying him and another accepting and believing in him, ask the one accepting and believing in him to pray to God for things, because his prayer will be granted (by Him).²

The significance of this story lies in the fact that Abū Yazīd was sending Abū Mūsá al-Daybulī as a missionary (dā'ī) for the propagation of the Ṣūfī way of life among the Armenians. The characteristic way of propagating any faith is by telling people: "If you do such and such, you will receive such and such rewards from God." In the same way, Abū Yazīd seems to have tried to propagate Ṣūfīsm by having the Armenians told that if they accepted what Ṣūfīs were saying, their

¹Nūr, p. 54.

²Ibid., pp. 54-55.

prayers to God would be fulfilled.¹ It is interesting to note that Abū Yazīd was not asking al-Daybulī to inform the Ṣūfīs of this matter, for they knew this already, and they did not need to be converted to the Ṣūfī way. Abū Yazīd was interested in getting others to join his fold.

ii) Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūyah²

On his way to Mecca, Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūyah, a well-known Ṣūfī of Balkh, came to visit Abū Yazīd at Bistām. He was accompanied by his wife Fāṭimah³ who was herself a Ṣūfī and the daughter of the prince of Balkh,⁴ and a

¹On another occasion Abū Yazīd invited people to Ṣūfism in this way:

Come to the desire (raghbah) of ascetics (zāhidūn), to the yearning (shawq) of those who follow the path (ḍarījūn), to the confidence (rukūn) of the forgetful (mutanāsiyyūn), to the love (ḥubb) of those who have reached (God) (wāsilūn), to the joy of those who have reached the goal (muttaṣilūn) and to the friendship (uns) of the Lord of the worlds (ibid., p. 100).

²He died in 240/854-855.

³Ṭabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 83; Kashf, p. 149.

⁴Kashf, p. 149.

For a story of Fāṭimah's removal of her veil in the presence of Abū Yazīd and conversation between her and Abū Yazīd, see Kashf, p. 150.

Referring to Fāṭimah's greatness, Abū Yazīd remarked: "Whoever wishes to see an important man in women's

large number of his disciples.¹ These disciples were believed to have attained such a high mystical station that each one of them was gifted with miraculous powers to walk on water and fly in the air.² Aḥmad considered himself very insignificant in comparison with Abū Yazīd. Before entering Abū Yazīd's house, he said to his disciples, "Let us go (to Abū Yazīd's presence) while we consider ourselves as a small coin (hamm) which no one would take for anything."³ Later when he talked to

dress, let him look at Fāṭimah" (ibid., p. 150). For another tradition regarding Fāṭimah's greatness, see Nūr, p. 134.

¹Nūr, p. 55.

According to al-Sahlagī, Aḥmad was accompanied by one thousand of his disciples. This and many other figures occurring in mystical literature should not be considered as exact. When al-Sahlagī says that Aḥmad visited Abū Yazīd with one thousand disciples, we should understand that he came with a large number of them. 'Aṭṭār also mentions the same figure (Tadhkirat, I, 148). He also points out elsewhere that Aḥmad "had" one thousand disciples (ibid., p. 288). But it seems quite impossible that Aḥmad came with the entire group of his one thousand disciples all the way from Balkh to Bistām.

²Nūr, p. 55; Tadhkirat, I, 148

For a discussion of the problem of miracles, infra, pp. 113-120.

³Nūr, p. 55.

Abū Yazīd, he was unable to grasp the meaning of Abū Yazīd's speech. Hence he had to ask Abū Yazīd to lower the level of his speech so that it would be understandable to him.¹ 'Aṭṭār tells us that Abū Yazīd had to lower the level of his speech seven times before Aḥmad could comprehend what Abū Yazīd was saying.² This shows the estimation of the greatness of Abū Yazīd. His mystical level was considered so high that he had to bring down the level of his speech seven stages below the normal to make it comprehensible to Aḥmad who was himself the master of those who had attained such a high mystical station that they could walk on water and fly in the air.

Before his departure from Abū Yazīd's place, Aḥmad remarked, "Everyone I met I called (invited) to God except Abū Yazīd. He is the one whom I called (away) from God."³ This means that all those whom Aḥmad met before were in a state of heedlessness; and, therefore, he had to invite and guide them to God. But in the case of Abū Yazīd he had to do just the opposite. Abū Yazīd

¹Ibid.

²Tadhkirat, I, 148.

³Nūr, p. 56. Var. ibid., p. 74.

was absorbed in mystical union with God. In order to be able to talk to him, Aḥmad had to call him away from God.¹

iii) Yaḥyá b. Mu'ādh al-Rāzī

Born in the city of Rayy, Yaḥyá lived in Balkh for a time. He died in Naysābūr in the year 258/872.

Yaḥyá used to exchange views with Abū Yazīd through written correspondence. Once he wrote to Abū Yazīd asking him his opinion about "one who drinks a single drop of the ocean of love and becomes intoxicated." Abū Yazīd sent a reply to this in the form of a question: "What do you say of one who, if all the oceans in the world were filled with the wine of love, would drink them all and still cry for more to slake his thirst?"²

According to 'Aṭṭār's account, Yaḥyá also met Abū Yazīd.³ During a conversation, Abū Yazīd told Yaḥyá that he wanted God Himself and not the mystical stations

¹According to 'Aṭṭār, Abū Yazīd himself said that everyone who came to him to accept his discipleship dragged him down (from his high mystical state) so that he would be able to talk to the master (Tadhkirat, I, 155).

²Kashf, p. 233; trans. Nicholson, p. 187. Var. Nūr, p. 136; Risālah, pp. 160 and 42; Hilyah, X, 40; Mir'at, pp. 168-169; Tadhkirat, I, 143; Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61.

³Tadhkirat, I, 143-144.

(maqāmāt); for, the latter are "other" and thus constitute a veil between him and God. Abū Yazīd said,

If you were granted the election (ṣafwat) of Adam, the holiness (quds) of Gabriel, the friendship (khillat) of Abraham, the yearning (shawq) of Moses, the purity (ṭahārat) of Jesus and the love (maḥabbat) of Muḥammad, still you would not be satisfied; you would seek what is beyond these; for, what is beyond is the real objective (lit. tasks, kārḥā). Be the possessor of spiritual energy (himmat). Do not descend (into anything); for, you will be veiled by whatever you descend into.¹

This also explains why Abū Yazīd, in his reply to Yaḥyá's letter, said that even after having drunk the wine of love of the seas of the world he was crying for more. To become drunken with God's love is far short of attaining God Himself. God's love is still "other" and thus constitutes a veil. Hence 'Aṭṭār says in his Mantīq al-Tayr, "Even if you have attained to the Throne of Glory, do not stop saying at every moment, 'Is there any more?'"²

¹Ibid., p. 144.

²'Aṭṭār, Mantīq al-Tayr, ed. Ṣādiq Gawhrīn (Tehrān: Bungāh-i Tarjumeh-o-Nashr-i Kitāb, 1963), p. 195; trans. S.C. Nott, The Conference of the Birds (London: Janur Press, 1954), p. 137.

iv) Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī

A well-known Egyptian Ṣūfī, Dhū al-Nūn was born at Ekhmin in Upper Egypt about the year 180/796. He travelled extensively in Arabia and Syria. He was accused of heresy and brought before the caliph Mutawakkil at Baghdād.¹ Dhū al-Nūn was cleared of this charge and returned to Cairo where he died in 245/860.

Dhū al-Nūn never met Abū Yazīd, but they had correspondence with one another through emissaries. Once Dhū al-Nūn sent one of his disciples to Abū Yazīd with the following message, "Oh my brother! How long shall you sleep and be in comfort while the caravan is gone?" In reply, Abū Yazīd said, "Tell my brother Dhū al-Nūn, 'The (real) man is he who sleeps the whole night and (yet) reaches the destination (manzil) in the morning before the caravan.'" When informed of this, Dhū al-Nūn said, "May he be blessed! This is a speech which our states (aḥwāl) have not reached."²

Dhū al-Nūn also sent a disciple to enquire about Abū Yazīd's virtue (ṣifah). The man came to Abū Yazīd's

¹ Risālah, p. 9.

² Risālah, pp. 102-103. Var. Nūr, pp. 79-80; Mir'āt, p. 167; Tadhkirat, I, 137.

place at Bistām and knocked at his door. Abū Yazīd said, "Who are you, and whom do you want?" He replied, "Abū Yazīd." Abū Yazīd said, "Who is Abū Yazīd, where is Abū Yazīd and what thing is he? I have been looking for Abū Yazīd for a long time, but I have not found him."¹ On hearing this, the man left the place with the remark, "He is a mad man." But when he informed Dhū al-Nūn of all that had happened, the latter remarked, "My brother Abū Yazīd is one of those who are lost in God."²

Dhū al-Nūn sent a prayer carpet to Abū Yazīd. The latter returned it with the instruction to its bearer to tell Dhū al-Nūn, "Someone like you needs this to perform prayer on it. Send me something to lean my back against." Dhū al-Nūn then sent him a comfortable cushion. But Abū Yazīd could not use the cushion either; for this happened during the last days of his life when hardly anything was left of him except skin and bones.³

We shall consider the significance of Abū Yazīd's ideas contained in this correspondence later.⁴

¹Kashf, p. 322.

²Risālah, p. 41. (For the whole tradition, Var. Nūr, pp. 65, 73, 110, 117; Tadhkirat, I, 156; ibid., II, 72; Kawākib, p. 246).

³Nūr, pp. 111 and 125; Tadhkirat, I, 144.

⁴Infra, p. 177.

For the time being, we would like to mention two points which emerge prominently in these episodes. First, in spite of the great difficulties with regard to transportation in those days, people used to travel long distances, from Egypt to Bistām, for example, to convey advice, deliver gifts, etc. from one Ṣūfī to another. Secondly, only a Ṣūfī could understand the significance of what another Ṣūfī would say. We find Dhū al-Nūn's disciple puzzled at Abū Yazīd's saying that he was looking for himself. But when he narrated this saying to Dhū al-Nūn, the master understood it at once. This clearly shows the difficulty of communicating mystical experience to those who have not had a similar experience.¹

22. Abū Yazīd's Order

Al-Hujwīrī has divided Ṣūfīs, whom he considered genuine, into ten groups (gurūh)-- the Ṭayfūrīs the Muḥāsibīs, the Junaydīs and others,² each named after its central personality. He has made the divisions on

¹Supra, p. xv.

For more on this, see 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 1-6.

²Kashf, p. 164.

the basis of differences in their doctrines and practices. While discussing the views of the Ṭayfūrīs, he says that Abū Yazīd Ṭayfūr (hence the Ṭayfūrīs) and his followers preferred intoxication (sukr) to sobriety (ṣahw) whereas al-Junayd and his followers (i.e., Junaydīs) preferred the opposite.¹ We shall consider the validity of al-Hujwīrī's argument later.² For the time being, we shall restrict the discussion to the Ṭayfūrīs as an order (ṭarīqah).

Obviously, the Ṭayfūrīs were not an order in the sense of the organized orders of later times, e.g., the Qādirīs, the Chishtīs, the Baktāshīs and others with their elaborate rituals, functions and ceremonies. Nevertheless, we find Abū Yazīd and his followers doing, in some form or other, many things which the later orders did.

Abū Yazīd was not a solitary ascetic withdrawn from the society of men. He used to sit in an assembly (majlis) of men, answer their questions and advise them on different religious matters. The fact that a hundred

¹Ibid., pp. 229-230.

²Infra, pp. 242-251.

people or so ate at his place every day¹ indicates that this assembly was a large one. Also people used to come from far off places and stay with him for a period of time.² All this shows that Abū Yazīd participated in a community which bore some resemblance to the communal life of the Ṣūfī orders of a later period.

These orders emphasized the necessity of the master's guidance in the disciple's journey on the Ṣūfī path (ṭarīqah),³ and the disciple's service to and confidence in the master. We find all these in Abū Yazīd's relationship with his followers. Perhaps Abū Yazīd was the first Ṣūfī to express the disciple's need for the master's guidance in such strong terms as these: "If a man has no master (ustādh), Satan is his guide (imām)."⁴ Abū Yazīd guided his disciples by example and by instruction. On one occasion, he instructed an aspiring

¹Supra, p. 79.

²Supra, p. 99.

³This word is used to refer to the Ṣūfī path on which a novice is required to travel before he reaches the goal, as well as to an organized Ṣūfī order.

⁴Risālah, p. 199.

In classical Arabic works on Ṣūfīsm, the master is usually called a shaykh. Here the editor of Risālah may have replaced the word 'shaykh' by the word 'ustādh'.

disciple to have his head shaven, to wear a woollen cloak ('abā'), and then to enter the market place so that there the people who used to respect him would see him in that condition.¹ This course of action was intended to help mortify the Self (nafs) of the person.² Concerning the disciple's service to his master, Abū Yazīd said,

If the master orders the disciple to do something worldly and sends him for his (own) good (fī islāhihi), and on his way the mu'adhdhin³ of a mosque recites the call to prayer and he says (to himself): 'I shall first go to the mosque to perform prayer and then go for what the master has sent me', then he has fallen into a well the bottom of which he will never discover...⁴

This idea of Abū Yazīd is best exemplified by Abū Mūsā's relationship with the master.⁵ Moreover, the kind of unqualified confidence that the disciples had in Abū Yazīd is shown by an incident which took place perhaps

¹Nūr, p. 87.

The full text of the tradition is quoted on pp. 138-140.

²For a discussion on this, infra, pp. 134-173.

³The person who recites the Muslim call to prayer (adhān).

⁴Nūr, p. 144.

⁵Supra, pp. 61-62.

the day before his death. A disciple, 'Abd Allāh Yūnābādī, had come from a neighbouring village to visit Abū Yazīd. During the visit, Abū Yazīd asked 'Abd Allāh not to leave for home before performing a funeral prayer (janāzah). The disciple was so certain that what the master said would be true that without question he postponed his departure.¹

Abū Yazīd also made a conscious effort to spread Ṣūfī ideas and ideals. This is exemplified in his instructions to Abū Mūsā al-Daybulī on the eve of his departure for Armenia.² Moreover, before and after Abū Yazīd's death, 'Umayy Mūsā acted as a deputy to propagate Abū Yazīd's ideas.³

In the light of the evidence above, we may conclude that the Ṭayfūrīs were an order, although they were not so well-organized as the later orders. What is significant is that Abū Yazīd was perhaps the first to have formed a more or less definite order which developed with the passage of time and played an important role in Islamic history in general and in the history of Ṣūfīsm

¹Infra, p.121.

²Supra, p.100.

³Supra, p. 63.

in particular. Of the Ṣūfī groups mentioned by al-Hujwīrī,¹ the Ṭayfūrīs were the earliest.

23. His Miracles

A large number of miracles (karāmāt)² have been attributed to Abū Yazīd. Once when he sought to cross the Tigris, the two banks of the river are said to have come together to let Abū Yazīd cross without any difficulty.³ When Abū Yazīd was on his way to Mecca, his sister's husband ('adīl'), who was accompanying him, complained that Abū Yazīd had placed excessively heavy luggage on the back of a camel. But then the complainer looked and found that the luggage was actually floating in the air over the back of the camel.⁴ Once during a period of drought when he, at the insistence of someone, prayed to God for rain, rain is believed to have started

¹Kashf, p. 164.

²Divine gifts. Karāmah (sing. of karamāt) is distinguished from mu'jizah (major miracle) in that the former belongs to the level of Ṣūfīs while the latter is limited to prophets only.

³Nūr, p. 94. Var. Ibid., p. 146; Tadhkirat, I, 153.

A similar miracle is attributed to Abū al-Ḥuṣayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907-908) (see Luma', p. 324).

⁴Nūr, pp. 89-90.

pouring in torrents, and immediately valleys and mountains were flooded.¹ On another occasion, three persons were discussing the station of a saint with God. They asked Abū Yazīd for his opinion on the matter. He answered, "I say: the station of the saint with God is such that if he says to the mountain 'Move from your place', it will move."² Although this was only a reply to a question, the mountain is said to have actually moved³ because Abū Yazīd uttered the words "Move from your place." One day, in the presence of Abū Yazīd, someone said that he had seen al-Khiḍr⁴ and Abū Yazīd with their hands on each other's shoulders at a funeral in Ṭabaristān, and that Abū Yazīd was flying in the air after the funeral, Abū Yazīd replied, "Yes, that happened!"⁵

¹Ibid., p. 112; Tadhkirat, I, 150.

²Nūr, p. 106.

³Ibid.

⁴A mysterious figure in Islām. Many legends are associated with him. For information on this figure, see The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islām, pp. 232-235.

⁵Nūr, p. 112.

Al-Sahlagī tells us that after the attainment of the mystical state, Abū Yazīd's wishes and hopes were realized faster than the twinkling of an eye (ibid., p. 125).

Abū Yazīd is believed to have breathed life into an ant which he killed by mistake (Kawākib, p. 245).

Clairvoyance or thought-reading (firāsah) has also been attributed to Abū Yazīd. It was believed that he knew other people's thoughts as well as events of the future. One day a man had been asked to eat with the visitors of Abū Yazīd. The man said, "I am fasting." Abū Yazīd remarked, "Leave him because he has been dropped from the eye of God." Shortly thereafter, the man was caught stealing, and his hands were cut off as a punishment.¹ On another occasion Abū Yazīd said that he was not sure whether or not a particular jurist (faqīh), who was envious of Abū Yazīd's position, would die as a Muslim. Soon after, the jurist fell sick and asked the people to bury him in a Christian cemetery because he was really a Christian.² Once Abū Yazīd remarked to Abū Mūsá, "I see you between two cradles rocking them both." Al-Sahlagī tells us that two children were born to Abū Mūsá. One night when they were crying in the absence of their mother, Abū Mūsá sat between the two cradles and rocked them both. At that time Abū Mūsá realized that what his master had told

¹Nūr, p. 91. Var. Risālah, p. 165; Mir'āt, p. 163; Tadhkirat, I, 152; Kawakib, p. 251.

²Nūr, p. 92.

him had come to pass.¹

These and many other stories of a similar nature actually tell us more about Abū Yazīd's biographers and the popular mind of his day than they tell us about the historical Abū Yazīd. Nevertheless, we do not mean to imply that Abū Yazīd did not believe in the possibility of being gifted with such powers. When asked about the possibility of walking in the air, he replied,

When the soul (nafs) of man is in agreement with his heart (qalb), when his heart rejoices at thinking good of the Lord, when his thought is in conformity with his will (irādah) and when his will is united with the will (mashī'ah) of his Creator, he wills by God's will, he looks according to God's

¹Ibid., p. 53.

It is also believed that if Abū Yazīd wished for something, the thoughts of others were so affected that Abū Yazīd's wish was fulfilled. Al-Sahlagī reports that Abū Yazīd was concerned about the heedlessness of the shepherds. He wished that one of them would become his disciple and that he would then go back to his fellow shepherds and lead them to the right path. The wish so affected Sa'īd al-Rā'ī that he gave up his attempt to win the heart of a certain woman. Instead he came to Abū Yazīd and repented (ibid., pp. 56-57).

For another story showing the influence of Abū Yazīd's thought on someone else's mind, supra, p. 73 .

looking, his heart is elevated by God's elevation, his soul (nafs) moves by the power of God, he goes wherever he wants by the will of God -- may He be exalted -- and he descends at whatever place God wants him to in thought and in action. This servant is with God everywhere, and no place is without Him. So, since this servant is with God, no place is without him. If he is not with God, he is not anywhere. The soul (nafs) of this man is united with his heart, his heart with his thought, his thought with his will and his will with the will of God. God -- may He be exalted -- said, "I am present in the thought that my servant has of Me." So, if God is present in the thought of the servant, he is wherever God is when he thinks. Just as God is not absent from the servant wherever he is, so the servant is not absent from God; he is through God with God wherever He is, and God is not absent from any particular place. Thus when the servant's thought of God is good, when he actually thinks of his Lord, when his heart is actually in his thought, and when his soul (nafs) is actually in his heart, he can actually move easily from wherever he wishes, by the will of God, to wherever he wishes, and everything comes to him while he is at his place. Both East and West come to him. Whenever he thinks of a place, that place comes to him; he does not go to that place. He never leaves (his place) because he is with the One Who has neither beginning nor end; for, that one is He who has never begun or ended. Understand this. Things follow

him while he does not follow anything, because all things are created by God.¹

Al-Sahlagī tells us that in the beginning Abū Yazīd used to doubt the validity of his own miracles until God removed this doubt by causing to appear before him a patch of yellow light in which was written in green light, "There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the Prophet of God; Abraham is the friend (khalīl) of God, Moses is the speaker (kalīm) of God; Jesus is the spirit (ruh) of God."²

In any case, Abū Yazīd did not attach much importance to the power of miracles. On being told by someone that he was gifted with the power to fly in the air and walk on water, Abū Yazīd remarked, "What is so special about this? Some of God's creatures of no significance (gīmah) can walk on water -- and these are crocodiles, and can fly in the air -- and these are birds."³ On another occasion, he told his disciples,

¹Nūr, p. 75.

Cf. also Tadhkirat, I, p. 152.

²Nūr, p. 112.

³Ibid., p. 121. Var. ibid., p. 136; Hilyah, pp. 35 and 39.

Cf. also Nūr, pp. 124 and 125; Tadhkirat, I, 152.

If you see a man who has been given miracles so that he can fly in the air, do not be deceived by him until you consider how you find him (behaving) in respect of (God's) commands and prohibitions (al-amr wa al-nahiyy) of keeping within limits and of the fulfilment of the Sharī'ah.¹

According to Abū Yazīd, a man's travelling from the East to the West in an hour is nothing extraordinary. The real Ṣūfī can travel in all the heavens and the earth "because all that is other than God is under his feet; he can pass with his feet wherever he wants."²

From Abū Yazīd's point of view, the miracles given to saints (awliyā')³ are quite insignificant when compared with those of a prophet. In his characteristic manner of exaggeration,⁴ Abū Yazīd remarked that all the miracles of the saints were as one tiny drop of honey while the miracles of but one prophet were as a bucket (ziqq)⁵ filled with honey from which the one

¹Supra, pp. 27-29.

²Nūr, p. 125.

³Infra, pp. 261-264.

⁴By this we are referring to the extremism of Abū Yazīd's thoughts and deeds. There existed in Abū Yazīd a tendency to carry things to extremes. Many examples of this tendency are apparent in our work.

⁵Ziqq means any container. But since he is talking of honey, we can take this in the sense of a bucket.

drop had been taken.¹ This interesting comparison was used extensively by later Ṣūfīs, and it may well be that Abū Yazīd is to be credited with being the first to use it.

24. His last Days and Death

During the last part of his life Abū Yazīd became very thin and weak.² Al-Sahlagī tells us that during this time nothing was left of him except skin and bones.³ His condition was perhaps a combined result of his rigorous ascetic practices and of old age. It seems, nevertheless, that he was able to fulfil his religious obligations until the last moment of his life. Abū Mūsá came, as usual, to inform him of the time of the morning prayer. He knocked at the door of Abū Yazīd's cell four times, but there was no response from inside.

¹Risālah, p. 175.

We are accepting this tradition as referring to Abū Yazīd's attitude to miracles on the authority of al-Qushayrī. The text says mā ḥaṣala, i.e., what was realised for Ṣūfīs. Al-Qushayrī understands this to mean what was realized for them in respect of miracles and thus he discusses this in the chapter on miracles.

²Nūr, p. 125.

³Supra, p. 107.

Then he shouted saying, "Oh Abū Yazīd!" Out of respect for his master, he had never called him by name before. When there was no response to this unusual address, he opened the door and discovered that Abū Yazīd was no more.¹

Although he did not reveal it to any one, Abū Yazīd is believed to have been aware of his approaching death. His disciple, 'Abd Allāh Yūnābādī, came from a village near Bistām to visit Abū Yazīd. Probably the day before he died, Abū Yazīd asked the disciple not to leave for home until he had performed a funeral prayer. 'Abd Allāh obeyed the master's order without any further question. The next morning when Abū Yazīd's funeral prayer took place, he realized that Abū Yazīd had his own funeral prayer in mind.²

As one would expect, a large number of people came from far and wide to attend the funeral of Abū Yazīd.³

¹Nūr, p. 50

²Ibid.

³Tadhkirat, I, 178.

25. People's Dreams of Abū Yazīd after his Death

A number of people dreamt of Abū Yazīd after his death. One of Abū Yazīd's disciples, for example, asked him in a dream how he went through the questioning of Munkar and Nakīr.¹ Abū Yazīd answered that when they asked him questions, he urged them to go back to God and enquire from Him what he was to Him; for, whatever he would say about his acts of worship would be of no use unless God considered him as one of His servants.² Another man dreamt that God, face to face with Abū Yazīd, asked him what he had brought for Him. In reply, Abū Yazīd said that although he did not bring anything worthy of His honour, he did not bring polytheism (shirk). God said, "Not even the night of milk!" Abū Yazīd then explained to the dreamer that one night he was afflicted with stomach-trouble which he had attributed to some milk which he had drunk earlier. This was polytheism because he attributed power and strength to something other than God.³ Abū Mūsá is also believed to have dreamt about Abū Yazīd. On the night of Abū Yazīd's

¹The two angels who are believed to visit the dead man in the grave, on the night after his burial, and to question him as to his faith.

²Tadhkirat, I, 178.

³Ibid.

death, he dreamt that he was carrying the Throne ('arsh) on his head. The next morning he actually carried the coffin of Abū Yazīd. The following night, Abū Yazīd appeared to him in a dream and said that the Throne of his dream the previous night represented the coffin which he carried the next morning.¹

26. His Tomb

Abū Yazīd's tomb still exists in Bisṭām. It became and still is a place of pilgrimage for many.² People go there to get spiritual benefit from the dead Ṣūfī. Among the distinguished visitors to Abū Yazīd's grave were Abū Sa'īd b. Abī al-Khayr,³ Abū al-Ḥasan

¹Tadhkirat, I, 177-178.

For other dreams, see ibid., pp. 178-179; Nūr, pp. 73-74.

²Mir'āt, p. 171.

³Ibn Munawwār, Asrār, pp. 150-151; Tadhkirat, I, 178.

When he came near the grave, he stood on a small sand hill from which the grave could be seen, bowed his head for a while in respect for Abū Yazīd and then said, pointing to the grave, "If anyone has lost a thing, he can find it there." Then he came to the edge of the grave, again bowed his head in humility and said "This is a place for the pure and not for the impure" (Ibn Munawwār, Asrār, p. 151. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 179).

Kharaqānī (d. 425/1033),¹ Fāṭimah² who was the wife of Aḥmad b. Khaḍrūyah, al-Sarrāj, al-Hujwīrī and Yaqūt.³

There are two memorial tombs of Abū Yazīd -- one at Bahadaliyyah near Damascus⁴ and the other at Chittagong in East Pakistan.⁵

¹Before his death he ordered his disciples to dig his grave thirty yards deep because the location of his grave was to be at a place which had a higher elevation than the location of the grave of Abū Yazīd, and he wanted to be buried at a level lower than that of Abū Yazīd out of respect for him (Tadhkirat, II, 254).

²Tadhkirat, I, 178.

³Supra, pp. 10, 19, 15 etc.

Al-Hujwīrī stayed near Abū Yazīd's tomb for three months engaging himself in devotional exercises with a view to finding the solution of some problem he was facing at that time (Kashf, p. 77).

⁴Essai, p. 274.

⁵The author of this dissertation has visited the tomb in Chittagong twice. It is located on the top of a hill in the village of Naṣīrābād which is about five miles north of the city of Chittagong. Attached to the tomb is a big pond with unusually large turtles. Hundreds of people visit the tomb everyday and feed the turtles. According to popular belief, Abū Yazīd, known to the Bengalees as Bayzīd Bostāmī, actually died at Naṣīrābād and was buried there. The popular explanation of the presence of the turtles is that Abū Yazīd turned the evil jinns into turtles in order to protect the people from evil inspiration.

Incidentally, there are two other well-known Ṣūfī shrines (aside from hundreds of small ones) in East Pakistan -- one in the district of Sylhet and the other in the district of Khulna. Each of these has a pond and a miracle associated with it. The pond of the shrine at Sylhet, which the author has

visited once, is filled with fish of an unusually large size. They float on the surface of the water most of the time in expectation of food from the visitors, although this species of fish usually does not float on the surface for any length of time. The pond attached to the shrine at Khulna has crocodiles which, when called by their names, come to the bank to eat chicken, mutton etc. offered by the visitors.

PART TWO

Chapter III

ZUHD (ASCETICISM)

A general remark needs to be made before we embark upon a discussion of Abū Yazīd's mystical doctrines. Abū Yazīd belonged to an early period in the history of Ṣūfīsm. The key Ṣūfī terms such as zuhd, fanā', tawhīd etc. did not crystalize themselves during this time; they were still in their formative stage of development. Hence, in introducing the meaning of these terms, we shall quote from Abū Yazīd as well as from other Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors to add content to their meaning. A discussion of how Abū Yazīd's understanding of some of these terms relates to the meaning which other Ṣūfīs have attached to them will be reserved for the concluding chapter.

1. Meaning of Zuhd

The term zuhd, derived from the Arabic root zh d, means asceticism, abstinence or renunciation. According to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), zuhd consists in the

renunciation of the world and all that is in it.¹ The world, says he, is like a snake which, although smooth to touch, has deadly venom;² whenever man

feels secure in any pleasure thereof, the world drives him over into some unpleasantness, and whenever he attains any part of it and squats him down upon it, the world suddenly turns him upside down.... its hopes are lies, its expectations false; its easefulness is all harshness, muddied its limpidity.³

In fact, God, according to Abū Yazīd, has created Iblīs as a dog and the things of the world as a dead body.

"Then He placed Iblīs at the end of the road of the world and at the beginning of the road of the hereafter, and said to him, 'I shall make you dominate over all those who incline towards the dead body.'"⁴ Because of this evil nature of the world, Sūfīs regard the world as the root of sins, and the renunciation of it as the source of goodness and obedience.⁵ The very first step of

¹Risālah, p. 61.

²Hilyah, II, 135.

³Ibid., pp. 135-136; trans. A.J. Arberry, Sūfism: an Account of the Mystics of Islām (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963), pp. 33-34.

⁴Mir'āt, p. 169.

⁵Luma', p. 46.

spiritual progress,¹ therefore, consists in "freeing the hands of possessions and the hearts of acquisitiveness."² The symbolical meaning attached to the term "zuhd" by Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Warrāq (d. 290/903) makes its implications clear. "Zuhd", says he, "consists of three letters: z, h and d. Z stands for the renunciation of honour, fame etc. (tark-e-zīnat), h for the renunciation of passions (tark-e hawá) and d for the renunciation of the world (tark-e dunyā)."³ That is, zuhd consists in the renunciation of all vices such as lust, pride, envy, anger, hatred, avarice, the desire for worldly wealth, honour and domination. The term by which Ṣūfīs

¹Ibid.

One can perhaps object to this, saying, that we cannot call this the first step because one is required to observe all the religious obligations of a Muslim before one can start on the Ṣūfī path (ṭarīqah). But, from the Ṣūfī point of view, it is assumed that a novice, who is ready to launch his journey on the Ṣūfī path, is already a Muslim observing the instructions of Shari'ah. Hence, in the case of zuhd, for example, it is not renunciation of what Shari'ah has declared forbidden and doubtful; for, it is taken for granted that this novice has already been doing this; zuhd is renunciation of what is permissible (ibid.).

²Al-Junayd (Ta'arruf, p. 93).

³Tadhkirat, II, 106.

designate the source of all these vices is nafs, the Self.¹

1) The Self

According to the classical Ṣūfī theory, the Self is the seat of the Devil (Satan). The attributes of the Self are such that it always leads one to falsehood (bāṭil)² and deceit. It imprisons man in the snares of what is transitory and thus distracts him from the everlasting God. Abū Yazīd held basically the same view; the Self, according to him, is impure and thus the source of all evil. In fact, he considered the Self more impure than a menstruating woman.³ Hence he used to address his own Self in this way:

Oh the refuge (ma'wá) of evil! Once a woman menstruates, she becomes pure after three days or at most ten. But you, my Self! You have been sitting for some twenty to thirty years and yet have not

¹For the sake of convenience, we are rendering nafs as the Self, although it should be more precisely translated as the lower Self (or soul) as against the higher soul (rūh).

Because the Self is considered the source of desires, passions, etc., it is often considered identical with human attributes (bashariyyah) as opposed to the Divine. Sometimes it is also used as synonymous with the world (dunyā) because of its concern for the world. But semantically, the Self is the driving force behind the desire for the world, while the world is the object of this desire.

²Kashf, p. 251; Tadhkirat, I, 166.

³According to Sharī'ah, a woman is impure during the

been purified. When shall you be purified? Standing in front of the Pure requires one to be pure.¹

On another occasion, again comparing the Self with menstruating women, he said, "Women are in a better condition than we. They become pure once a month or perhaps twice; for they purify themselves from menstruation by ritual bath. But we can almost never become pure in our life except once."² Perhaps the reference here is to the ritual bath given to the dead bodies of Muslims before burial.

In Abū Yazīd's thinking, the Self has a broad implication. By the Self, he referred not only to the passions and desires relating to this world but also to the desires, and even mere consciousness, relating to anything other than God. This point will be made clear

period of her menstruation and therefore is excused from religious obligations.

¹Nūr, p. 97. Var. Mir'āt, p. 161; Kawākib, p. 249.

²Nūr, p. 66. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 170 and 171.

It is said that whenever Abū Yazīd arrived at the door of a mosque, he wept because he felt that he was impure like a menstruating woman and therefore he was ashamed of defiling the mosque by entering it (Tadhkirat, I, 139).

when we discuss Abū Yazīd's views on self-mortification.

ii) The Self and the Heart

If the Self is the refuge of evils, the heart (qalb)¹ is considered by Ṣūfīs as the organ of Divine knowledge.² In fact, the heart is the very home of God. Because of their opposite nature, the weakness of the one results in the strength of the other and vice versa. Hence Abū Yazīd said, "The contraction (qabḍ) of the heart is the expansion (bast) of the Self, and the expansion of the heart is the contraction of the Self."³

iii) The Self and God

The same opposition which exists between the Self and the heart exists between the Self and God. Hence, to please the one means to displease the other and

¹It should be noted, however, that Abū Yazīd was not consistent in his use of the terms qalb and nafs. Sometimes, he used nafs to mean the heart (or soul) (supra, p. 117).

²Luma', pp. 23-24; Risālah, p. 48.

³Tadhkirat, I, 166. Var. Kashf, p. 490.

Abū Yazīd said on another occasion, "Be a rider as to the heart and a pedestrian as to the Self" (Nūr, p. 101).

vice versa. One cannot worship both God and Mammon. As Abū Yazīd said, "I loved God; so I hated the world. I hated the world; so I loved God. I left the world until I reached God and I preferred the Creator over creatures until I came near (ānastu) Him."¹ He further said, "Seek His (God's) desire (hawá) by opposing (khilāf) yours and His love by hating (bughd) your Self; for He is known by opposition to (one's) desire and loved by hating the Self."² Again, "Forgetting the Self is the remembrance of the Creator (bārī) of the Self"³ and "Whoever gives up passions (hawá) reaches God."⁴

iv) The Self, the Heart and God

It seems that according to Abū Yazīd's teachings, the "I"⁵ of man is constituted of the Self and the heart.

¹Nūr, p. 83.

²Ibid., p. 101.

Cf. other related sayings of Abū Yazīd in ibid., pp. 119, 142 and 143.

³Ibid., pp. 81 and 134; Hilyah, X, 37. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 158 and 167; Tabaqāt (Anṣarī), p. 91.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 165.

⁵By the "I", we refer to the whole psychological make-up of man, and not to "I-ness" (anāniyyah) by which Abū Yazīd designated the Self (infra, p. 170).

As for the relationship of the Self and the heart, we have seen that they are opposed to each other: the Self is the source of all evils and the heart of all goodness. We have also seen that the same opposition which exists between the Self and the heart exists between the Self and God. Now the question arises: How is the heart related to God? Later Ṣūfīs, al-Ghazzālī, for example, have discussed this problem in detail;¹ but we do not know of any statement by Abū Yazīd on this question. On the basis of his idea of the common opposition of both the heart and God to the Self, we may presume that, according to him, the heart is akin to God, or even, perhaps, that the heart, which is the real thing in man, is a part of God. For lack of evidence, however, we cannot make any definite statement in this regard.

Abū Yazīd also spoke of the sirr² (the secret part). Here again, for lack of evidence, we cannot say

¹Al-Ghazzālī, Mishkāt al-Anwār, ed. Abū al-‘Alá ‘Afīfī (Cairo: Dar al-Qawmiyyah li-Tibā‘ah wa al-Nashir, 1964), pp. 76-90; Al-Ghazzālī, Kīmīyā al-Sa‘ādah, trans. from the Turkish by H.A. Homes, The Alchemy of Happiness (Albany: N.Y. : J. Munsell, 1873), pp. 15, 17, 18, 19, 23 etc.; M. Smith, Al-Ghazzālī, the Mystic (London: Luzac & Co., 1944), pp. 141-146.

²Infra, pp. 144, n. 3; 159, n. 1.

what exactly he meant by the secret part. From the contexts in which he used it, it seems that he took the heart and the secret part to mean one and the same thing.

2. Mortification of the Self

Because of its evil and impure nature, the Self constitutes a veil before the heart. To use an image introduced to Šūfīsm at a later period of history, the heart, when polluted by the dirt and filth of the Self, is like a rusty mirror. For a clear reflection of the Divine Face on the mirror of the heart, therefore, the rust must be polished off. Unless this is done, one's prayer and fasting, however much one may perform these, will be of no avail.¹ Abū Yazīd said to a man of Bistām, "Even if you² fast for three hundred years and keep standing (in prayer) for three hundred years while you are (in the state in which) I see you, you will not experience one atom of that knowledge ('ilm).... Because you are veiled by your (own) Self..."³ According to

¹Tadhkirat, I, 146.

²The interesting question here is to know who or what is the "you" that is veiled by the Self. Probably Abū Yazīd meant by "you" the real "you", the heart of the man.

³Infra, p. 139.

Abū Yazīd the true worshipper is he who "cuts off the heads of all wishes with the sword of zuhd and all his desires become annihilated in the love of God."¹ He said to his disciples, "Separate your heart from pretension, possession, ornamentation and deliberation (tadbīr) until, having been freed from everything other than God, you see your heart above the kingdom between the lights of His Throne."² The process of polishing the Self is known as self-mortification (mujāhadah).³

Abū Yazīd's statement that one should separate his heart from deliberation (tadbīr) is interesting. As we shall see later, Abū Yazīd also spoke of mortification of actions.⁴ These statements may be interpreted to mean that by self-mortification he was referring to a state of mindlessness. We would say that, according to Abū Yazīd's teachings, the state of selflessness, in which the Ṣūfī loses all initiative and volition, is the result of the process of self-mortification rather than the process itself. We shall discuss the result of the

¹Tadhkirat, I, 161.

²Nūr, p. 101.
Cf. also ibid.

³This is derived from the Arabic root j h d. In the verb form I, it means to strive or to struggle. The word 'jihād' (holy war) is derived from the same root.

⁴Infra, pp. 167 and 168.

process of self-mortification in the next chapter. For the time being, by self-mortification Abū Yazīd meant the process by means of which one strips the heart of everything other than God.

To achieve self-mortification is indeed a very difficult task. "People think," said Abū Yazīd, "that the way to God, may He be exalted, is wider and clearer than the sun, but I ask Him to open to me a way to Him which is in measure like that of the point of a needle."¹ He said again, "I dealt with everything, but I did not find anything more difficult to deal with than my (own) Self."² Further, "To carry the burden of the Truth (ḥaqq) is a difficult task. This is possible only for special burden bearers³ who have been humiliated by

¹Nūr, p. 144. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 155; Kawākib, p. 249.

²Hilyah, X, 36

On another occasion Abū Yazīd said, "I practised self-mortification for thirty years, but I did not find anything harder on me than knowledge ('ilm) and its pursuit" (Risalah, p. 15; Kashf, pp. 20-21 and 132-133; Mir'āt, p. 164; Hilyah, X, 36; Tabaqāt [Sulamī], p. 63). For an interpretation of this saying, see Kashf, pp. 21 and 132. Abū Yazīd also said, "I supervised the heart for forty years. After forty (years) I found infidelity in it. Its infidelity consisted in paying attention to things other than Him." (Nūr, p. 94. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 141). For another similar saying, see Nūr, p. 107.

³Perhaps the reference is to the Qur'ānic verse, "Indeed, we offered the trust (amānah) to the Heavens and the earth and the mountains. But they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it (i.e., of its

self-mortification and have achieved vision (mushāhadah) as a result of self-discipline (riyādah)."¹ Hence, from the beginning of his mystical life, Abū Yazīd devoted himself to the acts of self-mortification.²

We can speak of two levels of self-mortification according to Abū Yazīd. At a lower level, it refers to mortification of the Self in its relationship to this world, and, at a higher level, it implies mortification of the Self in its relationship to the hereafter, to the gifts granted by God to the Ṣūfī, and even to love of God, ma'rifah, abstinence, etc.

i) Mortification at a Lower Level

How can self-mortification be achieved at a lower level? First, one needs to be aware of the defects of one's own Self. After this realization has been achieved, one should punish the Self severely. Asked when a man reaches the stage of maturity in Ṣūfī life,

burden) while man has borne it... (33:72). Ṣūfīs usually take amānah to mean ma'rifah or walayah. Here, by amānah Abū Yazīd seems to mean God Himself. This is another example of Bisṭāmī exaggeration.

¹Tadhkirat, I, 164. Var. Kawākib, p. 247.

²Kashf, p. 132.

Abū Yazīd replied, "When he knows the defects of his Self & his energies (himmah) have overcome it."¹ As a means of punishing the Self, he suggested that one should do the opposite of what it desires. According to one story, for example, on a very cold night Abū Yazīd had a nocturnal ejaculation which makes the ritual bath obligatory for a Muslim. When he woke up, he felt inclined to postpone his bath until the sun-rise because the water was very cold. But at once he realized the sluggishness of the Self. To punish the Self, therefore, he melted the ice, took a bath in the ice-cold water and remained in wet clothes until he fainted and fell on the ground.²

a) Mortification of Pride, Desire for Honour, etc.: From the Ṣūfī point of view, pride and desire for honour are among the worst desires of the Self. For the mortification of these, the Self needs to be treated very harshly. This is clearly exemplified in the following tradition:

There was a man in Bistām who was always in Abū Yazīd's assembly (majlis) and he never separated

¹Nūr, p. 145. Var. Hilyah, p. 37.

²Tadhkirat, I, 144.

Fainting and falling on the ground in this case seem to be an exaggeration.

from him. Once he said to Abū Yazīd, "Oh master! For thirty days I have been fasting in the day-time and remaining in a standing position (in prayer) at night. I have left (all my) passions (shahawāt). But I feel in my heart nothing at all of what you are talking about, although I believe in what you say and I know that you are telling the truth." Then Abū Yazīd said, "Even if you fast for three hundred years and keep standing (in prayer) for three hundred years while you are (in the state in which) I see you, you will not experience one atom of that knowledge ('ilm)." The man asked, "Why, oh master?" Abū Yazīd answered, "Because you are veiled by your (own) Self." He asked, "Is there any medicine which could remove this veil?"... Abū Yazīd said, "Go to the barber (hajjām) at this very moment, get your head and beard shaven, take off the dress (you are wearing), put on this cloak, attach a bag (mikhlah) to your neck, fill it with nuts, gather children around you and say at the height of your voice, 'Oh children! Whosoever will give me one slap, I shall give him a nut.' (Then) enter your market place in which you are respected and let everyone who knows you see you in this condition...." The man said, "Oh Abū Yazīd! I cannot and shall not do this. But show me something else and I shall do it." Abū Yazīd replied, "Begin with this before all (else) so that (first) you fall from your prestige (jāh) and make yourself humiliated. After this I shall let you know what will be suitable for you." The man said, "I am unable to do

this..."¹

Another means of mortifying pride and the desire for dignity, etc. is blame (malāmah). This consists in doing something which, apparently at least, contradicts the rules of the Sharī'ah in order to invite blame, insult and rejection from the people; for, these work as a shield against pride.² When Abū Yazīd, on his way back from Ḥijāz, was entering Rayy, many people of the town came out to show honour to him. This act on the part of the people created in him a sense of pride and thus distracted him from God. In order to avoid such a development, he drew a loaf of bread out of his

¹Nūr, pp. 86-87. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 146; Kawākib, p. 251.

According to one story, once, while on Mount 'Arafāt, Abū Yazīd's Self felt proud of his acts of piety. To mortify this sense of pride, he bought a piece of bread for the price of forty-five of his pilgrimages and threw it to a dog which ate it (Qiṣṣat Abī Yazīd, p. 173).

²Another purpose of the pretended contempt of Sharī'ah is to conceal one's piety.

In the third/ninth century, there arose in Khurāsān a group of Ṣūfīs known as the Malāmātiyyah. They were noted for their deliberate indifference to Sharī'ah as a means of inviting blame from the people. Abū Ḥafs al-Ḥaddād who was an important Malāmātī Ṣūfī, met Abū Yazīd at Bisṭām.

On the Malāmātiyyah, see al-Sulamī, Risālah; Kashf, pp. 68-78; M.S. Seale, "The Ethics of Malāmātiyyah Ṣūfism and the Sermon on the Mount", Muslim World (1968), pp. 12-23.

sleeves and ate it, although it was the month of Ramaḍān at that time. As soon as the people saw this, they left him.¹

b) Mortification of the Desires Arising out of Physical Needs: Abū Yazīd laid a great emphasis on the mortification of the desires arising out of physical needs. There is, on the part of the body, a desire for comfort and rest. To achieve the mortification of this desire, Abū Yazīd seldom allowed himself to lean against a wall. He said, "For forty years I never leaned against a wall except on that of a mosque or of a cell (ribāṭ)." When asked why he refrained from doing this although it is legally permissible, Abū Yazīd replied, "I heard God saying, 'Whoever does good of the measure of an atom will see (i.e., be rewarded by) it, and whoever does evil of the measure of an atom will see (i.e., be punished for) it.'² Then do you see any

¹Kashf, p. 72. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 138.

According to another tradition, once when he saw, while coming out of a city, that many people were following him, Abū Yazīd performed the dawn prayer and turned to them, saying, "There is no god but I; so worship me!" The people thought that Abū Yazīd had gone mad and thus they left him (Nur, p. 122).

²Qur'ān, 99:8.

permission?"¹

Another desire arising out of bodily needs is the desire for food and drink. From Abū Yazīd's point of view, mortification of this desire is of utmost importance. Hence we hear him saying, "For forty years I did not eat what human beings eat."² We are also told that he never ate anything during the daytime except during the two big festivals of the year.³ Once a man wanted to become his disciple. At first Abū Yazīd refused permission to him with the remark, "You will not be able to bear it." But at the insistence of the man, Abū Yazīd granted him permission. For two days, the novice did not get anything to eat. On the second

¹Nūr, p. 117. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 141; Luma', p. 395.

²Nūr, p. 98; Tadhkirat, I, 141.

Perhaps Abū Yazīd meant to say that he did not eat luxurious food for forty years.

Stories about Abū Yazīd's rigorous asceticism are numerous. One night in the beginning of his mystical life he did not experience the joy of obedience. On enquiry, when he found that there was a spoon-full of grapes in the house, he said to his disciples, "Give it to someone. The house has become a grocer's shop" (Nūr, p. 70. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 149; Kawākib, p. 244). According to another tradition, Abū Yazīd was refused permission to enter the court of God because he had in his house a broken pot and a ripped shirt (Tadhkirat, I, 157).

³Luma', p. 395.

day when he asked for food, Abū Yazīd replied, "Oh young man! Our food is God." The man said, "Oh master! What is necessary is necessary (i.e., there is no escape from food)." Then Abū Yazīd said, "God is necessary." The man said, "Oh master! I want something to sustain my body for the service of God." Abū Yazīd replied, "Oh young man! (Our) bodies do not subsist except by God."¹ On another occasion, Abū Yazīd said, "I called my Self to obedience, but it refused. So I did not give it a drink of water for one year."²

As a corollary to his emphasis on the necessity of the mortification of the desire for food and drink, Abū Yazīd placed a high value on hunger. He said, "Hunger is (like) clouds. When a man is hungry, his

¹Nūr, p. 85.

²Mir'āt, p. 167; Risālah, p. 15. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 156; Kawakib, p. 247 and 250; Nūr, pp. 98-99.

Once in the beginning of his mystical life, Abū Yazīd travelled a long distance to see a man. When he saw the man fat, he became repentant for having taken the trouble of going there. Having perceived this in Abū Yazīd's mind, the man said, "Oh Abū Yazīd! Do not spoil your travelling seven thousand farsakh [farsakh is perhaps equal to three miles (see E.W. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon [London: Williams & Norgate, 1874], I:5, 2369)]. Obviously, in this case, we should not take the figure literally] to me. My fatness is due to my happiness with God" (Nūr, pp. 146-147).

heart sends down the rain of wisdom."¹ Once asked why he valued hunger so highly, he replied, "If Fir'awn were hungry for a day, he would not have said, 'I am your Lord, the exalted.'"² on another occasion when he was asked how he had achieved what he had achieved (i.e., the mystical aim), he answered, "By a hungry stomach and a naked body."³ Al-Sahlagī tells us that

¹Nūr, p. 136; Hilyah, X, 39. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 167; Kawākib, p. 247.

²Nūr, p. 136; Hilyah, X, 39. Var. Kashf, p. 453; Tadhkirat, I, 169.

³Nūr, p. 118; Mir'āt, p. 166; Risālah, p. 14.

Cf. also the following reply of Abū Yazīd received by someone in a dream when he asked, "What is Ṣūfīsm?": "Tying ropes tight (on the waist, which is the symbol of hunger) and opposing the (desires of the) body." (Nūr, p. 64).

It is obvious from many of Abū Yazīd's sayings that sometimes Ṣūfīs go through immense physical pains and sufferings. One wonders how it is possible for them to bear these. The answer is that they are lovers of God and they can bear anything for the sake of their love. They have, moreover, a complete trust (tawakkul) in what the Beloved does for them and thus accept everything as a gift from Him. When asked from what source he received food, Abū Yazīd replied that if God feeds dogs and pigs, He could also feed Abū Yazīd (Kawākib, p. 246). When someone described to him the state of tawakkul as that state in which one's secret part (sirr) does not move even though all lions and all snakes were on one's right and left hands, Abū Yazīd said, "Yes! This is almost right. But if the people of Paradise are enjoying themselves in Paradise and if the people of Hell are being tortured in Hell, and you are able to distinguish between the two, you will come out of the state of tawakkul, completely" (Nūr, pp. 107-108. Var. Risālah, p. 83). In real tawakkul, said Abū Yazīd, man considers no one as his helper other than God, no one as

Abū Yazīd "never kept anything for tomorrow."¹

As for the mortification of sexual desire, Abū Yazīd could not be so emphatic as he was with regard to other physical desires. He wished to be free from the burden (mu'nat) of women, but at once he realized that it was not proper for him to do so because the Prophet did not ask it for himself.² Nevertheless, Abū Yazīd's attitude to women was such that women and walls appeared the same to him.³

C) Mortification of the Entire Self: The mortification of only one aspect of the Self or another does not help achieve the goal. The entire Self needs to be mortified, and, in fact, God Himself has commanded man to do this. Abū Yazīd said to Abū Mūsá, "Oh Abū Mūsá! A (real) believer is without Self." Then he recited the

the provider of his livelihood except Him and no one as the witness of his actions except Him (Nūr, p. 144; Kawākib, p. 249).

¹Nūr, p. 68.

The real servant, according to Abū Yazīd, does not leave behind in this world anything except his Lord (Kawākib, p. 248). Hence we are told that Abū Yazīd on his death left behind only the shirt that he was wearing and even this shirt was loaned to him by someone.

²Risālah, p. 15; Tadhkirat, I, 153.

³Tadhkirat, I, 153.

Qur'ānic verse: "Indeed, God has bought from His believers their Selves"¹ and added, "How can one who has (already) sold his Self (still) have it?"²

Abū Yazīd compared the Self to a store-house (kundūj). A store-house contains various things; if we remove a few things from it, many other things will still remain there. The same is the case with the Self which houses many desires. Hence he advised his followers to mortify the entire Self. He said, "Empty the store-house! Empty the store-house! Indeed, when you empty the store-house, you will not have to covet seventy others."³

When Abū Yazīd asked God in a dream "What is the way to You?", God is said to have replied, "Leave

¹Qur'ān, 9:111.

²Nūr, p. 84.

³Ibid., p. 91.

Although apparently Abū Yazīd referred by seventy store-houses to other seats of desires than the Self, actually he meant by these store-houses the desires of the Self. Seventy desires constitute seventy veils. If all these are emptied, no more veils would remain to be pierced.

Number seventy is significant. Abū Yazīd also spoke of seventy Magian girdles, seventy maqām, etc.

your Self and come."¹ Abū Yazīd followed God's command rigorously and thus renounced the Self completely. He said, "I collected all worldly things (asbāb), tied them with the rope of contentment, put them in the catapult (manjanīq) of sincerity (ṣiḍq), threw them in the ocean of despair (iyās) and (only) then did I rest."² Again, he said, "I called my Self to God, but it disobeyed me. So, I left it and went (alone) to Him."³ He gave up all that creatures have and concentrated on what is God's.⁴ Thus he reached God "with nothing".⁵ One can reach God "by dumbness, deafness and

¹Nūr, p. 96. Var. Risālah, p. 194 and 55; Mir'āt, p. 162; Nafahāt, p. 57; Tadhkirat, I, 171; Tabaqat al-Kubrā, p. 61; Kawakib, p. 250.

According to another tradition, God told Abū Yazīd that the best way to come near Him is to come with something which He does not have. Asked what it was, God said, "Oh Abū Yazīd! I have no want (fāqah) and poverty (faqr). Whoever wants My nearness through these, I bring him close to My carpet" (Nūr, p. 127).

²Ibid., p. 67. Var. Risālah, p. 82; Tadhkirat, I, 168; Kawakib, p. 251.

³Hilyah, X, 36; Mir'āt, p. 165. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 170.

⁴Nūr, p. 67.

⁵Ibid.

blindness"¹ to all other than God.

The completeness and irrevocability of Abū Yazīd's renunciation of the world, which is here another name for the Self, is best expressed in his utterance of the Muslim formula of divorce to the world three times.² He said,

I uttered the triple formula of divorce once for all, never again to return to it, and went to my Lord alone. Then I called for His help saying, "Oh my God! I pray to You the prayer of the one for whom nothing remains except You." When He knew the sincerity of the prayer of my heart (qalb), the first thing that came to me as a response to it was that He made me forget my Self (nafs) completely and put all the creatures in my hands although I

¹Ibid.

The Qur'ān applies deafness, dumbness and blindness (2:18) to the hypocrites. It is interesting to see how Abū Yazīd applied this expression to the Ṣūfīs who are completely oblivious of the world. According to one story, Abū Yazīd, on his way to Mecca, found a human skull on which was written the Qur'ānic verse, "Deaf, dumb and blind, they will never understand" and remarked that it was the skull of a Ṣūfī who was annihilated in God (Tadhkirat, I, 137).

²According to Sharī'ah, a wife divorced by the triple formula is forbidden to her husband unless she is married to him again after having been married to some other man.

refrained from them.¹

d) Devotion to the Service of God: Simultaneously with the mortification of worldly desires, the novice is required to devote himself energetically to worship² and other acts of piety. Hence Abū Yazīd not only divorced the world³ but also occupied himself completely with service to God. He used to spend "his nights

¹Nūr, p. 95. Var. ibid., pp. 67 and 99; Mir'āt, p. 165; Hilyah, X, 36; Tadhkirat, I, 170; Kawakib, p. 247.

It is interesting to notice that according to one tradition quoted by Aṭṭār, Abū Yazīd received an order from God to utter the formula of divorce to his Self thrice (Tadhkirat, I, 159).

According to Abū Yazīd, the Qur'ānic expression, "God is the first...." (57:3) means that He unveils to the people "the conditions of the world so that they may not have any desire for it (Nūr, p. 85). Abū Yazīd also said that the sunnah of the Prophet means the abandonment of the world, while fard (obligatory duties to God) is companionship with God; for, sunnah refers to the world while the Qur'ān insists on God's companionship (Ibid ., p. 96).

²By this we mean supererogatory prayers (nawāfil); for, the compulsory prayers prescribed by Sharī'ah are obligatory on all Muslims.

³After this divorce, Abū Yazīd said to himself, "If God is not sufficient for you, nothing in the heavens and earth will" (Nūr, p. 67).

standing (in prayer), his days fasting and his heart remained insensible to things (perplexed, hā'im)."¹ He said, "I occupied my tongue with His remembrance (dhikr) and my body with his service. Whenever one limb (of my body) got tired, I used another. Then I was called, 'Abū Yazīd! Abū Yazīd!'"² Here God was addressing Abū Yazīd as a result of his devotion to God. This seems to us to be a fulfilment of God's promise in the Qur'ān, "You remember Me and I shall remember you."³

This is the kind of Islām Abū Yazīd practised. No wonder, therefore, that when someone asked a Magian, who was perhaps Abū Yazīd's neighbour, to accept Islām, he refused with the remark: "If Islām is what Abū Yazīd practises, I have no capacity for it; and if it is what you do, I have no desire for it."⁴

Summary: The above discussion shows that for a clear apprehension of the Reality, which is the Ṣūfī goal, one is required to tear aside the veil of the Self.

¹Ibid., p. 46.

²Ibid., p. 67. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 170.

Cf. also Nūr, p. 68 for God's addressing him as, "Oh Abū Yazīd!"

³Qur'ān, 2: 152.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 149. Var. Nūr, p. 95.

But this, as we have seen, is a very difficult task. There is no "instant" mortification of the Self. To achieve the objective, one is required to go through a long process of rigorous self-discipline accompanied by constant prayers and fasting. These ideas have been very well summed up in the following saying of Abū Yazīd:

I was the blacksmith of my Self for twelve years, the mirror of my heart for five years, and I looked at what is between the two for one year. Then I found a Magian girdle clearly visible around my waist. So I tried to cut it for twelve years. Then I looked and found a Magian girdle in my interior (bāṭin). I tried to cut this for five years. Look how I cut this! Then I looked at the creatures and saw them all dead. So, I pronounced over them the formula of funeral prayer¹ four times.²

¹Takbīr (Allāh akbar).

²Risālah, p. 52. Var. Nūr, p. 74; Mir'āt, p. 166.

Cf. also the following tradition concerning Abū Yazīd's mortification of the Self:

... he fired the bow of the world by separating (him from it), cut the neck of desire with the rein of fear, hearded it with the whip of hope, clothed it with the shirt of patience and dressed it with the robe (riḍā') of forbearance (taṣābur). Deprivation and gift, hardship and comfort (rakhā'), blame and praise -- all have become equal to him. So, pretension has disappeared from his external as well as internal aspects. For him there is no difference between dāniq (a small coin) and dīnār; for, he knows that if his dāniq is blessed (by God), it will have greater value (barakah) than a dīnār. He also knows that if a cat attacks him, it could be more harmful than a lion. This being the case, Paradise will say, "Oh God! Let this man enter as one of

'Aṭṭār's record of this saying of Abū Yazīd is interesting. It explains and elaborates on Abū Yazīd's saying at several points. This is how 'Aṭṭār quotes Abū Yazīd:

For twelve years, I was the blacksmith of my Self. I put it in the furnace of discipline (riyādat), burnt it in the fire of self-mortification (mujāhadat), placed it on the anvil of reproach (mudhammat), and struck it with the hammer of blame (malāmat) until I made out of it (the Self) a mirror. For five years I was my own mirror. I polished it with different kinds of worship ('ibādat) and piety (ṭā'at). After that I gazed upon my own reflection for one year and saw around my waist a Magian girdle of deceit, of vanity, of pride and of dependence on obedience and approbation of my own work. I fought for five more years until that Magian girdle was cut and I became a Muslim anew. I looked and saw that the creatures were dead. I pronounced the formula of funeral prayer over them four times. I returned from the funeral of them all and without the intrusion (zahmat) of creatures, I reached God with His help.¹

my inhabitants. Thus Paradise will seek him; he will not seek Paradise. When the Hell-fire will see him in the condition in which he is, it will realize that his light will extinguish its sparks. So, the Hell-fire will seek refuge with God from him... (Nur, p. 105).

¹Tadhkirat, I, 139.

This account of Abū Yazīd's saying by 'Aṭṭār clearly illustrates what we have said about the nature of the material in Tadhkirat (supra, p. 35).

A further word needs to be said about Abū Yazīd's views on the renunciation of the world. As we have seen, he insisted on a total renunciation. He divorced the world thrice never to return to it and pronounced the formula of funeral prayer on the creatures. He considered the world so deceptive that he wished it were a morsel of food so that he could throw it to a dog¹ and thus save all mankind from its harm. What does Abū Yazīd mean by all this? Does he mean to say that a Ṣūfī should abandon this society of ours and live the life of a Hindu sanyāsī in a cave of the Himalyas?

To answer this question, we should bear in mind that the Ṣūfī is a Muslim, and a Muslim, aside from what he owed to God, has duties to his family, to his relations, to his fellow-men and to the world at large. As a Muslim -- and he claims to be a good Muslim -- he is required to perform all these duties. Naturally, therefore, he cannot renounce the world in the sense of a complete withdrawal from it. Abū Yazīd did not do this either. We have seen that he ate food and, in fact, refused once to eat charred bread,² wore dresses and shoes, had a house and most probably a family, lived

¹ Nūr, p. 79.

² Supra, p. p. 78.

in the community of men, had friends and associates, entertained guests, helped the needy, visited sick neighbours, and so on. The real meaning of renunciation is abstinence in thought and action from all that is abhorrent to and thus forbidden by God. An orthodox Muslim is also expected to abstain, both in thought and in action, from all that has been forbidden by God. In this respect, the Ṣūfī goes much further than an orthodox Muslim; he takes from the world what is absolutely necessary and shuns what is not. The Ṣūfī may be a general, a professor, a merchant -- anything that is approved in the eyes of God as long as he is free from ambition, greed, pride etc. He is in the world, but not of it. From the Ṣūfī point of view, this is the kind of asceticism that was practised by the Prophet.

ii) Mortification at a Higher Level

Thus far in the chapter we have discussed mortification of the Self in its relationship with the world. Up to this point, orthodox Muslims will, to a certain extent at least, go along with Abū Yazīd because the Qur'ān considers everything as perishable except the Face of God,¹ and says that whosoever "restrains his

¹Qur'ān, 28:88.

Self (nafs) from passions, indeed Paradise shall be his abode."¹ In addition, there are Traditions from which one can draw inspiration for a life of renunciation. For example, Muḥammad is reported to have said, "May the dinār-worshipper perish, may the dirham-worshipper perish, may the stomach-worshipper perish, may the sex-worshipper perish, may the clothes-worshipper perish!"²

It is obvious, however, that a majority of Ṣūfīs will also agree with Abū Yazīd up to this point. But Abū Yazīd went much further than this. In the typical Bistāmī style of exaggeration, he insisted on a higher kind of mortification, -- mortification of the hereafter (ākhirā)³ and of abstinence itself.

a) Mortification of Desires Concerning the Hereafter (ākhirah): According to Abū Yazīd, this world and the next are both homes of the Devil (Iblīs).⁴ Hence one is required to strip oneself not only of the desires

¹Ibid., 79:40-41.

²Ta'arruf, p. 83.

³From now on, the Self is taken to include not only the world, but also the hereafter and, in fact, anything other than God.

⁴Nūr, p. 121.

concerning the present world, but also of those concerning the next. He said, "I looked and saw the people enjoying food, drink and marriage in this world. (I saw them doing) the same in the next world. Then I made God's remembrance (dhikr) my enjoyment of the next world."¹ He said again that "there is experience of joy neither in this world nor in the hereafter; joy is the joy of the Merciful."² Love of God, according to him, "is that you do not make friendship either with this world or with the hereafter."³ Al-Hujwīrī informs us that whenever a thought of this world occurred to Abū Yazīd's mind, he performed ablution (ṭahārat); and when a thought of the next world occurred to his mind, he performed a ritual bath (ghusl).⁴ Al-Hujwīrī explains this by saying that

this world is non-eternal (muhḍath), and the result of thinking of it is legal impurity (ḥadath), whereas the next world is the place of absence and repose (ghaybah ū ārām) and the result of thinking of it is pollution (janābat); hence legal impurity

¹Mir'āt, p. 166.

²Nūr, p. 129.

³Tadhkirat, I, 167.

⁴Kashf, p. 378.

involves purification and pollution involves total ablution.¹

We have seen previously how this world, from Abū Yazīd's point of view, is an evil. But how is the hereafter an evil? This may sound strange in view of the fact that Sharī'ah prescribes acts of piety in this world for the attainment of pleasures in the next. But Abū Yazīd did not want to worship God like a wage-earner in a factory; his goal was not to receive Paradise in exchange for his acts of worship; for, Paradise is nothing in comparison with the Owner of Paradise. So his aim was to meet the Owner of Paradise. The servants with whom God is really pleased can never be interested in the palaces of Paradise.² In fact, Paradise constitutes a veil separating God if one remains pre-occupied with it, and veiling from God for the twinkling of an eye is the greatest of punishments. Hence Abū Yazīd said, "There are servants of God who, if they were veiled from seeing God, would cry for a way out of Paradise as the

¹Ibid.; trans. Nicholson, pp. 293-294.

²Nūr, p. 89.

people of Hell cry for a way out of Hell."¹ The following saying of Abū Yazīd sums up his ideas on the renunciation of the world and of the hereafter:

The people of (this) world are veiled by the world, people of the next world are pre-occupied with the next world, the pretenders of Ṣūfīsm are veiled by eating, drinking and begging (kudyah), and those above them are veiled by listening to music (samā') and visions. But the leaders of Ṣūfīsm are not veiled by any of these. You will see them perplexed and drunken.²

We should mention, however, that in spite of his views with regard to the hereafter discussed above,

¹Risālah, p. 163. Var. Hilyah, X, 34 and 37; Nūr, pp. 84, 110 and 133; Mir'at, p. 169; Kashf, p. 430 Kawākib, p. 247.

According to another tradition, which may also be a variation of the one cited, Abū Yazīd said that God has servants who, if they were veiled from God for the twinkling of an eye, would not accept Paradise from Him after that (Kawākib, p. 249. Var. Kashf, p. 430).

Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah (d. 185/801) was the first Ṣūfī to have said that Paradise has no value for the lover of God (M. Smith, Rābi'ah, the Mystic and her fellow Saints in Islam [Cambridge: The University Press, 1928], pp. 70 ff.). Massignon has also shown that Rābi'ah and Abū Yazīd considered Paradise as of no value (Essai, pp. 216 and 283).

²Nūr, p. 75. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 160-161.

Abū Yazīd considered the next world to be of some value¹ and hence looked forward to it. According to the Qur'ān, everyone will be required to give account of his actions on the Day of Judgment. For this reason, Muslims are very much afraid of the day. Abū Yazīd, on the other hand, will himself ask God to take account of him, because perhaps God, at the time of taking account of him, will address him saying, "Oh My servant!" and Abū Yazīd will reply, "I am present (labbayk)."²

¹In fact, if there was a choice between this world and the hereafter, Abū Yazīd would prefer the hereafter to this world; for, when one does this, one's silence overcomes his speech, his poverty overcomes his richness, his Self is bound by the rope of service to God, his heart is afraid of separation from Him and his secret part (sirr) is happy enjoying the intimacy (uns) of God's companionship. On the other hand, if one chooses this world over the hereafter, his ignorance dominates over his obedience and his occupation with trivial things dominates over his recollection of God (Nūr, p. 96. Var. Kawākib, p. 248). "The world", said Abū Yazīd, "is for the commonality and the hereafter for the élite. Whoever wants to be one of the élite should not take part in this world with the commonality" (Kawākib, p. 248). Again, "I made the world a mirror for the hereafter. Whoever has seen the hereafter in it (the mirror) is saved, and whoever is distracted by it from the hereafter, his mirror has been darkened and he has perished" (Ibid.).

²Mir'āt, p. 165. Var. Kawākib, p. 247.

Abū Yazīd would be willing even to suffer punishment in order to "know" God, the Punisher (Nūr, p. 49).

At first glance one may think that there is an inconsistency in Abū Yazīd's views on the value of the hereafter; for, he spoke of mortification of the hereafter and, at the same time, considered the Day of Judgement to be of some value. But there is no real inconsistency here. What Abū Yazīd was looking for in the hereafter was God's acceptance of him as a true worshipper and the grant of permission to enter the Court of God, a privilege given only to a true worshipper. It is clear, then, that Abū Yazīd considered the hereafter valuable only in so far as it may be used as a means to a higher goal.¹ Otherwise, "Paradise is the greatest veil because its inhabitants rest in Paradise, and whoever rests in anything other than God is veiled."²

b) Mortification of Abstinence: We come across the unique and original Bisṭāmī doctrine of renunciation when he said that even abstinence needs to be mortified; for, according to him, abstinence has no value.³ Once

¹If God does not give him vision of Him on the Day of Judgement, Abū Yazīd will cry so hard that the people of all seven Hells, having heard this cry, will forget the suffering of their punishment (Tadhkirat, I, 160).

²Nūr, p. 128.

³Risālah, p. 15.

when he asked Abū Mūsá as to what branch of knowledge 'Abd al-Raḥīm¹ was talking about (takallama fī), Abū Mūsá replied, "Concerning abstinence (zuhd) from the world." Abū Yazīd remarked, "What value does this world have that he needs to talk about abstinence from it!"² On another occasion, he said, "... Poor ascetic! If he had known that God has called the world the least of the little, then how little he possesses of that 'least' and how much of even that he abstains from!"³ In fact, according to Abū Yazīd, "whoever abstains from the world has pointed its value in his heart."⁴

Abū Yazīd did not stop at saying that abstinence is of no value; he went much further than this. Again, in the true Bistāmī manner of exaggeration, he,

¹An 'ālim of Bistām (Nūr, p. 120).

²Ibid. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 163.

³Mir'āt, p. 165. Var. Nūr, p. 128; Hilyah, X, 37.

According to one tradition, God having placed Abū Yazīd in His front, asked him what he had brought to Him. In answer, Abū Yazīd said that he had brought renunciation of the world. To this, God said that the world to Him is like the wing of a mosquito. Then Abū Yazīd sought God's forgiveness for having brought something of so little significance, and said that he had brought trust (tawakkul) to Him. Thereupon God accepted him (Kawākib, p. 245).

⁴Nūr, p. 107.

for the first time, declared that abstinence, and even worship ('ibādah) and knowledge ('ilm) need to be mortified because these are veils. He said,

The most veiled from God are three (people) by three things: the zāhid by his zuhd, the 'ābid (worshipper) by his 'ibādah (worship) and the 'ālim by his 'ilm.... Poor zāhid! He associates himself with zuhd and moves in the field (maydān) of zuhhād (ascetics). (I wish) he knew the triviality of the world, in what thing he is a zāhid and how valuable is that in which he does zuhd! What position he has among the zāhidūn (ascetics)! Indeed, the zāhid looks at himself. So he remains with himself and cannot turn his eyes to any other than himself. As for the 'ābid, he cares more for God's gift (minnah) to him in worship than worship (itself) so that his worship is drowned in the gift. As regards the 'ālim, if he knows that all that God has shown of knowledge is only one line of the Protected Tablet, how much does he know of that knowledge (which is in the Protected Tablet) and how much does he practise of what he knows?¹

Abū Yazīd further said that the "people of love are

¹Ibid., pp. 120-121. Var. ibid., p. 128; Mir'āt, pp. 164-165; Hilyah, X, 36-37; Kawākib, p. 247.

On another occasion Abū Yazīd said, "There is nothing better for a man than to be always poor having nothing with him: neither tazahhud, nor ta'abbud, nor 'ilm" (Nūr, p. 110).

veiled by their own love."¹ Abū Yazīd himself discovered that even his recollection (dhikr) of God constituted a veil for him. He said, "I remembered God for thirty years. Then I rested and found that my veil was my recollecting Him."² Once asked if the 'ārīf was veiled by anything, Abū Yazīd replied that the 'ārīf is his own veil.³ Abū Yazīd went still further and declared abstinence to be polytheism (shirk).⁴ Hence, he called for the mortification of abstinence itself. He said, "Seek abstinence in abstinence."⁵ According to another tradition, he said,

I was an ascetic for three days. On the fourth day I came out of it.... On the first day I abstained from the world and what is in it; on the second I abstained from the hereafter and what is in it; and on the third day, I abstained from what is in between the two⁶ except God. On the fourth

¹Hilyah, X, 36. Var. Nūr, p. 133; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 63; Kashf, p. 133.

²Nūr, p. 80. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 159.

³Hilyah, X, 38.

⁴Nūr, 128.

⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁶Perhaps by this Abū Yazīd was referring to God's gifts which He offers to the seekers on their way to Him. From his point of view, even these constitute veils; for, they are other than God. Hence, Abū Yazīd

day, nothing remained for me except God. Then I was overcome and heard a voice saying, "You do not have

insisted on the renunciation of these gifts. He said to Abū Mūsā, "Look! If He (God) gives you all that he has given to the prophets, tell Him, 'I want You and nothing other than You' (*ibid.*, pp. 76-77). On several occasions, Abū Yazīd refused to accept from God anything other than Him. Once, God, having enlightened him with His own essence, addressed him, saying, "Oh My proof (*hujjah*)!" But Abū Yazīd refused to serve as His proof to His creatures; for, in that case, he would be merely an intermediary between God and creatures, and not God Himself. So he said to God, "You are Your own proof. I have no need for that" (*ibid.*, p. 123). Abū Yazīd told Yaḥyá,

God made me enter the lowest part of the sphere, took me around in the bottom of the angelic world (*malakūt*) and showed me the earth and what is under it up to its soil. Then He introduced me to the highest sphere, took me round the heavens and showed me Paradise and the Throne in it. Then He put me in front of Him and said, "Ask Me for something that you see and I shall give it to you!" I said, "I do not find anything good to ask of you." God said, "You are my real servant! You worship Me sincerely for Myself" ('Abd Allāh b. As'ad al-Yafī', *Rawḍ al-Riyāhīn fī Hikāyat al-Ṣāliḥīn* [Cairo: Shirkat Maktabat wa Maṭbu'at Muṣṭafā, 1955], pp. 285-286).

Another time Abū Yazīd said, God made me stand before Him at one thousand stations (*mawqif*). At every station He offered me a kingdom; but I said, "I do not want it." At the last station He said, "Oh Abū Yazīd! What do you want [We are reading the text as *mā turīdu* instead of *urīdu* in Badawī's edition of *Nūr*]? I said, 'I want not to want' (*Nūr*, p. 113. Var. *Tadhkirat*, I, 158).

According to another similar tradition, Abū Yazīd said, I crossed the deserts until I reached the valley; I crossed the valley until I reached the *malakūt*, and I crossed the *malakūt* until I reached the King. I said, "Give me permission (to enter)!" He said, "I give you all that you have seen." I said, "You know that I do not want anything of that." He said, "Then what do you want?" I said [the text in Badawī's edition of *Nūr* is wrong here; it should

the capacity to bear Us." I said, "I was looking for these words." The voice said, "You have found! You have found!"¹

Here again we have a problem more or less similar to that which we faced in connection with Abū Yazīd's views on the mortification of the hereafter.²

That is, on the one hand he insisted on abstinence from this world as well as from the next, and on the other hand he considered abstinence not only as of no value but also as an evil. Was Abū Yazīd inconsistent?

Our answer to this is again similar to the one we suggested in connection with his views on the mortification of the hereafter. The ultimate aim of the Ṣūfī is immediate vision of God and unification with Him.

be gultu instead of qāla], "I want not to want." He said, "Then We give you (permission to enter)" (ibid., p. 115. Cf. also Tadhkirat, I, 143).

¹Nūr, p. 117. Var. Mir'āt, pp. 166-167; Risālah, p. 15; Tadhkirat, I, 167; Kawakib, p. 246.

According to Abū Yazīd, God said that if a servant cuts himself off from everything other than Him, He will make for him a life which has no death and a kingdom which never perishes, and will cause His will to flow into his will (Nūr, p. 110); if he engages himself with God completely, He will raise the veils between the servant and Him (ibid.).

²Supra, p. 160.

Worship, learning, abstinence, etc. are all helpful in the journey towards the goal no doubt; as long as these are considered as means towards an end, these are certainly valuable. But the moment these are taken as ends in themselves, they act as a veil; for, these are all "other" than God. Hence Abū Yazīd prayed, "God! Do not make me an 'ālim, nor a zāhid, nor one who seeks nearness (to You). If You qualify me (with anything at all), qualify me with a little of Your things", i.e. qualify me with a thing of Your secrets and realities (ma'ānī).¹

One can notice here that Abū Yazīd did not want even nearness to God; for, this is still "other" than God Himself. God is single (farq); hence He should be sought completely abstracting oneself from everything other than Him.² The implication in this is that it is necessary to pass beyond all ways and means and meet the Divine face to face "with nothing". As Abū Yazīd said, "Leave the way (ṭarīqah) (and) you will reach God."³ And again, "The (real) servant has nothing better than

¹Nūr, pp. 53-54.

The explanation of "a little of Your things" is al-Sahlagī's.

²Ibn Munawwār, Asrār, 256.

³Nūr, p. 104; Tadhkirat, I, 169. Var. Nūr, p. 128; Tadhkirat, I, 168.

having nothing -- neither asceticism, nor learning nor action ('amal). When he possesses nothing, he has everything."¹

iii) Mortification is the Result of Divine Grace

From the above discussion, we may get the impression that man, by his own efforts, achieves mortification of the Self at the lower as well as at the higher levels. But according to Abū Yazīd, human acts are of no value and, in fact, God is not in need of them.² These are useless so far as the mortification of the Self is concerned. Abū Yazīd engaged himself in pious acts, but he realised that these acts could not

¹Tadhkirat, I, 162.

The above classification of the degrees of self-mortification into different levels and sub-levels is based on our own understanding of Abū Yazīd's sayings and reports of his deeds.

Al-Sarrāj has classified ascetics into three classes. The first class is represented by novices who renounce their worldly possessions and free their hearts of what they have renounced; the second class is represented by those who renounce the pleasures of the Self, e.g., joy, praise and reputation arising out of the renunciation of the world. The third and the highest class of ascetics consider this world so worthless that they hate to pay any attention to it; they regard even renunciation of it as turning away from God, and thus they renounce renunciation itself and return to Him (Luma, pp. 46-47).

²Nūr, p. 105.

free him from the shackles of the Self. He said, "I was drowned in the seas of actions (a'māl) for forty years. Then I came out and saw myself tied with a Magian girdle."¹

If human acts do not help to achieve mortification of the Self, what is it that makes this possible? Abū Yazīd answered that it is God's help which enables man to mortify the Self step by step. Hence he talked of God's gifts (minnat) while others talked of human actions; for, the latter are impure and therefore can never lead one to the Pure.² He said, "I do not see in prayer anything except exertion of the body and in fasting anything except starving." Commenting on this, al-Sahlagī says that Abū Yazīd made this statement after his attainment of the final goal; for, at this stage he realized that things that were done before were not done through his own efforts but by God's grace (faḍl).³ It is God who made Abū Yazīd forget his

¹Ibid., p. 117. Var. ibid., p. 64; Ṭabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 90.

²Tadhkirat, I, 168.

³Nūr, p. 94.

'Aṭṭār quotes Abū Yazīd's saying as follows:

He said, "I did not find in prayer anything except standing and in fasting except starving. Whatever I have is due to His grace (faḍl), not due to my

Self.¹ So he said that one should regard mortification as the result of God's grace and not of one's own acts.² Once asked about the most difficult thing on the Ṣūfī way,³ Abū Yazīd replied, "I continued to drive my Self to God; but the Self wept until it drove me to Him and it laughed."⁴ 'Aṭṭār's version of the same saying, which

deeds." Then he said, "You cannot attain anything with renunciation or acquisition (*kasb*). What I have achieved is more than the two worlds. The fortunate man is he who walks and suddenly steps on a treasure and becomes rich (*Tadhkirat*, I, 155).

¹*Nūr*, p. 119.

²*Tadhkirat*, I, 164.

Cf. the following words of a hymn in a Hymnal by an anonymous Christian writer:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true:
No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,
'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold,
As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul;
Always Thou lovedst me.

(*Pilgrim Hymnal* [Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1964], hymn No. 578).

³*Tadhkirat*, I, 142.

⁴*Nūr*, p. 99. Var. *Kawākib*, p. 248.

is an explanation of the same, makes the idea clear. According to his version, Abū Yazīd was dragging the Self to God's presence on his own with the result that it wept, i.e., he failed in his objective. But then came God's help so that Abū Yazīd took the Self to Him easily and it became happy.¹ On another occasion, Abū Yazīd said, "Through God I am advancing, and through myself I am falling behind. If man sees his own Self, he uses his own free-will; but if he loses his Self (i.e., is without Self), he is chosen (by God)."² He prayed to God saying, "I ask You to annihilate my I-ness (anāniyyah) from me so that my I-ness will be You. Oh my Friend! You will then remain alone and see only Yourself!" "God", said Abū Yazīd, "accepted my prayer and put me in ecstasy."³ It is God who guided Abū Yazīd to the cultivation of the Self by a variety of acts of worship and He led him to the funeral cloth, so that

¹Tadhkirat, I, 142.

This is an example of how 'Aṭṭār's quotations are helpful in understanding the intent of the Ṣūfīs.

²Nūr, p. 113.

³Ibid., p. 125.

he washed himself clean of the impurities.¹

It seems to us that Abū Yazīd spoke of two levels of Divine help in the mortification of the Self. On the first level God opens the heart of a man and causes him to embark on a journey along the Ṣūfī path. Al-Sahlagī tells us that Abū Yazīd used to have heart-ache in the beginning and thought that it was some sort of physical malady. But when the time of pilgrimage approached, a traveller told him that when God wants to adopt someone as His friend, He takes his heart in eagerness in order to purify it. On hearing this, Abū Yazīd realized that his heart-ache was due to the desire of the heart for God and to God's demand for it.² This is the start. But man is too weak to proceed in the journey. Hence comes God's help which makes him

¹Ibid., p. 66.

The following saying of Abū Yazīd presents, in essence, the whole process of self-mortification:

I made the world my enemy and went to the Creator. I chose the Creator in opposition to the creatures so that God's love overcame me in such a way that I made my own Self my enemy. When I removed the obstacles (zahmāt) from in between, I received the intimacy (uns) of baqā' by the grace (luṭf) of God (Tadhkirat, I, 161).

²Nūr, p. 49.

Cf. also ibid., p. 66.

strong¹ and thus enables him to mortify the Self stage by stage. As we have seen, Abū Yazīd said that he had advanced in his journey when God helped him, but, had lagged behind when he depended on himself.² On the first level, then, although there is God's help from the very beginning of the journey, there seems to be at least some element of effort on the part of man.

But although, in the first level of the mortification of the Self, human effort seems to be of some use, it cannot take the novice to the journey's end. The completion of the last part of the journey depends exclusively on God's grace. As Abū Yazīd said,

I put off seventy Magian girdles from my waist, but one (still) remained. I tried to open it, but I failed. (Then) I implored (God) saying, "Oh God! give me strength to open this one." A voice came, "You have taken off all the Magian girdles, but it is not within your power to put off this one."³

¹Tadhkirat, I, 162.

²Supra, p. 170.

General Sūfī theory recognizes this as the distinction between the maqāmāt (station) and the ahwāl (states). The maqāmāt result from human effort, while the ahwāl are God's grants to man (see Kashf, pp. 224-225).

³Tadhkirat, I, 159.

He said again, "Nearness cannot be achieved by acquisition. The fortunate¹ servant is the one who walks and his feet sinks in a treasure." This means, says al-Sahlagī, that little things can be achieved by efforts, but great things are obtained only by luck.²

If mortification is the result of Divine grace, what is it that accounts for one's receiving God's grace while others are deprived of it? The answer is that when God wills the good of a servant, He chooses him with this special gift. So it is God's will which determines who will be the recipient of His grace.

The idea of Divine grace is very important in Abū Yazīd's thought. We shall see later that (ma'rifah), tawhīd and, in fact, anything that is attained by the Ṣūfī is the result of Divine grace and not of human action.

¹The Arabic word in the text is jawharī which literally means essential, substantial, precious, etc.

²Nūr, p. 94.

Chapter IV

TAWHĪD (UNIFICATION)

The summum-bonum of the Ṣūfī is the experience of tawhīd, i.e., unification with God. This experience occurs in a state of the heart which Abū Yazīd, perhaps for the first time in the history of Ṣūfīsm, designated as fanā'. In order to understand Abū Yazīd's doctrine of tawhīd, therefore, it is necessary for us to understand his concept of fanā', i.e., passing-away or obliteration.

1. Fanā'

i) Meaning of Fanā'

The Arabic word fanā' is derived from the root f n y which, in the verb form I, means to disappear or perish. This word is used in the Qur'ān to describe the nature of the world as opposed to that of God. The Qur'ān says, "Everything perishes (fānin) except His [God's] Face (wajh)."¹ In the technical language of

¹Qur'ān, 28:88.

the Ṣūfīs, fanā' means the disappearance of all that is evanescent so that the Eternal may take its place in the heart. As al-Kalābādhī says,

Passing-away [fanā'] is a state in which all passions [huzūz] pass away, so that the mystic experiences no feelings towards anything whatsoever, and loses all sense of discrimination: he has passed away from all things, and is wholly absorbed with that through which he has passed away.¹

In this state, the Ṣūfīs experience the truth of the Qur'ānic verse to which we have referred above. From the Ṣūfī point of view, the idea of fanā' is illustrated in the Qur'ānic story of the Egyptian women's vision of Yūsuf (Joseph). First the human attributes (bashariyyah)

prevailed in the women of Egypt as they gazed, enraptured, on the wondrous beauty of Yūsuf (Joseph), on whom be peace! But afterwards the preponderance was reversed, until at last they beheld him with their human nature annihilated (bā-fanā-yi bashariyyat) and cried: "This is no human being" (Kor. xii, 31). They made him their object and gave expression to their own state.²

¹Ta'arruf, p. 123; trans. Arberry, Doctrine, p. 120.

²Kashf, p. 37; trans. Nicholson, p. 32.

They cut their own hands¹ because, as a result of the complete loss of consciousness, they did not feel the pain.²

ii) Nature of the experience of Fanā'

The goal of the process of self-mortification is the state of fanā'. Piety (ṣalāḥ) and renunciation, said Abū Yazīd, are of no avail if these do not lead one to the root (qā'idah) of fanā'.³ Having renounced the world, the hereafter and even renunciation, the heart of Abū Yazīd had now been swept clean of all the dirt and filth of the Self. He "came out of his Self as a snake from its skin."⁴ All his creaturely attributes disappeared; hence there remained no state to which creatures are subjected. Once, when asked how he was that morning, Abū Yazīd replied, "No morning, no evening. Indeed, morning and evening are for the one who has attributes. But I have no attribute."⁵

¹Qur'ān, 12 : 31.

²Ta'arruf, pp. 126-127.

³Tadhkirat, I, 162.

⁴Nūr, pp. 77 and 118; Tadhkirat, I, 157. Var. Kawākib, p. 246.

⁵Nūr, p. 111. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 155.
Cf. Tadhkirat, I, 147-148.

In the highest state of fanā' the Ṣūfī possesses nothing -- "neither asceticism, nor learning, nor action ('amal)."¹ He becomes completely oblivious of what is happening within or without him; his "heart is not occupied with what his eyes see, nor with what his ears hear."² This is illustrated in the following tradition. One of Dhū al-Nūn's disciples came to Abū Yazīd's cell and knocked at the door. Abū Yazīd asked, "Who are you, and whom do you want?" He replied, "Abū Yazīd." Abū Yazīd said, "Who is Abū Yazīd, where is Abū Yazīd and what thing is he? I have been looking for Abū Yazīd for a long time, but I have not found him."³ 'Aṭṭār tells us another story according to which Abū Yazīd was lost in God in such a way that he could not remember the name of one of his disciples, although this disciple associated with the master for twenty years. In explanation, Abū Yazīd said that God's name entered his heart and expelled all other names from it. Hence he would quickly forget any name that

¹Supra, p .167.

²Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 67.

³Supra, p . 107.

he would learn.¹

Abū Yazīd expressed his experience of fanā' in connection with his mi'rāj.² He said,

I ascended to the field (maydān) of nothingness (laysiyyah). Then I continued to fly in it for ten years until I passed from nothing in nothing through nothing. Then I ascended to loss (taḍyī') which is the field of tawḥīd. I continued to fly through nothing in loss until I was completely lost in loss, and I was lost, and was indeed lost even to loss through nothing in nothing in the loss³ of loss. Then I ascended to tawḥīd in the absence of creatures from the 'arīf and in the absence of the 'arīf from creatures.⁴

The above text illustrates an extreme state in Abū Yazīd's experience of self-lessness, of a void. He

¹Tadhkirat, I, 157.

Cf. the following story told of al-Junayd:

A certain man came to Junayd and said: "Be present with me for a moment that I may speak to thee." Junayd answered: "Oh! Young man, you demand of me something that I have long been seeking. For many years I have been wishing to become present with myself a moment, but I cannot; how, then, can I become present with you just now?" (Kashf, p. 322; trans. Nicholson, p. 250).

²Infra, pp. 191-193.

³We are reading the word as ḍiyā'ah.

⁴Luma', p. 387.

was totally lost. He was lost even to the consciousness of being lost, i.e., he was unconscious even of his unconsciousness. Hence al-Junayd refers to this state of Abū Yazīd as fanā' 'an al-fanā'.¹

What is it that makes the Ṣūfī forget himself completely? The answer is: his love for God. This love for God needs to be absolutely pure. Hence the real Ṣūfī loves nothing besides God; for "the love of God makes you forget this world and the next."² God does not tolerate anything short of love of Him alone. He is a jealous God and thus does not want to be loved along with anything else. Abū Yazīd experienced God's jealousy on several occasions. "One night I searched my heart but did not find it. At dawn I heard a voice saying, 'Oh Abū Yazīd! Are you looking for something other than Us?'"³ On another occasion, his attention was distracted from God by an apple. He said, "This is a beautiful (laṭīf) apple" referring to an apple which he was holding in his hands. At once he realized that he had applied God's name, Laṭīf, to an apple. He

¹Ibid., p. 388.

²Tadhkirat, I, 167.

³Nūr, p. 118; Tadhkirat, I, 161.

remained oblivious of God's name for forty days. Thereupon, he promised never to eat another apple.¹

iii) Degrees of Fanā'

Self-mortification results in the state of fanā'. But since self-mortification, as we have seen above,² has different levels, we can perhaps speak of different degrees in the experience of fanā'.³ The lowest degree of fanā' results from the mortification of the Self in its relationship with the world, that is, from the mortification of low desires and passions such as hunger, thirst, pride, desire for domination, prestige, etc. The next higher stage of fanā' consists

¹Nūr, pp. 142-143; Tadhkirat, I, 141; Kawākib, p. 249.

The story of "the night of milk", which we have narrated on p. 122, also shows God's intolerance of anything short of love of Him alone.

²Supra, pp. 137-167.

³This is our classification of the degrees of fanā' according to Abū Yazīd's teachings. There are, however, other ways in which Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors have classified the levels or degrees of fanā'. Al-Junayd, for example, classifies fanā' into three levels represented by three classes of Muslims -- ordinary Muslims, theologians and Ṣūfīs. According to this classification, the lowest degree of fanā' consists in trying to disobey the Self. This is the goal of the ordinary Muslims. The next higher degree of fanā', which is the goal of theologians, is, annihilation of the pleasures arising out of the performance of one's duties to God. The highest degree of fanā', which is the goal of Ṣūfīs, is the one in which the Muslim is conquered and overwhelmed by God ('Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 57-59).

in the disappearance of the fear for Hell and the hope for Paradise. The third level of fanā' is represented by a loss of the desire for the gifts of God such as the Throne and the Protected Tablet. The highest level of fanā' results from the renunciation of abstinence itself. In this state, the Ṣūfī is unconscious even of his unconsciousness. Al-Junayd, as we have seen, calls this state fanā' 'an al-fanā''.¹

iv) Positive Aspect of Fanā'

Thus far we have been discussing fanā' in negative terms, i.e., in terms of separation of the heart of the Ṣūfī from the world, from the hereafter, from the gifts of God and even from fanā' itself. In doing this, we have been describing the negative aspect of fanā'. But there is another and more important aspect of the experience of fanā' -- its positive aspect.² If the Ṣūfī has lost consciousness of the

¹Supra, p . 179.

²Fanā' and baqā' are intellectual distinctions of the negative and positive aspects of the mystical experience. But psychologically, it is difficult to make this distinction. It is perhaps for this reason that Abū Yazīd said, "I did not reach Him (God) until I was separated from my Self, (and) I was not separated from my Self until I reached Him. Which is the first

world, of the hereafter and even of his loss of consciousness, he exists in God. According to Abū Yazīd, the Ṣūfī, having been completely self-annihilated and creatureless, subsists (bāqī) on the carpet of God; the self-annihilated becomes self-subsistent, the dead alive, and the veiled unveiled.¹ Having lost his own attributes, the Ṣūfī is clothed in Divine attributes; his essence is replaced by Divine essence. In other words, he achieves the experience of tawhīd. In this state, Abū Yazīd recited,

My heart has indicated to You until
I have been annihilated from myself and
You have remained.
You have obliterated my name and the trace
of my body;
You have asked about me, and I have said, "You."
You have made me forget my imagination;
So, wherever I turn, You are there.²

He alone knows (Tabaqāt [Anṣārī], p. 145).

For another example of the idea that the states of fanā' and baqā' are but two closely related aspects of the experience of tawhīd, infra, pp. 185-186.

¹Tadhkirat, I, 169.

Abū Yazīd once said, "I lowered my head in (the state of) fanā' and raised it in (the state of) baqā', of the Truth (ḥaqq) (Tadhkirat, I, 154). This means that the consciousness of fanā' and baqā' interchange as rapidly as lowering and raising the head.

²Nūr, p. 109.

2. Tawhīd

i) Meaning of Tawhīd

The Arabic word tawhīd, derived from the root w h d, means, in the verb form II, 'to make one', or 'to assert oneness'. Theologically, it means belief in the oneness of God which is the very basis of Islāmic faith. The Qur'ān expresses the idea of God's oneness very clearly in chapter al-Ikhlās, which is sometimes called the chapter on tawhīd¹: "(Oh Muḥammad!) Say, "God is one, He is eternal. He neither begets, nor is begotten Himself, and there is no one like unto Him."² It is because of this principle of strict monotheism that Islām considers shirk (associating any partner with God) as the greatest sin. Consistent with this attitude, Islām rejects the Christian doctrine of Trinity. The Qur'ān says, "Believe, therefore, in God and His apostles, and say not 'there is Trinity'. God is only one God."³

The Mu'tazilah have carried the belief in the oneness of God to its logical conclusion. To vindicate

¹Infra, p.336.

²Qur'ān, 112:1-4.

³Ibid., 4:171.

the principle of God's absolute unity, they have denied the idea of His possession of attributes. According to them, possession is a relation showing the duality of the subject and object, of the possessor and the possessed. Hence, if God possesses attributes, these attributes must have been either co-eternal with Him or non-eternal, that is, have come into existence after God. But neither of these alternatives can be maintained. In the former case, there would have been two eternal things -- God and His attributes; but this is impossible because the Qur'ān declares God to be the only eternal Being. The Qur'ān says, "And everlasting is the Face (wajh) of your Lord..."¹ and "Everything perishes except His Face (wajh)."² In the latter case, that is, if the attributes were not possessed by God from eternity but came to be possessed by Him later, then it would mean that there was a time when God was without attributes, and therefore imperfect. This again is against the teaching of the Qur'ān which says, "You will never find a change in the way (sunnah) of God."³ The Mu'tazilah concluded that the attributes of God

¹Ibid., 55:27.

²Ibid., 28:88.

³Ibid., 33:62.

mentioned in the Qur'ān are identical with His essence. God is powerful, for example, not by virtue of His 'possession' of the attribute of powerfulness, but because He is powerful essentially.¹

In Ṣūfī language, tawḥīd is much more than mere confession of God's oneness; it is a verification of His oneness by means of personal experience. In the state of tawḥīd, the Ṣūfī sees, as if with the direct sight of an eye-witness, that there is nothing in existence except God, and that "everything perishes except His Face."² This vision occurs only when one has achieved a sense of complete self-annihilation. As al-Junayd says, one's real vision of God comes

with the disappearance of his existence (i.e., human nature); with the loss of his existence, God's existence has been purified; with the purification of God's existence, his own attributes have disappeared and, being lost to himself, he is

¹For Mu'tazilah views on the problem of God's attributes, see Shahrastānī, Kitāb al-Milāl wa al-Nihāl, ed. Badrān (Cairo, 1951), esp. pp. 8-11; Abu Rīḍa, Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām (Cairo, 1946), pp. 80-98; 'Allāmah Ḥillī, Al-Bāb al-Hādī 'Ashar, commentary by Miqdād al-Fāḍil (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i kitāb, 1962-1963), pp. 27-28; D.B. Macdonald, Development of Muslim Theology... (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 142-145.

²Al-Ghazzālī, Mishkāt al-Anwār, ed. Abū al-'Alā 'Afīfī (Cairo: Dar al-Qawmiyyah li-Tibā'ah wa al-Nashir, 1964), p. 55.

present in God. Thus, being present with God, he is lost to himself, and being lost to himself he is present with God.¹

It is in this state of tawhīd that the Ṣūfī having experienced a sense of identification with God, cries out, "Glory be to me" as did Abū Yazīd, and "I am the Truth" as did al-Ḥallāj.²

According to al-Junayd, ordinary Muslims, theologians and Ṣūfīs -- all affirm tawhīd, but in different degrees. The lowest degree of tawhīd, which, says he, is represented by ordinary Muslims ('awāmm), consists in the confession of the oneness of God (shahādah). But the activities of ordinary Muslims are guided by fear of Hell and hope for Paradise. The next higher degree of tawhīd is represented by the theologians (mutakallimūn) who, in addition to the profession of shahādah, have reason and knowledge by virtue of which they can distinguish clearly between right and wrong and act properly according to the commands and prohibitions (al-amr wa al-naḥiyy) laid down by God. Nevertheless, the theologians have not been able to overcome the forces of fear and hope as motivating

¹Al-Junayd, Rasā'il, p. 51.

²Al-Ghazzālī, Mishkāṭ, p. 57.

factors of their activities. At the third stage of tawhīd, which is represented by Ṣūfīs, all the negative qualities of the earlier stages are gone; the Ṣūfī is no longer motivated by the forces of fear and hope. He professes God's unity and can perform his duties to God properly and distinguish between right and wrong. In addition to these, he is now

sunk in the seas of His unity, self-annihilated and dead alike to the call of mankind to him and his answer to them, absorbed by the reality of the Divine unity in true proximity, and lost to sense and action, because God fulfils in him what He hath willed of him...¹

As we shall see later, Abū Yazīd distinguished between an 'ābid, zāhid, 'ālim and 'ārīf.² Further, we find in his teachings a conception of the degrees of tawhīd represented by different levels of paradoxes.³

¹Al-Junayd, Rasā'il, p. 56; Kashf, p. 363; trans., Nicholson, pp. 282-283 (We are quoting Nicholson's translation).

Cf. also Luma', p. 29. For al-Junayd's classification of Muslims according to the degrees of tawhīd represented by them, see 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 28-34.

²Infra, pp. 213- 220.

³Infra, pp. 252-274.

ii) Nature of Tawhīd

Tawhīd, according to Abū Yazīd, consists in the realization that all "movement and rest of creatures are the work of God, may He be exalted and glorified, and that there is no partner in His actions. When you have known your Lord (in this way) and He has settled in you, you have found Him."¹ This means that "you realize (lit. see) that God is one and has no partner in his actions and no one does His acts."² Thus, in the state of tawhīd, the Ṣūfī "wills by God's will, he looks according to God's looking, his heart is elevated by God's elevation, his soul (nafs) moves by the power of God...."³ Once asked who a prince (amīr) was, Abū Yazīd replied, "The one to whom no choice has been left, and whose will has been overcome by God's will."⁴

Abū Yazīd's realization of God as the cause of all things was such that he refused to count any other

¹Nūr, p. 129. Var. Kawākib, p. 249.

²Nūr, p. 129.

³Supra, pp. 116-117

⁴Kashf, p. 502.

number than one.

A man said to Abū Yazīd, "Count for me!" and threw (something¹) to him. Then he asked, "How many do you have with you?" Abū Yazīd answered, "One." The man threw (something) several times. But Abū Yazīd said, "One." The man said, "What do you say!" Abū Yazīd replied, "I do not know anything other than one. Many comes from one and not vice versa; for, counting cannot be done except through 1 (one). If 1000 is completed and 1 (one) is missing, the name one thousand will be dropped."²

The realization of God's perfect unity necessitates being one with God. Just as a man "speaking of eternity needs to have the light of eternity with him",³ and just as a man "speaking of the beauty of lordship needs to have the genus of lordship flowing in him",⁴ so the verification of God's absolute unity involves a complete identification of his (man's) essence with God's. Having reached this state of identification, Abū Yazīd cried, "I am You, You are I, and I am You"; for, Abū Yazīd now realized that God "is the Lord and

¹Something that could be counted, e.g., pebbles.

²Nūr, p. 69.

Cf. Abū Yazīd's explanation of God's oneness, ibid., p. 128.

³Ibid., p. 113; Hilyah, X, 38.

⁴Nūr, p. 113.

the Lord is the servant."¹ The differences between Abū Yazīd and God disappeared altogether so that he said, "If I am told 'Oh!', I shall be You."² Once when someone knocked at his door and enquired about Abū Yazīd, he said, "Go away! Woe to you! There is no one in the house except God."³ That is, Abū Yazīd was united with God so that he saw nothing other than Him. Al-Hujwīrī compares this state of the Ṣūfī with that of Jacob and Majnūn. "Jacob concentrated his thoughts on Joseph, so that he had no thought but of him; and Majnūn concentrated his thoughts on Laylā, so that he saw only her in the whole world, and all created things assumed the form of Laylā in his eyes."⁴ Abū Yazīd said on another occasion, "For thirty years, God, may He be exalted, was my mirror. Now I am my own mirror."⁵ This means, says 'Aṭṭār, that "I am no more what I was, because 'I' and God are polytheism. Since I am no more, God, may He be exalted, is His own mirror. Lo! I say that God is my

¹Tadhkirat, I, 142.

²Nūr, p. 131.

³Ibid., p. 65. Var. ibid., 131; Kashf, pp. 331-332.

⁴Kashf, p. 331; trans. Nicholson, p. 258.

⁵Tadhkirat, I, 160.

own mirror because He speaks with my tongue and I do not appear in between."¹ It is in this state of complete identification with God that Abū Yazīd shouted, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!"²

We find a clear example of Abū Yazīd's feeling of identification with God's essence in his experience of mi'rāj.³ He said,

Once God raised me up, placed me before Him and said to me, "Oh Abū Yazīd! My creatures desire to

¹Ibid.

Anything less than a complete identification with God falls short of real tawhīd. We are told that once Abū Yazīd made a moaning sound (shahāqah) and a man behind him saw this moaning sound piercing the veil between Abū Yazīd and God. Surprised at this, he informed Abū Yazīd of what he saw. Abū Yazīd remarked, "Oh poor man! The good moaning sound is the one which, when it appears, does not have any veil to pierce." (Nūr, pp. 134-135). Abū Yazīd said again that he would consider God's asking him on the Day of Judgement "Why did you do this?" worse than His question "Why did you not do this?" (Tadhkirat, I, 171) because, says 'Aṭṭār, the first question asserts the existence of Abū Yazīd's I-ness which is infidelity and thus the greatest sin; Abū Yazīd did not want to come between him and God (ibid.).

² Infra, p. 226.

³ Mi'rāj refers to the famous Night Journey (al-Isrā) of the Prophet in which Muḥammad is believed to have been taken from Mecca to Masjīd al-Aqṣá and thence, through seven heavens, to the court of God until he stood near God at a distance of two bow-lengths or nearer still. The Qur'ān briefly refers to the story of Muḥammad's mi'rāj (17:1 and 53:4-18) and Traditions elaborate on the Qur'ānic references. From the fourth/tenth century onward, a series of mi'rāj legends grew

see you." I said, "Adorn me with Your oneness
(waḥdāniyyah), clothe me with Your I-ness and
raise me up to Your unity (aḥadiyyah) so that

up of which at least eighteen are known (Abū al-'Alá 'Afīfī, "The Story of the Prophet's Ascent [Mi'rāj] in Sūfī Thought and Literature", Islāmic Quarterly, II [1955], 23-27. For more on Muḥammad's mi'rāj, see: "Al-Isrā, E.I., II:I, 353-354; E. Widengren, Muḥammad, the Apostle of God and his Ascension [Uppsala: Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift, 1955]; al-Samarā'i, Theme; L. Massignon, La passion d'al-Husayn b. Mansūr al-Ḥallāj [Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1922], II, 846 ff).

Muḥammad's mi'rāj is of special significance to Sūfīs. To them, it means that Muḥammad's soul, having been loosened from the shackles of the phenomenal world, attained God's nearness (qurb) (Kashf, p. 306). Hence, claiming to be the heirs of the Prophet, they also want, in imitation of the Prophet, to experience a mystical movement of the soul, stage by stage, until it reaches tawḥīd (On the mystical significance of mi'rāj, see J.C. Archer, Mystical Elements in Muḥammad [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924], pp. 44-51).

As far as we know, Abū Yazīd was the first Sūfī to have expressed his experience of tawḥīd in terms of the mi'rāj of the Prophet. We shall discuss this point more fully in the concluding chapter.

There are several versions of Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj. Perhaps the earliest recorded version is the fragments preserved in Luma' (pp. 382, 384 and 387). In quoting these fragments, Massignon (Essai, p. 278) has changed the order in which these are given in Luma'. Gardet, although he has depended heavily on Massignon's Essai for his information on Abū Yazīd, has retained them in the order in which they appear in Luma' (Mystique, pp. 111-112). Other versions are contained in Ru'ya, in Nūr (pp. 138-141) and in Tadhkirat (I, 172-176). Zaehner has translated the versions in Nūr and Tadhkirat in the appendix of HMM (pp. 198-218) in parallel columns with the purpose of showing the difference in the two texts. Aside from these versions, there are references to mi'rāj in many short sayings of Abū Yazīd in Nūr and in other works.

when Your creatures see me, they may say, "We have seen You", and You shall be that, and I shall not be there.¹

Abū Yazīd added that God listened to his request. He adorned him with His oneness and asked him to come out before the creatures. Accordingly, he proceeded from God to creatures. But "when I took the second step, I feel fainting. So He (God) shouted, 'Bring My friend back! He cannot bear (separation) from Me.'"²

God has neither beginning nor end. Since Abū Yazīd became one with God, he had also been clothed with this aspect of God's nature. Abū Yazīd said, "My example is that of a sea of which neither the depth, nor the beginning, nor the end is known."³ This being

¹Luma', p. 382. Var. Nūr, p. 116.

For a discussion on the variant translations of this passage, see Arberry, "Bisṭāmīāna", pp. 33-34.

²Nūr, p. 116.

According to another tradition, Abū Yazīd said, "I went from God to God. Then a voice said, 'The one (who has come) from Me in Me! Oh You I!'" (Tadhkirat, I, 160). This seems to imply a passage from God in God. At the state of complete identification, Abū Yazīd himself was God, but yet there seems to be some movement from him to God. This might be a passage from union (jam') to the union of union (jam' al-jam').

³Tadhkirat, I, 171. Var. Nūr, p. 99.

the case, Abū Yazīd had no resemblance with any created being; he was unlike everything other than God. He said, "There is no one like me existing in heaven, nor is there anyone known with my attribute on earth."¹ Abū Yazīd was also omnipresent as God is omnipresent. "Just as God is not absent from the servant wherever he is, so the servant is not absent from God; he is through God with God wherever He is, and God is not absent from any particular place."²

When rivers and streams flow towards the sea, they produce noise. But when they become one with the sea, all noise is gone and quietness prevails.³ In the same way, on his way to the state of unification, Abū Yazīd wept and laughed, but when he reached the goal, he realized that there is neither weeping nor laughter there;⁴ for, he was one with the One who is at rest. Having drunk from the cup of Divine essence,

¹Nūr, p. 111.

²Supra, p. 117. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 165.

Abū Yazīd was now a real believer so that "the East and the West are in his hands. Hence he can take (anything) from wherever he wants" (Nūr, p. 112).

³Supra, p. 95.

⁴Nūr, p. 118; Kawākib, p. 248.

his thirst for God's remembrance disappeared,¹ and he reached a state of complete satisfaction.² So he said, "Oh Lord! I do not want any more than tawhīd,"³ for "there is nothing more than tawhīd."⁴

The experience of tawhīd brings to the Ṣūfī a feeling of a deepened significance of life. Having reached this state, when he looks back to his previous life, he finds that it was of no significance at all. Hence, when asked how old he was, Abū Yazīd replied, "Four years." As an explanation of this, he said, "I have been veiled (from God) in this world for seventy years, but I have been seeing Him for the last four years. I do not count the period of veiling as part of my life."⁵

¹Nūr, p. 132; Hilyah, X, 35; Kawākib, p. 245.

Abū Yazīd said that if one feels thirsty when he reaches the valley of eternity, he will be given a drink which will satisfy his thirst forever (Nūr, p. 89).

²Ibid., p. 138.

³Tadhkirat, I, 171

⁴Nūr, p. 66.

⁵Kashf, p. 429. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 169.

The experience of tawḥīd is something to be tasted and not described; for it is beyond all description. According to Abū Yazīd, the farthest from God are those who point to Him.¹ In fact, whoever points to Him with 'ilm' points to the object of 'ilm' (ma'lūm), and this is infidelity; whoever points to Him with ma'rifah points to that which is limited (maḥdūd), and this is heresy.² Addressing God, he said, "Oh God! How beautiful is that which cannot be revealed to the people nor described by tongue; for, it is incomprehensible by intellects."³ He said again that one who has achieved this state cannot describe his experience because his tongue becomes short.⁴

iii) The Experience of Tawḥīd is the Result of God's Grace

According to Abū Yazīd, man cannot attain the state of tawḥīd by his own effort. God favours His

¹Luma', p. 223; Nūr, p. 137; Mir'āt, p. 165; Hilyah, X, 38; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 66; Tabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 90; Tadhkirat, I, 167; Kawākib, p. 247

²Luma', p. 224. Var. Nūr, p. 133.

³Nūr, p. 109. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 177.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 169.

friends and takes care of them, for "Ṣūfīs are children in the lap of God."¹ Hence Abū Yazīd reached God through Him.² Addressing God, he said, "I am guided to You by You and I reach You through You."³ Prayer, said he, is nothing but turning the body, and fasting nothing but hunger of the stomach. Commenting on this, al-Sahlagī says that Abū Yazīd made this statement after the realization of the mystical goal when he "became certain that he did not achieve it by his own effort, piety, asceticism, acquisition and preparation (intiṣāb), but by the grace (faql) of God, may He be exalted."⁴ God made him forget his Self and "drew me in such a way that I came nearer (to Him) than the soul (ruh) to the body. Then He said, 'They are all my creatures except you.' I said, 'I am You, You are I, and I am You.'"⁵ He said again that God took

me to the field (maydān) of unification: Then He made me run in the space (fasahat) of Lordship and

¹Nūr, p. 131.

²Ibid., p. 109; Tadhkirat, I, 177.

³Nūr, p. 133.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

⁵Ibid., p. 119.

the beauty of His essence, and said, "Oh my friend! Be my power (qudrah) and sign (āyah) in your earth, my lighthouse (manār) in your creation. Then he clothed me with the coverings of His lights, covered me with His coverings and enlightened me with the light of His essence..."¹

We should notice that in every case, it is God Who was acting and Abū Yazīd was only behaving as a passive receptacle.

iv) Degrees of Tawhīd

We have discussed different degrees of fanā'.² According to Abū Yazīd, there are also different degrees of the experience of the unity of God. When asked if the worshipper reaches God in one instant,³ Abū Yazīd replied, "Yes, but profit and benefit are according to the degree of the journey."⁴ We shall

¹Ibid., p. 99.

On another occasion, Abū Yazīd said that God gives a drink to the hearts of His friends at night with the result that these hearts fly high in the angelic world (malakūt) in love for Him (Mir'at, p. 167).

²Supra, pp. 180-181.

³Literally, one hour (sā'ah). But most probably Abū Yazīd meant by sā'ah an instant rather than an hour.

⁴Nūr, p. 137; Hilyah, p. 41.

discuss these degrees of unification in the next chapter.

3. Ma'rifah

There is another aspect of the state of unification. There occurs, in the state of unification, an awareness -- an illumination of a specific kind -- which Abū Yazīd, as well as most other Ṣūfīs, call ma'rifah.

i) Meaning of Ma'rifah

The word "ma'rifah", derived from the Arabic root ' r f, means "knowledge". In the language of Ṣūfīs, it refers to a special kind of knowledge; it is a direct and immediate knowledge of God.¹ The one who has this knowledge is called 'ārif, the "knower", and God, the object of this "knowledge", is ma'rūf, the "Known".

Abū Yazīd distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: exoteric knowledge ('ilm al-zāhir) and

¹According to Abū Yazīd, God says to the 'ārif: "See" (Nūr, p. 97).

esoteric knowledge ('ilm al-bāṭin).¹ The former is knowledge from God in the form of the Qur'ān and Traditions for the guidance of mankind on the right path; it is God's proof (ḥujjah) to His creatures.² This knowledge can be transmitted from person to person through instruction (ta'līm). Esoteric knowledge, on the other hand, is "useful" (nāfi') knowledge given by God to his friends directly by means of inspiration (ilhām).³ To prove the existence of this knowledge, Abū Yazīd cited several examples.⁴ Muḥammad received knowledge of this kind in his face-to-face encounter with God. Even Gabriel and Michael did not have this knowledge.⁵

¹He makes this distinction on the basis of the following alleged saying of the Prophet: "Whosoever works according to what he knows will be given by God knowledge which he does not know" (ibid., p. 87; Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61).

²Nūr, p. 87.

³Ibid., pp. 87-88.

From the Ṣūfī point of view, ilhām is a direct inspiration from God; it is binding on the receiver if it does not contradict waḥī (revelation). Waḥī, on the other hand, is given to the prophets only through angel Gabriel and is binding on all.

⁴Ibid., p. 88.

⁵The reference is to Muḥammad's experience in mi'rāj when he is believed to have come nearer to God than even His nearest angels could.

Moses received this knowledge when God spoke to him;¹
 Khiḍr was taught knowledge of this kind by God Himself.
 This esoteric knowledge is what is called ma'rifah.²

ii) Nature of the Experience of Ma'rifah

When ma'rifah comes, the heart of the 'ārif is completely subdued by God's omnipotence. On being asked about ma'rifah, Abū Yazīd recited a verse of the Qur'ān which says, "Indeed, when kings enter a city, they destroy it and put the mighty men of its people to humiliation."³ According to al-Sarrāj, this means that just as a king, when he conquers a city, enslaves its people and debases them in such a manner that they lose all power to do anything except in accordance with the commands of the conqueror, so also when ma'rifah enters the heart, it casts out of it (the heart) everything, and nothing moves in it except what is moved

¹Qur'ān, 4:164.

²We should mention here that sometimes Abū Yazīd used 'ilm to mean esoteric knowledge and sometimes, although very rarely, ma'rifah to mean exoteric knowledge. However, it is not difficult to understand from the context the real intention of Abū Yazīd in these cases.

³Qur'ān, 27:34 (Luma' p. 92; Risālah, p. 155; Nūr, p. 129; Mir'āt, p. 168; Hilyah, X, 37).

by it (ma'rifah).¹ That is to say, the Ṣūfī realizes his absolute dependence on God in every action and thought. Ma'rifah annihilates him, but at the same time it makes him alive² with the overwhelming consciousness of God. The 'ārif realizes that "all movement and rest of the creation is in the hands of God."³

Everything other than God having been cast out of the heart, "the 'ārif has no state (hāl); for, his traces (rusūm) have disappeared⁴ (lit. are veiled) and he does not see anything other than God either in sleep or in his waking state."⁵ The 'ārif has reached the state of perfection, which consists in being consumed in God for Him,⁶ and has found his highest reward

¹Luma', p. 92.

²Tadhkirat, I, 169.

³Ibid., 166.

⁴In Risālah, the word is muḥiyat.

⁵Mir'āt, p. 168. Var. Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61; Tabaqāt (Anṣārī), pp. 561-562; Risālah, p. 155; Kashf, p. 353.

For an explanation of this saying, see Kashf, p. 353.

⁶Nūr, p. 135.

Cf. ibid., p. 81, and Tadhkirat, I, 161 and 162.

from God which is God Himself.¹ God has occupied his heart in such a way that if there were one hundred thousand angels in his heart and all of them were as great as Gabriel, Michael and Isrāfīl, he would not be conscious of them.² In his characteristic manner of exaggeration, Abū Yazīd said that even if the earth and the heavens had hundreds of thousands of Adams, and every Adam had hundreds of thousands of generations like ours and each of these generations had the life of hundreds of thousands of thousands of years according to the counting of Gabriel, Michael and Israfil, they (the earth and the heavens) "would be hidden in one corner of the corners of the corners of the heart of the 'ārif; he would never be aware of them, nor would he know their existence in God's creation."³

The experience of ma'rifah brings to the 'ārif a profound bliss. Abū Yazīd said that this experience is sweeter than honey.⁴ Even the sweetness of Paradise

¹Nūr, p. 129; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 62; Hilyah, X, 37; Tadhkirat, I, 163.

²Nūr, p. 116.

³Ibid., p. 130. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 163.

⁴Mir'āt, pp. 169-170.

is nothing in comparison with the sweetness of ma'rifah. One "atom of the sweetness of ma'rifah in the heart is better than one thousand palaces in the highest Firdous."¹ Naturally, therefore, the 'ārif, who has drunk from the cup of God's love and is drowned in the sea of intimacy with Him,² does not want to see, hear or talk to any other than God. Abū Yazīd said,

When the 'ārif is silent, he does not have the desire to speak except to the One he "knows"; if he shuts his eyes, he does not have the desire to open them except to the One he meets; and when he puts his head on his knees, he does not have the desire to raise them until the Day of Resurrection due to the intensity of intimacy with Him.³

"The lowest attribute of the 'ārif", said Abū Yazīd, "is that the attributes of God and the genus of

¹Tadhkirat, I, 162.

On another occasion Abū Yazīd said that the Paradise of Na'im is temporary whereas the Paradise of ma'rifah is permanent (Nūr, p. 88), and that Paradise will be an evil to the 'ārif whereas he will be a reward to Paradise (ibid., p. 92).

²Nūr, p. 102.

³Ibid., p. 101. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 162.

Abū Yazīd said on another occasion that it is impossible for one to "know" God and yet not love Him (Nūr, p. 122).

lordship flow in him."¹ This is another typical Bistāmī exaggeration. What is the highest attribute of the 'ārīf if his lowest attribute consists of the inflowing of God's attributes and the genus of lordship in Him? The answer is that in real ma'rifah, the subject-object relationship of the 'ārīf and the ma'rūf disappears; the 'ārīf and ma'rūf become one;² man becomes God Himself because real ma'rifah is possible only for God.

Now, this being the case, nothing in heavens and on earth is hidden from the 'ārīf,³ and he becomes powerful over everything⁴ because God knows everything and is powerful over everything.

The experience of ma'rifah gives the 'ārīf silence and rest. Drowned in the ocean of unity, the 'ārīf "is not delighted by anything at all, nor is he

¹Nūr, p. 112. Var. ibid., p. 79; Ṭabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 62.

Cf. Nūr, p. 82.

²Nūr, p. 113.

At this stage, God becomes the protector of the 'ārīf; for, otherwise, he would go astray (Mir'āt, p.167).

³Ṭabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 93.

⁴Nūr, p. 100.

ever afraid of anything."¹ On the way there is noise, screaming and confusion arising out of longing for the Owner of the House and out of fear for Him. But in the house there is silence, glorification (ta'zīm), awe and discipline due to the ma'rifah of the Owner of the House."²

iii) How Ma'rifah is Achieved

How can man achieve ma'rifah? Abū Yazīd answered: "By an empty stomach and a naked body";³ "by deafness, dumbness and blindness"⁴ to all other than God; by losing all that belongs to man and witnessing

¹Ibid., p. 130.

As for Hell-fire, the 'ārif will not be afraid of it, but he will be a punishment for it (Tadhkirat, 1, 165).

²Nūr, p. 100.

Ma'rifah also brings perplexity to the 'ārif. Abū Yazīd said that when the 'ārif "knows" God, he "becomes perplexed at God's greatness" (ibid., p. 102).

³Supra, p. 144.

⁴Nūr, p. 67.

to what belongs to God;¹ "by destroying (tadyī) what they (men) have and standing firm with what is His."² "The least that is obligatory on the 'ārīf is to give away what he possesses."³ Abū Yazīd advised someone, saying, "Know your Lord without consciousness (lit. "knowledge") of your Self and without the vision of your heart. Refrain from being deceived by anything other than God."⁴ He said again that one who "knows" God renounces all that distracts his attention from Him;⁵

he stays at the door of his Lord and does not return from it with a charitable gift (birr). He advances towards Him without being attracted to anything which may veil him from God. He turns and moves in the galaxy (majarrah) of the intimacy of his Lord and around communion (munājah) with Him. He is never satisfied being occupied with anything

¹Ibid.

The 'ārīfs, said Abū Yazīd, "flee away from creatures" (ibid., p. 102); they "give up everything for the sake of Him (God)" (ibid., p. 100).

²Ibid., p. 135; Mir'āt, p. 164; Risālah, p. 156; Hilyah, X, 39; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 64; Kawakib, p. 247.

³Nūr, p. 130. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 163.

⁴Nūr, p. 119

⁵Ibid., p. 133; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 67.

other than God, may He be exalted and glorified, and he escapes from creatures to the Creator, from all relations (asbāb) to the Owner of relations.¹

One reaches ma'rifah when one becomes annihilated in the awareness of God and subsists on His carpet -- self-less and creatureless.²

The real cause of ma'rifah, according to Abū Yazīd, is God Himself. "The people of inspiration (ilhām) are those whom God has specified with grants out of grace (faḍl) and generosity from Him."³ Abū Yazīd prayed to God saying, "Lord! Make me understand You, for I cannot understand You except through You."⁴ God granted Abū Yazīd's prayer. Hence he "knew" God through Him.⁵ He said, "I 'knew' God through me so that I became annihilated. Then I 'knew' Him through

¹Nūr, p. 130.

Cf. Tadhkirat, I, 162 and 168.

²Tadhkirat, I, 169.

³Infra, p. 211, n. 3.

⁴Nūr, p. 135. Var. Mir'āt, p. 166; Hilyah, X, 38; Tabaqat (Sulamī), p. 64.

⁵Nūr, p. 129; Hilyah, X, 37; Tadhkirat, I, 179.

This reminds us of Dhū al-Nūn's saying "I 'knew' my Lord through Him" (Risālah, p. 156).

Him with the result that I became alive."¹ God "chooses a worshipper for Himself, protects him from disobeying Him and enables him to converse (with Him) through his heart..."² Thus ma'rifah is God's generosity granted to His chosen ones.

It seems that ma'rifah, according to Abū Yazīd, is imposed on the 'ārīf by God. While speaking of the stages of reaching God, he said, "He (God) has encompassed them. So it is not possible for them to depart."³ But the force of ma'rifah is overwhelming. "If one atom of Him were revealed to the creatures, the universe and all that it contains would not have remained."⁴ Naturally, therefore, all men cannot bear its burden. Well aware of this, God grants ma'rifah to the special burden-bearers, to those whom He has chosen for Himself protected and enabled to converse with Him.⁵

¹Nūr, p. 83.

²Ibid., p. 69.

³Ibid., p. 73.

⁴Ibid., pp. 84 and 110.

⁵Ibid., p. 69.

Since God is the sole cause of ma'rifah, the 'ārīf realizes that in respect of ma'rifah he has nothing and God has everything, that he is completely ignorant while all ma'rifah belongs to God. Abū Yazīd said, "The servant continues to be an 'ārīf as long as he is ignorant. When his ignorance disappears, his ma'rifah ceases to exist."¹

According to Abū Yazīd, the experience of ma'rifah cannot be understood or communicated. Once asked by someone how he "knew" God, Abū Yazīd answered, "If you "knew" (Him), you would not ask me about it. One who does not "know" God does not understand what an 'ārīf says; and one who "knows" God has no need of asking the question."² Therefore, the 'ārīf does not like to discuss ma'rifah. On being told that Sahl b. 'Abd Allāh was discussing ma'rifah, Abū Yazīd said, "Sahl is a seeker (lit. seeks) on the shore of ma'rifah, but he has not been drowned in the waves (of the sea)."³ "The one who "knows" God is lost and

¹Ibid., p. 118. Var. Ṭabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 562; Tadhkirat, I, 165.

²Nūr, p. 97.
Cf. Tadhkirat, I, 164.

³Nūr, pp. 75-76. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 169.

does not concern oneself with (its) expression."¹ The real 'ārifs "keep (their ma'rifah) secret; and when they have kept it secret, they rest in His (God's) ma'rifah."²

iv) Degrees of Ma'rifah

It seems that Abū Yazīd distinguished between three levels of ma'rifah³: ma'rifah of the common run of Muslims (al-'awāmm), ma'rifah of the élite (al-khawāṣṣ) and ma'rifah of the élite of the élite (khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ).

Ma'rifah of the commonality is the ma'rifah of servanthood ('ubūdiyyah) and of lordship (rubūbiyyah), of obedience and of disobedience. This is "knowledge" of the "enemy" (i.e. of Satan) and of the Self (nafs). Ma'rifah of the élite is the ma'rifah of glorification (ijlāl) and of exaltation ('azamah), of goodness (iḥsān) and of gift (minnah). This is ma'rifah of success (tawfīq). As for the ma'rifah of the élite of the élite, it is the ma'rifah of intimacy (uns) and of addressing

¹Nūr, p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 102.

³He said, "The people of inspiration (ilhām) are those whom God has specified with grants of grace (faḍl) and generosity from Him; and He has made some of them superior to others in inspiration (ilhām) and clairvoyance (firāsah)" (ibid., p. 88).

(munājah), of grace (luṭf) and of favour (talattuf). This is the ma'rifah of the heart (qalb) and of the secret part (sirr).¹

In the above text, Abū Yazīd used ma'rifah in a general sense. Even the common run of Muslims have ma'rifah. They know man's rights and what they owe to God. They know the difference between the worshipper and the Worshipped, the lowliness of the Self and how to worship God. But this is the lowest degree of ma'rifah; for, this group places an emphasis upon God as a severe dispenser of justice. The common run of Muslims representing this ma'rifah are perhaps the worshippers ('ābidūn).²

From Abū Yazīd's point of view, the knowledge of the élite is also ma'rifah. They know how to exalt and glorify God because they recognize God's goodness and gift. Their ma'rifah is higher than that of the commonality. But even at this level of ma'rifah, the knowers are not very near and intimate with the object of their knowledge; they still exalt and glorify God and are concerned with His goodness and gifts. The

¹Ibid., p. 118.

²Infra, pp. 214-215, etc.

élite representing this level of ma'rifah are perhaps the 'ulamā'.¹

The third and highest degree of ma'rifah is characterized by intimacy and conversation with God. This group is represented by the Ṣūfīs ('ārifs), the élite of the élite. This degree of ma'rifah is a special gift of God which He has granted as a favour to His friends.²

- v) Abū Yazīd's Use of 'Ubūdiyyah (Servanthood) in a Specific Sense and the Distinction between 'Ābid, Zāhid, 'Ālim and 'Ārif

Abū Yazīd's idea of the degrees of ma'rifah

¹Infra, pp. 218-220, etc.

²In another tradition we also find that Abū Yazīd distinguished between three levels of ma'rifah.

The people of ma'rifah with God, the Most High, are on three levels. One group seeks God, may He be exalted and glorified, because of their heedlessness towards Him; another group runs away from God, may He be praised, because of their weakness (to approach) Him, and the third group stands (waqafu) (at a stage) where they neither seek nor run away from Him (Nūr, p. 79. Var. ibid., pp. 104 and 106).

Perhaps all these three groups represent Ṣūfīs at different levels; for, Abū Yazīd calls them people of ma'rifah. The first group may represent hope (rajā) and intimacy (uns), while the second fear (khawf) and awe (haybah); but the third, the most perfect, has neither. It is interesting to notice Abū Yazīd's use of waqafa. In jurisprudence (fiqh) tawagguḥ means a judgement which is neither positive nor negative.

brings us to the question of his distinction between 'ābid, zāhid, 'ālim and 'ārif.¹ It seems that he used 'ubūdiyyah (servanthood) in two senses. In one sense, he applied it specifically to a worshipper ('ābid) as distinguished from a zāhid, 'ālim and 'ārif; and in another sense he used it to refer to all men. The latter is the general sense of 'ābid meaning man. Let us first see the meaning of 'ubūdiyyah in the specific sense.

An 'ābid, according to Abū Yazīd, is concerned about his sins² and he worships God for the sake of reward from Him; "he looks at God's blessing (minnah) on him in worship more than at his worship, so that his worship is drowned in the blessing."³ But his obedience leaves much to be desired.⁴ Hence Abū Yazīd said, "Repentance for disobedience is one, while

¹In his Al-Ishārāt waal-Tanbihāt, Ibn Sīnā, in a later period, discusses the distinction between an 'ābid, zāhid and 'ārif al-Ishārāt waal-Tanbihāt, commentary by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī [Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1958], pp. 789-852).

²Nūr, p. 122.

³Ibid., p. 82.

⁴Ibid., pp. 85, 105-106 and 144; Hilyah, X, 36; Kawākib, p. 247.

repentance for obedience is one thousand."¹ The 'ābid is proud of what he does and this separates him from God.² That is, his worship itself constitutes a veil between him and God.

The zāhid on the other hand, is concerned with God alone; he has risen above the level of the 'ābid who is concerned with reward. The zāhid "glances at God once and remains with Him; he does not turn his attention to anything else."³ This is the case in spite of the fact that when he sees God, he experiences fear of God.⁴

The stage of a zāhid is still lower than that of an 'ārif. Both the 'ābid and the zāhid experience fear of God; but the 'ārif is not delighted by anything at all, nor does he stand in fear of anything."⁵ Abū Yazīd compared the zāhid with a pedestrian who walks on earth and an 'ārif with a bird which flies

¹Tadhkirat, I, 161.

²Nūr, p. 122.

³Ibid., p. 82.

⁴Ibid., p. 136.

⁵Hilyah, X, 39.

in the air.¹ That is, the zāhid is still concerned with the world, at least with the renunciation of it, whereas the 'ārif is concerned with the spiritual world. Abū Yazīd said, "The zāhid hopes for miracles in this world and stations (maqāmāt) in the next, whereas the 'ārif hopes for the persistence (baqā) of his faith (īmān) in this world and forgiveness (of creatures²) in the next."³ Again, "The 'ārif's concern is what he hopes for, and the zāhid's concern is what he eats."⁴

Even man's reactions to a zāhid and to an 'ārif differ. When he sees the rigorous ascetic life of a zāhid, he stands in awe for him; but when he goes away from a zāhid, the latter's work appears easy to him. The very thought of an 'ārif makes a man "fear" him. So Abū Yazīd said, "When you see the sincere zāhid, you will stand in awe for him, and when you go away from him, his work (ʿamal) will appear easy to you."

¹Risālah, p. 156; Tadhkirat, I, 165.

²This is al-Sahlagī's addition.

³Nūr, p. 131. Var. ibid., p. 132.

⁴Hilyah, X, 37; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), pp. 66-67. Var. Nūr, pp. 131 and 132.

But you will stand in awe for the 'ārif when you see him and when you go away from him."¹

The 'ārif is distinguished from the 'ābid in that "the 'ābid worships through (bi) the mystical state (ḥāl) whereas the 'ārif worships in (fī) ḥāl."² Perhaps this means that the 'ābid has the ecstatic experience only when he is in worship, whereas the 'ārif is all the time in ecstasy. Moreover, anyone can be an 'ābid, although, according to Abū Yazīd, all need to seek God's help in worship.³ But bearing of ma'rifah is possible only for special burden-bearers.⁴ As Abū Yazīd said, "God is informed of the hearts of His friends (awliyā'). Some of them are not fit for bearing the burden of ma'rifah. So He engages them with 'ubūdiyyah."⁵ Thus an 'ārif is far superior to

¹Nūr, p. 136; Hilyah, X, 39.

²Nūr, p. 79. Var. ibid, p. 130; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 62.

³Mir'āt, p. 166; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 62.

⁴Supra, p. 209.

⁵Nūr, p. 135; Tadhkirat, I, 164; Hilyah, X, 39.

It is interesting to note that those unfit for ma'rifah and thus engaged in 'ubūdiyyah are also awliyā'.

an 'ābid. In fact, Abū Yazīd said that "the hypocrisy of an 'ārif is better than the sincerity of a novice (murīd)."¹ Probably Abū Yazīd regarded a murīd as an 'ābid and a shaykh as an 'ārif.

In Abū Yazīd's distinction of an 'ārif from an 'ālim, we find the common attitude of Ṣūfī opposition to the learned class. According to him, the 'ālim possesses exoteric knowledge whereas the 'ārif is endowed with inner knowledge which is 'ilm in 'ilm.² 'Ārif's knowledge comes from God, the Living; but the 'ālim receives his knowledge from the dead authors and narrators. If the 'ārif speaks "from" God, the 'ālim speaks "about" God.³ Referring to the ulamā' Abū Yazīd said, "Poor people, dead men took (knowledge) from dead men, but I have taken my knowledge from the Living who never dies!"⁴ Abū Yazīd further said that the 'ārif is above what he says whereas the 'ālim

¹Tadhkirat, I, 165.

The 'ābid is concerned about his sins and of the pride of his actions (supra, pp. 214-215), but the 'ārif is never joyful about anything, nor is he ever concerned about anything (Nūr, p. 122).

²Nūr, p. 54.

³Tadhkirat, I, 170; Kawākib, p. 246.

⁴Nūr, p. 77.

is below what he says.¹ Perhaps this means that the 'ālim knows much less than what he says he does, while the case of the 'ārīf is its opposite, or that the 'ālim acts much less than he speaks while the 'ārīf does its opposite. The 'ārīf sees his Lord whereas the 'ālim sees himself."² The 'ārīf depends on God for everything. Hence he asks, "How does He do?" But the 'ālim depends on himself for his work. So he asks, "How shall I do?"³ The 'ārīf is satisfied with nothing other than union."⁴ His reward from God is God Himself.⁵ But the 'ālim is concerned with his 'ilm. "The 'ārīf sees the ma'rūf whereas the 'ālim sits with the 'ālim."⁶ According to Abū Yazīd, 'ilm is good no doubt, especially when it is sought for the sake of instructing

¹Ibid., p. 130; Hilyah, X, 39.

²Nūr, p. 130; Hilyah, X, 39.

³Tadhkirat, I, 163.

According to one tradition, for thirty years Abū Yazīd asked God to give him something or to do something for him, but when he reached the first stage of ma'rīfah, he said, "God! Be for me and do whatever You like!" (Ibid., p. 159).

⁴Ibid., p. 165.

⁵Hilyah, X, 39.

⁶Tadhkirat, I, 163.

others,¹ but ma'rifah is far better. In 'ilm there is life, but ma'rifah gives repose to the 'arif.²

Although the stage of an 'arif is very high, Abū Yazīd was not satisfied with ma'rifah. He did not want to be an 'arif, nor an 'abid nor a zāhid; for, the most veiled, said he, are the 'arif by ma'rifah, the 'abid by 'ibādah and the zāhid by zuhd. He prayed to God saying, "Oh God! do not make me an 'alim, nor a zāhid, nor a close companion (mutaḡarrib). If you qualify me with anything, qualify me with some of Your things", i.e., qualify me with Your secrets and realities (ma'ānī).³

¹Nūr, p. 135; Mir'āt, p. 166; Hilyah, X, 38; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 63.

²Tadhkirat, I, 166.

In one tradition we find Abū Yazīd speaking of the domination of the Self (nafs), of the Soul (rūh) and of ma'rifah on individuals and the consequences this leads to. He said, "The Self looks at the world, the soul at the hereafter and ma'rifah at the Lord (mawla). Whosoever is overcome by his Self is destroyed, whosoever is overcome by his soul is a struggler (mujtahid), and whosoever is overcome by his ma'rifah is righteous (muttaqin). " (Nūr, p. 146).

³Nūr, pp. 53-54.

The explanation of "some of Your things" is al-Sahlagī's.

vi) 'Ubūdiyyah used in a General Sense and the Degrees of 'Ubūdiyyah

Thus far we have used 'ubūdiyyah in a specific sense and designated its possessor as an 'ābid as distinguished from a zāhid, an 'ālim and an 'ārif. But just as Abū Yazīd spoke of ma'rifah in a general sense and called everyone from an 'ābid to a Ṣūfī an 'ārif, so he spoke of 'ubūdiyyah in a general sense and designated all mankind as 'ābidūn (pl. of 'ābid).

'Ubūdiyyah, said Abū Yazīd, progresses on three levels: general ('āmm), special (khāṣṣ) and special of the special (khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ). General 'ubūdiyyah has five aspects (awjuh): The first aspect is represented by those who are sinful and deceived by the world; they do not respond to the promise and threat of God in the Qur'ān. Concerned with this world, they are forgetful of the hereafter. The second aspect is represented by those who are hypocritical in their deeds, for they seek praise, glory, etc. through their worship. They are satisfied with the world instead of with the hereafter.¹ The third aspect is represented by those

¹Abū Yazīd once said, "God said to the infidel, 'Believe (in God)!', to the hypocrite, 'Be sincere!' to the sinner, 'Come back (to the right path)!', to the lover, 'Be satisfied!' and to the 'ārif, 'See!'" (Nūr, p. 97).

who sincerely act according to the Qur'ān and the sunnah of the Prophet and thus deserve praise from God and His creatures. The fourth aspect is represented by those who, in addition to the performance of obligatory duties to God, do a great number of voluntary acts of piety. They sell the world for the hereafter and are in search of reward from God. The fifth aspect is represented by those who fight against the enemy, the Self, seeking to break it and force it on the right path until God gives His support to overcome it.

Special servanthood also has five aspects. The first aspect is represented by those who approach God with the heart and escape from creatures to Him. The second aspect is represented by those who, out of fear of God, are abstinent, hopeful and acceptable to God. They are truthful and thankful to God for His blessings; they enjoy God's destiny for them. The third aspect is represented by those who turn their attention from the world to the hereafter and prefer recollection of God to His creatures. The fourth aspect is represented by those who have delegated all their affairs to God and are happy with all that He has given them. They are desirous of God's friendship and

nearness and do not want anything other than Him.¹

The fifth aspect of special 'ubūdiyyah and the whole third level of 'ubūdiyyah (special of the special) are missing from al-Sahlagī's text. However, we can perhaps take the following saying of Abū Yazīd as representing the fifth aspect of special 'ubūdiyyah. Asked when a man fulfils the conditions of servanthood, Abū Yazīd said, "When he has no will.... His will and desire and passion are included in his love for God; his will never proceeds to anything until he perceives (lit. knows) the will of God, may He be exalted and glorified, and His love for him in that thing."² Perhaps Abū Yazīd was referring to an 'ābid representing this aspect of 'ubūdiyyah when he said, "I wonder how a man who has ma'rifah of Him (God) can worship Him";³ for, the distinction between the 'ābid and the ma'būd has disappeared; they have become one. Then who can worship whom?

It should be noted that according to Abū Yazīd, even at the highest state of unification in which one

¹Ibid., pp. 97-99.

²Ibid., p. 84.

³Ibid., p. 130.

is endowed with ma'rifah, one cannot be free from one's obligations to God. In other words, one can never come out of servanthood. Abū Yazīd said, "The inhaling and exhaling of the 'ārīf is (God's) worship."¹ This may mean that the very basis of ma'rifah is worship; just as man cannot survive without breathing, so ma'rifah cannot exist except on the basis of 'ubūdiyyah. Or, this may mean that the 'ārīf is all the time busy with God's worship although we may not see him worshipping, just as a man breathes continually although we may not be particularly aware of him doing so. Once when asked about the signs of the lover of God, Abū Yazīd said that he (the lover) keeps himself busy with God's service in prostration and kneeling (rukū'); when he is unable to do this, he remembers and praises Him with the tongue; when he cannot do even this, he remembers God with the heart. As for the one whom God loves, he is endowed with the generosity of the ocean, the kindness (shafaqah) of the sun and the humility of the earth.² Abū Yazīd said on another occasion that the 'ārīf never leaves the status of servanthood, although he becomes powerful

¹Tadhkirat, I, 162.

²Nūr, p. 141.

over everything.¹ Again, "The 'ārīf has no gaps in the recollection (dhikr) of God, nor is he tired of performing his duties to God, nor does he seek friendship with any other than Him."²

We can now ask: If the 'ārīf is never free from 'ubūdiyyah, how can we explain that in the state of tawhīd, the Ṣūfī experiences a complete identification with God's essence so that he cries out, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!" or that in the experience of ma'rifah the 'ārīf and the ma'rūf become one, or that Abū Yazīd wondered "how a man who has ma'rifah of Him (God) can worship Him!"³ and so on? This is the problem of Abū Yazīd's Paradoxical utterances which we shall discuss in the next chapter.

¹Ibid., pp. 100-101.

²Ibid., pp. 103 and 135. Var. Mir'āt, p. 164; Hilyah, X, 39; Ṭabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 64.

³Supra, p. 223.

Chapter V

SHATAHĀT (MYSTICAL PARADOXES)

The most important aspect of Abū Yazīd's thought is his mystical paradoxes.¹ It is for these paradoxes, more than for anything else, that he is so famous. The very mention of Abū Yazīd's name at once calls to mind his paradoxical utterances such as "By God! My banner is greater than Muḥammad's,"² "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!"³, "Indeed, my grip is stronger than His (God's)",⁴ etc. These are called

¹This aspect of Abū Yazīd is so important and one can say so much about it that it alone could serve as the topic of a doctoral dissertation.

The Greek word 'paradox' means that which is outside or seemingly contradictory to belief (para= outside, and doxy= belief). Paradox, then, is that which is unconventional and unexpected and, therefore, shocking. Here, following the lead of Corbin (Introduction to Shathīyāt, p. 7), we are calling it 'mystical paradox' because in Ṣūfīsm it is the expression of an ecstatic experience. It is true that sometimes these utterances may have been made in a matter-of-fact manner, but their origin must have been in an ecstatic experience of the Ṣūfī in the past. For an example of this, infra, pp. 240-241.

²Nūr, p. 111; Shathīyāt, p. 132.

³Kashf, 327; Tadhkirat, I, 140. Var. Nūr, pp. 78 and 11; Luma', p. 390; Shathīyāt, p. 89.

⁴Nūr, p. 111; Shathīyāt, p. 129.

shatahāt (or shathīyāt, sing. shath)¹ in Arabic.

Before we proceed with a discussion of these paradoxical statements of Abū Yazīd, let us consider what shath means.

1. Meaning of Shath

Al-Sarrāj defines shath as "an expression of the tongue resulting from an ecstasy (wajd) which overflows its source (ma'din) and is connected with a pretension (da'wā)."² An analysis of this definition shows that there are several ideas contained in it. First, there is the idea of motion. In fact, al-Sarrāj tells us that literally shath means movement; hence one says shataha, yashtahu of something that moves.³ But shath does not imply an ordinary kind of motion; it refers to a severe motion which shakes an object

¹This is the term under which Ṣūfī writers (e.g., al-Sarrāj and Baqlī) have classified the paradoxical utterance of the Ṣūfīs.

²Luma', p. 346.

³Ibid., p. 375.

Corbin rightly says that dictionaries are too discreet about the word shath (Introduction to Shathīyāt, p. 7). According to Massignon, it is "probably a Syrian loan-word" ("Shath", E.I., IV;I, 335).

violently. The second idea contained in the definition, then, is that the violent movement of the object results in an overflow. A bakery where flour is processed is called mishtāh because there is in it a great deal of motion caused by the kneading of the flour and the consequent overflowing of it.¹ A third idea contained in the definition is that of an agent which is responsible for the motion and the overflow. A fourth idea in the definition is that of a pretension (da'wā) behind the overflow. The third and the fourth ideas will become more clear in the following discussion.

If we apply all these ideas to the shath of a Ṣūfī, the result stands like this: It is the Ṣūfī's heart (his mishtāh) which is moved; it is his experience of intense ecstasy in the state of tawhīd which moves the heart violently; the overflow resulting from the violent movement of the heart is the utterances of the Ṣūfī's tongue, and the misleading aspect of an utterance refers to the fact that its surface meaning is strange² and incomprehensible to the ordinary Muslims, while its real and inner meaning is

¹Luma', p. 375.

²Ibid.

understandable only to the adept.¹ Al-Sarrāj compares the shath of a Ṣūfī to the overflow of floodwaters which rush down a river bed too narrow to accommodate the flow.²

We should mention in this connection that although shath means all this, usually it is used to refer to the effects of the experience rather than to the conditions leading to them. In other words, by shath one usually means the strange utterance of a Ṣūfī and not the movement of the heart or the ecstatic experience which accounts for the utterance.

2. The Paradoxical Nature of Abū Yazīd's Thought

We find that paradoxes lie at the very heart of Abū Yazīd's teachings. On the one hand, we find him a very devoted Muslim acting according to the rules of Sharī'ah; on the other hand, he uttered statements and did things which ran contrary to Sharī'ah. Let us now elaborate these two aspects more fully.

¹This is strictly our application of al-Sarrāj's ideas to shath.

²Luma', p. 376.

i) The Orthodox Aspect

Abū Yazīd acted according to the commands and prohibitions of Sharī'ah; for, according to him, no one can reach God except through adherence to the Law.¹ God commands man to serve Him. So Abū Yazīd spent his days fasting and his nights praying.² He put his body to God's service in such a way that whenever one limb got tired, he used another.³ God prohibits eating of forbidden food. Hence we find him extremely conscientious about eating permissible food.⁴ Abū Yazīd said, "One who abandons reciting the Qur'ān, performing prayer⁵ in congregation, attending funerals and visiting the sick, and yet claims this position (of a Ṣūfī) is a pretender."⁶ The following story demonstrates

¹Tadhkirat, I, 166.

²Supra, pp. 149-150.

³Supra, p. 150.

⁴Supra, pp. 85-86.

⁵The Arabic word used here is taqashshuf which literally means living the life of an ascetic. But by this Abū Yazīd perhaps meant the performance of prayer; Badawī also suggests this interpretation (Nūr, p. 94, n. 4).

⁶Nūr, pp. 94-95.

Abū Yazīd's extreme reverence for Sharī'ah. Once he went to see someone who had become famous as a saint (walī). But the moment he saw him spitting in the direction of the Ka'bah, he returned, with the remark, "This man is not reliable concerning the matters (lit. manners) of Sharī'ah. So how can he be trusted in what he claims (of sainthood)?"¹ All this shows that a Ṣūfī, must, first of all, be a good Muslim, i.e., act according to Sharī'ah. Whatever the additional qualities of a Ṣūfī may be, his life must be founded on Sharī'ah. The Ṣūfī, said Abū Yazīd, "is the one who takes the Book of God by the right hand and the sunnah of His

¹Mir'āt, pp. 162-163. Var. Luma', pp. 103-104; Nūr, p. 65; Risalah, p. 15; Tadhkirat, I, 136.

Once when someone said to Abū Yazīd, "People say that the shahādah Lā ilāha illā Allāh is the key to Paradise", he replied,

They are right, but a key does not open anything other than a lock. The lock of Lā ilāha illā Allāh is four things: a tongue without lies and speaking ill of others, a heart without deception and treachery, a stomach without forbidden and doubtful things, and action without passion and innovation (Nūr, pp. 85-86). 'Aṭṭār tells us that Abū Yazīd never spat on the way between his house and the mosque out of respect for the mosque (Tadhkirat, I, 136).

Cf. also Abū Yazīd's saying on the relationship between miracles and the observance of the rules of Sharī'ah (supra, pp. 118-119).

Prophet by the left hand..."¹ At a later period, Al-Junayd succinctly puts this idea thus, "Our knowledge ('ilm) is bound up with the Traditions of the Prophet."²

As a corollary to his reverence for Sharī'ah, Abū Yazīd had a tremendous respect for the Prophet. When asked whether anyone could exceed Muḥammad, he replied, "Can anyone be his equal?"³ Once he said, "I was drowned in the sea of ma'rifah until I reached the sea of Muḥammad, may God bless him and give him peace. Then I saw that between me and him there were one thousand stages. Had I approached one of them, I would have been burnt."⁴ Abū Yazīd considered "the end of the Ṣūfīs (siddīqūn) as the beginning of the states (aḥwāl) of the prophets."⁵ According to him, all of the miracles given to the saints were like a drop in

¹Nūr, p. 96.

Abū Yazīd defined Ṣūfīsm as "throwing the Self in servanthood, attaching the heart to lordship, practising high morality and concentrating one's attention to God completely" (ibid., p. 107).

²Luma', p. 103.

³Ibid., p. 408.

⁴Nūr., p. 66.

⁵Ibid., p. 74.

a bucket of honey when compared to the miracles given to a single prophet.¹

Abū Yazīd's sense of awe before God was so great that sometimes he failed to raise his hands in prayer for the takbīr and his shoulders moved so violently that one could hear the crackling sound of his bones.² Once when the preacher (khaṭīb) of a mosque recited the verse, "And they do not make a proper estimate of the power of God...",³ Abū Yazīd hit the pulpit and blood came out of his eyes.⁴ On hearing from a man that he was a care-taker of donkeys (kharbandeh), Abū Yazīd wished that the man's donkeys would die and

¹Supra, pp. 119-120.

²Mir'āt, p. 161; Nafaḥāt, p. 57; Tabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 90.

³Qur'an, 6:91.

⁴Nūr, p. 110.

Abū Yazīd is believed to have rinsed his mouth and cleansed his tongue before mentioning (dhikr) the name of God (ibid., p. 106; Mir'āt, p. 164; Tadhkirat, I, 142). We are also told that he urinated blood at the mentioning of His name (Nūr, p. 126; Kawākib, p. 245). He stood in front of God very humbly as if he were a Magian willing to cut his zunnār (Nūr, p. 126).

that the man would become a servant (bandeh) of God.¹

Abū Yazīd was very conscious of the shortcomings of his acts of worship.² He said, "If one utterance of the formula 'There is no god but God' were pure, I would not have cared for anything after that."³ The greatest reward on the Day of Judgement would be to have God address him as servant.⁴ When asked by someone when a man reaches God, Abū Yazīd replied, "Oh poor man! does anyone ever reach Him? If an atom of Him were manifested to the creation, neither the universe nor what it contains would have remained any longer."⁵

¹Mir'āt, p. 167.

As the Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors often do, Abū Yazīd was here playing on the double meaning of the word bandeh. Kharbandeh is the one who takes care of donkeys, whereas Khudabandeh is the servant of God. Abū Yazīd said to the man that he should become a Khudabandeh because it is not suitable for one to be a kharbandeh.

²Nūr, pp. 85, 106 and 144; Hilyah, X, 36.

³Supra, p. 88.

⁴Supra, p. 159.

⁵Nūr, p. 84.

ii) The Paradoxical Aspect

We have seen that Abū Yazīd identified with what might be called an "orthodox" position in the Islāmic tradition. But there is a paradoxical side to Abū Yazīd. Some of his sayings seemingly contradict an "orthodox" position. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥarb (234/848) sent Abū Yazīd a rug on which he could perform his night prayers. Abū Yazīd sent Ibn Ḥarb the following message: "I have gathered all the worship of the people of seven heavens and earths, put it into a pillow and placed it under my cheek."¹ Abū Yazīd also made such utterances as, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!";² "By God! My banner is greater than Muḥammad's";³ "Indeed, my grip is stronger than His (God's)";⁴ etc. These are representative of his paradoxical sayings.

3. Explanation of his Paradoxical Sayings

How can we explain these paradoxes? One might be tempted to associate these paradoxical sayings with

¹Ibid., p. 133.

²Supra, p. 226.

³Supra, p. 226.

⁴Supra, p. 226.

a second stage in the development of Abū Yazīd's personality. Thus, in an earlier stage, he was a devoted orthodox Muslim and acted strictly according to Sharī'ah, but at a later stage he became a Ṣūfī and said things which appear to contradict those of an earlier stage.

In answer to this, we may say that although we have no way of determining when exactly Abū Yazīd uttered the paradoxical statements, we can safely assume that they belong to a period some thirty years prior to his death.¹ But most of his sayings and actions which conform to Sharī'ah also belonged to this period. In fact we find him acting according to the principles of the Law right up to his death. He said, "I never left (my) obligatory duties (farḍ) in my life".² We have every reason to believe that he performed the evening prayer on the night he died.³ Before his death, he felt so ashamed of the inadequacy of the acts of worship which he had performed throughout his life that he addressed God very humbly, saying,

¹For the basis of this assumption, supra, p. 95, n.3.

²Nūr, p. 115.

³Supra, p. 120.

... Right now I am coming from the desert crying Tangrī, Tangrī. Only now I am learning to say 'Allāh', 'Allāh'; only now I am cutting the Magian girdle; only now I step into the circle of Islām; only now I move my tongue with the attestation of faith (shahādah).¹

This being the case, one cannot say that the two distinct aspects to Abū Yazīd's sayings represent two distinct stages in development. From our point of view, the paradoxical nature of Abū Yazīd's sayings represent two different states of mind which existed simultaneously. Sometimes his heart was seized and he was intoxicated with ecstasy. The ecstasy was so strong that his heart trembled and he burst forth with mystical utterances. These emotional statements constitute his paradoxical utterances. But the state of intoxication (sukr) was only temporary. Soon afterwards, he would return to the state of sobriety (sahw) and would behave like an orthodox Muslim. In fact, sometimes, after he returned to the state of sobriety, he could not believe that he had made those extreme utterances in the state of intoxication. The following tradition strongly supports our interpretation:

Once he (Abū Yazīd) was in intimate friendship with God (khalwa). (In this state) his tongue had

¹Supra, pp.88-89.

uttered the words, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!" When he returned to himself, his disciples told him that his tongue uttered such words. He said, "May your God be my enemy and may your Abū Yazīd be my enemy."¹ If I utter this kind of words (again), cut me into pieces." Then he gave each of them a knife, saying, "If such words come to me again, strike me with these knives".²

Abū Yazīd did utter this kind of words again, but his disciples did not carry out his orders.³

One may now ask how it was possible for Abū Yazīd to perform his duties to God when he was in a

¹This is a kind of oath.

²Tadhkirat, I, 140. Var. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Mathnawī, ed. R.A. Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1929), IV, 388-389.

There is another tradition according to which some people came to visit Abū Yazīd, saw him in a state of ecstasy, excused him and went away: on them fell God's mercy; but others came to visit him, saw him in that condition, blamed him and left his place: on them fell God's curse (Nūr, p. 107). This again shows that sometimes Abū Yazīd was intoxicated with ecstasy, but at other times, e.g., when he made the above statement, he was sober. It further shows that Abū Yazīd was conscious of the fact that the state of drunkenness is not viewed as permissible from the orthodox point of view. Nevertheless, he thought that Sūfīs deserved not to be blamed but to be forgiven for this.

³Tadhkirat, I, 140.

state of intoxication. As an answer to this, we are told that he used to remain in the state of intoxication only until the time of prayer. At that time he would become sober, perform his prayer and then he would return to the intoxicated state.¹ In the Ṣūfī view, this is made possible by God's initiative. In this state of intoxication, the Ṣūfī is in the hands of God and He sees to it that the duties of Islām are observed; God becomes the disposer of all his acts. This, says al-Kalābādhī, is what is called infallibility (iṣmah) and this is the meaning of the Prophetic Tradition, "God has said, 'When My servant draws ever nearer to me by performing works of supererogation, then do I begin to love him; and once I have started to love him, I have become his hearing by which he hears and his sight with which he sees.'"² Abū Yazīd himself addresses God, saying, "You have specified some people, honoured them and enabled them to perform Your commands; they did not do this except through You. Your mercy on them was before their obedience to You."³

¹Kashf, p. 331.

²Ta'arruf, p. 123.

The edition of al-Ta'arruf which we have been using does not give the full text of this Tradition. We are quoting it from al-Junayd (Rasā'il, p. 33).

³Nūr, p. 100.

We should mention in this connection that the strange paradoxical utterances of Abū Yazīd were not always the immediate expression of an experience of intense ecstasy. Once, for example, while he was passing by a certain town on his way to Mecca, a large number of people followed him. Having been informed that these people were seeking his company, Abū Yazīd, after the performance of his dawn prayer, turned to them and said "Verily I am God; there is no god but I; so worship me!" On hearing this, they turned their backs on him and left with the remarks, "This man has gone mad ."¹

As is very clear from the context, "Verily I am God; there is no god but I; so worship me" was not a direct and immediate expression out of an experience of ecstasy. On the other hand, we must admit that on some occasions similar expressions did arise out of ecstatic experience. The statement just quoted was made in a sober moment and for a definite purpose. People's love and honour for him was too much for him to bear.

¹Tadhkirat, I, 136-137.

Again the paradoxical nature of Abū Yazīd's behaviour is in evidence. He performed his worship and immediately after that pronounced the paradoxical statement.

He realized that the desire for human approval might receive his attention and thus veil him from God.¹ To remove this veil of creatures from between him and God, therefore, he said things contrary to Sharī'ah. In this way he used blame (malāmah) as a mean for the mortification of the Self.²

Perhaps Abū Yazīd was not aware what utterances he had made in the state of intoxication. As we have seen above,³ his companions would inform him of his utterances when he returned to a sober state. According to another tradition, his companions used to memorize and thus preserve these utterances.⁴ Abū Yazīd later learnt of these sayings from his followers and, being conscious of how radical they were, Abū Yazīd may have used them in sober moments for the sake of incurring blame.

¹Tadhkirat, I, 137 and 138.

²Supra, pp. 140-141.

It seems that Abū Yazīd was conscious of the danger of making paradoxical utterances. He said to his companion Muḥammad al-Rā'ī, "Do not mention our sayings to everyone. Leave them..." (Nūr, p. 60).

³Supra, pp. 237-238.

⁴Nūr, p. 109.

4. A Discussion of al-Hujwīrī's Characterization of
Abū Yazīd as One who Prefers Drunkenness to Sobriety

We have discussed the Paradoxical nature of Abū Yazīd's thought and have seen that his radical sayings were usually uttered while in the psychological state of intoxication, although in some cases they were uttered while in the state of sobriety. Now, the question arises: Is al-Hujwīrī's classification of Abū Yazīd among the Ṣūfīs, who prefer intoxication to sobriety, correct?

The term intoxication (sukr), says al-Hujwīrī, denotes "the overcomingness of love for God, may He be exalted, while the term sobriety (ṣaḥw) expresses the attainment of the goal (murād)."¹ Accordingly, from his point of view, intoxication is an evil (āfat) and therefore sobriety is preferable to intoxication.² Intoxication, says he, "is to fancy one's self annihilated while the attributes really subsist and this is a veil. Sobriety, on the other hand, is the vision of subsistence while the attributes are annihilated; and

¹Kashf, p. 230.

²Ibid., p. 232.

this is actual revelation."¹

According to al-Hujwīrī, Abū Yazīd's mystical experience arose in the state of intoxication. Al-Hujwīrī bases this statement on the views of Yaḥyá b. Mu'ādh and of Abū Yazīd which are presented in a correspondence which took place between the two. Yaḥyá wrote to Abū Yazīd asking him his opinion about "one who drinks a single drop of the ocean of love and becomes intoxicated." Abū Yazīd sent a reply to this in the form of a question: "What do you say of one who, if all the oceans in the world were filled with the wine of love, would drink them all and still cry for more to slake his thirst?"² Al-Hujwīrī thinks that here Abū Yazīd favoured intoxication while Yaḥyá favoured sobriety, for the

man of sobriety is he who is unable to drink even one drop, and the man of intoxication is he who drinks all and still desires more. Wine being the instrument of intoxication, but the enemy of sobriety, intoxication demands what is homogeneous with itself, whereas sobriety takes no pleasure in drinking.³

¹Ibid., p. 233, trans. Nicholson, p. 187.

²Supra, p. 104.

³Kashf, p. 233, trans Nicholson, p. 187.

In this respect, al-Hujwīrī has also contrasted Abū Yazīd and his followers with al-Junayd and his followers. He says,

Abū Yazīd and his followers prefer intoxication to sobriety. They say that sobriety involves the fixity and equilibrium of human attributes, which are the greatest veil between God and Man, whereas intoxication involves the destruction of human attributes, like foresight and choice, and the annihilation of a man's self-control in God, so that only those faculties survive in him that do not belong to the human genus; and they are the most complete and perfect.¹

Al-Junayd and his followers, on the other hand, continues al-Hujwīrī,

prefer sobriety to intoxication. They say that intoxication is evil, because it involves the disturbance of one's normal state and loss of sanity and self-control; and inasmuch as the principle of all things is sought either by way of annihilation or subsistence, or of effacement or affirmation, the principle of verification cannot be attained unless the seeker is sane. Blindness will never release anyone from the bondage and corruption of phenomena.²

¹Ibid., p. 230; trans. Nicholson, p. 185.

²Ibid., p. 231; Nicholson, p. 185.

From al-Hujwiri's point of view, Abū Yazīd represented the stage of Moses who was intoxicated, while al-Junayd represented the stage of Muḥammad who was sober. He says,

...Moses was intoxicated; he could not endure the manifestation of one epiphany, but fell in a swoon (Kor. vii, 139): but our Apostle was sober; he beheld the same glory continuously, with ever-increasing consciousness, all the way from Mecca, until he stood at the space of two bow-lengths from the Divine presence (Kor. Liii, 9.).¹

The classification of Abū Yazīd among those who prefer intoxication to sobriety is not quite correct. We have seen that Abū Yazīd's thought is paradoxical in nature. If he preferred intoxication to sobriety, how can we explain that Abū Yazīd, after having returned to the state of sobriety, asked his disciples to cut his throat in case of repetition of the paradoxical utterances that he had previously made in a state of intoxication?² In fact, we find in Abū Yazīd's thought the concept of a return to the world from the flight in the realm of tawḥīd. He said,

¹Kashf, pp. 231-232; trans. Nicholson, p. 186.

²Supra, pp. 237-238.

....When he (the Ṣūfī) is united (with God) through his separation (faṣl), he is given knowledge ('ilm) of the unseen of His eternity. When he is perfectly established, separation returns to separation without the removal of union and negation of separation.¹

This saying indicates that the whole mystical life, according to Abū Yazīd, proceeds in three stages. The first is one of separation or abstraction from everything other than God. At the second stage the Ṣūfī becomes united with God and receives ma'rifah from Him. But at the third and the highest stage, the Ṣūfī comes back to the world. This is the stage of union in separation or separation in union. The Ṣūfī is both absent from and present with God and the world; he lives and moves in the world among creatures, but his heart is occupied with God. When asked of the greatest sign of the 'ārif, Abū Yazīd said, "You will see him eating, drinking, mixing, and buying and selling with you, while his heart is in the angelic world (malakūt) of holiness (quds)."² He said again that the 'ārif eats whatever food he finds, sleeps wherever he is, while

¹Nūr, p. 78. Var. ibid., p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 145. Var. Tadhkirat, I, 168.

he is occupied only with God.¹ Since he has come back to the world with a mystical illumination, the Ṣūfī sees things in a different light: he sees them in the light of God. Abū Yazīd said, I "Knew" God through God while I knew what is other than God through the light of God."²

Al-Hujwīrī is fond of classifying Ṣūfīs. As an historian of Ṣūfism, he has in his mind a divisional scheme and he tries to fit everyone in that scheme. Moreover, al-Hujwīrī was concerned with the defence of Ṣūfism in the eyes of orthodox Muslims. Perhaps this led him to show the superiority of the state of sobriety which, according to him, was represented by al-Junayd, to that of intoxication represented by Abū Yazīd; for, the teachings of al-Junayd were much more acceptable to the orthodox Muslims than those of Abū Yazīd. Al-Hujwīrī also makes his own agreement with al-Junayd's position very clear. He says,

My Shaykh, who followed the doctrine of Junayd, used to say that intoxication is the playground of children, but sobriety is the death-field of men. I say, in agreement with my Shaykh, that

¹Kawākib, 245.

²Nūr, pp. 129 and 133; Hilyah, X, 37; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 64. Var. Nūr, p. 129.

the perfection of the state of the intoxicated man is sobriety.¹

It is clear from this that al-Hujwīrī's classification of Abū Yazīd as an intoxicated Ṣūfī and al-Junayd as a sober one tells us more about al-Hujwīrī than it does about those of whom al-Hujwīrī speaks.

We must say, nevertheless, that at least in one sense al-Hujwīrī is right. In Abū Yazīd, the overflowing of the heart caused by an intense experience of ecstasy ran uncontrolled. He let the tongue express freely what he felt. He did not, and perhaps could not, build a "dam" to contain the enormous outbursts of the heart. Al-Junayd, on the other hand, could and did control this experience. So, Abū Yazīd was dominated by the experience of intoxication while al-Junayd was dominated by that of sobriety. Perhaps in this sense al-Hujwīrī is right in saying that Abū Yazīd preferred intoxication to sobriety while al-Junayd did the opposite.

But now the question arises: How can we account for the predominance of the state of intoxication in one Ṣūfī and that of the state of sobriety in another?

¹Kashf, p. 232; trans. Nicholson, p. 186.

We can suggest two explanations for this. First, this may be due to the way in which the experience of ecstasy comes. In one case, it "may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport and to ecstasy."¹ Sometimes this leads one to make expressions like "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!",² "I am greater (than God)",³ etc. In the case of another, the experience may "come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship."⁴ Such an experience suggests a state of sobriety.

Here we should make two points clear. The predominance of the experience of intoxication or of sobriety in different Ṣūfīs is only relative. The experience of ecstasy leads to the experience of intoxication. But in one case, the degree of intoxication

¹We are borrowing the language of R. Otto (The Idea of the Holy, trans. J.W. Harvey [New York: Oxford University Press, 1958], pp. 12-13).

²Supra, p. 226.

³Infra, p.

⁴Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 12.

may be very intense, while in another case it may be much less so. Furthermore, the relative predominance of either of the states may be applied to the same person. On one occasion, he may be seized with an intense ecstasy resulting in a state of extreme intoxication, while on another occasion the experience may "come sweeping like a gentle tide" with the consequent retention of the sober and tranquil mood.

As a second explanation of the problem, we can say that we are judging the predominance of the state of intoxication and of sobriety from their outward expressions only. It is quite possible that the Ṣūfī whom al-Hujwīrī would call sober may actually have had an intense experience of ecstasy, but did not express it outwardly. On the basis of this supposition, we may ask: How is it that one Ṣūfī did not and perhaps could not control the violent tide of his experience, while another succeeded in doing so?¹

¹Abū Sa'īd b. al-A'rābī, a disciple of al-Junayd, speaks of two kinds of ecstatic experiences -- one which makes man silent and another which compels him to motion. The latter, according to him, is better than the former (Luma', p. 308).

There is a similar problem in connection with samā' (audition). Some people move at the time of samā', while others do not (Ta'arruf, p. 161). Once, for example, a group of Ṣūfīs at al-Junayd's house were dancing and shouting as a result of excitement caused by samā', while al-Junayd remained calm (Risālah, p. 37).

In explanation of this difference, we may suggest several reasons. It might be due to the differences in the strength of intellect of different Ṣūfīs. One may have had a weak intellect incapable of controlling the experience, but another a strong intellect enabling him to control it successfully. Or, it might be due to the fact that one Ṣūfī had no guidance before him to keep him within acceptable limits and to warn him of the evil consequences of transgressing the limits. This was certainly the case with Abū Yazīd. Since he was the pioneer with respect to mystical paradoxes, there was no one before him to guide him. Al-Junayd, on the other hand, had Abū Yazīd and other Ṣūfīs to guide him. There may be another factor which may explain why some controlled their experience and others did not. We have in mind the different circumstances in which men live. The religious and political environment of Abū Yazīd was different from that of al-Junayd. The former was much more free than the latter so that Abū Yazīd could say things without much hindrance, while al-Junayd's environment did not permit him to do this. We shall discuss this point more fully later.¹

¹Infra, pp. 276-282, etc.

5. The Levels of Abū Yazīd's Paradoxical Utterances

We have mentioned previously that the degree of the intensity of the experience of intoxication may vary in the same person from one occasion to another. We think that this was really the case in the experience of Abū Yazīd. The experience of intoxication seized him on different occasions in different degrees of intensity. Hence, his paradoxical utterances also differed from each other in respect to their unconventional, strange and shocking character; for, the paradoxes are merely the expressions of the experience of intoxication. That is, we think that some paradoxical utterances are more radical than others depending on the degree of the intensity of the experience. The following is an attempt to classify Abū Yazīd's paradoxical utterances in relation to the intensity of experience.

We want to make a few remarks before we proceed to the classification. We should remember that Abū Yazīd did not himself classify his paradoxes. It is quite possible that he would not even have known the meaning of the word shath by which later Ṣūfī writers have designated his strange utterances. The following is our own classification of Abū Yazīd's

paradoxes based on our understanding of them. Moreover, we do not claim this classification to be exhaustive although most of his paradoxes fit into one of the categories which we have used. Further, in our classification, we begin with the paradoxes which, from our point of view, represent the lowest level and then gradually proceed on an ascending scale until we reach those which belong to the highest level. One must not get the impression that this procedure follows a chronological sequence which can be traced in the mystical experience of Abū Yazīd, i.e., that Abū Yazīd started with the paradoxes of the lowest level and then, as time went on, he uttered statements which became more and more paradoxical. In fact, the paradoxical statements belonging to the highest level could very well have been made before those belonging to the lowest.

i) The First Level: the Interiorization of the Rites of Islām

At the lowest level stand Abū Yazīd's sayings and deeds concerning the interiorization of the rites and practices which are obligatory on a Muslim.¹ We

¹According to Abū Yazīd, it is the sincerity of intentions which counts rather than the formal rites and rituals. Someone once asked him about the gesture of raising hands in prayer for takbīr. Abū Yazīd said,

shall take the example of pilgrimage. God orders man to perform pilgrimage to the Ka'bah. In compliance with this order, Abū Yazīd performed pilgrimage at least once. But to him the meaning of pilgrimage is

"This is a practice which goes back to the Messenger of God, may God bless him. But try to raise your heart to God; this is better" (Nūr, p. 115). Another day, Abū Yazīd decided to perform his prayer for the second time because he discovered that the imām (leader), behind whom he performed the prayer first, did not know who the Giver of provisions (al-razzāq) was (ibid.). From his point of view, to utter the name of God or any other religious formula heedlessly is a sin. Once when someone said, "Subhān Allāh" heedlessly, Abū Yazīd remarked that it was polytheism to do so (ibid., p. 87). On another occasion, someone received scoldings from Abū Yazīd because he uttered "Allāh" heedlessly (ibid., p. 89). But the concentration of the heart exclusively on God is a very difficult task. For forty years Abū Yazīd tried to do this but failed and found polytheism in his heart because it was occupied with things other than God (ibid., p. 94. Var. ibid., p. 107). Nevertheless, once someone succeeds in doing this, the very shahādah which Muslims utter so many times a day, becomes the greatest name of God. Asked about God's greatest name, Abū Yazīd replied, "In your saying 'Lā ilāha illā Allāh' while you are not there" (ibid., p. 84). The tradition immediately following this in Nūr is an exact opposite of the one cited. It says, "... while you are there". Possibly, the first refers to the state of fanā' while the second refers to the state of baqā'.

As a corollary to his emphasis on sincerity of intentions, Abū Yazīd disliked any kind of hypocrisy. According to him, the search for knowledge ('ilm) and the Traditions of the Prophet, for example, is good; but if this is done "for one's own glorification in the eyes of the people, one's distance from God and His Messenger will increase" (ibid., p. 116). Abū Yazīd was not impressed with those who pretended to be Qur'an readers (mutaqarr'ūn) (ibid., p. 93).

different from that which orthodox Islām understands it to be. From his point of view, one does not need to go to Mecca to seek God. Hence we hear a Negro, who met Abū Yazīd on the latter's way to Mecca, urging him to go back to Bistām and seek Him there.¹ Moreover, he considered other duties in life, helping the poor, for example, as more important than the performance of pilgrimage. When, on Abū Yazīd's way to Mecca, a poor man with a family asked Abū Yazīd to give him the money instead of spending it on his journey to Mecca and then to circumambulate him (the poor man) instead of circumambulating the Ka'bah, Abū Yazīd did as he was asked and returned to Bistām.² Even when he finally

¹Nūr, pp. 83-84 and 128; Tadhkirat, p. 139.

One may argue that orthodox Muslims also consider pilgrimage as a process of going to Mecca to visit God. Our answer is that the difference between the orthodox attitude to pilgrimage (as also to other rites of Islām, and to the Qur'ān) and the Ṣūfī attitude to it lies in the degree of their emphasis on the spiritual meaning of pilgrimage. It is true that to an orthodox Muslim God is present in Mecca as well as in Bistām; but the realization of this will not bring him back to Bistām from his way to Mecca, nor will he experience, after circumambulating the Ka'bah, that the Ka'bah was circumambulating him (infra, p. 256).

²Tadhkirat, I, 139. Var. Nūr, p. 128.

According to another tradition, when Abū Yazīd made his fourth attempt to make pilgrimage to Mecca, he was informed by someone that he had left God behind in Bistām (Nūr, p. 128).

went to Mecca for pilgrimage, he did not find the Ka'bah useful except as a means to meet its Owner; for, the Ka'bah is nothing but a created thing. As soon as he achieved his objective, the Ka'bah not only lost all significance for him but the process of circumambulation led to an unusual experience for him. He began by circumambulating the Ka'bah as a Muslim is supposed to do, but he came to experience that the Ka'bah was circumambulating him. As he said, "I was circumambulating the House in search of Him. But when I reached Him, I found the House circumambulating me."¹ Al-Hujwiri comments on this experience with, "The darkest thing (in the world) is the Beloved's house without the Beloved."²

Abū Yazīd was not the first person to have interiorized the rite of pilgrimage. Rābi'ah al-'Adawīyyah

¹Nūr, p. 77. Var. ibid., p. 108; Tadhkirat, I, 161.

According to another tradition, when Abū Yazīd went to Madīnah, Mecca came there and circumambulated him (Nūr, p. 146).

²Kashf, p. 424.

We have another saying of Abū Yazīd which shows the progress of his journey to God stage by stage. He said, "On my first pilgrimage, I saw the House; the second time I saw the Owner of the House and not the House (itself); the third time I saw neither the House nor its Owner" (Nūr, p. 79. Var. Mir'āt, p. 170; Kashf, p. 424).

(d. 185/801), for example, said,

I want the Lord of the House. What shall I do with the House? I want to approach the One who said, "Whosoever approaches Me by a span's length, I shall approach him by the length of cubit." The Ka'bah that I see has no power over me. What happiness does the Ka'bah bring to me?¹

Not too long after the time of Abū Yazīd we find al-Junayd interiorizing not only the pilgrimage as such but also the physical journey to Mecca, the halting of the pilgrim at different stages of the journey, and the rituals and ceremonies connected with the pilgrimage. On being told by a man that he had just returned from pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, al-Junayd said,

"From the time when you first journeyed from your home have you also journeyed away from all sins?" He said: "No." "Then," said Junayd, "you have made no journey. At every stage where you halted for the night did you traverse a station on the way to God?" He said: "No." "Then," said Junayd, "you have not trodden the road stage by stage. When you put on the pilgrim's garb at the proper place did you discard the attributes of humanity as you cast off your ordinary clothes?" "No." "Then you have not put on the pilgrim's garb. When you stood on 'Arafāt did you stand one instant in contemplation of God?" "No." "Then you have not stood on 'Arafāt."

¹Tadhkirat, I, 62.

When you went to Muzdalifa and achieved your desire did you renounce all sensual desires?"

"No." "Then you have not gone to Muzdalifa. When you circumambulated the Temple did you behold the immaterial beauty of God in the abode of purification?" "No." "Then you have not circumambulated the Temple. When you ran between Ṣafā and Marwa did you attain to the rank of purity (ṣafā) and virtue (muruwwat)?" "No." "Then you have not run. When you came to Minā did all your wishes (munyathā) cease?" "No." "Then you have not yet visited Minā. When you reached the slaughter-place and offered sacrifice did you sacrifice the objects of sensual desire?" "No." "Then you have not sacrificed. When you threw the stones did you throw away whatever sensual thoughts were accompanying you?" "No." "Then you have not yet thrown the stones, and you have not yet performed the pilgrimage. Return and perform the pilgrimage in the manner which I have described in order that you may arrive at the station of Abraham."¹

The interiorization of the pilgrimage is an example of the Ṣūfīs' attempt to taste the reality (ḥaqīqah) which lies behind Sharī'ah. To them, Sharī'ah is the body, while the reality is the spirit of Sharī'ah. Hence they insist on passing beyond the husk of Sharī'ah and tasting the kernel of the

¹Kashf, pp. 425-426; trans. Nicholson, p. 328.

reality (ḥaqīqah).¹ Dermenghem has put the idea beautifully: "Music without soul is only an empty noise, but music cannot be reduced to pure silence. Merely formal religion is for whited tombs, but religion without rites is impossible for incarnate spirits."²

ii) The Second Level: Paradoxes Regarding the Hereafter

To the next higher level of Abū Yazīd's paradoxes belong his utterances concerning the hereafter (ākhirah). We can divide this level into two sub-levels. In the first of these sub-levels are the paradoxes concerning the punishment of sinners. We find Abū Yazīd challenging God for having created Hell-fire; for, according to him, God does not have the right to punish mankind because He created them without their knowledge and put on their shoulders the burden of trust (amānah) without their consent.³ Probably Abū Yazīd was referring to the Qur'ānic verses according to which the earth and the mountains refused to bear God's trust, but man foolishly assumed it with the

¹For a discussion of this, see Kashf, pp. 498-499.

²Dermenghem, Saints, p. 209.

³Nūr, p. 132; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 65; Hilyah, X, 34; Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61.

result that hypocrites and unbelievers will be punished.¹ Moreover, God is described as compassionate (ra'ūf) and merciful (rahīm).² So, if God's creatures commit sin, He should forgive them all; for, if He does not, who will?³ Furthermore, it is very easy for God to forgive all creatures. Addressing God, Abū Yazīd said, "If you forgive (mankind) beginning with Adam and continuing until the Day of Resurrection, You will forgive only a handful of clay...."⁴

Abū Yazīd, nevertheless, was conscious of the fact that God will not forgive all mankind on His own; for, otherwise, there would be no necessity for Muḥammad's intercession on the Day of Judgment. But Muḥammad's intercession will be confined to the members of his own community, the Muslims. This was very disappointing to Abū Yazīd. Hence he took upon himself the burden of interceding for the whole of mankind.

¹Qur'ān, 33:72-73.

²Nūr, p. 79; Tadhkirat, I, 161.

³Nūr, p. 132; Tabaqāt (Sulamī), p. 65; Hilyah, X, 34; Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61.

Cf. also Tadhkirat, I, 161.

⁴Nūr, p. 80. Var. ibid., p. 79.

When someone said that all the people¹ are under the banner of Muḥammad, Abū Yazīd remarked, "By God! My banner is greater than Muḥammad's. My banner is one of light under which are jinii and men of all the prophets."² Accordingly, while passing by a Jewish cemetery one day, he cried out, "Excused!"³ He also offered himself to God as a ransom for sinners.⁴ He asked God to expand his body to fill Hell so that there would be no space left for anyone else to be with him.⁵

Abū Yazīd's attitude to intercession which we have been considering raises an interesting problem regarding the relationship of the Prophet to the saint (walī). From Abū Yazīd's paradoxes concerning Hell-fire, the Prophet appears to be a mere dwarf in comparison with the gigantic figure of the saint. There are many other paradoxes which point in the same direction. For example, after the death of a tailor,

¹That is, the community of Muḥammad.

²Nūr, p. 111. Var. Shaṭḥīyāt, p. 132; Tadhkirat, II, 186.

³Luma', p. 391; Shaṭḥīyāt, p. 88. Var. Kawākib, p. 245.

⁴Nūr, p. 68; Kawākib, p. 245.

⁵Nūr, pp. 114-115.

angels found it impossible to get any answer to their questions from him because during his life-time he once repaired Abū Yazīd's pelt and carried it on his shoulder to his house.¹ The mere sight of Abū Yazīd in this world will save one from Hell-fire.² If anyone has even heard of Abū Yazīd, he will be saved.³ There will be no difficulty for Abū Yazīd to intercede even for the whole of mankind. When Ibrāhīm al-Harawī came to visit Abū Yazīd, he made the following remark to Abū Yazīd, "If He (God) had made you intercede for the entire creation, it would not be too much for you; it would be an intercession (only) for a handful of clay."⁴ But Abū Yazīd did not want to approach God for the forgiveness of His creatures; he was too ashamed to ask God for such a little thing.⁵ Moreover, he did not want to perform a function which belongs to the men of

¹Ibid., p. 142.

²Tabaqāt (Anṣārī), p. 345.

³Nūr, p. 52.

⁴Ibid., p. 78; Mir'āt, p. 163. Var. Risālah, p. 189; Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, p. 61; Tadhkirat, I, 150; Kawākib, p. 250.

⁵Tadhkirat, I, 156.

Shari'ah.¹ It is the disciples of Abū Yazīd who will stand at the gate of Hell, take by the hand everyone being carried to the Fire and guide him into Paradise.² According to Abū Yazīd, it is the love of saints which will bring God's forgiveness to men. Once he said to someone, "Love the saints of God and be friendly with them so that they may love you, because God looks at the hearts of saints seventy times a day. So, perhaps He will see your name in the heart of one of His saints and thus love you and forgive you."³ Abū Yazīd was looking forward to the Day of Judgment because he would camp at the gate of the Hell-fire so that, on seeing Abū Yazīd, its fire would be extinguished.⁴

What is a prophet in comparision with Abū Yazīd? Almost nothing. Once someone narrated to Abū Yazīd the story that Abraham, Moses and Jesus prayed that God make them members of the community (ummah) of Muḥammad; but in every case God refused to grant the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 154; Nūr, p. 76.

³Nūr, p. 89. Var. ibid., 76; Kawākib, p. 248.

⁴Tadhkirat, I, 153.

prayer, saying, "I shall not do it. They¹ are a community of Aḥmad [Muḥammad]." On hearing this, Abū Yazīd remarked to the narrator of the story, "Do you think that they (the prophets) had in mind your scandalous acts? Instead, they viewed men whose heads surpassed the high (heaven) and whose legs were below the lowest (earth), and they (the men) were lost in between."² Probably, Abū Yazīd was here referring to the awliyā' of God. If so, then the awliyā' would be so great that even prophets like Abraham, Moses and Jesus aspired to be in companionship with them. Moreover, according to Abū Yazīd, a prophet wishes to see God, while God Himself wishes to see a saint. Abū Yazīd said, "Moses, on whom be peace, wished to see God. But I do not wish to see Him; it is God who wants to see me."³

¹The followers of Muḥammad.

²Nūr, p. 72.

³Ibid., p. 146.

Abū Yazīd said once,

My soul (ruh) was raised and it penetrated into the malakut (angelic world). I saluted the souls of the prophets whom I passed by, with the exception of the soul of Muḥammad, may God bless him and give him peace, because around it were one thousand veils of light which were about to be pierced at the first glance (ibid., p. 86).

It seems that this saying of Abū Yazīd has reference to the famous Tradition of the Prophet which reads as

To the second sub-level of paradoxes concerning the hereafter belong Abū Yazīd's paradoxes relating to Paradise. At the previous stage, Abū Yazīd was conscious of the intense torture of Hell-fire and was concerned with the salvation of all mankind from it. But one should not get the impression that by detesting Hell-fire, he desired the pleasures of Paradise coveted by orthodox Muslims. According to Abū Yazīd, the servants with whom God is really pleased can never be interested in the Palaces of Paradise.¹ He considered Paradise as a toy in the hands of children.² It

follows : "God has seventy veils of light and darkness. If He had removed these veils, surely the splendours of His Face would burn everyone who would apprehend Him with his sight" (Al-Ghazzālī, Mishkāt, p. 39). We should notice, however, that the veils referred to in the Prophetic Tradition are those around God, while the veils in Abū Yazīd's saying refer to those around Muḥammad.

We can see here, as elsewhere, that to Abū Yazīd Muḥammad comes out superior to other prophets. Abū Yazīd saluted the souls of all other prophets without requiring his glance to go through any veil, but his glance needed to pierce one thousand veils before it could reach the soul of Muḥammad. But Abū Yazīd was so great that all the veils around Muḥammad were about to be pierced at the very first glance. Yet, Abū Yazīd did not want to tear these veils. This may have been because, out of honour and respect for Muḥammad, he did not want Muḥammad to be shorn of all veils.

¹Supra, p. 204.

²Kawākib, p. 245.

had no significance for him except as a means to the vision of God. If Paradise is taken as an end in itself, it constitutes a veil between man and God; for, Paradise is certainly other than God, and anything other than God is a veil. But being veiled from God even for the twinkling of an eye is unbearable to the lover of God. Hence he said, "There are servants of God who, if they were veiled from seeing God, would cry for a way out of Paradise as the people of Hell cry for a way out of Hell."¹

iii) The Third Level: Paradoxes Regarding the Identification with Beings near God

At the third level of paradoxes, Abū Yazīd passed beyond the stage of Hell and Heaven, and identified himself with beings near God. On being told that the Protected Tablet (al-lawḥ al-mahfūz) contains everything, he said, "I am the whole of the Protected Tablet."² According to one tradition,

he was asked, "What is the Throne ('arsh)?" He said, "It is I." "What is the Chair (kursī)?" "I." "What are the Tablet and the Pen?" "I." "God has

¹Supra, pp. 157-158.

²Nūr, p. 113. Var. ibid., p. 80.

servants the like of Abraham, Moses and Jesus, may God bless them all." "All of them are I." "God has servants like Gabriel, Michael and Seraphiel." "All of them are I."¹

Abū Yazīd also said that he was "all seven pillars (awtād)."²

Although Abū Yazīd identified himself with the Throne, the Chair, the Tablet, the Pen and those among mankind whom God has chosen as His dear friends, he was still far from God Himself because, however near God they may be, they are only created beings and therefore other than God. He still retained his creaturely attributes, for identification with creatures cannot free one from his creaturely attributes.

iv) The Fourth Level: Paradoxes Regarding the Experience of Nothingness

Up to this level, Abū Yazīd was conscious of things other than God. But we have seen³ that the

¹Tadhkirat, I, 171.

²Nūr, p. 111; Hilyah, X, 37.

For some other sayings on this, see Nūr, p. 99.

On awtād, see Shorter E.I., p. 49 and E. Sell, Essays on Islam (Madras: S.P.C.K. Depot, 1901), p. 109.

³Supra, pp. 185-186.

experience of real tawhīd necessitates a complete loss of consciousness of the Self. This is the level represented by Abū Yazīd's utterances concerning his experiences of nothingness, of a void. God made him forget his Self completely,¹ and he came out of it (the Self) as a snake out of its skin.² He said,

I ascended to the field (maydān) of nothingness (laysiyyah). Then I continued to fly in it for ten years until I passed from nothing in nothing through nothing. Then I ascended to loss (taḍyī') which is the field of tawhīd. I continued to fly through nothing in loss until I was completely lost in loss, and I was lost, and was indeed lost even to loss through nothing in nothing in the loss of loss. Then I ascended to tawhīd in the absence of creatures from the 'ārif and in the absence of the 'ārif from creatures.³

Abū Yazīd's experience of nothingness, of a void, was only one aspect of his experience of tawhīd. There was also a positive aspect of his experience. He requested God saying, "Adorn me with Your oneness (wahdāniyyah) and clothe me with Your I-ness and raise

¹Supra, pp. 168-169 .

²Supra, p. 176.

³Supra, p. 178.

me up to Your unity (ahadiyyah) so that when Your creatures see me, they may say, 'We have seen You' and You will be that, and I shall not be there."¹ We are told that God listened to his request and adorned him with His oneness.² The next level of Abū Yazīd's paradoxes, therefore, will represent his experience of identification with God.

v) The Fifth Level: Paradoxes Regarding Identification with God

In the positive aspect of his experience of tawhīd, Abū Yazīd experienced identification with God. But this level, we think, can again be divided into four sub-levels. At the lowest of these are the paradoxes in which Abū Yazīd still addressed God in the third person. Asked about the meaning of the ma'rifah of God, he said, "There is no Truth (haqq) except that I am He."³ He said, "I am my Lord, Most High."⁴

¹Supra, pp. 192-193.

²Supra, p. 193.

³Nūr, p. 108.

⁴Luma', p. 390; Nūr, p. 68.

"Indeed, there is no God but I. So worship me."¹ "His friendship (wudd) is my friendship and my friendship is His friendship; His yearning ('ishq) is my yearning and my yearning is His yearning; His love is my love and my love is His love..."²

Obviously these paradoxes express Abū Yazīd's experience of identification with God; but still they do not represent the experience of "complete" identification with Him. Duality between him and God still remained; for, he talked in terms of I and He. We may interpret this level of Abū Yazīd's experience as being represented by the famous statement, "I am the Truth (anā al-ḥaqq)", which is attributed to al-Ḥallāj. In fact, we find a close similarity between the expression "I am the Truth (ḥaqq)" and Abū Yazīd's saying "There is no Truth (ḥaqq) except that I am He".³

The sense of duality lessens in the paradoxes which belong to the second sub-level. For, the address changes from the third person to the second person. God said to Abū Yazīd, "They are all my creatures except

¹Luma', p. 391; Nūr, p. 122; Tadhkirat, I, 137; Kawākib, p. 251.

²Nūr, p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 108.

you." Abū Yazīd replied, "I am You; You are I, and I am You."¹ He addressed God, saying,

My heart has indicated to You until
I have been annihilated from myself and you remained.
You have obliterated my name and the trace of my body,
You have asked about me, and I said, "You."
You have made me forget my imagination;
So, wherever I turn, You are there.²

According to another tradition, Abū Yazīd passed "from God to God. Then a voice said, 'The one (who has come) from Me in Me! Oh you I!'"³

"I and "You" are still not the expression of a perfect unity; some amount of duality between Abū Yazīd and God persisted in his consciousness. But at the third sub-level, this consciousness of duality disappeared so that he expressed his experience in the first person.⁴ He said, "Glory be to me! How great is

¹Nūr, p. 119.

Cf. ibid., pp. 102-103.

²Supra, p. 182.

³Supra, p. 193, n. 1.

⁴The following extremely ecstatic utterance of Abū Yazīd shows his passage from the level of addressing God in the third person to that of addressing Him in the first person: "I am not I; I am I, because I am He, I am He, I am He" (Nūr, p. 111).

my majesty."¹ This expression is applicable to God and to no one else; for, God alone can praise Himself as He should be praised. But Abū Yazīd could say this because he and God became one; he had reached the stage of the supreme 'I' of the Divine. Hence all that was applicable to God was now equally applicable to Abū Yazīd. We can take the following traditions of Abū Yazīd as an interpretation of subhānī. He said, "The whole matter ends with the knowledge (ma'rifah) of Lā ilāha illā Allāh.... It ends with the knowledge of my praise and with the extremity of my perfection."² This saying contains the very essence not only of Abū Yazīd's teachings but also of Ṣūfīsm as such. The ultimate aim of the Ṣūfī is to realize the meaning of the very first principle of Islām: "There is no god but God." But this realization is possible only when the Ṣūfī becomes one with God. God alone can realize His oneness in perfect fullness. Hence, in order to praise God as He deserves, the Ṣūfī needs to be one with Him.

¹
Supra, p. 226.

Sometimes we shall use subhānī to refer to this whole paradoxical statement.

Abū Yazīd's saying "I saw that I was I; I was I" (Nūr, p. 128) may also belong to this category of paradoxes.

²Nūr, p. 78.

It seems that Abū Yazīd was not satisfied with an experience of identification with God as expressed in his famous statement subhānī; a number of his paradoxical utterances indicate his passage to a higher level of experience. When a mu'adhdhin recited, "God is the greatest", Abū Yazīd cried out, "I am greater (still)."¹ A man came to him and recited the Qur'ānic verse, "Indeed, God's grip (baṭsh) is very strong."² On hearing this, Abū Yazīd said, "By my life! my grip is stronger than His."³ Addressing God, he said, "Oh Lord! Your obedience to me is greater than my obedience to You!"⁴ and addressing a man, he said, "To see me once is better for you than to see God a thousand times."⁵ We consider these paradoxes as belonging to a level of experience which is higher than that represented by subhānī. To make the distinction between the two levels clear, we shall briefly describe the ideas of

¹ Shaṭḥīyāt, p. 101.

² Qur'ān, 85:12.

³ Nūr, p. 111.

⁴ Quoted by Badawī (Shaṭḥāt, p. 21) and by Massignon (Recueil de textes inédits concernant l'histoire de la mystique en pays d'Islam [Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1929], p. 29) from Lata'if al-Minan wa al-Akhlāq

⁵ Ibid.

God's oneness (wāḥidiyyah) and of His unity (aḥadiyyah) which were introduced into Ṣūfīsm at a later period.

God's oneness (wāḥidiyyah) is expressed by the term 'Allāh'. At this stage, God is a unity in multiplicity; for, He comprises and unifies "names" (asmā') and "attributes" (ṣifāt). God's unity (aḥadiyyah), on the other hand, is His Absolute Essence (al-dhāt al-muṭlaq); it is shorn of all "names" and "attributes" so that it defies all description and thinking; it is the unseen of the unseen (ghayb al-ghayb).¹

Let us now apply the distinction of God's oneness and of His unity to Abū Yazīd's paradoxes. We presume that subḥānī represents his experience of identification with Allāh together with His "names" and "attributes", while the paradoxes such as "I am greater (than God)" represent his identification with God's Absolute Essence. If this presumption is correct, the paradoxes of the latter kind belong to the highest level of Abū Yazīd's experience of tawḥīd

¹On Ibn al-Arabī's (d. 638/1240) ideas of God's wāḥidiyyah and aḥadiyyah, see T. Izutsu, The Key Philosophical Concepts in Ṣūfīsm and Taoism - Ibn al-Arabī and Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1966), I, 17-32, 41-60, 91 ff. etc.

Following Prof. Izutsu, we are translating wāḥidiyyah as oneness and aḥadiyyah as unity.

6. Reactions to his Paradoxes

Abū Yazīd's shatahāt, especially his famous subhānī, has been discussed by Muslims, including both Ṣūfīs and non-Ṣūfīs, from the days of Abū Yazīd until the present. Reactions to his shatahāt have ranged from an outright condemnation of Abū Yazīd as an infidel to an exaltation of him to the status of a great saint. The following are a few examples of such reactions.

i) Orthodox Muslims of Abū Yazīd's Time

We have hinted previously that the 'ulamā' of Bistām at Abū Yazīd's time reacted to his shatahāt unfavourably.¹ The immediate consequence of this reaction was his banishment from Bistām seven times. He did not, however, have to remain away for long periods of time; for, we are told that every time the Bistāmīs exiled him, they were afflicted with some type of epidemic disease so that, to get rid of the scourge, they were compelled to call him back.²

¹Supra, pp. 97-98.

²Kawākib, p. 245.

Now, the question is: How is it that al-Ḥallāj, whose shatahāt were less radical than those of Abū Yazīd, lost his life while the latter suffered very little? In answer to this, we can suggest several factors. Al-Ḥallāj, although of Persian origin, lived and taught in the city of Baghdād, the centre of the 'Abbaside caliphate and the stronghold of the 'ulamā'. His shatahāt, therefore, would attract the attention of and disturb the religious and political authorities more readily than the shatahāt of Abū Yazīd; for, the latter lived in the ~~out-of-the-way~~ township of Bistām in Khurāsān which was very far from the capital. Even if, let us say, the central authorities were disturbed by Abū Yazīd's strange utterances and deeds, they could do little to punish him. Because of its distance from the capital and perhaps also because of the temperament of its people, Khurāsān was always a land of rebels. From its first conquest under the caliph 'Umar (reign 13/634--23/644), it was hardly ever under the complete control of the central caliphal authorities for a long period of time.¹ This is especially true of

¹ Although conquered in 22/642 during the caliphate of 'Umar, it needed to be reconquered during 'Uthmān's reign (23/644--35/656). Khurāsān's rebelled again when 'Alī (reign 35/656--40/661) and Mu'āwiyah (reign 40/661-- /680) were engaged in quarrels. Although 'Alī succeeded in suppressing the uprising, after his death Khurāsān fell in disorder. Later, Mu'āwiyah had to send

the period in which Abū Yazīd lived the most fruitful years of his mystical life.¹ In the year 205/820, the

Ibn 'Āmir, who conquered Khurāsān during 'Uthmān's time, to reconquer it. During the whole Umayyad regime, with the exception of the reign of 'Umar II (99/717--102/720), Khurāsān remained a constant source of trouble to the caliphs. It was with the Khurāsānī recruits that Abū Muslim (d. 137/755) helped the 'Abbasides to overthrow the Umayyads. After Abū Muslim was murdered by the caliph al-Manṣūr, the Khurāsānī Sindbad, the Magian (d. 139/756), in order to avenge the murder of Abū Muslim, occupied Qūmis and Ray, and intended to proceed to the Ḥijāz and to destroy the Ka'bah (E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia* [Cambridge: the University Press, 1956], I, 313-314). During the reign of Mahdī (159/775--169/785) arose Ḥāshim b. Ḥākīm as al-Muqanna' (d. 169/785), the "veiled prophet" of Khurāsān. Al-Ma'mūn (reign 198/813--218/833) had his brother al-Amin (reign 194/809--198/813) killed by Ṭāhir b. al-Ḥusayn who was sent from Khurāsān (*Wafayat*, trans. Slane, *Biographical Dictionary*, I, 649-650). In fact, until the rise of the Ṭāhirids, the Abbasides were plagued with various disturbances in Khurāsān. Then the Ṭāhirid governors ruled Khurāsān as semi-independent rulers from 205/820 to 259/872. Ṭāhirid power was superseded by the Ṣaffārids (reign 253/867--287/900) who controlled not only Khurāsān but also the most of Persia, even threatening Baghdād during the caliph Mu'tamid (reign 256/869--279/892). From the Ṣaffārids, Khurāsān passed to the hands of the Sāmānids in 287/900. The Sāmānids ruled Khurāsān under the nominal authority of the 'Abbāside caliphs until Subuktigīn, the Ghaznawīd ruler (reign 366/976--387/997) annexed it to his territory.

¹Some thirty years of his latter life (*supra*, p. 95 (and p. 96) , n. 1.

Ṭāhirids¹ established a semi-independent state in Khurāsān. Although nominally under the 'Abbaside caliphate, the Ṭāhirids were virtually independent rulers of the province.² Hence, the Baghdād authorities would have had little power to punish Abū Yazīd even if they had wanted.

Once can further ask: Why did the Ṭāhirid rulers and the 'ulamā' in their regime spare Abū Yazīd? Most of the Ṭāhirid rulers seem to have been men of high education and culture.³ Especially enlightened was 'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir who ruled from 213/828 to 230/844. Very much concerned about the uplift of the poor peasants of the province, he rightly realized that the remedy lay not only in the improvement of agriculture by means of the construction of canals for irrigation purposes, which he did, but also in the

¹On the Ṭāhirids, see: E.I. articles "Ṭāhirids" (IV:I, 614-615) and "'Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir" (new ed., I, 52-53); Wafayāt; trans. Slane, Biographical Dictionary, I, 649-655 and II, 49-55; W. Barthold, Turkestan down to the Mongol Invasion, trans. Gibb Memorial series (London: Luzac & Co., 1928), pp. 207-222.

²E.I., IV:I, 614.

³Ibid.

Significantly, some thirteen years of Ṭāhirid rule falls in the reign of the caliph al-Ma'mūn who is so well known for this patronage of learning and culture.

spread of education among the masses.¹ Hence he adopted means to make education available even to the children of the poorest peasants.² 'Abd Allāh was himself a musician and a poet.³ His nephew Maṣṣūr b. Ṭalḥah "wrote philosophical treatises; 'Abd Allāh called him the 'Wisdom of the Ṭāhirids' and was extremely proud of him."⁴ We presume that it was natural for this enlightened man to allow freedom of expression to his people in religious matters and thus to overlook what Abū Yazīd said or did. 'Abd Allāh's successor, Ṭāhir b. 'Abd Allāh, under whose regime Abū Yazīd lived the

¹Barthold, Turkestan, p. 213.

'Abd Allāh wanted to raise the position of the peasants in the estimation of the Government officials. Hence, while instructing the officials to protect the rights of the peasants, he declared, "God feeds us by their hands, welcomes us by their mouths and forbids their ill-treatment" (ibid.).

²Ibid.

"Knowledge", declared 'Abd Allāh, "must be accessible to the worthy and unworthy; knowledge will look after itself and not remain with the unworthy." We do not know what exactly he meant by knowledge. Barthold doubts if 'Abd Allāh, living in an age of rationalist supremacy, meant by it only Islāmic theology (ibid.).

³E.I., new ed., p. 53; Barthold, Turkestan, p. 213.

⁴Barthold, Turkestan, p. 213.

last four years of his life,¹ was also an enlightened person like his father.²

As to the question why the 'ulamā' under the Ṭāhirids did not react in the manner of their counterparts at Baghdād, it is important to remember that there was a time-gap of some seventy five years between Abū Yazīd and al-Ḥallāj. Since, Abū Yazīd, as far as we know, was the first Ṣūfī to have made very shocking statements such as subḥānī, perhaps the 'ulamā' did not take him very seriously; it is likely that he was considered a mad man. But after Abū Yazīd's time, as more and more Ṣūfīs began to make extravagant claims, the 'ulamā' gradually realized the gravity of the situation and developed an attitude of hostility to them (Ṣūfīs). The situation reached a state of crisis only in the last quarter of the third/ninth century, and the Baghdād school of Ṣūfism had to bear the brunt of the orthodox attack. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nūrī (d. 295/907-908), for example, was prosecuted by the authorities, although ultimately he escaped punishment.³ He said

¹If Abū Yazīd died in 234/848 (supra, pp. 47-49).

²Barthold, Turkestan, p. 214.

³Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, p. 41.

to his friend al-Junayd, "O Abū 'l-Qāsim, thou hast concealed the truth from them and they have put thee in the place of honour; but I have told them the truth and they have pelted me with stones."¹ Even al-Junayd, in spite of his reputation as a devoutly religious person and a great intellectual, was later accused of infidelity² and brought before al-Muwaffaq, the brother of the caliph Mu'tamid (reign 256/870--279/892). Al-Junayd described himself as a jurist and thus escaped.³ If the orthodox failed to punish al-Nūn, al-Junayd and others,⁴ they ultimately succeeded in sending al-Ḥallāj to the gibbet.

We have mentioned previously that everytime Abū Yazīd was banished from his native place, its population were believed to have been afflicted with some type of epidemic disease.⁵ Whether or not there would th any connection between Abū Yazīd's banishment

¹Kashf, p. 164; trans. Nicholson, 131.

²Pages, p. 9.

³Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, p. 38.

⁴See Pages, pp. 7-9.

⁵Supra, p. 275.

and the occurrence of an epidemic disease is a question we cannot answer, but if the people were really afflicted with the disease when Abū Yazīd was banished, this would also explain why the Bisṭāmīs, including the 'ulamā', would not be very hard with him.

Finally, aside from the religious factor, al-Ḥallāj seems to have been a victim of political intrigues.¹ But we do not know of any such complication in the case of Abū Yazīd.

ii) The Baghdād School of Ṣūfīsm

Al-Junayd, the most prominent representative of the Baghdād school both praised and criticized Abū Yazīd for his shataḥāt, but al-Shiblī and al-Ḥallāj only criticized Abū Yazīd.

a) Al-Junayd: Al-Junayd had high respect for Abū Yazīd. Statements such as "Abū Yazīd among us is like Gabriel among the angels"² and Abū Yazīd "reached 'ayn al-jam'"³ which, according to al-Sarrāj, is

¹L. Massignon, "Al-Ḥallāj", E.I. new ed., III, 100-102.

²Tadhkirat, I, 135.

³Luma', p. 372.

another name for tawhīd,¹ show his appreciation of Abū Yazīd's mystical achievement. In justification of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt such as subhānī, he said, "The one who is annihilated in the vision of (God's) Glory expresses himself according to what annihilates him. When he is withdrawn from the perception of himself so that he sees nothing other than God, he describes Him."² He said again, "I saw that the utmost limit of his state (ḥāl) ... was that which few could understand from what they had heard or which few could interpret because only those who knew its meaning (i.e., the meaning of the state) and were aware of its source could bear with it."³

It is the same al-Junayd who said: "In spite of his exalted state and lofty symbolic expression (ishārah), Abū Yazīd did not come out of beginning stage; I did not hear any of his words which would be indicative of his perfection (kamāl) and completion

¹Ibid.

²Nūr, p. 68.

Massignon seems to be prejudiced against Abū Yazīd when he says that this comment of al-Junayd applies more properly to al-Ḥallāj's utterances (Essai, p. 280).

³Luma', p. 381.

(nihāyah)."¹ Abū Yazīd, said al-Junayd, "was drowned in what he experienced and missed the true reality (ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqq) because he did not enter it...."² He correctly described things concerning the science of unification ('ilm al-tawḥīd) except that his words were only the beginnings of what would be worthy of an adept in this science."³

Now, how can we explain the inconsistency in al-Junayd's attitude to Abū Yazīd? We do not know at what period of his life al-Junayd made which statement. It is, however, possible for us to presume that he made the appreciative statements about Abū Yazīd in a period when the hostility of orthodox Muslims to Ṣūfīsm had not yet grown very strong and when al-Ḥallāj had not yet gotten into serious troubles. But later,

¹Ibid., p. 397.

²Ibid., p. 381.

³Ibid.

There are other comments of this nature by al-Junayd. For example, Abū Yazīd requested God to clothe him with God's I-ness and raise him to His oneness so that when the creatures would see him, they would say, "We have seen You". Commenting on this, al-Junayd remarked that the very fact of Abū Yazīd's asking God to clothe him with His I-ness, etc. shows that Abū Yazīd was only near to achieving the goal (ibid., p. 382). For another remark of this kind, see ibid., pp. 388-389.

when the situation changed, al-Junayd perhaps changed his views about Abū Yazīd. If it is true that he was forced to disavow al-Ḥallāj as his disciple¹ to save his own skin, it may also be true that he changed his views about Abū Yazīd for the same reason.²

We can suggest yet another explanation for al-Junayd's inappreciative remarks about Abū Yazīd. As we said in the discussion of the states of drunkenness and of sobriety, al-Junayd was more sober than Abū Yazīd.³ In fact, the final goal of a Ṣūfī, according to al-Junayd, is the state of sobriety. Abū Yazīd said the same; but al-Junayd put it more emphatically than did Abū Yazīd. Perhaps with this controversy in mind, al-Junayd remarked that Abū Yazīd had not yet achieved the highest goal.⁴

¹Kashf, p. 235.

²Badawī presumes that al-Junayd criticised the shataḥāt of al-Ḥallāj when the latter drew the attention of the former to Abū Yazīd's shataḥāt. This, according to Badawī, embarrassed al-Junayd and thus obliged him to lower the position of Abū Yazīd (Shataḥāt, pp. 29-30).

For al-Sarraj's explanation of the unappreciative remarks of al-Junayd on Abū Yazīd's shataḥāt, infra, pp. 287-288.

³Supra, p. 248.

⁴This might also be taken as an explanation of al-Junayd's denial of al-Ḥallāj's discipleship.

b) Al-Shiblī and al-Ḥallāj: Al-Shiblī and al-Ḥallāj also criticized Abū Yazīd. Al-Shiblī said, "If Abū Yazīd were here, indeed he would have accepted Islām at the hands of our children."¹ Al-Ḥallāj's remark seems to be less critical. He said, "Poor Abū Yazīd! He reached the threshold of divine speech. These words which came to his lips were really coming from God. But he was unaware of it, because he was blinded by his pre-occupation with the so-called Abū Yazīd."²

Badawī tries to explain al-Shiblī's unfavourable remark on Abū Yazīd's shatahāt in terms of an attitude of prudence (taqiyyah). According to Badawī, the case of Abū Yazīd must have been raised along with that of al-Ḥallāj because of the similarity of their teachings. Al-Shiblī, who was asked on the day of the punishment of al-Ḥallāj, to come and to declare a curse on al-Ḥallāj in the presence of witnesses, would naturally have been asked his opinion about Abū Yazīd's

¹Luma', p. 397.

Al-Sarrāj's explanation of al-Shiblī's comment is interesting. According to al-Sarrāj, al-Shiblī meant to say that Abū Yazīd would have benefitted from the disciples of al-Shiblī's time (ibid.).

²Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, Kitāb al-Tawāsin, ed. L. Massignon (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1913), p. 177.

shatahāt. It is in this situation that al-Shiblī criticized Abū Yazīd. This, says Badawī, is clear from al-Shiblī's expression, la-aslama (indeed, he would accept Islām); for, this usage made Abū Yazīd an infidel in the same way al-Ḥallāj was made an infidel.¹

Badawī's argument is based on his distinction of two stages in al-Shiblī's Ṣūfī life. To the first stage, which according to Badawī, fell before al-Ḥallāj's death, belonged al-Shiblī's own shatahāt. In the second stage, that is, after the fate of al-Ḥallāj was decided, he uttered things which sounded like words of repentance.² If Badawī could prove that all of al-Shiblī's shatahāt belonged to what Badawī calls the first stage of al-Shiblī's life, Badawī's explanation of al-Shiblī's comments would be convincing. But since it is not possible to prove this, we are not sure how valid Badawī's argument may be. Moreover, we have to explain al-Ḥallāj's attitude to Abū Yazīd's shatahāt. Badawī does not at all attempt to explain al-Ḥallāj's criticism.

Al-Sarrāj explains al-Junayd's criticism of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt with reference to a kind of

¹Badawī, Shatahāt, p. 30.

²Ibid., pp. 30-31.

jealousy (ghayrah) which God induces in the Ṣūfī. Due to this sense of jealousy, says al-Sarrāj, the Ṣūfī thinks that his mystical state is the highest of all¹ and thus, criticizes the states of other Ṣūfīs. In our view, al-Sarrāj's explanation is better applicable to the criticisms of al-Shiblī and of al-Ḥallāj than to those of al-Junayd. The sense of jealousy is believed to exist among equals, and al-Shiblī and al-Ḥallāj were more nearly equal to Abū Yazīd than al-Junayd. We would place Abū Yazīd, al-Shiblī and al-Ḥallāj in one category in the sense that they, in contrast to al-Junayd, were all dominated by the state of drunkenness and showed relative unconcern for the consequences of the strange utterances.²

iii) Ibn Sālim and al-Sarrāj

Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad Ibn Sālim (d. 350/960), who succeeded his father Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn Sālim (d. 297/909) as the head of the Sālīmiyyah school of Ṣūfīsm founded by Abū Muḥammad Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), vehemently attacked Abū Yazīd for his shataḥāt.

¹Luma', p. 397.

²Al-Shiblī, however, was more concerned about the consequences of the shataḥāt than Abū Yazīd and al-Ḥallāj.

Al-Sarrāj, who came to Abū Yazīd's defence, not only tried to justify Abū Yazīd's shatāḥāt but also attacked the Sālimiyyah¹ on their own grounds.

Once in a gathering with his disciples at Baṣrah, Ibn Sālīm declared that Abū Yazīd had said what the infidel Fir'awn would not say. Fir'awn called himself rabb (lord) when he said, "Ana rabbukum al-a'lā" (I am your Lord, Most High),² and creatures can be called rabb as we say 'rabb dār' (the owner of a house), 'rabb māl' (the owner of a property), etc. But Abū Yazīd called himself subḥān which is the name of God and thus cannot be applied to anyone else.³ Al-Sarrāj, who was present at this gathering, protested and asked Ibn Sālīm if he had known the intention of Abū Yazīd to be the same as that of Fir'awn. Ibn Sālīm replied that what Abū Yazīd said was infidelity (kufr), and that he did not have to look further to see his intentions.⁴

¹On the Sālimiyyah, see E.I. IV:I, 115; Essai, pp. 294-300.

²Qur'ān, 79:24.

³Luma', p. 390.

⁴Ibid.

Not satisfied with this answer, al-Sarrāj remarked that it was not just for Ibn Sālim to condemn Abū Yazīd as an infidel without knowing the intention behind this saying. It is possible, continued al-Sarrāj, that Abū Yazīd was uttering the words of God Himself when he said "subhānī"; when someone says "Lā ilāha illa anā; fa a'budūnī" (there is no God but I; so worship me),¹ everyone knows that the person is reciting the Qur'ān and not speaking of himself.²

Ibn Sālim also condemned Abū Yazīd for his sayings, "Excused!" referring to the Jews buried in the cemetery and "Deceived!" referring to the Muslims buried in the graveyard, and for his saying, "I planted my camp near the Throne ('arsh)".³

As for Abū Yazīd's saying about planting his camp near the Throne, al-Sarrāj said that there is not a piece of earth anywhere which is not close to the Throne of God.⁴ This argument was very strong because,

¹This is a shath of Abū Yazīd (supra, p. 270).

²Luma', pp. 390-391.

³Ibid., p. 391.

⁴Ibid., p. 392.

according to the belief of the Sālimiyyah themselves, God is present at every place so that there is no difference between the Throne and any other place from this point of view.¹ As regards the question of the Jews being excused and Muslims deceived, al-Sarrāj, said, among other things, that the mere fact of one's being a Muslim and one's performance of external rites and rituals alone will not bring salvation. What is needed is God's grace. Hence the Prophet said, "There is not one among us who will be saved by his actions." "Not even yourself?", said his companions. He replied, "Not even myself except if God strengthens me with His mercy."²

Al-Sarrāj further pointed out that Ibn Sālim was unjustly prejudiced against Abū Yazīd; for, Ibn Sālim's own teacher, Sahl, made such strange utterances as "To mention God by the tongue is foolishness (hadhayān) and to mention God by the heart is devilish insinuation (waswasah)", and "My guardian (mawlā) does not sleep and I do not sleep." Since Ibn Sālim did not accuse Sahl of infidelity, he should not accuse Abū

¹Essai, pp. 299-300.

²Luma', p. 393.

Yazīd of the same.¹

As an advice for people like Ibn Sālīm, al-Sarrāj suggested that one should maintain al-Junayd's attitude to the strange utterances of Ṣūfīs. When al-Junayd first associated with Ṣūfīs, he failed to understand many of their utterances. But he refrained from criticising them for these, and this ultimately led him to achieve the mystical goal that he attained.²

iv) Other Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī Authors

Most of the important Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors of later times accepted and interpreted Abū Yazīd's shataḥāt in order to justify them. In doing so, most appear to have followed and sometimes to have elaborated on the ideas contained in al-Junayd's appreciative comments³ on these shataḥāt. To illustrate this stand, we shall take a few examples.

¹Ibid., p. 394.

²Ibid.

³That Abū Yazīd, having been annihilated in the vision of God, was only describing Him, and that it is not possible for anyone to understand the meaning of the shataḥāt unless he has gone through the same experience himself (supra, p. 283).

a) Al-Hujwīrī: To al-Hujwīrī, Abū Yazīd's subḥānī expresses the mystical state of union (jam') in which all human attributes disappear and a Ṣūfī experiences God as the sole performer of his acts.¹ Abū Yazīd's words, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!", according to al-Hujwīrī, occurred on his tongue, but the real speaker of these words was God Himself.² It may so happen that "God's love holds absolute sway over the heart of His servant, and that his reason and natural faculties are too weak to sustain its rapture and intensity, and that he loses all control of his power to act (kasb)."³ When "the Divine omnipotence manifests its domain over humanity, it transports a man out of his own being, so that his speech becomes the speech of God."⁴ As a further proof of this, al-Hujwīrī quotes the following Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic Traditions which, according to him, express the same state of union:

¹Kashf, p. 326.

²Ibid., p. 327.

³Ibid.; trans. Nicholson, p. 254.

⁴Ibid.

Qur'ānic verses:

"You did not throw when you threw"¹ and "David killed Goliath."²

Traditions:

Gabriel told the Apostle that God said: "My servant continually seeks access to Me by means of works of supererogation until I love him; and when I love him, I am his ear and his eye and his hand and his heart and his tongue: through Me he hears and sees and speaks and grasps."³

And the Prophet said, "God speaks with the tongue of 'Umar."⁴

Al-Hujwīrī warns, however, that one should not think that in the state of union, a fusion (ittiḥād) of creatures and God occurs. According to him, it is impossible for God to "be mingled (imtizāj) with created beings or made one (ittiḥād) with His works or become incarnate (ḥālī) in things: God is exalted far above that which the heretics ascribe to Him."⁵

¹Kashf, p. 327 (Qur'ān, 8:17).

²Kashf, p. 327 (Qur'ān, 2:252).

³Kashf, p. 326; trans. Nicholson, p. 254.

⁴Kashf, p. 327.

⁵Ibid.; trans. Nicholson, p. 254.

b) Al-Sahlagī: Al-Sahlagī's interpretation of subhānī is interesting. He argues that subhān (the Glorified One) is a name of God just as khāliq (Creator), rāziq (Provider) etc. are. Hence, when Abū Yazīd said subhānī, he meant "Oh my Glorified One!" just as one says 'khāliqī' to mean "Oh my Creator!" and Rāziqī to mean "Oh my Provider!". As regards mā a'zama shahī, al-Sahlagī thinks that Abū Yazīd meant "How great is my majesty [Oh God], since You are my Glorified One, i.e., since You are mine!"¹

Al-Sahlagī points out, however, that the reality of subhānī cannot be understood

except by the one for whom -- the Self having been annihilated completely -- there remains only God through God with God. So, this [subhānī] is an indication from Him through Him to Him; this refers to the exaltation (tanzīh) of men after the attainment of perfection (kamāl), the end of beauty (jamāl), the utmost degree (ghāyah) of glorification (jalāl) and the permanence in a state beyond which there is no state.²

¹Nūr, p. 147.

²Ibid.

Al-Sahlagī says elsewhere,

The understanding of men came short in understanding his [Abū Yazīd's] speech; the imagination of the élite and of the generality was perplexed about the meaning of his words; his words were narrated, but his

In al-Sahlagī's interpretation, we notice two elements. In the first case, he gives a very orthodox interpretation of the shah of Abū Yazīd from the linguistic point of view, while in the second case he justifies subhānī by saying that its real meaning can be understood only by those who have themselves reached the state of subhānī.

c) 'Aṭṭār: According to 'Aṭṭār, when Abū Yazīd said 'subhānī', it was God who spoke with Abū Yazīd's tongue. But how could a human tongue speak the words of God? 'Aṭṭār answers that it is possible for a small thing to grow much bigger than its size. For example, the baby in the womb of the mother is very small; but it becomes many times bigger when it grows into an adult. The same happened to Abū Yazīd. God's light penetrated the heart of Abū Yazīd so that he was made capable of uttering God's words. God's light is such that when it shines on someone, it transforms him completely. If it shines on an old woman once, it makes

intentions were not perceived; his wonders were described, but his strange (sayings and deeds) were not understood; his subtle (sayings and ideas) (daqā'iq) were collected, but his realities (haqā'iq) did not reach the ears; his expressions were known, but his indications (isharāt) were not understood (ibid., p. 46).

of her a Rābi‘ah, if it shines on Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 160/776), it makes him a king of two worlds. When this light penetrates the heart of the Ṣūfī, he becomes completely oblivious of this world and the next. Being absolutely effaced in this light, he now says, 'subhānī' and 'anā al-ḥaqq'.¹

‘Aṭṭār, like al-Junayd and al-Sahlagī, adds that no explanation will be useful to one who has not experienced the state of subhānī himself.²

d) Rūmī: Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), the great Persian Ṣūfī-poet, interprets subhānī by saying that when Abū Yazīd, in a state of intoxication, lost his Self and the candle of his reason disappeared before the bright sun of God, God spoke on his tongue the words "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!" and "There is no god but I; so worship me!" That God speaks with human tongue is shown by the fact that His words in the Qur’ān were spoken on the lips of Muḥammad.³

Elsewhere, Rūmī regrets that in earlier times Ṣūfīs such as Abū Yazīd and al-Ḥallāj suffered at the hands of their contemporaries for their strange

¹Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, Elāhi Nāmeḥ, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul: Staatsdruckerei, 1949), pp. 361-362.

²Tadhkirat, I, 141.

³Rūmī, Mathnawī, IV, 401-402.

utterances. As lovers of God, they suffered the pain. God said, "They put the Prophets to death unjustly."¹ But it was good that they suffered; for they suffered the pain as aloes wood ('ūd) does when put in the fire.²

Rūmī, nevertheless, expresses his satisfaction over the fact that although each of the verses composed by Ṣūfī masters in his day contains one thousand anā al-ḥaqqs and subḥānīs, no one has the audacity to say a word against them.³

¹Qur'ān, 2:61.

²Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Aflākī, Manāqib al-'Arifīn, ed. Tahsin Yazici (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1959), I, 466-467.

³Ibid., p. 467.

Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 720/1320), the author of the famous Gulshan-i Rāz, does not mention subḥānī. But his interpretation of al-Ḥallāj's anā al-ḥaqq is equally applicable to Abū Yazīd's subḥānī. Shabistarī says that in a state of complete selflessness, al-Ḥallāj realized the absolute oneness of God so that there remained for him no distinction between 'I', 'You' and 'He'. In this state, al-Ḥallāj cried out, saying, "Anā al-ḥaqq". These were but God's words; for, who can say these except He? It was lawful for al-Ḥallāj to utter these words, because, if the burning bush could say, "I am God" (Qur'ān, 20:14; this refers to the Qur'ānic story of the speech of the burning bush that Moses witnessed), why should it be unlawful for a good man to say, "Anā al-ḥaqq"? (Maḥmūd Shabistarī, Gulshan-i Rāz in E.H. Whinfield's Gulshan-i Rāz: The Mystic Rose Garden [London: Trübner & Co., 1880], p. 27).

For Baqlī's interpretation of subḥānī, see Shaḥīyat, pp. 89-93. Baqlī devotes a large section of his work (pp. 78-150) to the interpretations of Abū Yazīd's shataḥāt.

Chapter VI

THE PROBLEM OF POSSIBLE INDIAN INFLUENCE ON ABŪ YAZĪD

We turn now to a discussion of a controversial subject -- Indian influence on Abū Yazīd's thought. Scholars started debating this question more than a century ago and are still debating it. Hence a dissertation on Abū Yazīd without a discussion of this problem would be incomplete.

1. Background of the Controversy on the Problem

European scholars began to discuss the question of Indian influence on Ṣūfīsm from the very beginning of their serious study of this subject. Writing in Latin in 1821, Tholuck declared,

For considering the multitude of Magians that had remained especially in northern Persia, and apprehending that many of the most eminent Ṣūfī doctors were born in the northern province of Khorasan; having in mind also how the language had formerly passed from India to Persia, as well as how, amid the variety of opinions which even in

the time of Agathias had divided Persia, some portion of Indian doctrine had also migrated thither: I came at one time to the view that Ṣūfīsm had been thought out in about the time of al-Ma'mūn by Magians in Khorasan surviving [Magians surviving in Khurāsān who were] imbued with Indian mysticism. This opinion gained further support from the fact that, as we often read, the founders of the sects were either descendants of Magian families or at least were well acquainted with Magians.¹

Tholuck later abandoned this theory for lack of evidence.² But the tradition of tracing Indian influence in Ṣūfīsm continued. Most of the important nineteenth century scholars of Ṣūfīsm, e.g., Alfred

¹Tholuck, Ssufismus, pp. 42-43; trans. Arberry, History of Ṣūfīsm, p. 17.

On the basis of this statement, we can say that, from Tholuck's point of view, Abū Yazīd was influenced by Indian thought because he belonged to Khurāsān, lived about the time of Caliph al-Ma'mūn, was the grandson of a Magian and lived in the neighbourhood of Magian families. It is probable that when Tholuck made the above statement, he had Abū Yazīd in mind.

²Arberry, History of Ṣūfīsm, p. 17.

von Kremer¹ of Germany, R. Dozy² of Holland and I. Goldziher³ of Hungary believed that in some form or other Indian thought influenced the development of Ṣūfism.

The controversy over this problem took momentum in the twentieth century. But since at the moment we are concerned with the question of the possibility of Indian influence on Abū Yazīd, we shall discuss the problem only in so far as it is related to an understanding of Abū Yazīd.

In 1906, R. A. Nicholson, in his article "A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and

¹Alfred von Kremer, Geschichte der herrschenden ideen des islams; der Gottesbegriff, die prophetie und staatsidee (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1868), p. 67.

He says, "...It is much more natural to believe that mysticism came from Persia; it actually existed in that country before the Muslim conquest, thanks to the influence from India..." (trans. Arbery, History of Ṣūfism, p. 25).

²R. Dozy, Essai sur l'histoire de l'islamisme (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1879), p. 317.

³I. Goldziher, "Materialien zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Ṣūfismus", Vienna Oriental Journal, XIII (1899), 35 ff; and the chapter "Asketismus und Sufismus" in his Vorlesungen über den Islam (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1910), pp. 160-165.

Development of Ṣūfism", declared that Abū Yazīd was "probably" influenced by Buddhist thought.¹ Afterwards, he modified his views. In 1916, he wrote in The Mystics of Islām that he was certain of this influence.²

Some six years later Massignon studied some of the basic terms of the classical Yoga of Patanjali, and of Ṣūfism and concluded that some of these terms, e.g., nafs and ātman, qalb and manus, have equivalent meanings.³ But at the same time he discovered that the Ṣūfī terms such as fanā have no equivalents in the Patanjali texts.⁴ He further pointed out that shath which, according to him, is a positive state of dialogue between man and the supernatural, is the most characteristic feature of Ṣūfism. But the phenomenon of shath does not exist in Patanjali because he does not have the conception of a personal God.⁵ With this evidence, Massignon had doubt about the possibility of

¹R.A. Nicholson, "A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Ṣūfism", JRAS (1906) p. 330.

²Nicholson, Mystics, p. 17.

³Essai, p. 92.

⁴Ibid., p. 93.

⁵Ibid., pp. 94-95.

any Indian influence on Ṣūfīsm in general and on Abū Yazīd in particular.¹ He concluded that "Islāmic mysticism, in its origin and development, proceeded from the Qur'ān constantly recited, meditated and practised [by Muslims]." ²

We should mention, however, that Massignon did not exclude the possibility of some Hindu ascetic influence on the Ṣūfī orders of modern times. According to him, "it is probable that the critical student of the modern congregations [tarīqāt] would establish the infiltration of certain methods of Hindu asceticism."³

After Massignon came Max Horten who, in the first of his two papers published in 1927, tried industriously to prove that there was an Indian influence in Abū Yazīd,⁴ al-Ḥallāj⁵ and al-Junayd.⁶ Because of

¹Ibid., p. 279.

²Ibid., p. 104.

³Massignon, "Taṣawwuf", E.I., IV, 685.

Gardet has elaborated on Massignon's views on the question of Indian influence on Ṣūfīsm (Mystique, pp. 95, 110-115, 201, 235 and 242 ff.

⁴Horten, "Indische", pp. 17-25.

⁵Ibid., pp. 1-17.

⁶Ibid., pp. 26-32.

his "methods of argumentation and the categorical nature of his conclusions,"¹ we shall not take Horten very seriously.

The controversy on the question of the possibility of Indian influence on Abū Yazīd was then taken up by two living scholars of our time: R.C. Zaehner and A.J. Arberry. In his Revelation and Reason in Islām, Arberry, in 1957, tried to refute the views of his teacher, Nicholson, on this problem.² Since that time the two British professors³ have been talking back and forth on the problem in the form of a dialogue. Zaehner is an enthusiastic supporter of the theory of Indian influence on Abū Yazīd as propounded by Nicholson and Horten. He also presented his position in 1957. Two years later he elaborated further on his position in Hindu and Muslim Mysticism.⁴ Then came Arberry

¹Arberry, History of Sūfīsm, p. 38.

²Arberry, Revelation and Reason, pp. 90-91.

³Zaehner and Arberry

⁴HMM, pp. 93-110.

One gets the impression from Zaehner's writings that from his point of view, almost all that Abū Yazīd said or did by way of paradox and, for that matter, all that is of a paradoxical nature in Sūfīsm itself, must have been borrowed from Indian sources.

again. In his "Bisṭāmiāna",¹ in 1962, he tried to refute Zaehner's thesis point by point. Arberry's views have found further support in the work of his pupil, Qāsim al-Sāmarā'ī, in The Theme of Ascension in Mystical Writings.²

In brief this is a history of the debate on the problem of possible Indian influence on Abū Yazīd. We shall now take up the major issues on which the controversy centers and examine them one by one.

2. A Discussion of the Major Issues of the Controversy

i) Abū Yazīd's Doctrine of Fanā' and the Buddhist Doctrine of Nirvāṇa

According to Nicholson, "the method of Ṣūfīsm, so far as it is one of ethical self-culture, ascetic meditation, and intellectual abstraction, owes a great deal to Buddhism."³ As a clear example of this, he refers to Abū Yazīd's doctrine of fanā' which "is

¹Supra, p. 42.

²Al-Sāmarā'ī, Theme, pp. 212-224.

³Nicholson, Mystics, p. 17.

certainly, I think, of Indian origin."¹ Nicholson then concludes that although the implications of the concept of fanā' and those of the Buddhist concept of nirvāṇa differ greatly, "the terms coincide so closely in other ways that we cannot regard them as being altogether unconnected."²

Horten divides the development of Abū Yazīd's mystical life into three periods and finds an aspect of Indian thought corresponding to each of these periods. The first period which, according to Horten, extends from 236/850 to 246/860, is the period of negativism. In this period, Abū Yazīd said, "I ascended to the field (maydān) of nothingness (laysiyyah). Then I continued to fly in it for ten years until I passed from nothing in nothing through nothing."³ This is the stage of his consciousness of the void, of nothingness. Since, at this stage, Abū Yazīd had no consciousness

¹Ibid.

Nicholson was not so certain as this in 1906 (supra, p. 302).

²Nicholson, Mystics, pp. 18-19.

³Supra, p. 178.

of the Brahman, this was his experience of Buddhistic nirvāṇa.¹

The views of Nicholson and Horten that nirvāṇa has only negative implications is no longer considered correct. Modern scholars have shown that it also has

¹Horten, "Indische", I, 17-19.

In the second period (after 246/860), Abū Yazīd, according to Horten, passed from the stage of negativism to that of positivism. So he (Abū Yazīd) said, "Then I ascended to loss (tadyī') which is the field of tawhīd" (supra, p. 178). Abū Yazīd was now conscious of the substance, the Brahman, underlying the phenomena. This period, therefore, represents a passage from the Buddhistic nirvāṇa to the positivism of Brahmanism ("Indische", I, 20-24).

In the third period (around 256/870) Abū Yazīd, says Horten, experienced an identification of the phenomenal ego with the eternal I. This is expressed in his address to God, "Adorn me with Your oneness (wahdā-niyyah), clothe me with Your I-ness and raise me up to Your unity (ahadiyyah) so that when Your creatures see me, they may say, "We have seen You", and You shall be that, and I shall not be there" (supra, pp. 192-193). At this stage, Abū Yazīd had surpassed the limits of phenomenal existence and become the I of God. So, he could say, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty!" This, according to Horten, is the Indian Ātman doctrine ("Indische", I, 24-25).

Horten's distinction of the development of Abū Yazīd's mystical life into three periods of time on the basis of the texts on Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj makes one doubt if Horten understood the real nature of Sūfism. Obviously, when Abū Yazīd said that he flew in the sphere of nothingness for ten years, he did not refer to a period of ten calendar years.

a positive aspect. According to E. Conze, for example, nirvāṇa is 'unthinkable' or 'inconceivable'; "there is nothing in the world even remotely like it"¹ and "reasoning (tarka) cannot get anywhere near it.... All conceptions of Nirvana are misconceptions."² Hence it is not possible to say what thing nirvāṇa is. But "if one cannot say what a thing is, that does not make it into a nothing if the fault lies not in the thing, but in the words."³ What nirvāṇa is can only be tasted; "everyone must experience it personally for himself..."⁴

Another scholar, B.L. Suzuki, shows that although in Hinayana Sutras nirvāṇa means a "state of

¹E. Conze, Buddhist Thought in India(London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1962), p. 57.

Conze says elsewhere that ultimately nirvāṇa "is unthinkable and incomprehensible. It is only as a therapeutically valuable, though basically false concept that, during certain phases of our spiritual progress, it can be of use to our thoughts, and enter into the practice of contemplation" (Buddhism: its Essence and Development [Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1951], p. 112).

²Conze, Buddhist Thought, p. 57.

³Ibid., p. 76.

According to Conze, even "the 'extinction of individuality' is not necessarily something 'negative'" (ibid.).

⁴Ibid., p. 57.

complete extinction in which there is no more greed, no more anger, no more folly, nor all the other evil desires and passions",¹ in the Mahāyana Sūtras it

acquires a positive significance; it is no more a negative state but something existing by itself; it is Reality, from which all Buddhas issue. In the Mahāyana Nirvāṇa Sūtra (Fas. VI) we read: "It is not quite right, it is inadequate to state that the Tathagata's² entrance into Nirvāṇa is like a fire going out when the fuel is exhausted. It is quite right to state that the Tathagata enters in the Dharma-nature itself."³

Suzuki further tells us that according to Mahāyanists, the Arhat,⁴ having attained individual emancipation, must feel compassion to creatures; he "must become the Bodhisattva, even for his own salvation, because if he is endowed with the Buddha-nature he cannot sit

¹B.L. Suzuki, Mahāyana Buddhism (3rd ed.; London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), pp. 33-34.

²This is an epithet to express Buddha's personality (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, XII, 202).

³Suzuki, Mahāyana Buddhism, p. 34.

⁴This is a technical term "applied to those who have reached the end of the Eightfold Path, and are enjoying the fruits of it..." (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, I, 774).

serenely, all alone, at the top of the hill of enlightenment and look down on the suffering multitudes."¹ He must return to the world to help people achieve emancipation as Buddha himself did.²

Thus we find that both nirvāṇa and fanā' have negative as well as positive implications, and that both the Maḥayanists and Ṣūfīs say that man, after having achieved the supreme goal, must return to the world for the guidance of his fellow-men. We would note, however, that these similarities are only superficial and, therefore, should not give an occasion to the protagonists of the theory of Indian influence on Ṣūfīsm to speculate that nirvāṇa and fanā' have identical meanings. In its negative aspect, fanā' implies an obliteration of the consciousness of all other than God--of the world, of the hereafter, of God's gifts and even of God's names and attributes. But nirvāṇa cannot refer to the annihilation of the consciousness except of the first, that is, of the world. Buddhism does not

¹Suzuki, Mahayana Buddhism, p. 64.

²Ibid., p. 63.

For an excellent survey of the history of the study of the doctrine of nirvāṇa, see G.R. Welbon, "On Understanding the Buddhist Nirvāṇa", History of Religions, V (1965), 300-326.

have the ideas of God and therefore of His reward, punishment, etc. In its positive aspect, fanā' means baqā' in God. Obviously, nirvāṇa of atheistic Buddhism cannot imply a positive element in this sense. Regarding the notion of a return to this world, first we should make one point clear. Strictly speaking, the idea of a return to the world is not implied in the concept of fanā'. Fanā' refers to an upward journey from creatures to God whereas the return, which al-Junayd calls sahw, refers to a downward journey from God to creatures. Having made this point clear, we would say that the Ṣūfī conception of a return has distinct implications. For example, it is God who returns the Ṣūfī to His creatures so that he may guide his fellow men in their journey to Him.¹ Moreover, in Ṣūfīsm, one makes a distinction between the functions of a Ṣūfī (walī) after his return and those of a prophet (nabī). For example, obedience to a prophet is obligatory on man, whereas obedience to a Ṣūfī is not. It goes without saying that nirvāṇa does not have any such implications.

¹Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, p. 111.

ii) Abū Yazīd's Use of the Words Shajarah (Tree) and Khud'ah (Deceit) and the Occurrence of the Words Svatthas and Māyā in Indian Thought

While expressing his experience of mi'rāj, Abū Yazīd said, "... I reached the expanse of eternity and in it I saw the tree of oneness." According to al-Sarrāj, Abū Yazīd "described the soil [in which it grew] its root and branch, its shoots and fruits, and then he said, : 'Then I looked, and I knew that all this was deceit'."¹

Zaehner picks up from this text two words, "tree" and "deceit", and tries to prove that Abū Yazīd borrowed these from the Indian systems which have words exactly corresponding to these. As for the 'tree', he thinks that it is the tree of the Katha Upaniṣhad and the Bhagavad Gītā. Although al-Sarrāj does not say how Abū Yazīd described the soil from which the tree grew, its roots, branches, shoots and fruits, "we can be fairly certain", says Zaehner, that Abū Yazīd described these according to the original in the Gītā

¹Luma', p. 384.

We are quoting Zaehner's translation of the text (HMM, p. 95).

which runs as follows:

With roots above and branches below the imperishable fig-tree has been declared. Its leaves are the Vedic hymns. Whoso knows it knows the Veda. Below and above extend its branches nourished by the qualities (gunas), and the objects of sense are their sprouts. Below are extended the roots from which arise actions in the world of men.¹

To Zaehner, this is a striking similarity. He further adds that the same tree also appears in the Mundaka and Svetāśvatara Upaniṣads.²

Regarding the word 'deceit', Zaehner thinks that it is a translation of the Sanskrit 'māyā'. In fact, he says that the "two words could scarcely correspond more exactly." To support this, he quotes the dictionary meanings of khud'ah and māyā from Lane and Monier Williams respectively. He points out, moreover, that to the best of his knowledge, "the world is not described as khud'ah in any other Ṣūfī text.... When the Ṣūfīs speak of the unreality of the world, they speak of it as a dream, or a game, not as deceit."³

¹HMM, p. 96.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 97.

In answer to Zaehner's arguments about the "tree", Arberry says that "there appears to be at least some grounds for supposing it [the tree] to be rather the famous Tree of Life so familiar in Jewish and Muslim literature."¹ In a Muslim context, this may be "the 'lote-tree of the Boundary',² farthest point of Muḥammad's mi'rāj." Ibn 'Arabī also made this Lote-tree the final point of his mi'rāj. The commentators of the Qur'ānic verse 53:14 in which the Lote-tree occurs speak of its root, branch, shoots etc.³

In regard to the word khud'ah, Arberry points out that it does not occur in the Qur'ān exactly in this form, but God is described in the Qur'ān as khādi' (derived from the same root kh d ') and mākir to mean that He is "a master of guile and cunning in His dealings with men.... It is part of His plan to 'try' and 'test' His creatures, to prove the true quality of their faith and worship; the term balā' occurs frequently enough both in the Qur'ān and in Ṣūfī literature."⁴

¹"Bisṭāmiāna", p. 29.

²Qur'ān, 53:13-18.

³"Bisṭāmiāna", p. 29, n. 3.

⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30.

Hence, naturally, a Muslim does not have to go to the Gītā to borrow the word khud'ah. As for Zaehner's remark that the world is not described as khud'ah in any other Ṣūfī text, Arberry points out that the celebrated Ṣūfī al-Junayd attributes the quality of khud'ah to God and "establishes the divine khud'ah as part of the 'law' of balā'".¹ Al-Junayd also speaks of God's makr (guile).² Ironically, Zaehner himself has translated in the appendix of his book the passages in which al-Junayd speaks of khud'ah and makr. Arberry further indicates that even if we suppose that no one other than Abū Yazīd has called "the world precisely a khud'", one can at any rate cite a verse attributed to 'Umar Khaiyām in which the universe is described as 'a sleep and a dream, a deceit and a delusion'."³ On the basis of this, Arberry concludes that "Abū Yazīd's phrase 'and I knew that all this was deceit'... is perfectly clear and natural regarded as a mystic's extension of the Qur'ānic picture of God as the supreme beguiler."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴Ibid.

As far as we are concerned, Arberry's arguments concerning Abū Yazīd's use of "tree" is correct. As further evidence in support of his arguments, we may add that in one account of Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj, the famous Lote-tree of the Qur'ān is positively identified. According to this account, Abū Yazīd is reported to have said,

I rode on the mount (markab) of sincerity (sidq) until I reached the air; then (I rode on the mount of) yearning (shawq) until I reached the sky; then (I rode on the mount of) love until I reached the Lote-tree (sidrat al-muntahá). Then I was called, "Oh Abū Yazīd! What do you want?" I said, "I want not to want."¹

But what seems more probable is that the 'tree' in Abū Yazīd's text may refer to the 'tree' of the famous light verse of the Qur'ān which reads as follows:

God is the Light of heavens and earth. The likeness of His light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The lamp is as it were a glittering star. This lamp is kindled from a blessed tree (shajarah), an olive which is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous even if no fire touched it. Light upon light. God guides to His Light whom

¹Kawākib, p. 250.

He will. God sets forth similitudes for men (i.e., He speaks to men in allegories), and He knows all things."¹

We find that the word 'shajarah' appears in this verse exactly in the same form in which it appears in Abū Yazīd's saying. Moreover, the light verse describes 'shajarah' as that which is neither of the East nor of the West and is the source of the light of heavens and earth.² It is quite likely, therefore, that Abū Yazīd had this 'tree' in mind when he spoke of the tree of oneness. We may add here that the light verse, because it is pregnant with mystical meanings, has always been a source of inspiration to the Ṣūfīs.³

Regarding Abū Yazīd's use of khud'ah, Arberry's argument that God, described in the Qur'ān as khādī'

¹Qur'ān, 24:35.

²The word shajarah in the verses such as 2:35; 7:19; 7:20; 7:22; 14:24 (see Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Al-Mu'jam al-Mufaharas li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm [Cairo: Miṣriyyah, 1945], p. 375) has a different meaning.

³Most of al-Ghazzalī's Mishkāṭ is an interpretation of the light verse.

For Najm al-Dīn Kubrā's references to the verse, see Fawā'ih, pp. 4-5, 30 and 32.

and mākir, is believed to 'test' and 'try' the believers, and that the idea of balā' also occurs in Sūfī literature, is correct. In support of Arberry's view, we may further point out that Abū Yazīd himself spoke of God's testing on many occasions. On one occasion, for example, he advised one of his companions on the eve of the latter's journey to some place, "...If any balā' of God falls on you, come out of it quickly because it is something which a man with patience cannot bear."¹ This means that one should try to pass the test quickly in order to reap its fruits. In the following tradition, we find Abū Yazīd's use of both 'testing' (imtiḥān) and khud'ah:

I was tested by an offer of a worldly gift, but I refrained from it. Then I was offered a gift relating to the hereafter, and my Self felt inclined to it. Then He (God) warned me that it was a deceit (khud'ah) and I refrained from it. When He saw that I was not deceived by the created things, He opened for me divine gifts.²

¹Nūr, p. 103.

²Ibid., p. 119.

Cf. The following saying of Abū Yazīd: "The worshipper is granted the experience of joy. But because of his delight in it, he is prevented from the realities of (God's) nearness" (ibid., p. 79). For other examples of deception and testing, supra, p. 163 (and 165), n.

It seems to us, however, that both Arberry and Zaehner have failed to understand the real implications of the word khud'ah in Abū Yazīd's teachings. Both of them start with the assumption that māyā and khud'ah have identical meanings. As a matter of fact, māyā refers to the material world in which we live, move and have our being, whereas khud'ah in Abū Yazīd's recitals refers to the angelic world (malakūt) which includes the Protected Tablet, the Throne, the Chair, etc. This is clear from the very context in which Abū Yazīd used the word khud'ah, i.e., the context of his spiritual journey (mi'rāj) in the angelic world. This is also shown by the repeated theme in the version (or interpretation) of his mi'rāj story in Ru'yā': "Then He continued to offer me a kingdom such as no tongue can describe, but all the while I knew that He was testing me therewith, and in reverence for the holiness of my Lord I paid no heed to it, saying, 'O my Beloved, my desire is other than what Thou offerest me'."¹ This theme occurs seven times in the Ru'yā', each time referring to God's gifts offered to Abū Yazīd in a particular heaven.

¹Ru'yā', p. 404; trans. Nicholson "Mi'rāj", Islamica, p. 410.

We may go even further and say that by khud'ah Abū Yazīd may have meant his deception by himself and not by God. When in his spiritual journey he saw different things, he saw them as apart from God. That is to say, he failed to view those things as aspects of God. Thus Abū Yazīd was himself responsible for his own deception. This view of ours is supported by the fact that the Qur'ān describes God as khādi' and mākir only with reference to those men who are themselves khādi's and mākirs. For example, the Qur'ān says, "The hypocrites deceive (yukhādi'ūn) God, and God deceives them,"¹ "They (the unbelievers) tricked (makarū) (God) and God tricked (them)."² These and many other verses³ show that God deceives and tricks the unbelievers and hypocrites who have done the same to Him first. Certainly this sense of the word cannot be applied to Abū Yazīd; for, he was neither a hypocrite nor an unbeliever who deceived God. If we take khud'ah in the sense in which we have just explained it, Abū Yazīd's tradition cited above⁴ will mean that he considered God's gifts

¹Qur'ān, 4:142.

²Ibid., 3:54.

³E.g., 13:42; 14:46.

⁴Supra, p. 318.

relating to the hereafter as truly divine and thus felt inclined to them. But at once God warned him that he was being deceived by himself. Having realized his error, Abū Yazīd turned his attention away from them.

We should further note that balā' and khud'ah do not mean the same thing. Balā' is a favour which God bestows on his worshippers with a view to purifying them. It is like the educational punishment that a father inflicts on his son. As an example of this, we may refer to the Qur'ānic story of Abraham's sacrifice of Ismā'īl. According to God's order, Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son. When the slaughtering was to take place, God replaced Ismā'īl with a sacrificial animal (dhibh).¹ This was not God's deception of Abraham; "obviously this was a trial (balā')"² for him for his own spiritual development. Abraham passed the test and received rewards from God.³ Thus, because

¹Qur'ān, 37:99-107.

²Ibid., 37:106.

³Ibid., 37:108-111.

The word balā' is used in the same sense also in other verses of the Qur'ān (e.g., 2:49; 7:141; 8:17).

balā' comes from God for the good of the one on whom it is imposed, Ṣūfīs look for and welcome it. It is said, for example, that Abū Yazīd wished to receive balā' everytime he ate his food.¹ Khud'ah, on the other hand, has very different implications. God, as we have seen,² deceives only in retaliation. Certainly a Ṣūfī would not want this kind of khud'ah.

The above discussion shows that the assumption of both Zaehner and Arberry that māyā and khud'ah have identical meaning appears incorrect. Although Arberry is right in saying that God, as described in the Qur'ān, deceives, tries and tests, it is perhaps incorrect to say that by khud'ah Abū Yazīd meant God's deception of him. Whether or not the cause of deception was God or Abū Yazīd himself, the fact remains that the objects with reference to which Abū Yazīd felt deceived were very much different from those to which māyā refers. Hence it appears meaningless to draw any parallelism between māyā and khud'ah.

¹Nūr, pp. 48-49.

²Supra, p. 320.

iii) Abū Yazīd's Paradoxical Utterance Subhānī (Glory Be to me!) and the Mahyam eva Namo Namah (Homage, Homage to me) of the Upaniṣad

Zaehner thinks that Abū Yazīd's famous utterance "Glory be to me!" has also been derived from a Hindu source. He argues that subhānī "is absolutely blasphemous to Muslim ears, and nothing remotely comparable is recorded of any of the Ṣūfīs who preceded Abū Yazīd",¹ and that a Sanskrit equivalent of it is found in mahyam eva namo namah, "Homage, homage to me!", in the Braḥatsannyāsa Upaniṣad.²

Arberry does not offer a refutation of Zaehner's view; for, according to him, Massignon has convincingly shown that subhānī represents Abū Yazīd's attempt to experience in the first person what Muḥammad had articulated in the Qur'ānic verse in an indirect style in the second person by identifying himself with the prominent 'I' of ana rabbukum al-a'lā "I am your Lord, Most High",³ the words of Pharoah. According to Arberry,

¹An exact opposite of Massignon's view (Essai, p.279).

²HMM, p. 98.

³Qur'ān, 89:24 (Essai, p. 279. For Arberry's reference to Massignon, see "Bisṭamiāna", p. 32).

"the attempt to find a Hindu source for this celebrated shath seems so unlikely as not to call for further discussion."¹

Arberry, nevertheless, finds it necessary to point out two errors of Zaehner. Zaehner argues that it

is very possible, however, that Abū Yazīd never went further than to say subhānī, which is all that Sarrāj records, while Sahlaḡī reports no less than three versions of this particular logion, and it is therefore probable that the second phrase is in each case a gloss. Besides 'How great is my glory' we also have 'How great is my sovereignty (sultānī), and, more striking still, 'I am the Lord Most High', the last of which is also reported as a separate saying.²

This argument, says Arberry, "is somewhat invalidated by the fact that Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, who died only eight years after al-Sarrāj, quotes the saying in its full form (Qūt al-qulūb II, 75)."³ Secondly, Arberry points out that the correct translation of anā rabbī al-‘alā is "I am 'my' Lord, the Most High" and not "I am the Lord, Most High" as Zaehner has done. There is a

¹"Bisṭāmiāna", p. 32.

²HMM, p. 98.

³"Bisṭāmiāna", p. 32, n. 2.

significant difference between these two translations. As a result of the mistranslation, Zaehner "has missed the subtle significance of the change made by Abū Yazīd from the Qur'ānic 'your Lord' to 'my Lord'."¹

Arberry's criticisms of Zaehner are justified. But how can we explain these errors on Zaehner's part? Zaehner seems to be obsessed with the idea that all that is important in early Ṣūfīsm in general, and in Abū Yazīd in particular, must have been borrowed from Indian sources. Hence, he seems to choose only that material which supports his already-formed view and to translate texts wrongly to fit them into his arguments. Otherwise, how can we explain his translation of rabbī as "the Lord", for example, since we are sure that Zaehner knows the meaning of the Arabic personal pronounced yā in the possessive case?

We agree with Massignon (and Arberry who follows Massignon) that subhānī was formed by a simple twist of a Qur'ānic expression.² The word subhān

¹Ibid., p. 32.

²We do not, however, exclude the possibility of the reference of subhānī to the formulī subhān rabbī al-azīm and subhān rabbī al-a'lá which are used by Muslims in prayer.

occurs in the Qur'ān forty-one times in three forms: eighteen times followed either by the word 'Allāh' or 'rabb' or the relative pronoun 'alladhī' (who) referring to God, nine times in the form of subhānaka, and fourteen times in the form of subhānahu.¹ In a state of ecstasy, Abū Yazīd changed one of these expressions into subhānī.² This, in fact, is the peculiarly Bistāmī way of expressing a mystical experience. The following examples of Abū Yazīd's mystical expressions (shatahāt) and the corresponding Qur'ānic verses from which these expressions were formed will further illustrate our point:

<u>Shatahāt</u>	<u>Qur'ānic verses</u>
<u>Anā rabbī al-a'lā</u> ³ .	<u>Anā rabbukum al-a'lā</u> ⁴ .
<u>Inna batshī ashaddū min</u> <u>batshihī</u> ⁵ .	<u>Inna batsha rabbika</u> <u>la-shadīd</u> ⁶ .

¹ Abd al-Bāqī, Mu'jam, pp. 339-340.

² This change was made spontaneously; Abū Yazīd was not conscious of what he was doing in a state of drunkenness (supra, pp. 237-238).

³ Nūr, p. 68.

⁴ Qur'ān, 79:24.

This correspondence has already been shown by Massignon (Essai, p. 279).

⁵ Nūr, p. 111.

⁶ Qur'ān, 85:12.

Innī anā lā ilāha illā anā; ...Annahu lā ilāha illā anā
fa a'budūni¹. fa a'budūni².

We can also point out that Abū Yazīd is so well-known primarily because of his subhānī. The very mention of his name calls to our mind this famous expression of the Ṣūfī. But why should subhānī be so important? The answer is: because it contradicts the Qur'ānic subhānahū, subhan Allah, etc. and is thus "blasphemous to Muslim ears."³ In fact, subhānī has the meaning that it has only in reference to the corresponding expressions in the Qur'ān; but for this reference, subhānī would be sheer non-sense.⁴

It needed the genius and daringness of the rebellious Khurāsānī to formulate the shatahāt such as

¹Nūr, p. 122.

²Qur'ān, 21:25.

We should note that all shatahāt do not correspond to the verses of the Qur'ān in form. Many shatahāt stand in a paradoxical relation to the 'meaning' of certain Qur'ānic verses or in paradoxical relation to the meaning and form of certain Prophetic Traditions. In any case, they always contradict what is generally accepted as true by Muslims and this is why they are paradoxes.

³We are borrowing Zaehner's language here (supra, p. 323).

⁴The same would be true of the shatahāt quoted on pp. 326 - 327.

subhānī either from Qur'ānic verses or from some other Islāmic sources.¹ On several occasions, shatahāt flowed from Abū Yazīd's tongue when he fell into ecstatic states caused by his hearing the recitation of a Qur'ānic verse, or the voice of a mu'adhdhin calling out "Allāh akbar", etc. Once someone recited the Qur'ānic verse "On that Day We shall gather the righteous to the Merciful in groups."² On hearing this, Abū Yazīd fell into an ecstatic state and said, "The one who is with Him does not need to be gathered, because he is all the time sitting with Him."³ Another time, he made the utterance "There is no God but I; so worship me!" immediately after he had finished his dawn prayer.⁴ All this shows that his subhānī as well as other shatahāt have reference only to Islāmic contexts. Hence, any attempt to find an extra-Islāmic source for subhānī or for any other shath of Abū Yazīd seems meaningless.

¹Supra, p. 327, n. 2.

²Qur'an, 19:85.

³Nūr, p. 137.

⁴Ibid., p. 122.

- iv) His Use of the Expression Anta dhāka (Thou art that) and the Upaniṣadic Use of Tat tavam asi (Thou art that)

While describing his experience of mi'rāj, Abū Yazīd said that he addressed God saying, "Adorn me with Your oneness (waḥdāniyyah), clothe me with Your I-ness and raise me up to Your unity (aḥadiyyah) so that when Your creatures see me, they may say, 'We have seen You' and You shall be that, and I shall not be there."¹

To Zaehner, "Thou art that"² is not understandable in the context; for, the pronoun 'that' (dhāka) is never used in the Arabic language to mean God. But, on the other hand, the "pronoun 'that' (tat), however, is regularly used in Sanskrit as a synonym of Brahman ..."³ In fact, according to Zaehner, the

¹Supra, pp. 192-193.

Cf. Zaehner's translation of the text: "Adorn me with thy unity and clothe me in Thine I-ness and raise me up unto thy oneness, so that when thy creatures see me, they may say: 'We have seen thee (i.e. God) and thou art that.' Yet I (Abū Yazīd) will not be there at all" (HMM, p. 94).

²This is Zaehner's translation of takūnu anta dhāka.

³HMM, p. 94.

Arabic phrase takūnu anta dhāka is a literal translation of the tat tvam asi of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.¹

Arberry first points out the error in Zaehner's translation of the crucial Arabic phrase in question. In his translation of it as "... and thou art that", says Arberry, Zaehner has apparently failed to see the significance of 'fa' which indicates causality.² As regards Zaehner's view that the pronoun 'that' (dhāka) is not used in Arabic to mean God and that, in fact, takūnu anta dhāka is a literal translation of tat tvam asi, Arberry says that the Qur'ān uses the pronoun dhā (that) in many places to refer to God.³ The additional ka of dhāka is

like variant forms, a particle of 'allocution... relating to an object that is distant, or, accord. to general opinion, to that which occupies a middle place between the near and the distant.' It would appear... that Abū Yazīd was intending to say no more than that 'that' which the creatures were seeing (in 'a middle place between the near and the distant') was God, and that Abū Yazīd had

¹Ibid., p. 95.

²"Bisṭāmiāna", p. 34.

³Arberry mentions verses 6:102; 10:3; 35:14; 39:8; 40:64, 66, and 42:8 (ibid.).

ceased to exist as a contingent entirely apart from God. If this interpretation is correct, then there is no need to drag the Sanskrit tat tvam asi into the arena.¹

Arberry may be right in his explanation of the pronoun dhāka. It is possible that by dhāka Abū Yazīd was referring to God who is neither far nor near -- to God who is omnipresent. But we would say that Arberry's attempt to discover a Qur'ānic expression for every important utterance of Abū Yazīd does not seem to be justified. Abū Yazīd did not, and did not have to, always express his experience in exact Qur'ānic terms or in Qur'ānic terms at all.² But this is certainly no reason to believe that he borrowed his expressions from extra-Islāmic sources. The real error of Zaehner seems to be in the fact that he has taken the phrase tat tvam asi out of context and then has tried to show its similarity to takūnu anta dhāka. In the Upaniṣad, Uddālaka Āruṇi, while advising his son, says, sa ya eṣo'pimā aitaḍ ātmyam idaṁ sarvaṁ, tat satyam, sa ātmā: tat tvam asi, śvetaketo, iti; bhūya eva mā, bhagavān, vijñāpayatv iti, tathā, saumya,

¹Ibid.

³Supra, p. 327, n. 2.

iti hovāca."¹ "Now that which is that subtle essence (the root of all), in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art it."² We should note that the meanings of the two texts differ. In the Indian context, the father says to the son: You are not only you; you are everything. Abū Yazīd, on the other hand, says to God: I do not want that there be any Abū Yazīd which people could see; I want that there be only You and not me. Moreover, it is obvious that in the Upaniṣadic text, a man is addressing another man. In Abū Yazīd's text, on the other hand, a man is addressing God. This is clearly shown in one of Abū Yazīd's prayers: "How long shall this I-ness (anāniyyah) exist between me and You? I ask You to annihilate my I-ness from me so that my I-ness will be You, and You alone shall remain and you will see only Yourself, oh my Friend!"³

¹Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VI, 8, 7 (S. Radhakrishnan, ed. and trans., The Principal Upaniṣads [London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1953], p. 458.

²F. Max Müller trans. The Upaniṣads (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962), I, 101.

³Nūr, p. 125.

Abū Yazīd used to narrate this prayer of his to Abū Mūsá (ibid.).

For further evidence to show that by anta dhāka Abū Yazīd was addressing God, we can cite a saying of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharaqānī which is a resounding of Abū Yazīd's saying. Al-Kharaqānī says,

Oh God! On the Day of Judgement the prophets will sit on the pulpits (minbarhā) of light and the creatures will look at them, and Your friends (awliyā'i tū) will sit on the thrones (kursīhā) of light and the creatures will look at them, but Abū al-Ḥasan will sit on Your unity (yagānigī) so that the creatures will look at You."¹

In the last phrase of this saying we can detect the anta dhāka of Abū Yazīd. In fact this whole saying of al-Kharaqānī is in spirit the famous tradition of Abū Yazīd which is under discussion. We say this not only because of the similarity between the two sayings but also because al-Kharaqānī, an Uwaysī disciple of Abū Yazīd,² tried to imitate the master as closely as

¹Tadhkirat, II, 227.

²Nafahāt, p. 298.

Al-Kharaqānī lived in Khurāsān some two hundred years after Abū Yazīd, but the spirit of Abū Yazīd was his master. His veneration for Abū Yazīd was so great that before his death he ordered his disciples to dig his grave thirty yards deep because his place was higher than Bistām and he wanted to be buried at a level lower than that of Abū Yazīd (supra, p. 124, n. 1) .

possible. Many of his sayings contained in Tadhkirat,¹ Nafahāt² and in other sources resemble those of Abū Yazīd not only in meaning but also in form.

v) Abū 'Alī al-Sindī

Al-Sarrāj records that Abū Yazīd said,

صحبته أبا علي السندي فكنت ألقنه
ما يقيم به فرضه وكان يعلمني التوحيد والحقايق صرفا

I used to keep company with Abū 'Alī al-Sindī and I used to show him how to perform the obligatory duties of Islam, and in exchange he would give me instruction in the divine unity (tawhīd) and in the ultimate truths (ḥaqā'iq).³

Zaehner concludes, on the basis of the above text, that the man from whom Abū Yazīd learnt Indian doctrines was Abū 'Alī al-Sindī. He accepts Nicholson's view that this famous master of Abū Yazīd belonged to Sind, although Arberry and Massignon⁴ pointed out

¹Tadhkirat, II, 201-255.

²Nafahāt, pp. 298-299.

³Luma', p. 177.

We are quoting Zaehner's translation of the text (HMM, pp. 93-94).

⁴Essai, p. 98, n. 3.

after Nicholson that this Sind might be the name of a village in Khorāsān as recorded by the geographer Yāqūt.¹ In answer to Arberry's argument, Zaehner says, "Theoretically, of course, it might, but it is rather difficult to believe that the Sind referred to is any other than the province of that name."² It seems "fairly clear" to Zaehner that Abū 'Alī was a convert from another religion; for, as shown in the text, he "did not even know how to perform the obligatory duties of a Muslim."³

Arberry thinks that in translating the phrase "I used to show him how to perform the obligatory duties of Islam", Zaehner seems to have ignored Ritter's interpretation which suggests that Abū Yazīd "had to teach [al-Sindi] the Kur'ān verses necessary for prayer".⁴ According to Arberry, the crucial words

¹Arberry, Revelation and Reason, p. 90.

²HMM, p. 93.

³Ibid., p. 94.

⁴E.I., new ed., I, 162 ("Bisṭāmīāna", p. 53).

Arberry believes that Ritter's interpretation is based on the brief notice of Abū 'Alī al-Sindī in the Nafahāt of Jāmī drawn from Shaṭḥīyāt of Baqlī ("Bisṭāmīāna", pp. 35-36).

in al-Sarrāj's text are perhaps more subtle than Zaehner's translation indicates. The dictionary meaning of the verb laqqana is "specifically 'making to understand of a thing that which one had not understood before.' (By Abū Yazīd's time the term mulaqqin had hardly yet acquired the specific meaning of 'elementary teacher' which later attached to it...)." A conflation of al-Sarrāj's text with Baqlī's version of it,¹ continues Arberry, gives us grounds to speculate that

what Abū Yazīd meant was that he instructed... Abū 'Alī in the exegesis of Sura I and Sura CXII of the Qur'ān; and it is interesting, in view of what Abū 'Alī is said to have taught Abū Yazīd in return, to remember that Sura CXII is sometimes known as the Sura of Tauhīd.²

On the basis of this, Arberry presumes, in contradistinction to Zaehner's presumption, that Abū 'Alī was a new convert to Islām,

that Abū Yazīd took Abū 'Alī, a village Muslim of little or no formal education, through the religious and legalistic meaning of the ritual and common duties of Islam, and to his surprise discovered in his pupil a mastery of the 'real'

¹Infra, p. 342, n. 1 .

²"Bisṭāmīāna", p. 36.

and mystic apprehension of God. If this guess is right, then Abū 'Alī would belong to a type of simple saint, intuitively privy to the divine secrets, which is by no means uncommon in Ṣūfī hagiography.¹

Arberry further points out that even if the nisbah al-Sindī referred to Sind in India, there is no basis for thinking that Abū 'Alī was originally a Hindu. He cites examples to show that the nisbah al-Sindī was applied to many descendants of the original Arab conquerors of Sind. To mention one of these examples, the

traditionist Abū Muḥammad Rajā' al-Sindī, who died in 221/836, also bore the nisba al-Nīsābūrī (see Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb, III, 267) which takes him a long way from Sind; his son and grandson, who followed the same learned profession, also called themselves al-Sindī...²

Hence Arberry says that it is hazardous "to conclude that a man of Abū Yazīd's period was a native of Sind and a convert from Hinduism because he bore the nisba al-Sindī."³

¹Ibid., pp. 36-37.

²Ibid., p. 37, n. 1.

³Ibid.

Al-Sāmarra'ī, while supporting the views of his teacher, has further elaborated the points. On the problem of Abū Yazīd's teaching Abū 'Alī, al-Sāmarra'ī quotes from Luma' and Risālah,¹ and says that farḍ in Ṣūfī literature came to mean not the observances that are incumbent on all Muslims as Zaehner suggests, but "the strict² observation of the religious and legalistic ritual of Islām" in which a novice is instructed by a Ṣūfī master.³ As for Abū 'Alī teaching Abū Yazīd the doctrine of tawḥīd, al-Sāmarra'ī

¹We reproduce below al-Sāmarra'ī's quotations from Luma' and Risālah (trans. al-Sāmarra'ī):

Al-Sarrāj says: "The first duty required.... knowledge of the ordained obligations [farāiḍ] and the Sunnah and what is desirable and what forbidden by these, what is enjoined, what held fitting, and what is esteemed as virtue" [Luma', pp. 144, 149, 150]. Al-Qushairī put it more clearly: "The novice must master the science of the religious law, through self-scrutiny or asking the leaders of religion, that this may lead him to observe what is ordained [farḍahu ما يقيم به فريضه]; if the opinions given him by the jurisconsults differ, let him take what is agreed on by all, and always seek to avoid matters admitting difference of opinion, for latitude in religious law is for those whose faith is weak" [Risālah, p. 214] (al-Sāmarra'ī, Theme, pp. 217-218).

²The emphasis is ours.

³Al-Sāmarra'ī, Theme, p. 217.

first points out the discrepancies in Zaehner's translation of tawḥīd as "divine unity" and as "union".¹ Then he observes that the whole view of Zaehner is founded on his assumption that Abū Yazīd was an illiterate man. This assumption, says al-Sāmarrā'ī, is based on Zaehner's wrong understanding of al-Sahlagī's characterization of Abū Yazīd as ummī.² According to al-Sāmarrā'ī, al-Sahlagī means that Abū Yazīd was "uninstructed in esoteric doctrine" and not that he was an "uneducated" man as Zaehner suggests.³

Regarding Zaehner's contention that Abū 'Alī was an Indian from Sind, al-Sāmarrā'ī adds to his teacher's arguments by saying that since both editions of the Risālah and a number of manuscripts of the same work mention the name of Abū 'Alī with the nisbah al-Suddī, this nisbah would seem more probable than

¹Ibid., p. 220.

²HMM, p. 100 (Nūr, p. 53).

³Al-Sāmarrā'ī, Theme, p. 221.

We think that here Zaehner is right. Abū Yazīd, as we know, was uneducated in the sense that he did not receive any formal education except for the interpretations of the Qur'ān up to the verse regarding service to God and parents in the chapter of Luqman (supra, p. 67).

al-Sindī because there was a village by the name of Sudd near Rayy, which is two farsakh from Bistām, although two villages near Bistām bearing the name of Sind were known.¹ "Moreover", continues al-Sāmarrā'ī,

Al-Bistāmī was described by Al-Sahlajī as being a student of Abū 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Suddī and Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Suddī;² both of these seem to be one if we come to compare the authorities of their insād [isnād]. Again, Al-Sahlajī's monograph has no mention whatsoever of Abū 'Alī, which seems rather curious. Furthermore, Jāmī states that his teacher in Sufism was a certain Kurd but does not reveal his name or identity. Professor Zaehner's presumption that Abū 'Alī came to Abū Yazīd as a convert from another religion is no more than a presumption. Are we not at liberty to presume that this Abū 'Alī was a Kurd from Al-Sudd, a village in the neighbourhood of Rayy which is, according to Yāqūt, called "the land of the Daylam". This is also no more than a presumption but has at least tangible historical evidence. He might alternatively have been a native of Al-Sindiyya, a village on the river of 'Isá. This is merely to pile up presumptions.³

¹Al-Sāmarrā'ī, Theme, pp. 218-219.

²Massignon also has referred to this and said that Abū 'Alī al-Sindī may have been 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sindī (Essai, p. 273, n. 4).

³Ibid., pp. 219-220.

We agree with Zaehner that although theoretically it is possible that Abū 'Alī's nisbah al-Sindī refers to Sind (or Sudd) in Khorāsān, "it is rather difficult to believe that the Sind referred to is any other than the province of that name."¹ But again, Arberry seems to be right when he says that it is hazardous "to conclude that a man of Abū Yazīd's period was a native of Sind and a convert from Hinduism because he bore the nisba al-Sindī."² What seems most probable to us is that Abū 'Alī was a descendant of one of the early conquerors of Sind many of whom, as shown by Arberry, used to bear the nisbah al-Sindī.³ There seems to be no ground to believe that Abū 'Alī was originally a Hindu coming directly from Sind in India .

On the question of Abū Yazīd teaching Abū 'Alī, we cannot agree with Arberry and al-Sāmarrā'ī that Abū Yazīd took Abū 'Alī as a simple-minded villager Muslim. Abū Yazīd's expression ṣaḥabtu⁴ strongly suggests that

¹Supra, p. 335.

²Supra, p. 337.

³Supra, p. 337.

⁴Luma', p. 177.

Cf. F. Meier, "Qushayrī's Tartīb al-Sulūk", Oriens, XVI (1963), 1.

he considered Abū 'Alī as his teacher, not as his pupil. In Shaṭḥīyāt we find a clear reference to Abū 'Alī as one of Abū Yazīd's teachers.¹ Moreover, Baqlī has classified a saying of Abū 'Alī under the shataḥāt of Ṣūfīs.² On the basis of this evidence, we accept Zaehner's view that Abū 'Alī was a teacher of Abū Yazīd.

We have yet another question to answer. This has to do with what Abū 'Alī and Abū Yazīd taught each other. We cannot accept the view of Arberry that Abū Yazīd taught Abū 'Alī the "exegesis" of the chapters I and 112 of the Qur'ān, nor can we agree with al-Sāmarrā'ī that Abū Yazīd instructed Abū 'Alī on the strict observance of religious duties. The views of both Arberry and of al-Sāmarrā'ī are based on the assumption that Abū Yazīd was the master, and that Abū 'Alī was his disciple. This, as we have seen, does not seem to be correct.³

¹Jāmī quotes from Shaṭḥīyāt in the following way:
In his Sharḥ Shaṭḥīyāt, Shaykh Rūzbehān Baqlī says; that he (Abū 'Alī) was one of the masters of Abū Yazīd. Abū Yazīd said, "I learnt from Abū 'Alī the knowledge of self-annihilation in tawḥīd (fanā' dar tawḥīd), and Abū 'Alī learnt from me al-ḥamd and qul huwa Allāh (i.e., chapters I and 112 of the Qur'an) (Nafahāt, p. 57).

For Baqlī's text, see Shaṭḥīyāt, p. 35.

²Shaṭḥīyāt, p. 77.

³Supra, pp. 341-342.

But, on the other hand, we do not have a definite answer of our own to this question. However, we think that the key to the solution of the problem may lie in the meaning of the word 'laqqana'. On the basis of two meanings which, we think, this word had in the time of Abū Yazīd, we suggest two answers one of which may be correct. But we emphasize that both these answers should be taken as presumptions.

If by 'laqqana' Abū Yazīd referred to instructions in the ordinary sense, then Abū Yazīd taught Abū 'Alī the obligatory duties of a Muslim, e.g., prayer and fasting, as Zaehner suggests, or chapters I and 112 of the Qur'ān as is mentioned in Shathīyāt. That 'laqqana' in the present context may have implied simple instruction is suggested by the fact that Baqlī expresses the idea by saying that Abū 'Alī "learnt" (āmukht) from me," etc. If laqqana meant more than this, Baqlī would not have used āmukht to describe the situation; for, āmukht refers to learning in the ordinary sense. If this interpretation is correct, we have to accept Zaehner's view that Abū 'Alī was a newly converted Muslim; for, otherwise, why did he need to be instructed in the way in which a Muslim performs the obligatory duties or to be taught the chapters 1 and 112 of the Qur'ān? These things are usually learnt

by Muslim children soon after they learn to walk and talk. In fact, Zaehner's interpretation seems to be the most natural explanation of the situation on the basis of what we know of Abū 'Alī.¹ Moreover, this makes the explanation of Abū 'Alī's teaching of Abū Yazīd very easy. As a follower of some other faith, Abū 'Alī knew al-fanā' fī al-tawhīd² and, after conversion, he instructed Abū Yazīd in these mystical subjects. The instruction of a Ṣūfī by someone belonging to another religion is not unknown. Ibrāhīm b. Adham, for example, is said to have been taught ma'rifah by a Christian monk named Simeon.³ In the case of Abū 'Alī, however, we do not know to which religion he may have belonged. We have no indication to show that ~~he was~~ either a Hindu or a Buddhist.

¹Luma', pp. 325 and 334 in addition to 177; Nafahāt, p. 57.

²This is an Arabic translation of the Persian fanā' dar tawhīd

³Hilyah, VIII, 29.

For a translation of Hilyah's text in this connection, see Arberry, Ṣūfism, p. 37.

We should mention here that if a Muslim learns mysticism from a non-Muslim, it does not mean that the Muslim becomes a non-Muslim. All that it shows is that Ṣūfism drew inspiration from outside sources.

If, on the other hand, laqqana meant imprinting something on the mind, as in imprinting an idea on the mind of a child or as in imprinting shahādah on the mind of a dying man,¹ we may offer an interpretation of the situation in which the reciprocal teaching took place. Both Abū Yazīd and Abū 'Alī were (Muslim) Ṣūfī masters. They associated with each other and discussed mystical matters such as tawhīd and ḥaqā'iq. Abū 'Alī knew more about these subjects than Abū Yazīd so that the latter benefitted from his discussion with the former. Hence Abū Yazīd recognized Abū 'Alī as his master. But, on the other hand, while discussing the relationship of Sharī'ah and ḥaqā'iq, Abū Yazīd found that his teacher considered Sharī'ah unnecessary after one reaches ḥaqā'iq. Hereupon, Abū Yazīd 'imprinted' on Abū 'Alī's mind the necessity of performing obligatory duties as prescribed by Sharī'ah even after the attainment of ḥaqā'iq.

The above discussion shows that there is hardly any basis for supposing that Abū Yazīd was directly influenced by Indian thought. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that Abū Yazīd and other Ṣūfīs of Khurāsān, especially of the North-Eastern part of it,

¹"Bisṭāmīāna", p. 36.

were indirectly influenced by Indian thought. Cultural contact always results in give-and-take; underlying ideas are disseminated and the thought-patterns of the cultures involved are fertilized. Contact between Persia and India is known to have existed from ancient times.

According to the 'Dabistān',¹ under the Mahabid dynasty they had common sovereigns and religion; Mazdaism, the religion of Zarathushtra Spitama (Zordushta, Zoroaster) is a Brahmin heresy.... Even in the ancient biographies of Zarathushtra there is mention of the wise Brahmin Changrach who overcame Zarathushtra in argument. The Indian nation began in ancient times in Kābul and furthermore the Indian religion has reigned there from time immemorial. Persian literacy and art came from Bamiyan and Balkh where the population spoke the purest Persian dialect 'Dari' دری which is very close to Sanskrit. Witness is still given of the presence of India in Bamiyan by the extant ruins of Indian colossi, and Balkh is famed as the home of the school of Zoroaster and the 'Dastūri's', the high priests of his religion. A more decisive influence than that of Brahminism was to be had on Persia by Buddhism. Essentially, however, both

¹See A.E. Krymsky, "A Sketch of the Development of Sūfism down to the End of the Third Century of the Hījah", trans. from the Russian by N.S. Doniach, Islamic Quarterly, VI (1961-1964), 85, n. 5.

these influences are one and the same. Buddhist missionaries were successful in some provinces of Iran even perhaps during the period of Greek power in India. Under the Emperor Asoka, who sent missionaries to all countries, one of them, Madyantika, attracted many followers in Kābul. Buddhism spread quickly: Alexander Polyhistor, who was writing 80-60 B.C., makes mention of samanei, or Buddhist monks, in Bactria. There was Buddhism in Lesser Bukhara in pre-Christian times. Ampère says that in the fourth century A.D. Chinese pilgrims found in the north-eastern part of Persia Gothic tribes (des populations gothiques) who had come down from the plateau of Central Asia and founded a civilized state under the influence of Buddhism.¹

Indian influence in Persia continued even after the Muslim conquest, especially in the remote areas of the country.²

This influence was particularly strong under the Samānids who ruled both Khurāsān and Transoxiana, where Buddhism from Kara-Kitay was playing one important role. In eastern Turkistan, in the town of Khotan, the monk Hi-hio translated the Indian Sutra into Chinese in 684.... Chinese pilgrims

¹Ibid., pp. 85-86.

Cf. also Nicholson, Mystics, pp. 16-17, and Tholuck (supra, pp. 299-300).

²Krymsky, "Sketch", p. 87.

fairly often visited regions peopled by Iranians.¹

In view of this, it would be unusual if Abū Yazīd, who came from the North-Eastern region of Khurāsān, were not influenced by Indian thought, at least in an indirect way.

To sum up our arguments in the controversy on the question of the influence of Indian thought on Abū Yazīd, most of his thought can be explained with reference to Islāmic contexts. It is extremely important that his statements and words be understood in the contexts in which they were made. Taking some words and expressions of a system out of their contexts and showing their similarities with those of another system hinders rather than helps the understanding of either system of thought. As regards a direct link between Abū Yazīd's thought and Indian systems, there is little evidence to prove it. The connection is neither as simple nor as clear as Zaehner, for example, has argued. We think, nevertheless, that in view of the age-old cultural contact that existed between India and Khurāsān, it would be usual for Abū Yazīd to have

¹Ibid., n. 1.

been influenced by Indian thought in an indirect way.

We may add in this connection that even if we suppose that Abū Yazīd had borrowed some elements of Indian thought, he transformed them so radically that they no longer remained what they were. They were now "Islāmized" and thus adapted to the service of the new context. When Abū Yazīd got "done with them", they could no longer be "shipped" back to India for their use there.

To conclude this chapter, it is very unfortunate that scholars have indulged in tracing the origins of Ṣūfīsm at a time when not only that we should devote our time and energy to a more important task¹ but also that in the present state of our meagre knowledge of early Ṣūfīsm it is difficult to draw a comparison of any kind between Ṣūfī concepts and those of other systems of thought. Our knowledge of early Ṣūfīsm is so little that whenever we make a statement about a particular Ṣūfī or about a particular Ṣūfī concept, we are often forced to qualify it by "perhaps", "presumably", etc. Since, on the basis of this uncertain knowledge, scholars proceed to make further presumptions

¹Supra, p. ix.

about the influence of other systems of thought on Šūfīsm (and we have added a few of our own), we are faced with piles of presumptions which lead us nowhere.

In 1942, Arberry called for a truce asking the scholars not to involve themselves in this kind of controversy for some time.¹ But later he broke this truce himself and entered into the controversy because the proponents of the theory of extra-Islāmic influence on Šūfīsm did not accede to his call. We have also fallen in the same predicament; we have been forced to discuss this question because scholars have been debating it so hotly. Let us put a stop to the matter here with a reminder to all concerned of the following counsel of Arberry:

... let it be clearly understood that so far as the constructing of a history of Šūfīsm is concerned these attractive generalities make in reality very little solid matter; and personally I would recommend that a truce be called to all such speculations for at least a generation, so that meanwhile all possible energy can be concentrated upon the main task in hand, the only task appropriate to the thorough-going specialist, the

¹Infra, pp. 350-351.

description and analysis of Ṣūfī doctrine and practice on the basis of Islamic sources and Islamic sources only.¹

We would, however, slightly amend Arberry's counsel. Arberry made this statement about one generation. Since not much has been done in the field of the study of early Ṣūfīsm during this period, and since not many people are being attracted to this study even to-day, we need to continue the truce for another generation or two until we accomplish the task to which Arberry has rightly directed us.²

¹Arberry, History of Ṣūfīsm, p. 19.

²While introducing his article "Pre-Islāmic Monotheism in Arabia" (The Harvard Theological Review, LV;IV [Oct. 1962], 269-280), H.A.R. Gibb also has asked for a stop to all quest for origins. In his opinion, if one were simply pre-occupied with origins, then he would have to conclude that Christianity is Judaism; but to conclude so is to fail to understand either.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Abū Yazīd's Historical Importance

In the preceding pages we have drawn a sketch of the life and teachings of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī. This sketch has shown that he was an extremely complex and unusual personality. Our study has also provided us with an insight into the nature of Ṣūfīsm in the beginning of the third/ninth century. Now it remains for us to assess the role that Abū Yazīd played in the development of Ṣūfīsm.

In an assessment of Abū Yazīd's historical importance, we are faced with several problems. It is difficult to trace the history of Ṣūfī ideas with reference to the terms which have been employed to express them; for, sometimes different terms have been used by different Ṣūfīs, and sometimes a particular Ṣūfī has used more than one term to express a specific idea. We have seen, for example, that Abū Yazīd

sometimes used the term 'ilm to mean ma'rifah.¹ Our problem becomes more complicated in view of the fact that most Ṣūfī terms, e.g., mi'rāj and tawḥīd, may also be used as they are in general and common usage. Moreover, a specific Ṣūfī term does not always convey an identical meaning for every Ṣūfī. This is especially true of the early history of Ṣūfīsm when the use of technical terms had not yet been stabilized. The chapters on ma'rifah in Kalābādhī's Ta'arruf,² for example, show that early Ṣūfīs used the term ma'rifah with various meanings in mind. We also recognize that similarity of the ideas of two Ṣūfīs does not necessarily prove the historical influence of one Ṣūfī on another. Human minds may act in similar ways in similar circumstances. Hence, similarity of ideas may very well be the result of analogical causes affecting the minds. Last of all, our knowledge of Ṣūfīsm, especially in its early stages of development is extremely limited. "Too many gaps remain in our knowledge; too many Ṣūfī writings are unexplored, and too many mystics of enormous influence are all but unknown."³

¹Supra, p. 139.

²Ta'arruf, pp. 63-67.

³Supra, p. x.

In the present state of our knowledge, therefore, it is difficult to draw comparisons between the ideas of one Ṣūfī and those of another. For these reasons, we cannot arrive at definite conclusions about the historical importance of Abū Yazīd. Hence we realize that the conclusions which we present should be regarded only as tentative.

The teachings of Abū Yazīd have two distinct features. The first of these is his mystical extremism; he had a tendency to go to extreme limits. For example, while discussing his life and personality, we had occasion to refer to his unusually sharp sense of conscientiousness regarding what is and what is not permissible, his extreme sense of devotion to his mother, his extraordinary sense of humility before God and in relation to His creatures. The tendency in the direction of extremism also manifested itself in his mystical teachings. He brought, by what we have called the *Bisṭāmī* manner of exaggeration, some of the Ṣūfī concepts to their logical conclusions. Along these lines, Abū Yazīd was certainly influential in contributing to the development of the Ṣūfī tradition.

The second distinct feature of Abū Yazīd's teachings is that he introduced into Ṣūfīsm some

conceptual forms, imageries and metaphors which proved meaningful in the expression of mystical experience. His contributions to the expression of mystical experience served and continue to serve those within the tradition of Ṣūfīsm. We shall now discuss some of Abū Yazīd's teachings¹ in the light of the two features mentioned above.

Asceticism, the elements of which were present in the teachings of the Qur'ān and in the lives of Muḥammad and of his immediate companions, was adopted as part and parcel of the Ṣūfī movement. Ḥaṣan al-Baṣrī, Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Rābi'ah al-'Adawīyyah -- all practised and insisted on the renunciation of the world. Some of these Ṣūfīs also spoke of the necessity of the renunciation of the hereafter, i.e., of the fear of Hell-fire and hope for Paradise as motivating factors of the worship of God. According to Ibrāhīm b. Adham, the true saint of God covets nothing of this world, nor of the hereafter; he devotes himself completely to God.² Ibrāhīm once said that he had left

¹In doing so, we shall, in most cases, follow the order in which his teachings have been discussed in the dissertation.

²Kashf, p. 274.

the world and the hereafter and had chosen for himself the remembrance of God in this world and the vision of God in the hereafter.¹ One of Abū Yazīd's statements quoted above² is similar to this saying of Ibrāhīm. Rābi'ah was once found running with water in one hand and fire in the other. When asked why she was doing so, she replied that she was going to extinguish the fire of Hell with the water and burn Paradise with the fire so that thereafter no one would be able to worship God either for fear of Hell-fire or for hope of Paradise.³

Abū Yazīd also practised and preached the necessity of a rigorous asceticism concerning this world and the next. We can say that up to this point, he was walking on the trodden path except that, perhaps, no Ṣūfī before him had used such strong terms as "I uttered the triple formula of divorce, never to return to it (the world),"⁴ "I pronounced over them

¹M.M.Sharīf (ed.), A History of Muslim Philosophy (Wiesbaden:Otto Harrassowitz, 1963-1966), I, 336.

²Supra, p. 156.

³Al-Aflākī, Manāqib, I, 397.

⁴Supra, p. 148.

(the creatures) the formula of funeral prayer"¹ and "I was a black-smith of my Self for twelve years"² to describe his or her renunciation. What is new in Abū Yazīd's teachings is that he carried the idea of renunciation to its farthest limit. He renounced, in addition to the world and the hereafter, dhikr, love, ma'rifah and the gifts of God such as the Protected Tablet and the Throne.³ While speaking of renunciation of all other than God, he also insisted on abstinence from abstinence itself.⁴ It would seem that this last idea i.e., the idea of abstinence from abstinence, was taken up by later Ṣūfīs as the highest stage of asceticism,⁵ and the resultant psychological state, fanā' 'an al-fanā'', as the highest state of fanā'.

Although Ṣūfīs before Abū Yazīd emphasised the necessity of and also practised asceticism, no one, as far as we know, expressed the psychological state

¹Supra, p. 151.

²Supra, pp. 151 and 152.

³Supra, p. 163 and n. 6 of the same page.

⁴Supra, p. 163.

⁵Al-Shiblī, for example, says that asceticism is heedlessness (Luma', p. 47).

resulting from asceticism in the conceptual form of fanā', and its corresponding positive state, in the conceptual form of baqā'. Probably, Abū Yazīd introduced these two concepts into Ṣūfīsm.

According to Jāmī, it was Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz who first spoke of the theory of fanā' and baqā'.¹ We cannot accept Jāmī's view as correct. Al-Kharrāz died in 277/890-91 and thus belonged to a generation which followed Abū Yazīd (d. 234). The view that Abū Yazīd introduced the concept of fanā' into Ṣūfīsm has additional support if it is true that his master Abū 'Alī al-Sindī, who taught his disciple fanā' fī al-tawhīd,² was really a non-Muslim. One may argue, however, that probably Jāmī had the correlation of the concepts of fanā' and baqā' in mind when he said that al-Kharrāz was the first to speak of the two concepts. Our answer is that the idea of this correlation also existed in Abū Yazīd's teachings.³

On the basis of the available information, then, we conclude that Abū Yazīd was the first Ṣūfī

¹Nafahāt, p. 73.

Cf. Essai, p. 301; Nicholson, "Origin", p. 325.

²Supra, p. 342, n. 1, and p. 344.

³Supra, p. 182.

to speak of the concepts of fanā' and baqā' and of their correlation. From this time on, fanā' and baqā' became two pivotal concepts in Ṣūfī thought and literature. Soon afterwards, al-Junayd wrote a treatise on fanā' (Kitāb al-Fanā')¹ and developed the doctrine of fanā' into a well co-ordinated Ṣūfī theosophy.² He understood Abū Yazīd's subhānī to represent Abū Yazīd's experience of the state of fanā'. Referring to this famous shath of Abū Yazīd, al-Junayd said, "The one who is annihilated in the vision of (God's) Glory expresses himself according to what annihilates him. When he is withdrawn from the perception of himself so that he sees nothing other than God, he describes Him."³ Al-Junayd's idea of fanā', which has been well expressed in the following prayer for one of his friends is particularly reminiscent of Abū Yazīd's idea of fanā':

Then may He (God) perpetuate for you the life which is extracted from the eternity of life as He is everlasting, and may He isolate you from what is yours on His behalf and from what is His on your behalf, so that you are alone through Him

¹Al-Junayd, Rasā'il, pp. 31-39.

²For al-Junayd's doctrine of fanā' see 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 49-69.

³Supra, p. 283.

for all eternity. Then there shall remain neither you nor yours, nor your knowledge of Him, but God will be alone.¹

Al-Shiblī, al-Junayd's disciple, expressed the state of fanā' in the following verses:

I am lost to myself and unconscious,
And my attributes are annihilated.
Today I am lost to all things:
Naught remains but a forced expression.²

One can add numerous examples to show how the concepts of fanā' and baqā' were understood, developed, and made key concepts of Ṣūfīsm by Ṣūfīs after Abū Yazīd. Even a casual glance at the standard handbooks of Ṣūfīsm such as Risālah, Ta'arruf and Kashf shows that considerable space is devoted to the doctrines of fanā' and baqā'. But, as we have said, probably the credit for introducing these concepts into Ṣūfīsm goes to Abū Yazīd.

Another pivotal concept of Ṣūfīsm is that of tawhīd. The earliest definitions of this term are associated with Abū Yazīd³ and with Dhū al-Nūn

¹Luma', p. 243.

²Kashf, p. 244; trans. Nicholson, p. 195.

³Supra, p. 188.

al-Miṣrī.¹ The central idea in these definitions is the same. Abū Yazīd and Dhū al-Nūn were contemporaries and friends. Hence, if we assume that one of them knew the definition from the other, it is difficult to say who knew it from whom. But, most of the traditions which refer to their relationship indicate that Dhū al-Nūn was indebted to Abū Yazīd. Dhū al-Nūn would send a disciple to Abū Yazīd to ask a question and not vice versa. On one occasion, having heard Abū Yazīd's answer to one of Dhū al-Nūn's questions, the latter remarked about Abū Yazīd, "May he be blessed! This is a speech which our states (aḥwāl) have not reached."² On the basis of this evidence, it is possible for us to speculate that the Ṣūfī conception of tawḥīd originated in Bistām and not in Egypt.

Whether or not Abū Yazīd was the first to define the Ṣūfī conception of tawḥīd, he clarified and elaborated the concept of tawḥīd and the Baghdād school of Ṣūfīsm, which deserves the credit for the fullest development of this doctrine, may have received inspiration from Abū Yazīd. His ideas that in the state of tawḥīd, man loses all volition and

¹Risālah, p. 4.

²Supra, p. 106.

choice, that the experience of tawhīd is something to be tasted and not described, that this experience is the result of God's grace, and that there are different groups of worshippers,¹ are found in much more developed form in al-Junayd,² the most prominent representative of the Baghdād school. We know it for certain that al-Junayd, as well as other important members of his school, knew Abū Yazīd's teachings. Hence we can perhaps say more or less definitely that the Baghdād school of Ṣūfīsm was influenced by Abū Yazīd's doctrine of tawhīd.

Still another pivotal concept of Ṣūfīsm is that of ma'rifah. Dhū al-Nūn is generally credited with the introduction of the idea of ma'rifah into Ṣūfīsm. But this view does not seem to be correct. It is true that ma'rifah does not carry the same meaning for all early Ṣūfīs; but there were Ṣūfīs before Dhū al-Nūn, Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830-831), for example, who spoke of ma'rifah.³ Dhū al-Nūn's contribution seems to consist in his development of the idea

¹Supra, pp. 188, 196-198, and 221-225.

²See 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 9-48.

³Tadhkirat, I, 235.

of ma'rifah and his clear presentation of the idea. But in Abū Yazīd too we find a developed idea of ma'rifah very clearly presented. In fact many of Abū Yazīd's teachings on ma'rifah resemble very closely with those of Dhū al-Nūn's. Dhū al-Nūn distinguished three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the common man, of the elite and of the Ṣūfīs.¹ We find a similar distinction in Abū Yazīd's teachings.² Dhū al-Nūn's ideas that when ma'rifah comes God becomes the disposer of the 'ārif, and that one reaches ma'rifah through God⁴ are also present in Abū Yazīd's teachings.⁵ In fact, perhaps Abū Yazīd has further clarified the concept of ma'rifah through his distinction between exoteric knowledge ('ilm al-ẓāhir) and esoteric knowledge ('ilm al-bāṭin), his explication of the existence of knowledge in Prophets and others, and his idea of the sources for these two kinds of knowledge.⁶ Here again

¹ Ibid., p. 127.

² Supra, pp. 211-213.

³ Tadhkirat, I, 127.

⁴ Risālah, p. 156.

⁵ Supra, pp. 208-210.

⁶ Supra, pp. 199-201.

if one of the two Ṣūfīs influenced the other, it is difficult to say who influenced whom. But what we have said of their relationship in respect to the concept of tawhīd can also be applied in respect to the concept of ma'rifah.

Many ideas of Abū Yazīd and Dhū al-Nūn with regard to ma'rifah were developed by the Baghdād school of Ṣūfism.¹

Abū Yazīd introduced into Ṣūfism the imagery of mi'rāj² as a means of expressing the mystical experience. The audacity in introducing the mi'rāj imagery lies not only in his re-enacting the process of the Prophet's journey to the court of God, step by step, in Abū Yazīd's own experience, but also in his claiming to have gone beyond the limits reached by Muḥammad. Muḥammad stopped "two bow-lengths or nearer",³ and saw God face to face;⁴ but Abū Yazīd surpassed all limitations and became one with God.

¹See 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 83-108.

²Supra, pp. 191-193.

³Qur'ān, 53:9.

⁴Supra, p. 200.

The mi'rāj experience of Abū Yazīd played an important role in the history of Ṣūfī thought and literature. Many Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors, al-Junayd, al-Shiblī, al-Ḥallāj, al-Sarrāj, al-Hujwīrī, 'Aṭṭār and Rūmī to name only a few, have discussed and interpreted Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj. In fact, mi'rāj became a persistent theme in many later Ṣūfī works. Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā's Fawā'id and Lāhijī's commentary on Shabistarī's Gulshan-i Rāz,¹ for example, are full of expressions of the mi'rāj experience.

As for the influence of Abū Yazīd's use of the mi'rāj imagery on later Ṣūfī thought, many Ṣūfīs took Abū Yazīd as their ideal and tried to express their mystical experiences in the pattern of his mi'rāj. Al-Junayd's experience of tawḥīd as a return of the soul to the primordial state in which it was before it entered the human body,² was a kind of mi'rāj experience. Al-Kharaqānī's description of his mystical experience is particularly reminiscent of

¹Muḥammad Ja'far Lāhijī, Mafātīḥ al-I'jāz fī Sharḥ-i Gulshan-i Rāz ([Tehran] Kitābfurushī Maḥmudī, 1958).

²This is al-Junayd's famous doctrine of mīthāk (covenant) (see 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 70-82; 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, pp. 76-80).

Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj. He said:

I ascended at noon to the Throne, to circle it, and I encircled it a thousand times; I saw round about it people who were still and serene, and they marvelled at the speed of my circling. Their circling had little value in my eyes. I said: "Who are you, and what is this laggardliness in your circling?" They said: "We are angels created of light and this is our nature beyond which we cannot pass." Then they said: "Who are you and what is this speed in your circling?" I said: "I am a man compact of light and fire and this speed comes from the light of longing."¹

A woman Ṣūfī² also expressed her experience of mi'rāj through different stages in a fascinating way. She said,

I was recalling Abū Yazīd's signs of grace, and I asked the Lord that He would show me him in the hidden world; and while I asked Him, in the same night I was taken up into heaven, in an ascent of perception, until I passed beyond the seventh sphere and came to the Throne. I was summoned, "Draw near... draw near!" I came finally to the Throne, and penetrated the veils; there I was

¹Translated and quoted by al-Sāmarra'ī (Theme, p. 193) from al-Kafawī's A'lam al-Akhyār.

We have quoted another account of al-Kharaqānī's mi'rāj experience on p. 333.

²Al-Sahlagī tells us that she was a pious woman of royal descent from Khurāsān and that she belonged to the Ṭayfurī tradition of Ṣūfīsm (Nūr, p. 123).

called, "Approach me!" Then I rent the veils; came to a place where my sight left me, and I saw God purely through His own deed, regarding His creation, and I said to him who was with me, "Where is Abū Yazīd?" He said, "Abū Yazīd is before you"; and he gave me wings with which I might fly. My state of annihilation, accompanying me, was replaced by the emergence of godhead, until He took me through Him, that is to say not Him through me, until He achieved a Union which is, without a hint of aught else, that Union which gives no sign of any created work when such oblivion is met with. Afterwards [I walked] on the carpet of the Essence of the Truth, hence I was asked: "At what are you aiming, while this is Abū Yazīd?"... I was then taken to a green garden... I said, "O! that is Abū Yazīd!" He said, "This place is Abū Yazīd's; but Abū Yazīd is searching for his self but will not find it."¹

Since both al-Kharaqānī and the woman Ṣūfī belonged to the Ṭayfūrī tradition of Ṣūfīsm, we are certain of Abū Yazīd's influence on them.

Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffārī (d. ca. 365/976) and Muḥī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240)

¹ Nūr, p. 123; trans. al-Sāmarrā'ī, Theme, pp. 194-195.

wrote books on their experience of mi'rāj.¹

Aside from the mi'rāj imagery, Abū Yazīd introduced into Ṣūfīsm the symbolism of 'mirror', of 'drink' and 'cup', the metaphor of the 'Magian girdle',² etc. These were used extensively by later Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors, especially by the Ṣūfī poets.

The most important aspect of Abū Yazīd's thought is that of shaṭaḥāt. The phenomenon of shaṭh existed before Abū Yazīd. Ibrāhīm b. Adham, for example, had said, "Oh God! You know that Paradise does not weigh with me so much as the wing of a gnat. If You bring me near You by Your recollection, sustain me with Your love and make it easy for me to obey You; then give the Paradise to whomsoever You will."³ Rābi'ah, Ibrāhīm's contemporary, once addressed God, saying, "Oh Lord! Do You not have any kind of punishment and discipline (adab) except Hell-fire?"⁴ Another

¹Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffarī, Kitāb al-Mawāqif and Kitāb al-Mukhāṭabāt, ed. and trans. A.J. Arberry, (London: Luzac & Co., 1953); Ibn 'Arabī, Kitāb al-Isrā' ilā Maqām al-Asrā (Ḥaydarābad, 1948).

²Supra, pp. 105, 151, 152, 159, n. 1, etc.

³Hilyah, VIII, 35.

⁴Quoted by Badawī (Shāṭaḥāt, p. 19) from al-Munāwī's Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'.

time, having heard someone reciting the Qur'ānic verse, "Verily the companions of Paradise on that Day shall enjoy everything that they do,"¹ she said, "Poor people of Paradise! They are busy with their wives."² Referring to the Ka'bah, she said, "This is an idol worshipped on earth; God does not enter it, nor is it independent of Him."³

We notice that these shatahāt relate either to the interiorization of religious rites or to the hereafter. According to our classification, they fall into the lowest two categories of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt.⁴ But even in this respect, Abū Yazīd carried the shatahāt to their extreme limits in the Bisṭāmī manner of exaggeration. His claims that his banner was greater than Muḥammad's⁵ and his excusing the Jews,⁶

¹Qur'ān, 36:55.

²Quoted by Badawī (Shatahāt, p. 19) from al-Munāwī's Tabaqāt al-Awliyā'.

³Ibid.

⁴Supra, pp. 253-266.

⁵Supra, p. 261.

⁶Supra, p. 261.

for example, are much more paradoxical than the statements of Ibrāhīm and Rābi'ah.

One aspect of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt concerning the hereafter is his emphasis on intercession.¹ This is unique to Abū Yazīd. We do not know of any Ṣūfī before Abū Yazīd who claimed to have the power of interceding for men on the Day of Judgment. Later Ṣūfīs, al-Junayd, for example, spoke of shāfi' as one who helps people to achieve the mystical aim in this world.² Abū Yazīd also believed in intercession in this sense. We know that he received guidance from several Ṣūfī masters, and he insisted that others do likewise. But Abū Yazīd was the first Ṣūfī to have applied shāfi' to a Ṣūfī in the sense of an intercessor on the Day of Judgment.

In his typical fashion, Abū Yazīd made extreme claims for himself. Whereas Muḥammad's intercessory powers would be of assistance to Muḥammad's community alone, Abū Yazīd claimed for himself the ability to intercede for all mankind.³ There are statements which

¹Supra, pp. 260-264.

²Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, p. 111.

³Supra, pp. 260-262

suggest that the function was considered beneath him. Intercession for all mankind would be easier than interceding for a piece of clay,¹ and he would not want to approach God for such a small favour. Besides, intercession is more in keeping with the appropriate functions of the prophets -- men of Sharī'ah.² Abū Yazīd belonged to the men of ḥaqīqah.

The shataḥāt which have attracted the most attention are those statements which have been uttered in the moment of intense ecstasy at which time the Ṣūfī experiences being one with God. In such moments the intoxicated Ṣūfī breaks forth with statements such as "Glory be to me!" The Ṣūfī no longer speaks as though God were other than he; he experiences that he is none other than God and that God is speaking through him. Abū Yazīd is particularly famous for shataḥāt of this extreme kind. Of special historical significance is the fact that Abū Yazīd was the first to express the experience of the overpowering presence of God in this manner. Subsequently shatḥ has come to mean especially an utterance of this kind. It took a Khurāsānī rebel to break all the limitations set by

¹Supra, p. 262.

²Supra, pp. 262-263.

orthodox Islām and to cry out, "Glory be to me! How great is my majesty", "There is no god but I. So worship me!"

The formulation of shatahāt in which the Ṣūfī speaks as though he were God was a most radical innovation. It shocked "orthodox" minds and the response was tremendous. The immediate consequence was Abū Yazīd's exile from Bistām. What is more important is the fact that shatahāt became a subject of heated discussion among both the orthodox Muslims and Ṣūfīs. After Abū Yazīd's death, we find al-Junayd writing treatises on Abū Yazīd's shatahāt and al-Shīblī and al-Ḥallāj criticizing Abū Yazīd for having uttered the shatahāt. Ibn Sālīm discussed them in a debate with al-Sarrāj, and al-Sarrāj devoted chapters of his Luma' to explain and defend the shatahāt of Abū Yazīd as well as of others. In fact, there is hardly any Ṣūfī author after Abū Yazīd who has not discussed Abū Yazīd's shatahāt.¹

Not only did Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors discuss the shatahāt of Abū Yazīd, but they have also been influenced, either positively or negatively, by them. Let us take a few cases of positive influence first.

¹Supra, pp. 275-298.

The most immediate positive influence of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt was on al-Ḥallāj and al-Shiblī. It is true that both of them criticized Abū Yazīd; but they made their own shatahāt which closely resemble some of the utterances of Abū Yazīd. One can see a very close similarity between Abū Yazīd's "There is no Truth (ḥaqq) except that I am He"¹ and "I am the Truth" attributed to al-Ḥallāj. Some of al-Shiblī's shatahāt are very similar to those of Abū Yazīd. Among al-Shiblī's shatahāt, we would call attention to these: "If the thought of Gabriel and Michael occurred to you, you have committed shirk"² "BY God! Muḥammad will not be happy if there will be a single man from his community in Hell. If Muḥammad intercedes for his community, I shall intercede after his intercession until none will remain in Hell."³ In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that there would have been no shatahāt of al-Ḥallāj and of al-Shiblī if there had been no shatahāt of Abū Yazīd. They were not to enjoy the freedom to express themselves that Abū Yazīd

¹Supra, p. 270.

²Luma', p. 398.

³Quoted by Massignon (Texts inédits, p. 78) from al-Nāmūs of Ibn al-Jawzī.

enjoyed. This fact can be explained, partially at least, by the kind of political and religious atmosphere which prevailed in their day.¹

Later, the phenomenon of shatahāt became a very important aspect of Ṣūfīsm. Many important Ṣūfīs pronounced shatahāt in the form in which Abū Yazīd first introduced them. The famous Ṣūfī-poet of Egypt, ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), for example, said,

Since, but for me, no existence would have come
into being, nor would there have been a
contemplation (of God), nor would any secure
covenants have been known.

None lives but his life is from mine, and every
willing soul is obedient to my will;

And there is no speaker but tells his tale with my
words, nor any seer but sees with the sight of
mine eye;

And no silent (listener) but hears with my hearing,
nor any one that grasps [bāṭish] but with my
strength and might [shiddah];

And in the whole creation there is none save me
that speaks or sees or hears.²

¹Supra, pp. 276-282.

²Michael Farīd Gharīb, ‘Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (Zaḥlah: Zaḥlat al-Faṭāh, 1965), p. 69; trans. R.A. Nicholson, Studies in Islāmic Mysticism (Cambridge: The University Press, 1921), p. 255.

Ibn Fāriq's contemporary, Ibn 'Arabī, said,

He (God) praises me and I praise Him;
He worships me and I worship Him.¹

Elsewhere, he said,

Whenever I say, "Oh Master!"
He (God) says, "You are My owner (mālik).
By God! The existence
Of My servant has blocked all My ways.
Nothing prevents Us from
Serving him in any way.
I do not share his essence,
Nor his action with him.

...

And I am the Servant who
Looks after the kingdoms."²

Baqlī devoted a whole monograph to the elucidation and interpretation of sharḥāt.³ We have also mentioned Rūmī's statement that each of the verses composed by Ṣūfī masters in his day contained one thousand anā al-ḥaqqs and subḥānīs.⁴

¹Muḥī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, Fuṣuṣ al-Hikam, ed. Abū al-'Alā 'Afīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1946), p. 83.

²Ibn 'Arabī, Al-Fūtūḥāt al-Makkiyyah (Cairo, 1876) IV, 459.

³Supra, p. 34.

⁴Supra, p. 298.

There are two points here that should be mentioned. First, in the early period, shatahāt were criticized and the Ṣūfīs who pronounced them were persecuted and were killed in some cases; but in the late medieval period Ṣūfism became a very important force in the Muslim societies, and few uttered a word against them. Rūmī expressed his satisfaction over the fact that no one had the audacity to say a word against the shatahāt of the Ṣūfīs of his time.¹ The second point we wish to make is that Abū Yazīd's shatahāt were extreme to the degree that, as far as we know, no one after him could utter a more radical statement. Most of the shatahāt of later Ṣūfīs are moderate in comparison with those of Abū Yazīd.

On the negative side, most of the so-called sober Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors learnt a lesson from Abū Yazīd's shatahāt. Al-Junayd was perhaps the first man to have fully realized the evil consequences of the unbridled expressions of the mystical experience in the form of shatahāt. Therefore, he placed an emphasis on controlling the mystical expression, and he used obscure language to express the mystical experience.²

¹Supra, p. 298.

²Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 6-8.

He favoured sobriety, and he was joined by a number of apologetic writers who were directly or indirectly associated with the Junaydian school -- al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwīrī and al-Kalābādhī. Some might contend that their attitudes were more significantly influenced by the experience of al-Ḥallāj's than by the reactions to Abū Yazīd's statements. We maintain that the unfavourable consequences of shatahāt were already in evidence at the time of Abū Yazīd. He was the first to utter extreme statements which exceeded all limits. Al-Ḥallāj's shatahāt were only more of the same kind although somewhat milder. The treatment he received was more severe than that of Abū Yazīd for reasons we have explained above.¹ In short, then, we can say that the relatively more sober Ṣūfīsm that came into being with the Junaydian school was in a sense the result of Abū Yazīd's provocative utterances.²

¹Supra, pp. 276-282.

²The importance of Abū Yazīd's shatahāt in the history of Ṣūfīsm has been summed up very beautifully by Massignon. He says that Abū Yazīd

left a fulgurating memory ever alive in Islām. Having become a Semite spiritually, and praying in Arabic liturgy, he undertook a dialogue with God in the form of short invocations in Persian of a sharpness and violence which went beyond prayer, if I may say so. For, it is a vehement attack vis-a-vis Divine Omnipotence, which a pure Semite would perhaps not have dared to formulate,

Abū Yazīd's teachings also contained, in an embryonic form, some concepts which, in the later history of Ṣūfīsm, were developed into important Ṣūfī doctrines. Al-Junayd, for example, developed the doctrine of sobriety (ṣahw). According to this doctrine, the Ṣūfī, after having reached the experience of tawhīd, must come back to the world for the guidance of his fellow-men.¹ Later, many Ṣūfīs and Ṣūfī authors, e.g., al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī, al-Hujwīrī, 'Aṭṭār and al-Ghazzālī, adopted and elaborated on this doctrine. But the idea of a return to the world existed, in a

because he would have had to consider himself superior to a prophet in order to do it. Besides, there is in it something very Iranian: this psychological orchestration, this kind of frontal attack. Actually still, the whole vocabulary of Islāmic mysticism depends on this starting point, the attempt of the Iranians to seize the divine language throughout the Qur'ān. While the reverential fear of the Semite considers God as completely inaccessible, the Iranian temperament, which has a more supple language and a more daring "syllogistique", endeavours to penetrate to the nudity -- if I may say so -- of the Divine Semitic word in Arabic, the liturgical language of Islām (L. Massignon, Opera minora; textes recueillis, classés et présentés [(Beirut): Dar Ma'ārif, 1963], I, 542).

¹See 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 109-125; 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, pp. 88-95.

latent form, in Abū Yazīd's thought.¹

Al-Junayd also developed the doctrine of covenant (mīthāq). On the basis of the Qur'ānic verse, "When your Lord took from the children of Adam -- from their loins -- their posterity and made them testify as to themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?' they replied, 'Yes'",² al-Junayd concluded that the soul of man, before its entrance into the human body, existed in a state of unification with God, and that, in the experience of unification in this world, it (the soul) returns to the state in which it was originally.³

It seems that the idea of the pre-existence of the soul, on which al-Junayd's doctrine of mīthāq is based, was also present in Abū Yazīd's thought in a latent form. Some sayings of Abū Yazīd, especially, God's address to him, "I was yours when you were not",⁴ are suggestive of the same idea.

¹Supra, pp. 246-247

²Qur'ān, 7:172.

³For al-Junayd's doctrine of mīthāq, see 'Abdu-r-Rabb, al-Junayd, pp. 70-82; 'Abd al-Qādir, al-Junayd, pp. 76-80.

⁴Nūr, p. 140.

One very important concept developed by later mystics, e.g., Abū Sa'īd Abī al-Khayr, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428) and Ibn 'Arabī is that of "the Perfect Man" (al-insān al-kāmil). According to this conception, God chooses man, endows him with his own mysteries and makes him His vicegerent on earth. Hence "the Perfect Man" alone manifests God's Essence together with His "names" and "attributes". He is the pole (qutb) of the universe and the medium through which the universe is preserved; he is the final cause of everything and the connecting link between God and His creation.¹

Many traditions indicate the existence of the idea of "the Perfect Man" in a rudimentary form in the teachings of Abū Yazīd. According to him, the real Ṣūfī does not travel from the East to the West, but the East and the West come to him.² Abū Yazīd was omnipotent and omnipresent; he had neither beginning nor end;³ angels came to ask him questions concerning

¹On the idea of "the Perfect man", see, E.I., II-I, 510-511; Nicholson, Studies, etc.

²Supra, p. 117.

³Supra, pp. 193-194.

'ilm;¹ "present in the unseen (ghayb) and existent in the seen";² he informed other people of their presence with God;³ if the people had seen his hidden attributes, they would die of wonder.⁴ These are characteristics of "the Perfect Man". What is even more important is that Abū Yazīd used the expression al-kāmal al-tāmm (the perfect and complete man) to describe the perfect Ṣūfī.⁵ Our evidence strongly suggests that the history of the developed concept of "the Perfect Man" goes back to a significant aspect of Abū Yazīd's teachings.

We turn now to the question of Abū Yazīd's influence on the development of the social structure of Ṣūfīsm. One important aspect of medieval Muslim societies in general and of Ṣūfīsm in particular was the Ṣūfī ṭarīqah. In the fifth/eleventh century, the ṭarīqāt began to take the form of definite organized orders with hierarchical structures and elaborate

¹Nūr, p. 112.

²Nūr, p. 100.

³Ibid., p. 114.

⁴Ibid., p. 74.

⁵See Arberry, Revelation and Reason, p. 107 and Nicholson, Studies, p. 77, n. 2.

functions and ceremonies. In the later medieval period, these orders played a dominant role in Muslim societies. Even today, the influence of Ṣūfī orders on Muslim minds is very strong in many parts of the Islāmic world. An example is the belief of most Bengali Muslims that sāluation is dependant on the acceptance of a pīr (spiritual master).

Abū Yazīd may be credited with having made a significant contribution to the formation of the ṭarīqah. Earlier we referred to a female mystic who claimed to have the mi'rāj experience in the pattern of Abū Yazīd's mi'rāj. Al-Sahlagī says that she belonged to Abū Yazīd's ṭarīqah.¹ We do not wish to leave the impression that Abū Yazīd had an order in the sense of well-organized ṭarīqāt of later times. Nevertheless, the fact remains that many aspects of later ṭarīqāt were in one form or another present in Abū Yazīd's teachings. Although we have discussed this elsewhere, it is worthwhile to mention and elaborate on several points here.

We know that before and during Abū Yazīd's time, there was the tradition of receiving instruction

¹Supra, p. 366, n. 2.

from Ṣūfī masters. For example, Ibrāhīm b. Adham is said to have received instructions from a Christian monk;¹ Ibrāhīm also associated with Sufiyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) and Fuḍayl b. 'Iyāq (d. 187/803); Shaqīq al-Balkhī was taught by Ibrāhīm b. Adham. But no one before Abū Yazīd' ever expressed the necessity of the guidance of a spiritual teacher so clearly and strongly. His statement, "If a man has no master (ustād), then Satan is his guide (imām)"², almost became a maxim of Ṣūfī orders of medieval times.

To our knowledge, Abū Yazīd was also the first Ṣūfī who declared that it is necessary for the disciple to be in absolute submission to his master. He said,

If the master orders the disciple to do something worldly and sends him for his (own) good (fī iṣlāhihi), and on his way the mu'adhdhin of a mosque recites the call to prayer and he says (to himself): 'I shall first go to the mosque to perform prayer and then go for what the master has sent me', then he has fallen into a well the bottom of which he will never discover...³

¹Supra, p. 344.

²Supra, p. 110.

³Supra, p. 111.

Earlier we saw that a sizable group gathered around Abū Yazīd and that he used to live a community life as is shown by the fact that one hundred or more people ate at his place everyday¹ and that he used to sit in the majlis to discuss with and advise the disciples in mystical matters.² On the basis of this evidence, we can say that Abū Yazīd deserves the credit for introducing a more or less definite Ṣūfī ṭarīqah which in later history developed into a powerful and cohesive force in Islāmic societies.

The above discussion shows that Abū Yazīd introduced into Ṣūfism some important concepts, imageries and metaphors, elaborated and made clear some of the existing Ṣūfī ideas, began the practice of expressing the mystical experience in shataḥāt of the most extreme kind, anticipated some important doctrines developed by later Ṣūfīs and, as far as we know, was the first to have established the rudimentary structure of a Ṣūfī order. All this greatly contributed to the development of the Ṣūfī tradition. The Baghdād school

¹Supra, pp. 78-79.

²On the problem of master-disciple relationship see Meier, "Tartīb", pp. 1-39.

of Ṣūfīsm in particular was influenced by Abū Yazīd. But it would not be an exaggeration to say that nearly every Ṣūfī after Abū Yazīd was influenced either positively or negatively by his life and teachings. For lack of evidence, we could not accept many of Zaehner's arguments in favour of his theory that Abū Yazīd was directly influenced by Indian thought, but we agree with Zaehner's conclusion that Abū Yazīd constituted a turning point in the history of Ṣūfīsm. Al-Junayd remarked, "Abū Yazīd among us is like Gabriel among the angels",¹ and in tribute to his greatness, he received the title sultān an 'ārifīn the "king of 'knowers'".² We have not found these estimates inappropriate. Abū Yazīd was one of the most important Ṣūfīs of the early period; and, in view of his influence on future developments in the Ṣūfī tradition, he was probably the greatest Ṣūfī up to his time.

¹Supra, p. 282.

²Supra, p. 81.

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