

LOVE  
IN  
SUFISM

From Rabia to Ibn al-Farid

Süleyman Derin



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I dedicate this book to the memory of my parents with my profound gratitude. To my beloved sons Abdurrahman and Abdurrahim



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### **Abbreviations**

A.D.	: ( <i>Anno Domini</i> ). Christian era
AH	: ( <i>Anno Hegirae</i> )
c.	: ( <i>circa</i> ) about
ed.	: edited
ibid.	: ( <i>ibidem</i> ) in the same book
JMIAS	: Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society K.T.: Kutub al-Tis'ah
n.p.	: no place
n.d.	: no date



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## Foreword

This book investigates the significance of divine love in the Islamic tradition, with particular reference to Sufism. It is commonly accepted that Sufis were the forerunners in writing on the subject of divine love. However, there is a relative paucity of literature regarding the details of their conceptions of love. This attempt can therefore be considered one of the first of its kind in this field. We will study five Sufis—all of whom wrote in Arabic—and their conception of divine love. These are Rabia, Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi and Ibn Farid.

Regarding the scope and limitations of this study, this should not be seen as a historical or biographical study. The historical analysis and information is presented merely to provide some insight into the social and historical context of the Sufi's milieu. The primary aim of this research is to establish the different paradigms of love as conceived by the Sufis mentioned above, by analysing the specific motives of each particular paradigm.

Research on this topic can be approached from many different angles, and this research is by no means a comprehensive account of the Sufi paradigms of love. For example, the concept of love is closely associated with the concept of *ma'rifa* (gnosis) and the concept of God. The re-

relationship of the two with the concept of love is a possible area of further research. In addition, the historical information available on each individual Sufi provides ample material for a detailed study of the concept of love in that particular Sufi's paradigm. Hence, this work provides a general framework for further studies.

I would like to express my deep gratitude and thanks to Professor Ian Richard Netton for his supervision and comments during this study. In addition, I would like to thank all members of Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at Exeter University where I began this research. The librarian in the Old Library, Paul Auchterlonie deserves special mention for his continuous help and advice.

## The Nature of Love

Studying the nature of love is an intricate and complicated endeavour. The reason for this is that love is a phenomenon which falls into the ambit of many divergent disciplines, such as psychology, literature, medicine, theology, biology and so on. All these disciplines attempt to define this concept from their own perspectives. To give a few examples, literature considers love as the driving force behind the finest poetry; medieval medical science perceives it as a kind of disease; theology sees it as a way of approaching and nearness to God; and in philosophy it is the desire of the imperfect to attain perfection.

In this chapter, the concept of love will be studied from the Sufi perspective, with special reference to classical Sufi scholarship. Bearing in mind the complex nature of the subject, we will from time to time also refer to the insights gained from a variety of disciplines such as psychology, philosophy and theology. However, when these disciplines are studied, they will be confined to the boundaries of Sufi understanding. Otherwise, to study the concept of love independently according to these disciplines would be an immense work and would exceed the boundaries of this research. It is hoped that such an approach will offer a deeper and richer understanding of love, and will provide a more com-

prehensive understanding of the subject of this study. Our discussion will take as its starting point the development of love through the human life-cycle beginning from birth through adolescence and into maturity. The status of love throughout the existence of an individual's life will be looked at from a psychological perspective.

As a brief overview, it is possible to regard love as one of the most fundamental of the human emotions. As a working definition, love can be described as an emotion or a feeling that the lover has with regard to the beloved. This love can manifest itself in a variety of diverse ways. The most prominent of these is an attraction towards things which are pleasing to the eye, or in the words of Bammatt, as an "inclination of the heart towards the beauty of the forms" (Bammatt 1963, 252). However, this beauty is not solely restricted to physical beauty; it also includes the appreciation of beauty in its spiritual form.

In addition, love also has an active dimension, since it is not a mere thought in the mind or a feeling in the heart. Love also entails, particularly from the Sufi perspective, an act of obedience to the beloved. This is so much so that love without action in accordance with the will of the beloved is considered to be something that is not worthy of the name. Love is tested through actions of the lover. These issues will be broached in more detail in the following pages.

### **Love in Human Beings as an Emotion**

As was hinted at above, an inter-disciplinary approach can help us to place the concept of love in context. Following this line of thinking, the discipline of psychology can provide us with interesting insights into the nature of love as experienced by human beings. However, it is important to keep in mind that our objective is not to provide a psychological analysis of love. The aim is only to employ psychology in so far as it will enable us to understand "Sufi love" as a human phenomenon. It should not be forgotten that the early Sufis themselves were human beings who experienced the same kinds of emotions and feelings as the rest of mankind. The only difference was that they channelled their love in the direction of the Divine

rather than toward the direction of mortals. To further this aim, they refined and embellished the natural inclination toward love. The perspective outlined above is supported by the fact that a perusal of Sufi literature reveals the close interconnection of Sufi love with basic human love. Examples will be provided below to illustrate this.

As a human emotion, love is closely associated with psychology. However, psychology does not have as clear a theory of love as one might expect. The reason for this is that love cannot be tested in the laboratory. Reber quotes the following words of Harry Harlow, the president of the American Psychological Association, in order to emphasise this phenomenon. "So far as love or affection is concerned, psychologists have failed in their mission. The little we know about love does not transcend simple observation..." (Robin 1988, vii). Therefore, it seems that observation is one of the most important means for gaining an understanding of the nature of love.

The first observations made by psychologists were directed towards establishing the roots of love. The first thing which attracted their attention was the relationship between the mother and child (Murstein 1988, 14). Man's first experience of love takes place between birth and infancy; this is the natural bond of love between the mother and the baby. Suttie suggests that love of the mother is primal in so far as it is the first formed and directed emotional relationship (Suttie 1988, 31). These words are important because according to him, the first emotion experienced by human beings is that of love. Hence, love is an essential part of the human psyche.

The best definition of love that can be provided from a Sufi perspective is that given by al-Ghazali, who describes love as "an inclination towards a thing, which gives pleasure" (al-Ghazali 1992, 312). According to al-Ghazali, at the early stage, a child's love is directed exclusively towards the mother. As the child develops through the primary years of childhood, the child's love starts to explore different avenues. The love which was solely aimed at the mother in the beginning gradually inclines toward games and toys, and expands further to include friends in its ambit. When the child reaches adolescence, he or she starts experiencing a natural inclination to-



wards the opposite sex. Love of the opposite sex in the early stages of adulthood turns into the love of wealth and status at later ages. This process eventually culminates in the love of God (al-Ghazali 1992, 326).

According to al-Ghazali, there is a progression along a continuum, from the concrete to the abstract. When examined carefully, the first objects of love are very concrete, such as mother, toys and friends. At the second stage of this continuum, the objects of love become quasi-concrete objects such as power and status. The third and final stage of love is completely different, since its object is a divine being.

Therefore it can be said that those who have the ability to experience these material loves also possess the ability to love immaterial objects. However, this can only be achieved with proper instruction and in a conducive environment. As a matter of fact, the gradual development of material love prepares the heart for the reception of non-material love, i.e. the love of God (Ozak 1981, 27).

As a further example of this psychological approach, it is instructive to look at the views of al-Daylami. He divides the concept of love into two parts. The first part is natural love, which is love towards the opposite sex and the immediate environment. According to al-Daylami, if God wishes to place divine love in the heart of one of His servants, He will first prepare the servant's heart. This preparation entails initially the servant's acceptance of physical love. Only after the servant has digested the love of transient things, will they be in a state in which they may be elevated to the ranks of those who have the power to absorb the joy of divine love (al-Daylami 1962, 68).

Al-Daylami's views are in some ways similar to those of al-Ghazali. For example, like al-Ghazali, he holds the view that as the human being passes through the various stages of the human life cycle, the focus of love also matures from physical forms to abstract concepts. The ultimate abstraction is the real agent, namely God, who is the creator of all things. In the eyes of al-Daylami, one who has achieved this level of love, has attained to the supreme form of love - love of the divine. On the other hand, if a person lacks the capacity for natural love in due proportion, he or she will not be able to attain divine love. From this brief overview of al-Daylami's unders-

tanding of love, it may be concluded that natural love is the archetype of divine love. Hence, a person who cannot feel love for physical objects cannot love abstract objects.

Al-Daylami's view of love is illustrated in a somewhat humorous anecdote widely circulated among Sufis: One day a Sufi Sheikh was preaching in a mosque when a member of the congregation stood up and asked: "O Sheikh! I have lost my donkey, can you please ask the audience if they have seen it or not?" In response to this awkward question, the Sheikh turned towards his audience and appealed to them: "O congregation! Is there anyone among you who does not know what love is and who has never loved anything in their entire life?" Upon this, a small group of people stood up and proudly replied: "We have never loved anyone in our lives." On hearing this, the Sheikh called the man who had lost his donkey and said to him: "Here are your donkeys," pointing to the men who said that they had never loved anyone!" (Ozak 1981, 37).

According to many Sufis, the ability to love others, and in particular to love God, is a distinctive characteristic of human beings. This oft-quoted story among Sufis, although it may not necessarily describe an actual event that took place, indicates that being able to love someone is an exclusive privilege of humans, whether the object of love is directed towards another human being or towards God.

This line of thinking did not conflict with the teachings of the Qur'an. Sufi authors found examples of divine love which began initially as human love. From amongst these examples is the story of Zulaykha's love for the Prophet Joseph; how she passionately loved him in the beginning but her love was later transformed into love of God (Makki n.d. II, 52).

It is useful to pause at this juncture to highlight a few important points regarding the Sufi explanation of the origin and development of love. Firstly, the Sufi concept of love is firmly rooted in the natural emotions of mankind. People could thus instantly identify with the teachings of Sufis as they struck a chord in their hearts. Most Sufis draw a parallel between the love of humans for other humans and divine love. Sufis maintain that physical love is a transition period on the way to divine love. This was one

of the reasons for the popularity of the Sufi concept of love among the Muslim masses. The opinion of individual Sufis concerning the origins of love will be the subject of the following chapters.

Having presented some examples concerning the origins of love, a few words of caution must be heeded. Firstly, it should not be assumed that every person must follow every stage of the process of attaining divine love outlined above. Secondly, neither should it be assumed that everybody who follows these stages will necessarily attain the final stage of divine love. There is no deterministic connection between the various stages of love. Human effort alone cannot achieve this; an external source of divine intervention is needed. Without this it is impossible to achieve distinction in the ranks of divine love. This divine intervention is referred to in Sufi terminology as *wahb*, meaning God's special favouring of the servant.

Another point which needs to be highlighted as far as Sufi love is concerned is that many Sufi authors believe love to be a personal experience which cannot be described in objective terms. All definitions are the result of personal taste and differ from each other greatly. Hence there is no way to know love except through personal taste and experience (Ibn Qayyim 1972, 9).

Sufi authors also point to the divine origins of love. Love originates from God, and what ever love man has is nothing but a reflection of God's love for His creation. If He did not have the attribute of love, we could not have it either (Al-Qushayri 1981, 432). Furthermore, the ability to love Him is a God-given gift which cannot be compared with any of man's other characteristics and emotions.

To summarise, Sufi authors accept that there is a close relationship between physical love and divine love. In addition, love is a personal relationship which can differ from person to person. Finally, love is an exclusive privilege given to man by God, and hence it has divine origins.

### ***Love in Philosophy***

Another important discipline which endeavours to define and explain the concept of love is philosophy. In contrast with psychologists, philosop-

hers were preoccupied with the concept of love not only as a human phenomenon but also as a divinely inspired emotion. Because of this attitude philosophers influenced the theologians to a great extent in their understanding of the love between God and man. This influence was not limited to the theologians only; it also affected Sufis. In this light one can see a link between certain ideas of love in philosophy that influenced Islamic thought and in particular Sufism. Principal ideas included the theories systematically developed by Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, whose theories influenced first the theologians and in turn the Sufis. In Greek philosophy, love is an important concept which explains many different phenomena ranging from human behaviour to the creative acts of God.

As one of the earliest and most systematic philosophers, Plato devoted three of his dialogues to friendship and love: the *Lysis* to friendship, and the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* to love. In the *Symposium*, love is discussed in great detail. In Plato's system love is conveyed by the word *Eros*, which has a range of meanings. It expresses the craving of the soul for happiness and goodness; it is an absorbing passion for the immortal and for beauty in both mind and body, i.e. not only physical beauty but also spiritual. This love of goodness and beauty in its higher phases becomes an adoration of righteousness, a rapture of religious enthusiasm for eternity and truth (Moffat n.d., 36). The most prominent aspect of *Eros* is that it was always understood to be a kind of selfish love which only considers the interests of the lover. The beloved used only as a means of satisfaction for the lover.

In Greek philosophy, the apparent principles of profane love also appear to be interchangeable with those of divine love, i.e. love between humans and the gods. For them the transcendence of the gods was not an issue, since their understanding of the gods was very much anthropomorphic. Their gods were similar to human beings, and they felt the same emotions and passions. Therefore, there are many myths in Greek culture which describe conflicts between human beings and the gods.

The theory of love expressed by Plato had an immense influence on other cultures. Nygren's famous book *Agape and Eros* was essentially writ-

ten as a refutation of Plato's ideas to cleanse the concept of Christian love from ideas borrowed from Plato's *Eros*. Similarly, all theories of Sufi love refer in one way or another to Plato's theory of love. For example, almost all the Sufi classics deal with the issue of self-interest with regard to love, all downgrading the nature of *Eros* love to selfishness.

It is important to bear in mind that whenever a philosophy was developed and formulated in one specific culture and was then transferred into a different culture, there would inevitably be problems in conveying that philosophy. This was particularly true for the transfer of Greek philosophy into Islamic thought. Transfer is made more problematic by the fact that ideas taken out of their original context tend to lose their meaning or take on meanings which were not intended by the original authors. As an example, Greek society was embedded in a culture of polytheism with streaks of rationalistic thought. In contrast, Islamic culture was formed along strongly monotheistic lines, where even the concept of rationality was based upon scripture. Therefore, when these alien principles were imported into the Islamic context they needed to be explained in such a way that they could 'fit' into mainstream Islamic thinking. These ideas could not have survived in the Islamic context had this approach not been taken.

The following paragraphs provide a summary of Greek ideas which preoccupied Muslim theologians and Sufis. A detailed discussion of how these ideas were interpreted and transformed into concepts which are in harmony with Islamic principles is provided in the relevant chapters. There are a number of important themes in the Greek philosophical tradition which often recur in Sufi writings:

1. Plato's definition of passionate love (*'ishq*) as excessive love or an excess of feeling (Plato 1971, 489-97)
2. Love as a consequence of similarity or complementarity 489-97 (Plato n.d., 153).
3. The denial of love between God and man because of dissimilarity in their nature (Aristotle 1996, v. 3, 7. 1159a ).
4. The thesis that nothing which is possessed can be the object of desire or love (Plato 1983, 103).

5. The question as to whether the happy and self-sufficient man needs friends, and whether God as a self-sufficient being can be characterised as loving others (Aristotle 1996, v.3, 7, 1159a-1).

These ideas in Greek philosophy preoccupied Muslim theologians and Sufi authors alike. They were borrowed by Muslims most probably through translations, firstly by the theologians and secondly by Sufi theologians. According to Van Den Bergh, the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle had been translated into Arabic, and this work may have been widely familiar among the theologians (Bergh 1956, 306). It is also possible that some similar ideas were already present in Muslim culture.

### ***Love in Muslim Philosophical Thought***

Muslim philosophers understood the importance of the concept of love from quite an early date. For example, Avicenna's (d.1037) *al-Risalah fi al-Ishq* examines the various levels and kinds of *ishq* and culminates in a discussion of highest *ishq*: passionate love for God. In the first chapter of his *Risalah*, he defines *ishq* as "in truth nothing but the whole-hearted approval of the pleasing and the suitable, the source of yearning for it when it is absent and uniting with it when it is present." This understanding of *passionate love* allows Avicenna in a subsequent chapter to speak of *ishq* in inanimate simple beings as well as in vegetative, animal and rational souls. Thus, for Avicenna, it applies to both carnal, forbidden love, which he calls shameful, and to intellectual love of the Absolute Good (Harvey 1977, 184). This approach conforms with the attitudes of most Sufi authors, since they also use the same terminology for profane and divine love.

However, it is this Absolute – or Pure – Good, which Avicenna identifies with the First Cause, that is, the true object of love. Therefore, for him perfect love is the love of God (Fakhry 1970, 184); love is the most perfect relationship between man and God. Avicenna also claims that the worship of the lover is different from the worship of ordinary people. In the treatise of *Mahiyat al-Salat*, Avicenna describes true prayer which is the intellectual worship of God, as the contemplation of God "with a pure heart and

soul freed and cleansed of the desires.” In this treatise he proposes that such a man, whose intellect controls his passions, need only turn to God in love to attain the highest happiness. By *‘ishq* here Avicenna means the intellectual love and contemplation of God described in *Risalah fi al-‘Ishq* (Inati 1996, 28-29, 78-79).

Another important theory of love was developed by the body of philosophers called the *Ikhwan al-Safa’*, who entitled one of their missives *Fi Mahiyat al-‘Ishq*. The *Ikhwan* were very much aware of differing attitudes towards *‘ishq*, some praising it as a spiritual virtue and others censuring it as a shameful vice. They described *‘ishq* as “an excess of love, an intense yearning for union, which leaves the soul empty of all concerns save for the one who is passionately loved”. Like Avicenna, they believed that “God is the first object of passionate love” (*Ikhwan al-Safa’* 1957, 270). The *Ikhwan* explicitly applied *‘ishq* to love of God, to spiritual love as well as bodily love.

After this brief survey concerning the origin of human love, the question now arises as to whether it is possible to speak of God “loving” in the sense of the human love outlined above. This matter is dealt with in the following pages.

### The Nature of Lover and the Beloved

So far we have focussed on the nature of love. Love is a relationship that involves two parties: the one who loves, *the lover*; and the one who is loved, *the beloved*. In this section our discussion turns to the relationship between these two. The relationship of love must be distinguished from other similar but distinct feelings and emotions. Some actions can be performed without a recipient to which or for which the action is done. One may feel afraid without an identifiable object to be afraid of; one may feel sad, miserable or depressed, but not for or about another person. By contrast, love is necessarily directed towards some object (Osborne 1994, 46-48). Hence, it can be said that love necessitates some awareness of the object of that love.

Therefore, knowledge of the Beloved (God) constitutes an essential part of the Sufi understanding of love. Sufis such as al-Ghazali establish a direct

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link between love of God and knowledge of God. This implies that the lover requires the capacity to appreciate the beloved. Although animals share with human beings the fact that they are both sentient, an important distinction must be made between the two. The mere capacity to feel and respond to love is not enough to partake in the relationship of love. There is another distinction that distinguishes man from other creatures. This feature, in the words of al-Ghazali, is called "the sixth sense". This intellectual power to appreciate the reality which is invisible to the external eye is the preserve of human and divine beings only, e.g. angels (al-Ghazali 1952, 82).

In contrast, a question that might arise is whether the beloved also needs to possess the sixth sense. This question might be answered in two ways. Firstly, if the object of love is not divine, it seems the answer will be in the negative. There is not a universal agreement that the object of love should necessarily be a sentient being; apparently anything can be loved, including food, country, ideas, etc. Secondly, if the object of love is divine then the answer might be in the affirmative. From the Islamic point of view, God is regarded as having the absolute perfection. Nothing is lacking in him; he possesses the ability to perceive, to feel and to respond. Therefore, it can be said that God necessarily possesses the "sixth sense" and more, in the sense that He knows all the secrets of His creation and nothing is hidden from His knowledge.

However, several fundamental arguments, all inherited from Greek philosophy, most probably Aristotle, are used to deny a possibility of love between man and God on the basis of their different natures (Aristotle 1996, v3. 7. 1159a). The first is the argument that love requires a conformity or similarity (*munasaba*) between the two lovers. It is clear that man is contingent, whereas God is eternal; hence there is no affinity or similarity between them. The second argument is that love is the result of some need; hence it cannot be attributed to God, since He is not in need of anything. God is perfect in His nature and does not need anything whatsoever from His creation. For these and other reasons, some Islamic theological sects such as the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites denied the possibility of love between man and God (al-Qushayri 1990, 319).



In summary, certain difficulties arise in applying the concept of love to the relationship between man and God due to the fundamental differences in their natures. For love to be possible between two fundamentally different beings, there needs to be some compromise. It could be argued that this compromise in Christianity is incarnation, since through incarnation God comes to the level of humanity. In Islam, this compromise will be made in re-shaping the meaning of the word love or changing it. In this way, the answers provided by Sufis and theologians to issues such as whether love is possible between man and God, and whether man could love God or can God love man, are outlined in the pages that follow.

### ***Application of Love to God***

The preceding discussion about the nature of love reflects the ideas of various disciplines such as psychology, Greek philosophy, and possibly the traditions of those times. However, when love is attributed to God, it needs to be explained in a way that does not contradict the religious teachings of Islam. This entails some difficulties for the Muslim theologians. As explained above, love entails need and a lack of some attributes that are possessed by the beloved. Muslim theologians experienced problems in explaining how God could love man because of the essential differences between in their natures (Baqillani 1963, 39-41). God, who is eternal, uncreated, and who is the creator of everything, is not in need of anything, and has all the attributes of perfection, whereas man is created, ephemeral, imperfect and completely dependent on God for his existence. Keeping in mind also the idea that love in the human sense involves inclination to something which the lover lacks, the question arises: Is it possible to say that God can love man?

The notion that one cannot love anything which one already possesses was originally developed by Plato (Santas 1988, 27). Under the influence of Plato and Greek philosophy,<sup>1</sup> Muslim theologians in general understood love as a concept which implies "need and dependence" of and upon the beloved. Furthermore, for them love necessitated change in the lover. If we return to the origins of love, i.e. the infant-mother relationship, the infant

is in constant need the mother. Another notion that is borrowed from Greek philosophy is that love requires similarity and complementary elements between the lover and the beloved. The lover and the beloved always share common attributes. The gist of the matter for the theologians was to cleanse the concept of love from those human connotations. For example, in the 10th century, they attempted to explain the concept of love in a refined way. "There are no any notions which contradicted the fundamental principles of Islam."

Now, as an example, we can look at al-Baqillani's (d.1013) explanation of love. He tried to avoid attributing human features to God by explaining love in a modified way. He used terms that did not necessitate imperfection in God, like change in His essence or need for others. Understanding love in its literal sense, meant for him attributing imperfection to God. Hence he understood love and hate as manifestations of the God's will. According to him, God's love means "God's will to reward those with whom He is satisfied, whom He loves and befriends, and to punish those with whom He is angered, whom He hates. Nothing else!" Al-Baqillani justifies such a commentary on love for the following reason: "Anger, good pleasure and the like must mean His will to do good or to do harm alone, or they must mean an aversion and a change arising in His nature when He is angered, and a tenderness, an inclination, a tranquillity in his nature when he is pleased" (Baqillani 1963, 40). To accept the latter means that God can be subject to such sympathies and change like His creatures (Bell 1979, 57), which contradicts the notion that God is immutable. To prevent such a conclusion, al-Baqillani equates God's love with His will. Hence, he argues that God's love, anger and pleasure are unchanging, according to the eternal will of God. Therefore, God does not cease eternally to love a person whom He knows will die as a believer, even when that person is in a state of disobedience. Similarly, He does not cease to be angered at one whom He knows will die an unbeliever, even when that person is obedient.

In al-Baqillani's view, God's love and hatred are one insofar as they are both equivalent to His will, but they are clearly different with respect to their objects. This commentary, i.e. equating God's love with His will to escape attributing human characteristics to God, seems somewhat artificial.

However, al-Baqillani seems to accept that His will is eternal and does not imply change. In this way al-Baqillani attempts to prove that love does not necessarily result in a change in God.

A further example is provided by Ibn Taymiyya. He states firstly that God, who is qualified with every attribute worthy of love, is clearly a proper and worthy object of love. Secondly, he explains the affinity between man and God in the following manner. For him, the *munasaba* (affinity) is the believer's accord with what God commands through obedience in addition to loving that which is loved by God (Bell 1979, 76).

The theologians appear to have been far from solving the problem of how God can love man and vice versa. The theological discussion as to whether love is applicable to God or not is not the subject of this study. However, it is necessary for this study that we establish the background to theological aspects of this matter as they influenced the Sufi authors.

### Love in Islamic Terminology

In Islamic terminology, love is fundamentally divided into two branches based on the object of love. The mutual love between man and God is called "divine love"; if the object of love is a worldly entity other than God it is called "profane love". Divine love is also referred to as "real love" and profane love as "metaphorical love". Divine love falls primarily within the interests of the Sufis, but also partially within the interests of Islamic philosophers.

On the other hand, Islamic literature and poetry equally employs both kinds of love amongst their themes. This chapter, however, will study the Sufi understanding of love, hence excluding other kinds of love. It should not be forgotten that there is a close relationship between the experience of physical love and divine love, especially in the language that is used to convey these emotions. The terminology of profane love plays a key role in the terminology related to divine love. Schimmel states that Sufis express their love of God through symbols based on human love (Schimmel 1975, 5). This notion is supported by the classical Sufi authors' treatment of divine love. The majority of Sufi authors who have written on the subject of love, such as al-Hujwi-

ri (d.1072) and al-Qushayri (d.1074), explain divine love through anecdotes dealing with human love. Therefore, the terms and phrases which are used to express human love are also used for divine love.

It is important to note that there is no uniformity in the terminology employed by the Sufis regarding divine love. Sufi authors do not define love in various different ways. These differences of expressions should not be understood as a controversy but rather as a difference of their perception at the time of their experience. In addition, Ibn al-Khatib stated that these definitions are the result of the personal experiences of Sufis. He remarked that none of these Sufis can experience love completely, but only partially, in accordance with their states traversed on the spiritual ladder (Ibn al-Khatib 1970, 376).

The early Sufis' fellowship with God was driven by fear of God's majesty. However, some later Sufis preferred a different approach in their relationship with God, an approach which was based on love. In so doing, they drew support from the verses of the Qur'an, especially the verses that describe God's attributes. In the Qur'an, two types of God's attributes are always mentioned together. These are the attributes of beauty (*jamal*) and majesty (*jalal*). Attributes of the former kind indicate the loving and merciful aspects of the Divine, such as "the Compassionate" (*al-Rahman*) and "the Merciful" (*al-Rahim*). The latter kind specify the awesome aspects of the Divine such as the "Avenger" (*al-Muntaqim*) and the "Omnipotent" (*al-Jabbar*).

In al-Hujwiri's opinion, the seekers of God approach Him by entering through one of these gates, i.e. either from the gate of beauty or from the gate of majesty. Those who know God by the attributes of beauty worship Him in love, whereas those who know Him by His majestic attributes worship Him in fear (al-Hujwiri 1970, 288). Al-Hujwiri captures the entire problem of love in Sufi thought in one short question: Is the God of the Sufis a loving God or is He someone that must be feared? It seems that it is possible to prefer one of these approaches to the divine being by looking into the Qur'an, since it contains both the attributes of majesty and beauty in equal proportion.

It is also useful to examine the theory of Solomon and Corbit to understand the shift of the emphasis from "fear" to "love of God" among the early Sufis. Solomon and Corbit's psychological theory which is called "opponent-process theory" can illuminate the development of Sufism from being "fear-centred" to being "love-centred". They state that most negative feelings are followed by their opposites once the initial stimulus which was the cause of the negative feelings has been overcome, for example, when the causes which create fear are successfully overcome (Stenberg 1988, 15). According to them, the feeling of fear can be transformed into love. From this it can be concluded that the early Sufis who put more emphasis on fear of God went to an extreme, and eventually this notion lost its appeal. After this process, they finally realised that God had other attributes which made mutual love possible. In many Qur'anic verses, which will be discussed in the chapter that follows, God is described as a passionate, loving God. Hence they started to preach the loving attributes of God more than the ones which inspired fear.

### Love in the Classical Sufi Literature

An attempt will be made in this chapter to explain the nature of love as discussed in the classical Sufi literature. This literature includes the writings of early Sufi authors like al-Sarraj, al-Hujwiri, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, al-Kalabadhi, and al-Suhrawardi, who aimed to teach Sufi concepts in general. These are more or less accepted as first hand reference books by the majority of the scholars. However, we will also take into consideration works which were written exclusively on the subject of love such as *Tawq al-Hamama* by Ibn Hazm, *Kitab 'Atf al-Alif* by al-Daylami, and *Rawdat al-Ta'rif* by Ibn al-Khatib. In addition to the Islamic sources, Christian sources will be referred to in order to clarify the Sufi understanding of love.

In the following chapters, the notion of divine love will be divided into two categories: firstly, God's love for man; and secondly, man's love for God. This division will be made due to the fact that Sufis and Classical Sufi works always deal with these two types of love separately. According to

them, these two loves are not identical in their nature. The differences between the two will be elucidated in the following pages.

### ***God's Love for Man***

Before understanding the Sufi approach to God's love for man, it is essential to have an understanding of the concept of God in Islam. The understanding of God's love for man is very much related to the understanding of God in Islam. The Qur'an, the most important source concerning the nature of God, describes Him in two different ways. The first declares that God is not comparable to any creature or concept we can perceive; this is called *tanzih*, which is a concept that finds its expression in verses such as: "There is nothing like Him" (Qur'an, 42:11). *Tanzih* means that "God is not similar to His creation in any way" (Chittick 1996, 70). However, such a description of God without any affirmative attributes could result in nihilism, as this would mean that we could know no attribute of God in this way. Hence, the object of worship would be a mysterious, unknown being.

To prevent this, the Qur'an also follows a second method which is termed *tashbih*, which literally means to declare a thing similar to something else. For example, attributes such as life, knowledge, mercy, and generosity which belong to God, are also found in creation. Hence, all divine names suggest some sort of *tashbih* because they allow us to think that God is characterised in such and such a way. As soon as we name God, we create a concept in our minds of what He is like. *Tashbih*, in contrast with *tanzih*, allows us to describe Him in ways with which the human mind is already familiar. In essence, then, similarities in some shape or form and to some degree can be found for God. This makes God more accessible to the human mind. In particular, it allows man to identify himself with a God who can be comprehended by the faculties of the mind. The idea of *tashbih* is interspersed throughout the Qur'an in different verses, and the extreme position of *tanzih* is hence counter-balanced by the alternative concept of *tashbih*.

Although each divine name suggests similarity with creation, they differ in strength and intensity. Some bear closer resemblance to man

than the others. In this context, God's attributes are divided into two branches: the attributes of beauty and the attributes of majesty. The former attributes stress similarity with creation to a greater degree than they stress *tanzih*. Hence the names that tell us about God's nearness to creation and His concern for His creatures can be classified as *tashbih* (Murata & Chittick 1996, 71).

However, to understand these attributes merely in human terms leads us into danger of anthropomorphism, which inherently contradicts the fundamental principles of Islam. This could mean that Muslims would be the worshippers of a god who was essentially like themselves. To avoid such an understanding, Muslim theologians often approach the attributes of *tashbih* with caution. For example, saying that God is omnipotent leaves little scope for a blasphemous interpretation, as it will be accepted without question that God is all powerful in comparison to man. On the other hand, verses such as: "The hand of God is above their hand" (Qur'an, 48:9) can easily lead to an anthropomorphic interpretation due to the fact that humans also possess hands. Does this mean that God possesses hands which are the same as those of human beings?

The attribute of love is also an attribute of *tashbih*. Therefore, it must be handled with great caution. If not, then, God could be placed on the same level as that of a human lover who seeks beauty and perfection to compensate for his own lack of beauty and perfection. Since God is the most perfect being and has the most beautiful attributes, He does not need to love someone in the sense that we love. Therefore, His love is understood differently in comparison with our love for Him.

Although the concepts of love have been understood by the classical Sufi authors in different ways, there is one notion which is common to all of them: the idea that God has no equal. This idea pervades all the Sufi interpretations of love extant in the classical literature. This idea constrained the Sufis in all their interpretations of love. Such an approach may be easily demonstrated by looking at the works of some of the great Sufi authors.

When al-Sarraj (d. 998) deals with God's love for man, he is aware of this sensitivity (al-Sarraj 1914, 58). Hence, he does not explain how God

loves man other than by quoting the hadith which states that when Allah loves someone He becomes his sight, his hearing and so on. In addition to the hadith, the verses he quotes are very often the ones quoted by the other Sufis such as: "Then Allah will bring a people. He shall love them and they shall love Him" (Qur'an, 5:54); "But those of Earth following in their love for Allah." (Qur'an, 2:165). Nevertheless, i.e. God's love for man and man's love for God, are clearly treated as being separate in his exposition.

One of the major statements that al-Sarraaj makes regarding God's love for man is that God's love for his creatures precedes their love for Him, i.e. God's love for man is eternal and not temporary. This short statement by al-Sarraaj neatly captures the theological dogma that God is immutable, and accordingly, his actions are also immutable. To conclude, it could be said that al-Sarraaj does not provide a clear picture regarding this issue. This is due to the fact that there is an absence of detail in his exposition. For instance, he does not explain the nature of God's love which precedes man's love for God. How does this process take place? Is it similar to human love?

However, not all authors follow the thought of al-Sarraaj. Contrary to him, another Sufi author, al-Hujwiri, presents a clear idea of God's love for man. Firstly, he describes the love as "restless desire and inclination and passion for the object of love" (al-Hujwiri 1974, 366). Hence, love in this sense cannot be applied to God, who is exalted far above anything of this sort. Because human love involves need and lack of something, as Hall states, "Every theory of love, from Plato down, teaches that each individual loves in the other sex what he lacks in himself" (Santas 1988, 26). God, who is perfect and has no defects, does not need others in this sense. His love, therefore, must be understood in a sense which does not imply that God is in need of others.

As a result, al-Hujwiri understands "God's love for man" to mean His good will towards him and His having mercy upon him. According to al-Hujwiri, love is one aspect of God's will, like satisfaction, anger, and mercy. All of these are different manifestations of His will. If God wills good for so-



meone, it means that "He loves him". The nature of this love consists of rewards, such as showing much favour to the servant, and giving them recompense in this world and the next, securing them from punishment and keeping them safe from sin. When God distinguishes someone in this way, that specialisation of His will is called love (al-Hujwiri 1974, 367). In al-Hujwiri's view, this singling out is a divine gift. If the whole world wished to attract love, they could not, and if they made the utmost efforts to repel it, they could not. Hence, God's love is not the result of man's good deeds. Perhaps due to the fact that God loves a person, this person is drawn towards good deeds. It may be concluded, from al-Hujwiri's remarks, that the reason why God loves some and does not love others is a divine secret.

Al-Hujwiri also believes that God's love for man and man's love for God are fundamentally different in their natures. It is impossible that man's love for God should be similar in kind to the love of human beings towards one another. As has been seen, al-Hujwiri considers love as part of "His will" and nothing more. Al-Hujwiri sticks strictly to the understanding of love as understood by theologians like al-Baqillani (al-Hujwiri 1974, 307). Therefore, it may be concluded that al-Hujwiri does not very much approve of a personal relationship of love between God and man.

Al-Qushayri treats the subject of love in a similar way to al-Hujwiri. He introduces the Qur'anic verses and the traditions of the Prophet on the subject of divine love, and as a result he deduces that God is characterised as loving the servant, and the servant is characterised as loving God. However, like al-Hujwiri, he believes that the nature of God's love for man and man's love for God are substantially different. Love as it is experienced by mankind, such as feeling affection and feeling an intimate fondness for something, cannot be attributed to God (al-Qushayri 1993, 318-19).

In conclusion to this section, it can be said that almost all of the Sufi authors share the same concerns as the theologians as far as the transcendence of God is concerned. Their understanding of God's love is especially in conformity with the Ash'arite theologians, i.e. equating God's love with His will. The Sufi authors all believe that there are substantial differences between man's love for God and God's love for man. To understand these

differences, the views of the Sufi authors concerning man's love for God will be presented below.

### ***Man's Love for God***

In general, the classical Sufi authors do not elaborate very much on the nature of God's love for man. However, they give a more detailed account concerning man's love for God. That is only natural, as when they speak about man's love for God it is from within their own experience. Hence they speak on behalf of themselves. Whereas when they describe God's love for man, they are in a sense speaking on God's behalf. It is therefore understandable that they are hesitant to provide much detail.

The Sufi classical literature confirms that God loves the believers. However, this does not mean that God loves everybody equally. He might love one believer more and another less, but in essence this love is the same. His love for one person is not essentially different from His love for another person. On the other hand, the Sufi authors, without exception, inform us that each man has a different love for God, depending on the group to which he or she belongs. The believers, according to their stages in knowledge and other motives, have different degrees of love. They generally classify man's love for God into different categories and specifically into three groups. For example, al-Sarraj divides man's love for God into three categories according to their spiritual levels (al-Sarraj 1914, 58).

The first and the lowest degree of love is that of the common people. Their love originates from the beneficence of God in this world and from the expectations of rewards in the next. Hence, this love appears to be a kind of selfish love, loving someone not for his or her intrinsic value but for the benefit that the lover will gain. In al-Sarraj's opinion, this love is the most common type since it is natural to love someone who renders benefits. He affirms this kind of love through a saying of the Prophet: "Hearts are created with the nature to love those who benefit them, and to hate those who harm them." According to al-Sarraj, for this group of people, love means obedience and remembrance of the Benevolent at all times (al-Sarraj 1914, 59).

The lovers of God in the first group of al-Sarraaj's classification are simple believers who have no deep knowledge of God and who have no share in Sufi knowledge. For them love does not involve complex meanings. As al-Tustari explains, for this group "love consists of embracing the acts of obedience and avoiding the acts of disobedience" (al-Hujwiri 1970, 311). It is only thanksgiving for the benefits, which are already received or expected to be received in the future. This kind of love is one of the major themes that Sufis such as Rabiya deal with, and in general is considered to be a type of selfish love.

However, for the second group of lovers, referred to as *al-sadiqin* (the truthful), the idea of benefit has no value. The love possessed by people in this group originates from their contemplation of God's beauty, majesty, and omnipotence. Hence, their love is the result of deep contemplation and the acquisition of knowledge of the nature of God. It is not similar to the simple thanksgiving of the first group; this group's love involves deep mystical knowledge of the secrets of the Divine Being. The definition of love given by al-Sarraaj for this group is quoted from al-Nuri, who describes love as "tearing down the veils and exposing the secrets" (al-Sarraaj 1914, 59). Although al-Sarraaj does not give a clear explanation as to the meaning of the veils and the secrets, it is clear that these concern knowledge which requires specialised Sufi instruction. He also implies that this love involves contemplation which culminates in the obliteration of the lover's characteristics, in addition to the replacement of the lover's attributes with those of the Beloved. By obliteration of man's characteristics, Sufis generally mean the obliteration of bad characteristics and their replacement with good ones. It also means complete submission of man's will to the will of God, i.e. full obedience to His commandments.

The third and final kind of love is the love possessed by Gnostics. Their love originates from the contemplation of the knowledge that God's love for man precedes their love for Him. This group appears to be the most privileged group, since they are chosen by God. In al-Sarraaj's view, this last kind of love manifests itself in the complete annihilation of the lover. This annihilation is one step further from the previous group, since the lover in this group is unaware of his or her love.

Al-Sarraaj strengthens his theory and classification of love with the sayings of other Sufis. For example, in connection with the last group, he refers to Dhunnun who describes love as "a pure love without any taint, with the heart's unawareness of this love." Abu Ya'qub al-Sirafi describes this love in the following way: "Love is only perfect when the one who loves ceases to realise his love, but at the same time realises the love of the Beloved with the annihilation of the knowledge of love. When the lover reaches this state, he becomes a lover without love," i.e. he becomes completely annihilated in his love; he does not even realise his love is like the fish that lives in the water but does not know what water is (al-Sarraaj 1914, 59).

Another important characteristic of this love in al-Sarraaj's view is that it has no selfish motives, in comparison to, say, the first group in his classification, so it does not change according to the favours of the Beloved. To this effect he refers to the statement of Yahya b. Mu'adh: "Love is neither diminished by unkindness nor increased by kindness and bounty" (al-Hujwiri 1970, 310). As God's love for them is spontaneous and without any secondary motives, in a similar way man's love for God is a reflection of this spontaneous love. This understanding of love corresponds with the Christian idea of *agape* since the most prominent characteristic of *agape* love in Christianity is that it is spontaneous and unmotivated, having no motive outside itself. Nygren (1969, 78) remarks: "...*Agape* has nothing to do with the kind of love that depends on the recognition of a valuable quality in its object. *Agape* does not recognise value but creates it. *Agape* loves and imparts value by loving. The man who is loved by God has no value in himself; what gives him value is precisely the fact that God loves him." This resemblance might further explain the close relationship between Sufism and Christian thought.

Hence, al-Sarraaj describes the different levels of the lovers of God according to their motives. He also appears to establish a close link between love and annihilation (*fana*). Love culminating in annihilation is a favourite theme of Sufis such as Hallaj and Ibn al-Farid, whose ideas are discussed in later chapters.

Concerning man's love for God, al-Qushayri places great emphasis on the differences between divine love and profane love(s). With regard to the

latter, there is an inclination towards his beloved, whereas in man's love for God inclination cannot be possible. Human love also involves affection and enjoyment. However, divine love in this respect, too, is different from the species of human love; the love man feels for God is a state experienced in the heart, and is too subtle for words. This state propels him to glorify God and to attempt to gain God's pleasure. The servant's love for God does not imply affection or enjoyment in the human sense. For al-Qushayri, man's love is his conformity to the divine will (al-Qushayri 1993, 319). Once again, like other Sufi authors, he supports the ideas of the theologians.

Another classical scholar, al-Kalabadhi, understands love to be an inclination of the heart towards God, and an inclination towards what is of God, without any effort on the part of man (al-Kalabadhi 1960, 109). Al-Kalabadhi appears to view love as a divine gift, and not the result of human endeavour. God gives His love to the believers whom He favours. This theme is a major motif of Sufi love. Furthermore, man's love for God means reverence dwelling in his heart, so that it does not accommodate the love of any other than God.

By contrast, al-Hujwiri initially classifies the lovers of God according to their objects of love. He describes human love as, firstly: "love of the like towards the like"; and secondly: "...love of the one who is unlike the object of his love, i.e. God (divine love)". Concerning divine love, al-Hujwiri, like al-Sarraj, begins by citing Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions. If we consider the criticism faced by Sufis from mainstream scholars concerning their conception of divine love, we can better understand why Sufi authors always referred to the Qur'an and Hadith in the first place. By doing so, they provided proof that the concept of love originated from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Therefore, these concepts could not be rejected outright as originating outside of Islam. In summary, the Sufis had a characteristically apologetic approach, as they attempted to justify and defend their positions against the attacks of hostile theologians.

After this first attempt, al-Hujwiri divided love into the divine and profane according to the objects to which this love was directed. In his treatment of divine love, he classifies the lovers of God into two groups according

to their motives. The first group consists of those who love God because of His favours and His beneficence towards them. The second group consists of the those who love God because He is the Benefactor, and not because of the beneficence received from the Benefactor. These people are so enraptured by love that they hold all favours to be a veil. Al-Hujwiri (1970) divides a of benefit as a veil between the lover and beloved as well. He considers the second group more exalted than the former one (al-Hujwiri 1970, 503).

As a final example in the classical Sufi literature, Umar al-Suhrawardi, the author of *Awarif*, also divides the lovers of God into two groups. This division goes back to the division of Muslims into two groups by the Sufis: *ʿawam* and *khawas*. *ʿAwam*, as described above, refers to people who only understand the exterior aspects of religion and do not have a strong capacity to understand the internal wisdom which is hidden behind its exterior. The *khawas* are that minority of believers who understands the wisdom of the hidden aspects of religion (al-Sarraji 1914, 504).

The love of the first group, since they do not have a deep understanding of God, originates from the knowledge of God's favours and grace upon them. Because these benefits are received through the attributes of God, their love is related to the attributes, and not to the essence of God. For this group, love means obedience to His commandments out of appreciation for the benefits they have received. This is similar to al-Sarraji's first group. This group's love is referred to as *kasbi*, which describes those things which may be attained through obedience to the divine law (al-Sarraji 1914, 504).

The second kind of love is that of the lovers who are chosen by God. This group is closer to al-Sarraji's third group. This group's love is the result of their direct contemplation of the essence of God (al-Suhrawardi 1966, 504-505). For them the material benefits received from God are not important. Rather, God Himself is the important issue for them, and not their own personal interests. These lovers are chosen by God so their love is God-given. In a different approach from the other Sufis, al-Suhrawardi makes a distinction between God's attributes and His essence (al-Sarraji 1914, 504).

To conclude, the classical Sufis tend to view man's love for God from two main perspectives. The first pertains to the idea of benefit and interest within the love relationship. The second is based around the dissimilarity of man's love for God and God's love for man. On this matter, Ash'arite theology predominates in the Sufi view; man's love for God is nothing but love of obedience and worship of God.

The reason for the classical Sufis' preoccupation predominantly with the theological aspects of Sufi love is that their writings were direct toward both a Sufi and non-Sufi audience. For this reason, they did not want to attract hostility or become involved in controversial matters. To place this issue in its context, theology was considered to be a guardian of true Islam, protecting it from heretical ideas. For example, by branding a book or a sect heretical, theologians could cause popular opinion to turn against an individual or a group. In this light, Sufis thought it safer to follow the theologians in those matters of love where theology was involved. In addition, the classical Sufi literature took an apologetic tone. Sufis wanted to demonstrate that Sufism was no different from mainstream Islam.

The classical Sufi literature divides man's love primarily into two categories: love of the lay people and the love of the gnostics. By contrast, the books which examine love from both the profane and divine aspects provide more detail to the various stages of love. Books such as Ibn Hazm's *Tawq al-Hamama*, Ibn Dawud's *Zahra*, and Ibn al-Jawzi's *Dhamm al-Hawa'* are examples of such books dealing primarily with the subject of love. The authors of these books seem to have agreed upon the idea that love is not an immediate emotion, but rather a gradual evolution of positive feelings towards an object of love. Therefore, they employed different concepts to elucidate the different stages of this emotional process, selecting approximately sixty different words to convey the different levels of this inclination.

The position of Sufism vis-à-vis Islam can be compared with the position of Christianity with respect to Judaism. Anders suggests that Jesus did not come forward as the founder of a new religion, for he had not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfil their purpose. According to

him, Jesus did not seek to bring a new concept of God, or new ideas about God, but a new fellowship with God based on love, and not in the sense of Jewish piety or righteousness. In the same way, Sufism is not a different religion but a way of approaching God which stresses love rather than fear (Nygren 1969, 68). Of course this approach does not apply to all Sufis, not for there were Sufi sects from the earliest days of Sufism which placed primary importance to the concept of fear of God. This comparison should lead us to the idea that Sufism is a Christian form of Islam. The differences between Christian and Sufi understandings of love are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Most of the classical Sufi authors are careful in their treatment of God's love for man, being careful not to ascribe human characteristics to God. All of them appear to adhere to the theory of Islam theology on this matter. This theory may be briefly divided into two parts: firstly, God's love for man, which can be referred to as His rewarding of man; secondly, man's love for God, which can be referred to as obedience to God. Almost all of the classical Sufi works revolve around this paradigm of reward versus obedience. However, individual Sufis like Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, and Ibn al-Farid seem to be less concerned with theological concerns and whether love can be attributed to God or not.

The early Sufi ascetics appear to have not been greatly interested in the concept of divine love. While some glimpses of love are seen in their statements, these are extremely rare when compared to their words focussing on fear of God. Their preoccupation with combating the physical attractions of the world meant that very little attention was paid to the beauty of the Lord of the world. This preoccupation was both their strength and weakness; it was a strength because it saved them from being overly concerned about worldly matters, but it was a weakness because fear and ascetic practices are not ends in themselves. As a result, we do not find ecstatic words or actions attributed to these early Sufis.

For the Sufis who inclined more to intoxication and love of God, asceticism had two functions. First of all, at the beginning of mystical training all of them admitted the necessity of ascetic practices. Indeed we see that



almost all of the Sufis, such as Rabia, Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and Ibn al-Farid practised extreme asceticism. However, for them asceticism had value only when it furthered the relationship of love between God and man; it was not an aim in itself, as seems to have been the attitude of early ascetics. For the Sufis who inclined toward love of God, asceticism was a means to cleanse the soul from all kinds of base desires, purifying the heart from worldly concerns. This was a process of emptying the heart and only the beginning of mystical instruction. The second important stage was to fill the heart and soul with the knowledge and love of God. Otherwise, ascetic practices did not benefit the mystic, and might even harm his relationship with other people because of its negative attitude. In fact, many Sufis who preferred love and intoxication in God's love over fighting with God's world, severely criticised the dry and negative attitudes of the ascetics at later times to the extent that their ideals were ridiculed. They were blamed as harsh and senseless, unsuccessful in attaining spiritual perfection, and because of their unnecessary preoccupation with asceticism and poverty, of not reaching the highest degrees of Sufism.

A further positive aspect of asceticism for the intoxicated group was that in many cases the ascetic lifestyle became a test for the authenticity of the Sufis' claims, because the Sufis of love sometimes made extreme claims which were deemed suspect by many in the general populace. As a proof of their claims to extreme love, they were expected to show an ascetic attitude to worldly desires. Hence if a Sufi did not lead an ascetic life he or she was suspected of being a fraud.

## The Paradigms of Love in the Qur'an and the Bible

As the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an plays an essential role in shaping the teachings of all of the Islamic disciplines. All these disciplines are rooted in the Qur'an, or at least claim to originate from it. Sufism in general, and the concept of love in particular, is not an exception to this rule. All Sufis who wrote on the topic of love frequently referred to the Qur'an. Therefore, it is imperative that the Qur'an be examined thoroughly for what it says on the concept of love.

### **The Paradigm of Love in the Qur'an**

The Qur'an refers in a broad sense to three kinds of love: firstly, the love between man and God; secondly, between man and the opposite sex; and thirdly, between man and his worldly desires (Qur'an, 3:14; 76:27). In all passages in which this classification is referred to, the word most frequently used to refer to love is *hubb*. Other synonyms of the word *hubb* are used occasionally to describe the concept of love. However, it is significant that the word *'ishq* (passionate love) is not employed anywhere in the Qur'an.

It is noticeable that there is no specific word in the Qur'an which describes the love between God and man. For this reason, the use of the same terminology for both divine and profane love can be said to have its origins

in the Qur'an. Therefore, Sufis who used the terminology of profane love when referring to the themes of divine love are in a sense following the methodology of the Qur'an. None among the Sufis seems to have referred to the dual nature of the word used in the Qur'an to describe love.

In order to understand the Qur'an's position and use of terminology as far as divine love is concerned, it is therefore necessary to explore the verses that describe the relationship of love between man and God. Therefore, this chapter only aims to study the Qur'anic verses which illuminate the nature of love between God and man, and accordingly will exclude the two other aspects of love, *viz.* the love between a man and the opposite sex and the love of worldly desires. These two points will be dealt with briefly as they bear an important relationship with regard to divine love.

In the process of studying the Qur'anic verses, recourse will be made to some important and influential exegetes. Reference to Sufi oriented exegetes will be made infrequently, as our aim is to discover how the Qur'anic verses are understood by non-Sufis. The information gathered from these sources will be used to compare different Sufi understandings of love and those which are found in the Qur'an. In addition, such an approach also enables us to understand the nature of the differences between the respective paradigms of the Qur'an and Sufism.

It must be noted that the Qur'an acknowledges a mutual loving relationship between God and man - both from God towards His creation and from the creation towards God. The following verse is the most significant verse that includes both of these respective loves: "O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people. He shall love them and they shall love Him" (Qur'an, 5:54). This verse indicates two kinds of love: firstly, God's love for mankind; and secondly, mankind's love for God. In addition to this, the verse also refers to the order of love between man and God, i.e. God's love precedes man's love. This sequential order will be followed in our discussion in subsequent chapters of this study.

### **God's Love For Man**

Exegetes of the Qur'an by and large acknowledge that there is a mutual bond of love between God and man. However, differences arose regar-

ding the nature of this love as it is outlined in the Holy Book. Exegetes have come up with many explanations to account for this. Their views fall fundamentally into two broad categories. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

### ***The First Group of Exegetes***

The exegetes, like the theologians, firstly discuss whether or not love understood by human beings can be attributed to God. This is a controversial problem among both exegetes and theologians. On the one hand, there are those exegetes who define the word *love* as "inclination of the heart towards the beloved" (al-Qushayri 1981, 145). For this group, the only logical conclusion to be drawn from this definition is that love cannot be applied to God in its literal sense. In other words, it is impossible for God to love someone or something other than Himself, as the suggestion that God is inclined to an entity other than Himself implies that He is not perfect and therefore desires to achieve perfection through His beloved (Sweetman 1947, II, 61). This idea is in total contradiction with the fundamentals of Islamic theology. As explained above, in Islamic theology God is considered to be the most perfect being and is not in need of His creation. In this regard, it is noteworthy that some exegetes and theologians (especially the *Ash'arites*) are in agreement with regard to these matters.

Among this group, al-Zamakhshari (d.1144) is important, since he not only offers his own opinion as to how to apply love to the Divine Being, but he also clarifies his position as far as the Sufi understanding is concerned. He believes that God's love for His creation is manifested by his reward for mankind's good deeds. In other words, God Himself cannot love man directly since this implies that man and God are two equal partners in this relationship. This contradicts the notion that He is far too exalted to be the object or subject of man's love. On the other hand, this concept cannot be denied, since it is clearly repeated in the Qur'an. In order to deal with this apparent discord, the exegetes followed in the footsteps of the theologians and gave a different meaning to the concept of love.

The definition most favoured by the exegetes describes the concept of love as "forgiveness". According to them, the concept of God's love is interconnected with the idea of God's forgiveness. For example, in al-Qurtubi's (d. 1273) understanding, God's love for man is represented by His forgiveness of man. In his understanding, the verse that states "Allah does not love the unbelievers" (Qur'an; 3:32) means "Allah does not forgive the unbelievers" (al-Qurtubi 1993, v.III 60). In short, it may be said that al-Qurtubi equates God's love for man with His forgiveness.

Similarly, al-Qasimi shares the same opinion as al-Zamakhshari, and does not approve of the usage of love for God in its literal sense. For him, love means the inclination of like towards like, the feeling between the lover and the beloved (al-Qasimi 1957, VI, 612). It is evident that both al-Zamakhshari and al-Qasimi strove to avoid attributing human characteristics to God by rejecting the use of love for God in its literal sense. This approach has been an important one among the exegetes to this day. As an example, the author of an important Qur'anic commentary in the Turkish language, Hamdi Yazır, wrote that God's love for His creation means God's wish for the good of His servant in this world and in the next world (Yazır 1979, 1717). Therefore, it may be argued that this line of thought will be alive among the exegetes at all times in history.

There is another approach to these oft-quoted verses which speak of God's love. This approach is to understand the verses in the historical context and strive to ascertain who was loved by God during the time of the Prophet. This approach is employed for polemical reasons, especially to supply fuel for debate over the controversy as to who was the rightful successor to the Prophet following his death. For example, Ibn Kathir (d.1373), in his voluminous work, does not provide any explanation regarding the nature of God's love. However, he explains this verse in a historical context. He explores the question as to whom were the people loved by God when this verse was revealed. He mentions the names of some companions of the Prophet such as Abu Bakr (Ibn Kathir 1992, II, 69). This approach is not favoured among the exegetes since it restricts the verse to the boundaries of time and space. Consequently, such an approach would damage the claim that the Qur'an has uni-

versality and validity at all points in history. As a result, few exegetes emphasised the historical aspect of the verses that refer to love between God and man. They prefer to generalise such verses that might be restricted by time and space in order to include the believers who might live at any time in history, provided that they possess the appropriate qualities.

To summarise, this group of exegetes accepts the existence of *ḥubb* between God and man, but they do not accept it in its literal sense with all its man connotations. In order to achieve this end, they associate another meaning with the word "love" when it is used for God, defining it as "will". "God loves" means "God wills something for someone in a favourable manner" or "God forgives". On the other hand, they explain man's love as "obedience" to God. Their understanding of God's love for man may be explained in the paradigm of "reward in return for obedience".

In order to clarify the understanding of the first group, the following example may be given. According to the exegetes of the former category, the loving relationship between God and man is similar to that of the relationship between a master and a servant. The servant obeys the master, and the master, as a result of this obedience, rewards the servant generously. Certainly, this shows that the master cares for the servant by rewarding his or her obedience and forgiving his or her mistakes. However, this comparison also implies that God does not enter into a personal relationship with the servant. He does not even show His face to His servants because He is high in His palace and is transcendent. Therefore, it is hardly suitable to name this kind of relationship as that of love. There is very little in the way of a personal relationship according to this understanding of the concept of love.

This idea is not acceptable from the Sufi point of view. Forgiving and favouring are the *outcome* of the bond of love, and only one of the results of it. Therefore, Sufis are strongly against equating God's love with His forgiveness or other bounties.

### ***The Second Group of Exegetes***

The first group of exegetes ties God's love to His actions, but not to His essence. God in a sense loves man through His forgiveness. The second

group, on the other hand, ties God's love to His essence. However, this group could not clarify the nature of God's love, and believed that although God loves human beings personally, this is in a way that we cannot explain, as we cannot understand God's love. This is because we cannot understand His essence. He loves us without a modality. In their understanding, they go one step further from the basic understanding of the "reward versus obedience" paradigm. However, they do not qualify God's love for man with any adjective (Tabataba'i 1983 V, 383). It is certain that God loves man as stated in the Qur'an, but His love is not similar to human love as He is not similar to any created form (Rida 1960, VI, 438). His love is unique to Himself.

For this group, it is not sufficient to view the relationship between man and God as one that is confined to the boundaries of reward and punishment. For example, al-'Alusi states that God loves us in His essence (Alusi, n.d. VI, 162). This means that He tries to establish a kind of personal relationship between the master Himself and the servants. In this sense, it may be said that this group of exegetes are closer to the Sufi understanding of love, for Sufis too go beyond the mere paradigm of reward versus obedience and seek to progress onward to a higher plane which is close to God. However, these exegetes, unlike Sufis, do not establish theories and systems regarding the concept of love. What they do in fact do is provide material for Sufis to elaborate on and explain in theoretical terms.

There is, however, one aspect of love on which both the first and second group of exegetes agree upon: the precedence of God's love over man's love. They deduce this from the order of the words used in the verses that describe the mutual love between man and God. It is well-known that an important principal followed by commentators of the Qur'an is considering the order of words. A word in a verse may convey a different sense or meaning depending on the order in which the words are arranged. To illustrate this point, al-Razi (d.1209) suggests that since God's love for man is mentioned before man's love of God, God's love precedes man's love. Consequently, if God had not loved man beforehand, there would be no way that man could love Him (al-Razi 1938, XII, 23). Thus, al-Razi shares

the same opinion as the Sufis in his understanding of the verses, because what he expressed in plain words is reflected in the sayings of many Sufis.

As far as God's motive for His creation of the universe is concerned, the Qur'an does not provide a clear answer. However, the following Qur'anic verse gives some clue as to the reason for the creation: "I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me" (Qur'an, 51:57). Since the concept of worship also includes love, as explained in verse 16:51, it can be inferred that God created the world out of love and in order to be loved. This issue is not clearly stated in the Qur'an, but is clarified in a hadith which is claimed by Sufis to be authentic: "I was a secret treasure and I loved to be known, therefore I have created the creation."

### **Man's Love for God**

According to the Qur'an, man has the power and the capability to love God. It may even be stated that only man has the privilege of loving God by His own will. The Qur'an states in many places that everything in the universe worships God. However, to have a relationship of love with God seems to be only within man's power. The verse which states: "Verily we have honoured the Children of Adam" (Qur'an, 17:70) might indicate this nature in man. This is also evident from the rich literature on the topic of love, be it profane or divine. In the preceding chapters, information was provided in order to explain the nature of man's love from the perspective of different disciplines.

It is interesting that the same pattern of thought which is outlined under the title of *God's love for man* repeats itself in this section. In other words, those who did not consider it possible in a literal sense for God to love man, i.e. the first group of exegetes, consequently believed that neither can man love God. In the same way, the exegetes who held that God may love man believed that man may also love God. In what follows, we examine their explanations and justifications.

### ***The First Group of Exegetes***

The first group of exegetes defend the idea that loving God means obeying His commandments and following the example of the Prophet. This



argument is clearly explained in the Qur'an in the following verse: "Say: if you love Allah, then follow me (i.e. Muhammad); Allah will love you and forgive your faults, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (Qur'an, 3:31). This verse directly ties man's love for God to his obedience to the divine law as taught and practiced by the Prophet. The reason behind the revelation of this verse also supports this interpretation. As al-Qurtubi narrates, when the Christians of Najran visited Medina on their mission, they claimed that their belief regarding Jesus was a result of their intense love for God. Upon this, the Muslims approached the Prophet and asked: "O Prophet of God, we also love God do we not?" Then the archangel Gabriel appeared and revealed to the Prophet the verse above (al-Qurtubi 1993, III, 60). In this manner, God explained to Muslims through Gabriel how to fully realise their love for God.

The understanding of the first group of exegetes is much closer to the standard understanding of the Qur'an. One of the most prominent exegetes in the history of the discipline, al-Zamakhshari, strongly defends this understanding against other arguments. According to him, man's love for God is realised by way of respect and obedience toward Him; anything which exceeds this is wrong and unacceptable (al-Zamakhshari n.d., I, 326). It appears that al-Zamakhshari and the exegetes who adhere to this argument all accept that the servant should not demand a personal friendship with the master, but must be satisfied with the rewards he or she receives. This is due to the fact that to be able to love one needs knowledge about the object of love in order to understand the characteristics of the beloved's essence. This is not possible for man as far as God is concerned. Therefore, al-Zamakhshari denies any other possibility for the understanding of love and in particular the Sufi understanding. He criticises them severely, since they claim that it is possible to love God's essence. He describes them as illiterate people who are the arch-enemies of knowledge as far as their understanding of love is concerned. This severe criticism is because of the Sufi contention that their love originates from the contemplation of the very essence of God. The answer to this allegation is provided by al-Razi in his detailed discussion of the issue. This is examined in the section that follows.

### *The Second Group of Exegetes*

The understanding of the second group of exegetes is fundamentally different from the first group, and may also be understood as complementary to it. This is due to the fact that their understanding contains a definition based on the criteria of obedience. In their opinion, when they are concerned, love which is solely defined in terms of obedience is inferior to the concept of love which centres on loving God for His own sake (Alusi, n.d. II, 34).

Their criticism is further developed when they go on to refute the opposing argument by asking the question: "On what basis can the love between man and God be explained?". The former group of exegetes understood the cause of love in its literal sense; that is, in order to escape pain and to attain pleasure. However, this is the first stage of love; it is not the only definition of love. The second group of exegetes brings another dimension into this understanding. In their opinion, love is not always concerned with attaining pleasure or escaping pain in the physical sense. Apart from these sensual motives there is another motive which seems more intellectual than physical. It is the appreciation of beauty and perfection through intellect only, without physical attachment (Alusi, n.d. II, 34). This manner of viewing and explaining the concept of love, i.e. in an intellectual, non-physical manner, is followed by later Sufis of great repute, in particular al-Ghazali.

In line with the above manner of reasoning, the most analytical of the commentaries is that of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. In his commentary, he treats the subject of love, by firstly outlining the general attitude of the Muslim scholars towards the love between God and man. He states that "The *ummah* (the entire community of Muslims) reached a consensus in using the term love in relation to God, but they differentiated in their understanding of this. The majority of the theologians believe that love is an aspect of God's will; it neither pertains to His essence nor to His attributes. When we say that we love God, this means that "we love obeying and serving God, or we love Him rewarding us" (al-Razi 1938, XII, 232).

Al-Razi does not agree with the understanding of love as merely a type of obedience, and so he criticises it further. He criticises the theologians for being too literalist in their understanding: "These theologians thought that the only things that may attract love are physical pleasures such as eating and drinking. However, there is another kind of love which is not related to physical enjoyment. It is the spiritual or intellectual appreciation of the object of love." Al-Razi contends that the theologians could not understand that spiritual perfection may be loved for its own sake as well, and that they maintained love to be related only to physical love. To elucidate the differences between intellectual and physical love, he gives the following example: "We love prophets and heroes because of the attributes of perfection they hold and not because they benefit us physically. In comparison with God, who is perfect in His attributes beyond comprehension, the perfection of man does not come near to this. Perfection which is attributed to man is in fact borrowed from the idea of God's perfection. Hence the most perfect among the so-called perfect beings is God. If we love man for attributes of perfection such as heroism, generosity and so on, then God must be loved more for the attributes of perfection He possesses. Therefore God is loved and should be loved for His own sake, not for the sake of the rewards He gives" (al-Razi 1938, XII, 232). In this manner, al-Razi shuns the mere physical understanding of love, and inclines more to the intellectual understanding of love.

A logical result of intellectual love is certainly knowledge, since the fuel by which the intellect functions is knowledge. Therefore, the second element of al-Razi's exposition is that he establishes a positive interconnection between love and knowledge. We cannot understand His perfection without gaining some knowledge about Him, for it is impossible to love something of which one has no knowledge. Al-Razi, who is not ignorant of this relationship between love and knowledge, holds that the most important cause of love is knowledge of God. He suggests that this can be observed in the divine order seen in nature. According to him, the more one glances at the wonders that God has created in the universe, the more one will be able to recognise God's perfection. Consequently, the more one knows God

the more one will love Him. Al-Razi also deduces that since God has infinite perfection, knowledge about Him is also infinite. Accordingly, there is no limit in knowing God, so there is no limit in loving God (al-Razi 1938, XII, 233). In this connection, al-Razi implies that the path of love never ceases. The lovers always progress to higher and higher states, a notion that is exemplified by the story of the Sufi Baktami, who said concerning his love: "I have drunk seven oceans, and if there is any more?" It is of interest to note at this point the similarities between the views of al-Razi and al-Ghazali. On reflection, it becomes clear that they share almost identical conceptions of the relationship between love and knowledge. However, al-Ghazali develops the idea of this positive relationship between knowledge and love of God in greater depth.

Al-Razi also psychologically explains this exposition by giving an example from human life. Even love of despicable things such as love of money and hope of profit makes the merchant work very hard to the extent that he forgets his hunger and thirst. In comparison, for a Sufi it is possible to forget themselves for the love of the creator. Even the love of base things changes the psyche of the merchant, how, then, does the love for the highest object of love change the Sufi's life? According to al-Razi, loving God is the highest level of love, and should result in the annihilation of one's sensory and intellectual capacity. It may be concluded that for al-Razi, love's cause is knowledge and its end is annihilation of the lover. Thus al-Razi opens the way for Sufis to develop their understanding of love in relation to knowledge and annihilation in the Beloved (al-Razi 1938, XII, 233).

There are many exegetes in addition to al-Razi who have discussed the meaning of love. Of these, al-Qushayri is of interest, as he sheds light on two further diverging aspects of the same subject. The first focus regards the motivation for love of God. Al-Qushayri believes that the motivation for man's love is a God-given bounty. If God did not love us first, we would be unable to love Him. How could humans who are created from mere lumps of clay speak about love? The answer is that our love for Him is a reflection of His eternal and original love for us. It is crucial to note that this notion would go on to form an essential theme concerning all the prominent theories of love which would be expounded in the centuries to follow.

Secondly, al-Qushayri establishes a direct relationship between love of God and faith. According to him, loving God is an article of faith, i.e. it is not possible to have faith in God without loving Him (al-Qushayri 1981, 421). For him, to believe means to love. It is not enough to say with one's tongue or believe in one's heart that God is worthy of worship. This attitude will not reach its full culmination and be out of sincerity if it is not supported by a firm and penetrating love for that which a person outwardly claims to worship. In this respect, true devotion and worship is synonymous with loving the God to whom a believer turns in devotion.

Al-Qushayri's equation of love with faith reminds us of the following verse: "And there are some among men who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah, whom they love as they love Allah, and those who believe are stronger in love for Allah" (Qur'an, 2:165). In this verse it may be deduced that God is speaking of the strength of the love that His believers have for Him. The believers are distinguished from the non-believers by the intensity and power of their love as far as their objects of worship are concerned.

In the light of the above verse, it is also of interest to note that the most unforgivable sin in Islam, i.e. *shirk* (association of equals with God), is given an alternative meaning. The exegetes deduce that this verse also informs the believers of another kind of *shirk*. This new conception holds that if one contains in one's heart more love for something other than God then one has committed *shirk*, in that one has associated others in one's love for God. Hence the notion of associating idols with God may be viewed not only from the perspective of His absolute uniqueness, i.e. believing that there are other deities sharing the divinity of God, it is also a kind of association of partners with God and giving a portion of the love which only God deserves to others (Alusi, n.d. II, 34).

A comparison of these two groups gives us the essential differences in the two different conceptions of love. For the first group, man's love manifests itself as obedience, whereas the second group believes that obedience is not love itself but a result of love for God. The first group's understanding of love as obedience is considered by the second group to be only one

result of love. Although they accept the first group's understanding (love equals obedience; to love God is to obey God), they believe, in addition, that the real nature of love is to love God for His perfection. As far as the Sufi understanding of love is concerned, it appears that the understanding of the latter group of exegetes is closer to the Sufi understanding of love.

As a result of the above discussion, we can summarise the *fiqh* of the exegetes as follows. The commentators are divided into two groups, as far as the concept of divine love is concerned. On the one hand, we have certain exegetes who believe that God's love for man may be equated with the goodwill and grace of God upon his creatures. In their understanding, God cannot love His creation in the literal sense of the meaning because this implies God's need of creation.

On the other hand, we have exegetes who maintain that man may love God at a personal level. However, they do not stop at this contention, but in fact proceed one step further and claim that it is *necessary* to love God. They are closer to the Sufi theorists of love since they suggest a personal relationship between man and God.

### **The Characteristics that God Loves in Man**

The Qur'an accepts that a relationship of love may exist between God and His creation, the Qur'an also directs man to the principal qualities that attract God's love. To be suitable for the love of God, the Qur'an requires Muslims to inculcate good characteristics within themselves. The more these good characteristics are acquired, the more man deserves to be loved by God. The Qur'an explains in great detail the characteristics that God loves or does not love in man (Tabatabai 1983, V, 383). These verses are not related to issues of prayer and devoting oneself to God. Among the major issues addressed in these verses are the commandments that serve to organise the social relationships among members of the Muslim *ummah* with justice and fairness. If an evil act is committed against another human being, it is still a reason to be construed as an obstacle between man and God.

God explains to us in great detail the conditions by which we may attract His love. If human beings want to be loved by God, they need to abi-

de by the rules given in the Qur'an, since God promises His love when these rules are followed. The following verse confirms this: "Surely (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, for them will God bring about love" (Qur'an, 19:96). Al-Qurtubi states that when the servant obeys the commandments, God places in peoples' hearts a love towards that servant. He refers to the Prophetic hadith which states that when God loves one of His servants, He commands Gabriel to announce this love (al-Qurtubi 1993, II-1 136). Al-Suyuti also supports this interpretation (al-Suyuti n.d. 412).

The mention of 'good deeds' in the preceding verse logically entails the existence of 'bad deeds' as well. The commandments laid down in the Qur'an which describe the attainment of love may thus be divided into two types: the characteristics which God loves in His servants, and those which God does not love. Some characteristics which God loves in His servants are as follows:

1. God loves the faithful who strive to be righteous and purify themselves "for Allah loves the righteous"; and, "Allah loves those who make themselves pure" (Qur'an, 9:108).

2. The Believers are also described in the Qur'an as those who do good deeds for the sole purpose of attaining God's love: "...And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive..." (Qur'an, 76.8).

3. Interestingly, God loves those who fear Him (Qur'an, 3:76; 9:4.7). This is in clear contrast with the Biblical teaching that speaks of a love which casts out fear (John, 4:18). It appears that the Christian conception of love excludes fear from the principles which form the bedrock of its belief system. In contrast, the Qur'an often stresses the importance of fear, and appears to regard it as complementary to love. An analogy is given in the Qur'an, where fear and love are likened to the two wings of a bird which flies toward the divine presence. Since a bird cannot arrive at its destination by using only one of its wings, it is necessary that both wings are utilised in its flight. Similarly, it is essential for the lover of God to use the wings of fear and love equally. In summary, the Qur'an suggests that a balance of fear and love towards God are necessary; one should not be exclusive of the

other. Although the classical Sufi scholars maintain this balance by placing fear and love of God within the same category, it is interesting to note that this balance is not always kept by the early Sufis, whose main concern was fear of God.

4. God also confirms that He loves those servants who *do good deeds and behave in a righteous manner*: "God likes the person who does good deeds (Qur'an, 5:93).

In short, God loves good actions and behaviour, such as acting with justice and repentance. However, good characteristics are not limited to those mentioned in the Qur'an. Any other positive characteristics which were practised by the Prophet must be added to this list, since, as stated in the Qur'an, he is the best example for the believers. This matter will be discussed in the chapter which follows.

### **The Characteristics That God Does not Love in Man**

In the previous section the positive steps to attract God's love were outlined. In addition to this, the Qur'an also informs us of the characteristics that would render divine love impossible. In general terms, it can be said that sins are veils between man and God. Of these, the one which must be avoided most is *shirk*, as explained below (Qur'an, 2:165). In order to establish a relationship with God which is firmly based on love, the second step is to refrain from bad behaviour and to strive to wipe them out completely.

The greatest sin in Islam is *shirk*, which is attributing partners to God. Attributing partners to God may not only pertain to worship, but is also possible with respect to love. For example, the Qur'an strongly rebuked the unbelievers for their love of idols: "You have chosen only idols instead of Allah. The love between you is only in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will deny each other and curse each other, and your abode will be the Fire, and you will have no helpers" (Qur'an, 29:25). It may be deduced from this verse that the love between God and the believers will continue even after the Day of Resurrection. All other forms of man's love will disappear except man's love for God. Moreover,



the worldly friendships and love which are not established through God's love will even turn into hatred. There is also an indication that when the servant meets the Creator, all worldly states, such as fear of God and abstinence from pleasures, will disappear, leaving only love. So love is eternal and abiding, and is superior to other states because of its continuous and unchanging nature.

*Shirk* is a sin which is committed against God. In addition, there are other sins which are considered to be against God, such as being ungrateful to Him: "God does not love any that is unfaithful, ungrateful (to God)" (Qur'an, 22:38). There is, in addition, another category of crime that is condemned by God. These are the crimes which are committed against fellow Muslims and humanity in general. Both of these are obstacles between man and God's love. In short, these characteristics constitute almost anything which harms other people; hence a believer should distance himself or herself from such evils. Some examples of behaviour condemned by the Qur'an include transgressing social rules: "for Allah loveth not transgressors" (Qur'an, 2:190); and wasting the riches given by God: "but waste not by excess: for Allah loveth not the wasters" (Qur'an, 6:141).

It may therefore be said that God's love is very much related to personal conduct towards the general community as well (Tabataba'i 1983, IV, 384). The more a person is loved by society the more they are loved by God. In other words, if someone harms society, it may be said that this person is not loved by God according to the principles of the Qur'an. Loving God therefore means perfecting one's characteristics in a positive way. Hence, love in the Qur'an is an active process, i.e. it requires actions which are beneficial to society; it is not only a mere emotion felt towards the Beloved. On the contrary, the Beloved demands from His lovers that they translate their love for Him into deeds which are beneficial to society. This is also clear from the Qur'anic epithet which is often used to describe the Muslims: "those who believe and perform good deeds (Qur'an, 2:82; 9:111). Faith and good deeds are often mentioned together in the Qur'an, hence it can be argued that Islam is a religion primarily of action rather than dogma. This is also true of the concept of love according to the Qur'an.

### The Origin of the Word "Allah"

In addition to the Qur'anic verses regarding love, there are other things which must be taken into consideration when understanding the Islamic understanding of love. For example, the issue of how God is presented in the Qur'an must be dealt with. Is He a loving God, a merciful, a loving, vengeful God? In order to answer this question, the names of God that describe God will be outlined shortly. The issue that will be treated in this section consists of three parts. These are: firstly, the name by which God is primarily referred to in the Qur'an; secondly, other names by which He is referred to; and thirdly, among these names the one which directly invite associations with love.

Firstly, God's proper name in Islam is "Allah", meaning "God". The derivation of the word Allah provides an important clue as to how far the concept of love is concerned. The majority of lexicographers are of the opinion that it is derived from *Walah* (al-Sabuni 1977, I, 20) meaning anxiety, love and sympathy which a mother feels for her child. Later on, the word came to signify love only. For this reason, in some Indian translations of the Qur'an "Allah" is translated as *Man Mohan*, i.e. the Beloved of the hearts (Valiuddin 1979, 87). This is also supported by the verse in which God equates His special name "Allah" with the attributive name: *al-Rahman* (the Merciful). In the Qur'an, God says: "Say: Call upon Allah, or call upon Rahman: by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names" (Qur'an, 17:110). God's proper name "Allah" is not like His other names. It is the name that God has chosen for Himself above all others. The statement in the preceding verse concerning these two names suggests that the name "Allah" conveys a sense of mercy.

Secondly, the loving sense of the word Allah is also supported by other attributive names by which he refers to Himself. These names are known in the Qur'an as *the beautiful names of Allah*. In general scholars mention 99 beautiful names for God, depending on the verses in the Qur'an. From these names the most frequently occurring are "*al-Rahman*" and "*al-Rahim*" (cf. Qur'an, 17:110). They mean "most compassionate" and "most merciful" (Ibn Kathir 1992, I, 19). These two names of God are the parts of

the *Basmala*. The *Basmala* is a phrase which the Prophet recommended be recited prior to undertaking any action. Therefore it is one of the most frequently recited phrases among Muslims (al-Qurtubi 1993, I, 29). It means "In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful". This phrase appears at the beginning of each chapter of the Qur'an.

Finally, of all the other names by which God refers to Himself, one name deserves special attention. One of the beautiful names of God mentioned in the Qur'an is *al-Wadud* meaning "full of love". The word *al-Wadud* is an example of a rare type of word in the Arabic language. It belongs to a group of words which refer to either the subject or the object of the verb from which they are derived. Therefore, God is first, the subject (the lover) and then the object (the beloved) of the verb "love". As a subject, God loves His friends and forgives their sins. He is also the object of their love; He is loved by those who have faith in Him. Ibn al-Kathir prefers to explain the name *al-Wadud* as pertaining to God's forgiving nature (Ibn Kathir 1992, IV, 497).<sup>3</sup>

Al-Qurtubi gives a very different meaning to the name *al-Wadud*. He states that *Wadud* means "having no son". In this sense he says God has no son for whose sake He would forgive the sins of mankind (al-Qurtubi 1993, X, 195). Although this meaning is not mentioned by other exegetes, there is an implication here of the Christian concept of atonement and love. The implication is that God forgives His servants directly without the intermediary of a son. Although the Qur'an rejects the concept of incarnation, such a commentary on the word *al-Wadud* seems to be peculiar to al-Qurtubi alone.

Based on the rules of Arabic grammar, there is a further sense implied by the addition of the definite article "al" in *al-Wadud*. This prefix connotes exclusivity. So it may even be said that God is the only lover and beloved, since all the loves which are attributed to others originate from Him (Bayrak 1985, 60). Hence, in reality, all love belongs to Him.

To conclude, God's proper name, as well as the most important attributive names which are deducible from the verses of the Qur'an, all indicate that God is a loving and caring God. Although He named Himself by the

names referring to wrathful qualities, like *al-Mudhrib* (the Humiliator) and *al-Muntaqim* (the Avenger), the names which indicate love are more often used by Him to refer to Himself in the Qur'an.

### Profane Love

As stated above, this study does not intend to examine profane love in detail. However, since some Sufis draw parallels between divine and profane love, it is necessary to understand the Qur'anic approach to profane love. It may be easily deduced from the Qur'an that the love towards the opposite sex is something natural and created by God. This contradicts the position of Sufis such as Rabi'a, who hold love to be an obstacle for human beings on the spiritual path.

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are signs for those who reflect" (Qur'an, 30:21). This verse clearly explains that it is perfectly natural to love and marry women since this is one of the purposes for which they were created. Furthermore, it is a mercy from Allah that he created man and women to complement one another. Because of their intrinsic natures they attract each other (al-Qurtubi 1993, III, 414). As a result, the Qur'an does not see marriage as an obstacle to the love of God. Therefore, Muslims and Sufis throughout history married. Only some Sufis spoke against marriage, such as Rabi'a, who argued that marriage is an obstacle to attaining divine love. In the light of the Qur'anic verses addressing the issue of marriage, Rabi'a does not appear to have supported her position with any Qur'anic proofs.

The Qur'an does not consider the love between man and woman to be sinful; although it does teach that this love should be kept within certain limits. The Qur'anic paradigm of love indicates that the loves that are directed to profane objects should not exceed the love that is shown to God. Therefore, the Qur'an does not tolerate excessive love between a man and a woman, or love for other objects of worldly desire. In the following verse, God explains to the believers that if their worldly desires exceed their love for

God, then they will face calamities from God such as those promised in the following verse: "Say: if your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your mates and your kinsfolk and property which you have acquired, and the slackness of trade which you fear and dwellings which you like, are dearer [literally more beloved *ahabba*] to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then wait until Allah carries out that which He has decreed" (Qur'an; 9:24).

Interestingly, the Qur'an states that the love of worldly things is beneficial to divine love and is consistent with it. The Qur'an illustrates this through the example of the Prophet Solomon: "And he said, "Truly do I love the love of good, with a view to the glory of my Lord,"- until (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of night)" (Qur'an, 38:032). The Qur'an does not approve of excessive and blind enmity to worldly love as long as it does not obstruct the path to God's love. This idea was not welcomed by the early Sufi ascetics, who shunned all worldly pursuits.

In contrast, the Bible seems to discourage love between men and women. The reason appears to be that love is the first sin which man committed in Paradise before the Fall. The notions of original sin and Eve's seductiveness are emphasised in the Bible. As a result, married life is only tolerated on a utilitarian basis for the procreation of humans and to increase the followers of the Church (Schuon 1981, 130). It may be argued that because of this attitude in the Bible, it is not possible to find a positive relationship between profane and divine love.

On the other hand, the Bible seems to direct this love to another channel: one's neighbour. In the Christian paradigm, to love one's neighbour is an explicit commandment, and is specifically mentioned in the Bible. In contrast with the Bible, the Qur'an does not stress the love of one's neighbour as a manifestation of divine love. However, the Qur'an does this in a more general sense by encouraging good toward others and forbidding evil.

### **The Concept of Love in the Bible**

In order to understand the position which "love" occupies in the Qur'an, it is useful to make a comparison with this concept in the Bible.

When comparing the holy books of Christianity and Islam, it must be remembered that the Qur'an does not contest the truthfulness of the Bible completely,<sup>2</sup> but rather claims that some parts of the Bible have been corrupted. From the Qur'anic point of view, any similarities between the two sacred texts are due to their common origin. As such, the paradigm that is employed here for the Qur'an will also be used for the Bible. This approach will best allow a straightforward comparison of the patterns of thought in the two Holy books.

In the Qur'an, love is considered to be one of numerous types of relationship between God and mankind. It is difficult to claim that love is the most essential relationship, since other kinds of relationships overshadow the relationship of love. For example, other terms such as *taqwa* (fear of God or refraining from the forbidden) and *tauba* (repentance) occur more frequently in the Qur'an than words referring to love. Hence, love is not given primary importance among the other Qur'anic terms, as it is only one Qur'anic motif among many others. In addition to this, there is no direct commandment to love God in the Qur'an as there is in the Bible. Also, in many verses the Qur'an warns man to fear God. Under these circumstances, it seems that in contrast with the Qur'an, love plays a central role in the Bible; it is represented as the essence of religion and the most distinctive attribute of God. In particular, the verse "God is love", is the most fundamental concept in Christianity (Smith 1956, 95). As a result, it may be said that love plays more of a central role in the Bible than in the Qur'an.

### ***God's Love for Man According to the New Testament***

The concept of love is repeated often in the Bible. However, according to Moffatt, in the synoptic tradition of the term "love" is understood more in spirit than in letter. The conception of God as Father in itself implies the love between Him and his creation (Moffatt n.d. 67). Therefore in Moffat's view, the truth is implied rather than stated. In addition to the love of the Father the picture is completed with that of the Son.

As to the manifestation of this fatherly love, there are tremendous differences between the Islamic and Christian understanding with regard to

this sense of love. In the Qur'an, God's love is manifested by His forgiveness of man. In a general sense this is also a valid understanding of the Bible; however, there is a great difference between the natures of these two types of forgiveness. According to the Qur'anic conception of forgiveness, God forgives His servants without any change in His essential nature having occurred, whereas in the Biblical understanding, God forgives His servants rather differently. To cleanse humanity from sin, especially from original sin, He voluntarily takes on human form and allows Himself to suffer the shortcomings of human nature. This is the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus and his eventual crucifixion. Through the crucifixion, which is the ultimate manifestation of God's love, a new relationship between God and man is established which relies on the sacrificial love of God for man. Regarding God's love for humanity, John writes: "...not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning *sacrifice* for our sins" (John, 4:10). This verse encapsulates the most distinctive features of God's love for man in the Christian paradigm.

Hence, in the Biblical sense, God's love is active and self-sacrificial. It is active because it is motivated purely by God's gracious initiative. God has no expectations or derive any benefit from His love for us. He is the first initiator of love towards man and His sacrifice and love for humanity reaches its peak in the death of Christ. However, God's love does not carry the imperfections that our love possesses. His love is not a result of need for the beloved. His love is totally gracious; He has nothing to gain by loving the works of His hands. Whatever God does is out of sheer benevolence. He loves man even though mankind possesses nothing of particular value which may attract that love. Furthermore, God sacrificed His only Son to atone for the sins of humanity, and hence the Son is the focal point of the Father's love (Atkinson 1995, 9).

Paul in particular emphasises the sacrificial aspect of God's love for man. According to him, there was an initial bond of love between God and Adam before the Fall. However, the crime committed by Adam and Eve broke this relationship. God was not happy with man's separation for Him, and so to re-establish the initial bond of love and enable redemption He in-

troduced the crucifixion. Therefore, God's love is the source of reconciliation, and was brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus. It seems that in the paradigm of Paul's love the central focus is the idea of Jesus' crucifixion.

The Qur'anic concept of love differs completely from the Biblical paradigm of love. It does not accept the incarnation and Trinity (Qur'an 108:16). In order to understand the differences between the two paradigms clearly, the Qur'anic paradigm of God's love may be applied to the Biblical one. The Qur'anic paradigm of love is depicted through the example of a master-servant relationship. If we apply the same example to Christian love, the following picture would emerge: The master, having seen the miserable condition of His servants, lowered himself to the level of a servant. He disguised Himself in the dress of the servant and tasted the same shortcomings that they were suffering. In this way, God established the relationship which had previously been broken. From the Qur'anic perspective, this kind of attitude is unthinkable with regard to God. He does not need to sacrifice Himself, and He cannot enter a son-father relationship with His creation; this conception absolutely contradicts the Islamic conception of God.

This point brings us back to how Jesus is understood in the Qur'an. From the Qur'anic point of view, Jesus is one of many prophets of God, and like other Biblical prophets he has no share whatsoever in the divinity of God. The miracles attributed to Jesus do not make him an incarnation of God; they merely provide evidence that he is truly a prophet. With regard to his suffering on the cross, firstly this is denied by the Qur'an, and secondly, even if the crucifixion were accepted, this would not change anything as far as the Islamic understanding of Jesus' nature is concerned. In fact, the Qur'an mentions the stories of many prophets who were harmed or killed by their people. Hence, the Biblical version of God's love for man is incompatible with the Qur'anic understanding.

Nevertheless, there are some similarities between these two conceptions of love. The Qur'an agrees with the Biblical conception of love in a number of ways. Firstly, in the Qur'an, it is God who instigates the relationship of love between Him and His creation. Secondly, God informs us



that "The Prophet Muhammad, like Jesus, was sent as a mercy from God to the worlds" (Qur'an, 3:164). But the difference is that Jesus was only a prophet, possessing no divine nature. There is no father-son relationship between God and His messenger. Although the messenger is a manifestation of God's mercy and love for His creation, there is the same strict separation between God and Jesus as there is between God and other prophets. The Prophet Muhammad is also human being, bringing the divine message to humanity. Therefore, in the Qur'an, God's love is not particularly centred on the Prophet Muhammad. Thirdly, God's love is active, since He was the one who initiated his love towards His creation, but this is not self-sacrificial as in the Christian sense. In the Qur'an, God always confirms that He is quick to accept the repentance of believers and slow to punish them because of their sins, but there is no concept of sacrifice in this regard. This rather illustrates His grace towards humanity. With regard to the last feature, the Qur'an enjoins love between believers, but does not command people to love the ungodly and unbelievers. This attitude of the Qur'an is similar to the sentiment reflected in the Old Testament, and differs from that of the New Testament.

### ***God's Love for Man According to the Old Testament***

At this point, the understanding of love in Judaism is of relevance to the discussion, since the Qur'anic understanding of love is closer to this than to the Christian one. In comparison to the New Testament understanding of God's love for man, from the Jewish perspective this love manifests itself in a different way. In Jewish belief, God's love is exclusive and particular; it is directed toward the people of Israel. In this conception, even the prophets are believed to have never stated that the Lord loves other peoples or that mankind in general is the object of His love. God's love is elected by Him in His covenant with the people of Israel. This is stated clearly in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, which refers to God's love of Israel. His personal love for the Israelites is most strongly manifested in His deliverance of the Jews from Egypt.

Unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament states that God's love is not directed freely to all people, but only to the righteous and obedient (Ps.

1:46:8, Prov. 15:29). If the people appear to be unworthy of God's love because of ingratitude and infidelity, His love turns into wrath. Hence, if the sinner does not repent and abandon his sinning, he cannot be the object of God's love. These ideas are almost identical with the Qur'anic understanding of God's love for man.

There are, however, certain elements of the Jewish understanding of God's love which are rejected by the Qur'an, in particular, their claim of being the only people loved by God. The Qur'an denies that God's love is exclusively directed toward Jews: "And both the Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His loved ones.'" Say: "Why then does He punish you. Nay, you are but human beings, of those He created" (Qur'an, 5:18). Nevertheless, the Qur'an does admit that Jews previously had a privileged relationship with God. However, when they broke their covenant this special position was lost (Qur'an, 5:13-15) and they became equal with the rest of humanity. If they perform good deeds they are rewarded, and if they do evil they are punished (Tabersi 1935, II, 176). The implication of this verse is that the Beloved does not punish those who love Him. This idea that the Beloved does not will evil for his lovers is very common among the exegetes (Ibn Kathir 1992, II, 69; al-Suyuti n.d. 145). Thus, because Christians and Jews may be punished, this claim could not be valid. Hence, the Qur'an urges them to abandon this vain hope and accept the truth.

The Qur'an also suggests a test for the Jews and Christians who claim to be the sole loved ones of God: "Say: if the future abode with Allah is especially for you to the exclusion of other people, then invoke death if you are truthful" (Qur'an; 2:94). In this way the Qur'an tests the lovers of God by suggesting that they choose death, since death means union with the lover, and a true beloved is always eager to meet his beloved. Thus, the Qur'an employs the human paradigms of love to test those who love God.

In the Jewish scriptures, God's love does not extend to the enemy. In fact, in one place the Old Testament commands hatred of the enemy: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy" (Matthew, 5:43). Hence, it may be suggested that Judaism employs hatred as a value-creating process. This notion is also supported by the description of God's na-

ture in the Old Testament. Many verses in the Jewish Bible describe God as a jealous God who always takes revenge on His enemies (Exodus, 34:15; Numbers, 25:10-12). God commands His people to take vengeance: "The Lord spoke to Moses and said: "You are to exact vengeance for Israel on the Midianites...."" (Numbers, 31:1-2). At times the Jewish God is characterised as a ruthless king who is giving orders to his army. This attitude is in striking contrast with the Christian conception of the loving God (Nygren 1969, 64). However, it is not dissimilar to the Qur'anic paradigm, since the Qur'an also mentions God's vengeance and punishment for the non-believers and enemies of God.

All these characteristics of Jewish love explain why Christianity places so much emphasis on love as a divine and human form of relationship. Although, the same command occurs in both religions, it does not have the same sense with each use. Christian love gives a completely different meaning to the commandment. As Nygren states: "It is not the commandment that explains the idea of love, but the new<sup>3</sup> meaning that Christianity has given it" (Nygren 1969, 61). This means that although Christianity and Judaism take their philosophy of love from the same verse, they differ very fundamentally in their understanding.

Our purpose for allocating such a lengthy discussion to the Christian and Jewish concepts of love here is that they have their parallels in the Qur'an and Sufism. The Qur'anic conception of love is closer to that of the Old Testament in its simplicity and clarity, although the Sufi paradigms are much closer to the Christian ones with regard to love. The details and possible reasons for these similarities will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

### ***Man's Love for God According to Christianity***

The Bible contains many explicit verses dealing with man's love for God. For example, there is a clear commandment to love God: "...and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark; 12:30). So it may be argued that loving God is a fundamental pillar of Christianity.

God's unmotivated and sacrificial love for man, as described above, demands a reciprocal, imitative response from those who benefit from it (Atkinson 1995, 9). This response is required not only towards God but also towards one's neighbours.

As to the nature of man's love for God, the New Testament also espouse similar ideas to the Qur'anic conceptions of love. For example, *agape* (ἀγάπη) means serving Him and obeying His commandments. Jesus says: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John, 14:21,29). Secondly, the Bible states that loving God means preferring Him over worldly gains: "No one can serve two masters; either he will hate one and love the other, or else he will stand by one and despise the other; you cannot serve both God and mammon" (Matthew, vi, 24). Therefore, loving God means sheer devotion to Him in a state of humble confidence and contentment with Him.

Some Christian theologians, like their Muslim counterparts, are concerned with the dissimilarity of man's love to God's love. For example, Nygren shares the same concern with the Muslim theologians that we should not place God and man on the same level. Nygren stresses that these two loves possess completely different natures: "Therefore, we cannot speak of loving God in precisely the same sense as we speak of loving one another. Human love includes the motive of enriching and developing other's lives. This meaning is absent from the thought of love for God" (Nygren 1969, 94-95). He is the perfect Being and He is not in need of anyone's love.

Although there are some similarities between the Islamic and Christian conceptions of love, the essential difference is that the Christian concept of love is very much centred around dogma. Hence, it is more important to believe in dogmas such as crucifixion on the cross, resurrection, and atonement. In other words, the theoretical side of man's love for God is stressed more than the practical requirements. In contrast, the Qur'anic paradigm of love emphasises the practical requirements of love. After believing in God, the Qur'an—like Judaism—requires strict obedience to the law. Love

and the law are emphasised equally, whereas in the Biblical tradition the practice of the law is sacrificed for the dogma of love.

### ***Man's Love for God According to the Jewish Tradition***

It is quite safe to say that the manifestation of man's love for God in the Jewish tradition is almost identical with that of the first group of exegetes presented above. God loves Israel as His chosen people and favours them over others (Psalms 78:68, 87:2). In return, Israel loves God because of the covenant they have made with Him. Therefore, God's love demands a mutual love from the two sides. God's love for Israel is not free and absolute love as in Christianity. His love for Israel is conditional, and is not shown to everybody. It is only directed to the believers who keep the covenant. Therefore man's love for God is manifested as obedience to the requirements of the law and loyalty to Him (Deutonomy, 4:4; 10:20, 11:22; 13:5). It is also a love which is intimately related to fear and reverence. God's love for man depends on man's adherence to these principles, otherwise the love will quickly transform into wrath. This position is also acceptable from the Qur'anic point of view. In this way the Qur'anic understanding of love is closer to the Jewish understanding. This similar attitude is also valid for the understanding of the law. In both religions the law is divine and must be observed to the letter. Both approaches require practical outcomes and are not centred on dogma.

It is interesting that in both the Old and New Testaments man is commanded to love God with all his heart and mind. In the Qur'an, however, there is no direct commandment to love God, but there are indirect references to this effect. Furthermore, there are many hadiths where God through the medium of His Prophet openly commands man to love God.

### **Love of Neighbour**

The notion of love towards one's neighbour is not a topic in any detail in this study *per se*. However, in both the Christian and Jewish traditions love of one's neighbour is very important, since neighbourly love is viewed as a manifestation of man's love towards God. The commandment to love

God is immediately followed by the love of one's neighbour: "The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark, 12:31). This verse shows the importance in Christianity given to this kind of love. As Bornkamm asserts: "The summary of the law in the double commandment of love is probably peculiar to the message of Jesus" (Schrage 1988, 70).

The Old Testament also has the same commandment to love God and one's neighbour. However, in Jewish thought love of one's neighbour is not so closely associated with divine love. It is one of the many obligations that might be considered to be within the scope of the law. In Christianity, loving one's neighbour without any expectation of reciprocation became one of the essentials of the faith, since neighbourly love is considered to be a reflection of God's freely given *agape* love to humanity. The immediate occurrence of the commandment regarding loving one's neighbour after God signifies that neighbourly love is a reflection of God's *agape*, as God loves us without any worldly motive in the same way the Christian should love his or her neighbour without any worldly motives.

Neighbourly love does not discriminate between the righteous and the ungodly. In fact, it even extends to one's enemy. The New Testament insists that this love should be the distinguishing mark of Christian love. To love your brother or sister in Christ is both a mark of obedience to the Lord and an appropriate response to the love which God already has towards the individual. In order to show this difference Jesus says:

"You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43.10).

Christian love is the exact imitation of God's love: God lavishes His gifts upon even the ungrateful. Likewise, Christianity teaches that one should carry out favours for those who have no intention of returning the favour.

The priority of the law of love, as stated in Mark 12, means that love of God and one's neighbour are no longer an ordinary requirement demanded

by the Torah. It is "greater" (Mark, 12:31) than other things and takes precedence over all else. Of course, both the Qur'an and the Old Testament do not talk of such a high level of neighbourly love. Christianity is therefore quite unique in this regard. In comparison with the Qur'an, the second part of the commandment concerning "neighbourly love" is the main difference that distinguishes the two sacred texts. We find similar commandments in the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, although they are more a matter of ethics, and do not have the same theological significance as in the Bible.

Another point of interest with regard to the commandment of neighbourly love is that it even embraces enemies (Luke 6:35; Matthew 5:54). These enemies include both personal and religious enemies and the enemies of God and of God's people. This commandment is in clear contrast with the Qur'anic commandment of loving for the sake of God and hating for His sake as well, e.g. to love the friends of God and hate His enemies. God openly commands the believers: "O you who believe! Take not my enemies and yours as friends (or protectors), offering them (your) love even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you" (Qur'an, 60:1). The Qur'an claims to command a middle way between Judaism and Christianity. It does not command hate and revenge on the children of enemies, as in the Old Testament; nor does it command people to love their enemies as in the Bible. It rather commands a balanced love in between these two extremes.

Secondly, the Muslim exegetes believe that the Christians and Jews have distorted the meaning of "sonship". This is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an (Qur'an, 5:13). Ibn Kathir states that God addressed Jesus and Israel as His sons as a way of honouring them. He claims that this metaphorical language has been distorted, as the intended meaning was originally that they are considered to be like sons of God due to their closeness to Him (al-Suyuti n.d. 145).

In summary, although the Qur'an stresses the importance of love both in relation to God and His creation, the focus on love is not as strong as in the New Testament. The Qur'an also has many verses describing the hellfire, the dreadful end for sinners, and God's attributive names which describe His wrath toward sinners.

The Qur'an contains verses which refer to the possibility of the establishment of a close, loving relationship between God and man. The love between man and God represented in the Qur'an is a mutual love. However, there is a difference between man's love and God's love. If the commentaries are disregarded, the Qur'anic verses refer to the concept of love seem to define man's love for God as obedience. In Nygren's classification it could be called a "nomos" relationship. In a relationship, God's love for man is understood as his rewarding and favouring him above others. The commentators of the Qur'an have two inclinations: one group sides with the theologians and understands love as rewarding obedience, while for the other group love means appreciation of intrinsic values in the object of their love. This second interpretation is closer to that of Sufis. However, the commentators whose views are closer to those expressed in the classical Sufi literature never divide people into different groups such as the *awam* and *khalwas* (the lay people and the elected) of classical Sufi thought.

The Qur'an cannot be described as a book which exclusively focuses upon love; it equally employs the motif of fear to describe the relationship between God and man. In contrast, love occupies a central place in the belief system expressed in the Bible (Nygren 1969, 41). The Qur'anic paradigm of love is centred on various practical factors. The Qur'an encourages the performance of good deeds and refraining from evil. This is realised by following the Prophet in all matters of everyday life. In this regard, the Qur'an is in complete harmony with the Old Testament, while the paradigm of love in the New Testament is more closely connected with theological dogma.

The Qur'anic paradigm of love does not disapprove of profane love, but only when it is kept within its limits. When there is a collision of these two types of love, i.e. divine and worldly loves, the human being should sacrifice the latter for the former. The Qur'anic paradigm of love rejects the notion that any nation, race, or people of any ancestry hold any kind of privileged status. In God's eyes everybody is equal, and everybody is expected to show the same obedience towards God.





## Rabia's Paradigm of Love

In the preceding chapters we surveyed the general framework for the concept of love according to classical Sufism and in the Qur'an. Here we will now broaden this framework and focus on the lives of the individual Sufis. This perspective will allow us to examine Sufism as it was practised by people in their daily lives, and not merely as an abstract theory. Furthermore, it will reveal to us how the Sufis shaped, moulded, and refined their basic ideas of divine love according to Qur'an and hadith.

Our focus here will be on a select number of Sufi authors. Three broad criteria have been applied to justify this selection. The first is that they composed their works in the Arabic language. Excluded are Sufis who have written, for example, in Persian or in Turkish. Thus, the scope of this study is confined to authors of works in the original language of Islamic tradition and scholarship. The second criterion is the degree of their contribution to the concept of love. This is significant because we need to focus solely upon those Sufis who had an impact and enduring influence on this concept. Therefore, this criterion allows a clearer and more focused direction to the present study. The third criterion is originality, in other words, the new dimensions that the particular Sufi author brought to the understanding of divine love.

As far as methodology is concerned, the theories of love by the Sufis upon which the present study is focussed will be presented, and the unique aspects of each individual approach will be emphasised. Each approach will be compared and contrasted with the other. In the light of the preceding criteria, the first Sufi to be examined is Rabia al-Adawiyyah, since she is known as one of the first Sufis to present an organised approach to the concept of love. She therefore stands out among the early ascetics like a star of divine love. Al-Badawi goes so far as to call her a martyr of divine love, which is generally attributed to Hallaj (Badawi n.d, 6). It must be noted that Rabia did not build a completely systematic approach to the concept of love. What she did do was to emphasise the importance of disinterested (selfless) love of God, which was not prominent during her time. She categorised love on the basis of its motives, that is, whether the love is motivated by self-interest or not. This simple division proved to be very successful. It became a central theme in almost all Sufi books, and inspired individual Sufis' theories of love to the extent that it was employed by almost all Sufis (Affifi n.d. 198).

In addition to her contribution to the concept of love, Rabia is also important inasmuch as she is one of the first female Sufis which emerged in the eighth century. This is important since it shows that Sufism gave women a great opportunity to attain the rank of sainthood. As a result, the title of saint was bestowed upon women as it was with men. This is due to the fact that in Islam there is no formal system of canonisation. Sainthood is understood only by way of general acceptance among Muslims in addition to some well-known Sufis among their contemporaries.

### **Rabia's Life**

Her full name is Rabia Bint Ismail al-Adawiyyah al-Basriyyah. According to the account given by Smith, she was the fourth daughter of the family and so was called Rabia, meaning "the fourth". Her father's name was Isma'il. He was a poor man, and was intensely pious. As far as her titles are concerned "al-Adawiyyah" and "al-Qaysiyyah" are words that originate from the tribe of Qays b. 'Adi, to which she belonged. The first title refers to the 'Adi component of the name, while the second re-

fers to the Qays. Her other title, al-Basriyah, is derived from her birth place al-Basra.

The biography and history of Rabia have been topics of scholarly research. An example of such research is that of Baldick, who claimed that Rabia's position as a historical figure is questionable. Not only does he doubt the words ascribed to Rabia, he also fundamentally questions whether she actually existed (Baldick 1992, 20; 1990, 233-47). Such a claim has the potential to weaken the structure of Rabia's influence at its very foundation. However, there are numerous limitations and flaws in Baldick's arguments. The first limitation is that Baldick overgeneralises, and presents his ideas as if they are unquestionably proven facts. He picks up on similarities between two personalities and prematurely concludes that one is the product of the other. His approach is at times quite contradictory. Hence, Baldick first conceives of the hagiographical sources as unreliable and doubts their authenticity, but then base certain theories on these same sources. For example, he argues that religious prostitution has continued in the Islamic tradition but he cannot present any Islamic source to support this claim. As a result, Baldick employs a modern French source to back his claim that religious prostitution continued in Islam under the guise of religious piety, and does not bring any Islamic source to support this claim (Baldick 1990, 237).

Apart from Baldick's methodological flaws, he also ignores the vast number of references to Rabia which are contained in virtually all of the Sufi literature. In particular, the reference of al-Jahiz (d.868 A.D.) to Rabia is very significant (al-Jahiz 1968, III, 163) as al-Jahiz is widely known as a trustworthy scholar. In addition to the fact that he was not known to be a Sufi, it is also a significant indication of the objectivity of this opinion. This indicates with some degree of certainty that Rabia was not an imaginary figure.

The present study also aims to highlight Rabia's contribution to the development of the concept of love rather than to discuss her biographical history. Even if we assume for a moment that she was not a real historical figure, or the words attributed to her are not hers, this does not change Rabia's importance. This is because Rabia was believed by her contemporaries and later Sufis to have exerted an influence in certain ways not matched

by any other individual. Therefore, for the aims of this research, the importance of Rabia is based mainly on the perception of the Sufis and her impact on Sufi thought, and does not primarily aim to present a biographical account (Sells 1996, 155).

### *Her Birth*

Rabia was born about 95 or 99 A.H. (717 A.D.) in Basra and spent the greater part of her life there. She died in 185 A.H. (801 A.D.) and was buried in Basra. According to 'Attar, she was born into a poor family and her parents died when she was young. This helpless situation was made worse by a famine in Basra, when she and her sisters were later separated. Rabia was left alone, and was taken prisoner by an evil man who sold her into slavery ('Attar 1905, 60).

Rabia was forced to work very hard in her master's house. Nevertheless, she spent all the night in the worship of God. Rabia's master, on seeing her devotion to God, was deeply moved. In addition to this, 'Attar narrates that her master witnessed some miraculous happenings, such as a lamp on her head being suspended without a chain while she was in ritual prayer. Her master eventually set her free. As a free woman Rabia journeyed into the desert, and after spending some time there she left and obtained a small room in Basra wherein she engaged in devotional worship ('Attar 1905, 61).

If this narration is to be accepted as a true reflection of her life, it seems that she suffered as a slave in her childhood as well as in her adulthood. This fact might give some insight into Rabia's psychology. For example, it might provide an explanation for Rabia's reasons for devoting herself wholeheartedly to her God. The nature of Islamic society at her time was such that it was essential for free females to be under the protection and guardianship of a male relative. In the case of Rabia, such a protector did not exist. Her father had died when she was young, and as a result she had been forced into the shackles of slavery. She found solace in God during her intense loneliness. In this way she satisfied the psychological gap from which she suffered very deeply. It can be argued that if Rabia had not suffered this painful episode in her early life it would have been less likely that

she would turn towards God so sincerely, and Sufism would have been deprived of her valuable contribution.

There are also stories about Rabia's pilgrimage to Mecca and her encounter with Ibrahim b. Adham. These stories give a clear picture of a woman renouncing the world and its attractions, and devoting her life to the service of God. However, her remarks about the Ka'ba as "this is in my way of slipping" created some controversy among the theologians. If her words were to be accepted as authentic, then she was the forerunner to Hallaj in the understanding of pilgrimage and the Ka'ba.

Once Rabia had determined to lead a life of spiritual devotion, she strictly followed the popular form of Sufism of her time. The characteristic features of this were a life of denial, abstention and asceticism (al-Sha'rani 1993: 133). This attitude also determined her perception of marriage. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Rabia's approach towards marriage was very negative.

### ***Rabia's Rejection of Marriage***

Marriage has very little relevance in the discussion of the philosophies and ideas of great historical personalities. If Rabia's views on marriage had merely been a personal matter, restricted to her own private view, it would be of little interest as a subject of academic research. For Rabia, however, this is not the case. In her understanding of love, marriage has some negative implications. It is therefore a legitimate avenue of investigation for the scholar.

It would be uncontroversial to describe Rabia as being anti-marriage. She considered marriage to be an obstacle in the path of divine love, and anything hindering this objective was to be shunned. This was not merely out of personal desire on Rabia's part. Such a stance was a natural result of her love. This meant that an anti-marriage attitude was a fundamental component of her philosophy.

Ironically, despite Rabia's strong dislike of marriage, she received many proposals of marriage. However, she rejected all of these proposals. Among those who wished to marry her was 'Abd al-Wahid b. Zayd (d.793). Rabia did not welcome his offer, and she replied to him: "O sensual one, se-

ek another sensual one like yourself. Have you seen any sign of desire in me?" (Makki n.d. II, 57).

This strong reproach is quite remarkable, and indicates that for Rabia marriage meant sensuality, even though 'Abd al-Wahid is not known to be a man of sensuality. This can be supported by the fact that he was the founder of one of the first monastic communities near Basra.

It was not only ascetics who wanted to marry her; richer and more influential men also made proposals. For example, the 'Abbasid Amir of Basra, (from 145 A.H. to his death) Muhammad b. Sulayman al-Hashimi (d.172 A.H.), proposed marriage to her and offered a great sum of money as a dowry. Rabia replied to him: "It does not please me that you should be my slave and that all you possess should be mine, or you should distract me from God for a single moment" (Makki II, 57).

This answer again shows that Rabia viewed marriage as a hindrance and a distraction from the path. It is also understood that she considers marriage to be slavery to the spouse. Hence it is incompatible to give absolute devotion to God while maintaining the ties of husband and wife.

Another proposal is attributed to the great mystic saint Hasan al-Basri (d.728); although chronologically it is impossible that Hasan al-Basri proposed to Rabia, for the simple reason that he died some 70 years before her death. However, this story is given in more than one account. In her reply to him, another significant part of her understanding of marriage is found: "The contract of marriage is for those who have a phenomenal existence (i.e. who are concerned with the affairs of this material world). Here (i.e. in my case) existence has ceased, since I have ceased to exist and have passed out of Self. My existence is in Him, and I am altogether His. I am in the shadow of His command. The marriage contract must be asked from Him, not from me" ('Attar 1966, 59).

This quotation has the potential to be understood in many different ways. The ambiguity opens up different possibilities. For instance, there are some scholars who argue on the basis of this dictum that Rabia was a proponent of the concept of spiritual marriage. Spiritual marriage can be defined as the rejection of marriage in its ordinary sense, and makes God the object of devotion rather than an earthly spouse.

Al-Badawi concludes from her last remarks that Rabia was in fact married, but her marriage was with God in a spiritual marriage. He refers to other dialogues to explain this claim. One such dialogue is that of her friend Haynuna. Her words to Rabia were: "Stand up, surely the bridegroom of the guided has arrived" (al-Nishaburi 1983, 288; Badawi n.d., 36).

In al-Badawi's view, with these words Haynuna implied "God has arrived." This led al-Badawi to maintain that some female Sufis developed the idea of spiritual marriage. Al-Badawi questions whether Sufis also influenced the Christian Mystics (Badawi n.d., 26-27). Al-Badawi's conclusion is interesting due to the fact that it is generally assumed that Sufism borrowed some ideas from Christianity. However, in a sense this is a reversal of roles. Al-Badawi in this regard refers to St. Teresa of Avila and her ideas on spiritual love. These in some ways resemble the ideas expressed by Rabia. Al-Badawi was possibly referring to the following words of St. Teresa:

"It [spiritual marriage] will demand total, unswerving, exclusive fidelity to God, and if the soul is so careless as to set her affections on anything which is not God, she will risk losing all. Spiritual marriage is the highest summit of spiritual progress possible in this earthly life. The state of spiritual marriage is utterly ineffable, for this secret union takes place in the inmost centre of the soul, and the soul is so completely detached from all created things that it has no frame of reference within which it might describe its experience of God" (Dicken 1963, 428).

Although strong parallels can be drawn between the thoughts of St. Teresa and Rabia, it is still difficult to claim the presence of spiritual marriage in Sufism in general, and in Rabia's life in particular. The most that can be said is that there is a superficial similarity between the two. However, as far as Sufi thought is concerned this theory did not receive general acceptance. It appears that this kind of interpretation is a fairly recent phenomenon, since there is no mention of such a theory in the classical Sufi literature (al-Nashshar n.d. XXI, 202).

In the light of the historical circumstances and the Sufi literature, it is more plausible to argue that it was Rabia who was influenced by the Christian mystics and not the other way round. This is for the simple reason that



Christian monks were common at the time of Rabia, and there is evidence to suggest that there was communication between the two sides. In addition to this, there are many incidents of Christian mystics embracing Islam. Therefore, it can be said with some certainty that these Christians brought some of their ideas into their new faith. Otherwise, such attitudes would not have been expected from Muslim ascetics. It must be noted that Islam places a great emphasis on the institution of marriage. It extols its virtues and encourages its widespread existence within Islamic society.

The origins of the concept of spiritual marriage can shed further light on the way Rabia is viewed by Sufi scholars. According to Islamic tradition, Mary the mother of Jesus did not marry, but devoted herself to God. This belief lends itself to the idea of a kind of spiritual marriage. Some of the Rabia's biographers found similar narrations in the Qur'an. For example, her chief biographer 'Attar compares her with Mary the mother of Jesus, and refers to her as the second Mary. According to Islamic sources, Mary is known to have never married. In this way, 'Attar emphasises that there is nothing wrong with Rabia's rejection of marriage, as Mary constitutes a Qur'anic example of Rabia's situation, hence her choice of remaining unmarried must be respected.

From all her rejections, it can be concluded that Rabia considered marriage to be an obstacle on the spiritual path to God. She considered marriage to be sensuality, and driven by the desires of the lower self. Furthermore, she considered herself to be unsuitable for marriage since she had lost herself entirely in God. This last idea also opens up the possibility that later exerted a great influence on the development of the later Sufi conceptions of love, the most obvious being the concept of *fana'* (annihilation) of one's self in God as the ultimate endpoint on the path of love.

### ***Her Students***

Rabia had many disciples and associates who visited her to benefit from her advice and teachings. Her biographers constantly associate her with Hasan al-Basri, whom they portray as her disciple and follower. Again this is historically impossible since he died long before she was born. Eit-

her her name was introduced into anecdotes relating to Hasan, or Ha, and her name had been substituted for the name of one of her contemporaries. The latter appears to be the more likely explanation. However, the importance of these supposed meetings is found not in their historicity but in their implication. The implication is that the Sufi biographer, Ibn Sa'd, had a poor understanding of Sufism and disliked Hasan's gloomy approach to Sufism and Sufism. They portrayed them at times as having met on "occasional occasions. During these meetings they debated problems pertaining to the mystical path. In all of these meetings, Rabia was presented as the victor and Hasan as the vanquished. Sells wrote in support of this view: "A large number of anecdotes consist of verbal jousts amongst Rabia and several early Sufis including Hasan al-Basri and Ibrahim Adham. In comparison with her these great men of the age are shown as still held down by affectation and egoism" (Sells 1996, 153).

Behind this attitude, it can be deduced that her philosophy of love is favoured over the strongly ascetic and gloomy worldly view of the above mentioned Sufis and the likes.

Another ascetic with whom she is associated, and with greater probability, is Rabah al-Qays of Basra (d.810). They were contemporaries, and followed the same school of thought. In addition, among Rabia's important associates, Sufyan Thawri (d.778) is mentioned in hagiographical works. He was a great authority on hadith. He was even rebuked by Rabia for his excessive interest in the study of hadith, and was therefore distracted from the life of devotion to God (Makki n.d. II, 57; Attar 1976, 49). This also shows the general attitude of Sufis toward the scholars of exoteric sciences. In general, Sufis saw the scholars of exoteric sciences as insincere and literalist, i.e. only following the letter of the law and ignoring its spiritual dimension.

There are some accounts of Rabia meeting the famous Sufi Dhunmun Al-Misri, who died A.D. 856 and therefore survived Rabia by nearly half a century. It is possible that he may have met her in his early years. Besides these personalities, many visitors came to her house to benefit from her advice, such as al-Salih b. 'Abd al-'Aziz and Kilab b. Hari, Malik bin Dinar (Makki II, 57).

It seems that Rabia's disciples and friends were mainly men. Nevertheless, sources indicate that she had some female associates and followers: Mu'adha al-Adawiyyah, Layla al-Qaysiyyah, Umm al-Darda and her servants, Mariam of Basra and 'Abda bint Shuwal are mentioned in hagiographical works (Smith 1974, 19).

The preceding discussion has shown that it is very clear that Rabia was acquainted with the different trends in Sufi thought, since many of her associates were leading Sufis of the time. Contrary to the advantageous position of men in religious issues, she was given pre-eminence above her male contemporaries. As a result, it can be said that her philosophy of love greatly influenced her contemporaries. At this point, it is relevant to examine in detail the various elements of Rabia's conception of love.

### ***The Characteristics of Rabia's Understanding of Love***

As we have seen, Rabia's era was marked by a strong tendency toward asceticism. In this respect, Rabia is like a bridge which connects the ascetic form of Sufism with its love-dominated form. The majority of her associates, some of whom were mentioned above, are Sufis who concentrated on the ascetic life and fear of God as the main route to salvation.

With regard to Rabia's understanding, Hasan al-Basri may be considered as important. Margaret Smith characterised him as *misanthropic*, a fact which is illustrated in his description of *zuhd*: "Zuhd in this world is to hate its people and all who are in it and to leave what is in it to those who dwell in it" (al-Qushayri 1993, 118).

Rabia, who belonged to this early school, was an ascetic who was extremely isolated from worldly pursuits, but her asceticism was directed to and resulted from the love of God. Although she and the other ascetics of her time seemingly held similar ascetic views of the world, the motive behind their asceticism contrasted significantly. This can be seen in one of her dialogues, where one of her friends prayed in her presence saying: "O my God! I ask You for freedom from this world."

On hearing her friend's words, Rabia replied: "You must be very fond of this world; if you were not fond of it, you would not speak of it, either go-

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od or ill, remember the saying: 'Whoso loves a thing speaks much of it' (Attar 1976, 51).

In Rabia's background, the ascetic approach to Sufism, which concentrated on poverty, sadness, and the fear of God, dominated her time. In this context, Rabia was a unique voice, introducing the concept of love to Sufism. It cannot be ignored that an ascetic approach to the spiritual life is, and always has been, the indisputable element of all the major spiritual movements of almost all religions. In this sense, Rabia is not different from the main stream understanding. However, her asceticism was different from the mainstream Sufism of her day. The motive distinguishing her from the others was her love for God. This is clearly expressed in the anecdotes attributed to her.

They show clearly that Rabia lived the life of a true ascetic. For example, Jahiz, in his famous book *al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin*, classifies her name under the chapter: "Mentioning of the female ascetics and pious of Basra" (al-Jahiz 1968, III, 163).

Al-Jahiz's account of Rabia is very important since they were contemporaries, and Jahiz is known to be a trustworthy author. By contrast, some researchers believe that her sayings are nothing but expressions of the common ascetic concern prevalent at that time for single-minded devotion to God (Christopher 1996, 61). In this way, the author apparently diminishes the uniqueness of Rabia's contribution. However, in the light of her life and sayings, it can be argued that Melchert's statements do not reflect a complete picture of Rabia. Furthermore, the majority of the modern authors regard Rabia as the first person who introduced the element of selfless love into the austere teachings of the early period. In this way, she gave Sufism the true colour of mysticism (Nadeem 1979, 18).

One can argue that there were many Sufis in Rabia's time that spoke on love. The question arises as to which features distinguish Rabia from her contemporaries. Broadly speaking, it is the fact that Rabia presented a well-organised theory of love. However, Rabia was not the first of the Sufis to have discovered that the way to God must be sought through love. In addition to this, it is also true that she was perhaps the first to lay stress on

the doctrine of the *disinterested love* of God. This was a new concept to many of her fellow Sufis who mostly worshipped God in hope of eternal reward, or from fear of the hellfire. Rabia developed a new understanding of divine love and blended it carefully with asceticism without losing any of the feelings of love.

### **Her Understanding of Love**

#### ***God's Love for Man***

The position of the majority of Sufis regarding God's love for man is that they focus mostly on their love for God. On the other hand, they do not speak much about God's love for His creation. In this respect, Rabia is not an exception. She does not speak very much about God's love for man. Instead, she mostly speaks of her love for God. It can be said that this is the prominent feature distinguishing Sufi love. In contrast, Christian mystics put more emphasis on God's love for man.

Looking at love as a relationship, we need to determine from which side this relationship is initiated, that is, determining the lover and the beloved. The majority of Sufis suggested that Rabia believed that it is God alone who initiates the relationship of love. We can find evidence for such a suggestion in some of Rabia's poems. For example, there may be an indication in the last verse of her poem in which she attributes the cause of both of her loves to God: "So there is nothing to thank me for in either love: the thanks are to You in both" (Makki n.d. II, 57).

Not only is God the initiator of love, He is also the one who bestows the special kind of love which distinguishes Rabia's philosophy of love, namely, disinterested love. By both kinds of love Rabia is referring to the love which is based on self-interest, and to the love that is disinterested and above any selfish motives. God is the sole agent in putting both kinds of love into the hearts of His creation. As God placed selfish love into the nature of man, He also places disinterested love into the hearts of those who love Him. The following definition of love by Rabia confirms this:

"Love has emanated from pre-eternity, passed unto post-eternity

and perceived no one among the eighteen thousand worlds competent to imbibe even a draught of its sherbet. When at last Love reached the truth, this maxim alone remained: "He loves them and they love Him" (Attar 1966, 6<sup>th</sup>).

This definition shows that love first emanates from God. It is not possible that this kind of love can be attained merely by one's efforts and devotions alone. Rabia's pronouncements on the other hand do not address the issue of the motives behind God's love for man. It is essentially a one-sided representation of a relationship which is in its essence based upon two actors, viz. God and man.

The primacy given to the idea that God is the initiator is central to Rabia's understanding, and finds expression in her explanation of other Islamic ideas. For example, her answer to the question whether the repentance of the sinner is acceptable or not is that "no one can turn [in Arabic to repent also means to turn] to God before He turns to them" (al-Munawi n.d., 1, 2020).

This supports the view that God is always the one who initiates the move, in this case, toward the heart of the man. The choice, then, ultimately lies with man either to return this love to God or to ignore it.

Rabia is not alone in giving precedence to God's love over and above human love. For example, Abu Yazid of Bistam (d.875) echoes similar sentiments to Rabia in the following statement: "I fancied that I loved Him, but on consideration I saw that His love preceded mine" (Istafahani 1935, 34).

Rabia's God is also characterised by a certain degree of jealousy. Her God is a jealous God. His jealousy requires that His devotees should love Him and Him alone. Devotion should be undivided and focused solely upon God. Therefore, Rabia emphasises loving God entirely, without taking any equals or partners to Him. In a sense this is an extension of the Islamic concept of *shirk* into the arena of love. Whereas the jealous God of the orthodox does not allow anybody to worship anything besides Him, Rabia's God does not allow any to share with Him that love which is due to Him alone" (Smith 1974, 108). Rabia's ideas can be exemplified with reference to an excerpt from one of her poems:

O Beloved of the hearts, I have none like unto thee.  
 Therefore have a pity this day on the sinner who comes to thee.  
 O my hope and my Rest and my Delight  
 The heart can love none other but thee  
 (al-Munawi n.d. 202; trans. by Smith 1974, 55).

In summary, Rabia's conception of God's love consists of three essential elements. First, God is the originator and initiator of Love. Second, He alone is the bestower of His love on His creatures. Thirdly, He is a jealous God who will not admit any partners in the love due to Him.

### **Man's Love for God**

Sufis selected different criteria in their analysis of man's love for God. Some selected the final culmination of the process of love as a criterion. Some selected the knowledge of love. It is possible to add to these criteria. Rabia's analysis of man's love towards God is based on man's motives. She broadly classifies these motives into two groups. If the first priority of man's love is his own self interest, then she names this love as selfish love. On the other hand, if man's love stems from his realisation of the wonder and glory of God and is divorced from self-interest, it is classified as disinterested love.

### ***Selfish Love (Hubb al-Hawa)***

The first component of Rabia's philosophy of love is selfish love, as opposed to disinterested love. Rabia neatly describes the selfish love in the following lines of poetry: "I have loved You with two loves, a selfish love and a love that is worthy of You. As for the love which is selfish, I occupy myself therein with remembrance of You to the exclusion of all others" (Makki n.d. II, 57).

Rabia was aware of this selfish love in the nature of human beings, therefore she does not deny that she loves God for her own good. Whilst Rabia accepts this selfish love, she does not approve of it. She draws an analogy to explain the selfish love and its defects. She likens the selfish lover of God, that is, the person who loves God for his own ends, to a bad employee. In an anecdote related by 'Attar, we see the differences in the motives of

devotion between her and her associates. Attar relates that once a number of elders came to Rabia, and she asked one of them

"Why do you worship God?" He answered, "There are seven degrees in Hell which are a source of dread and threat to me, and everyone must pass by them in fear and terror". Another said, "The different degrees of Paradise are places of rare delight, and much rest is promised". Then Rabia joined, "He is an evil servant who worships God out of fear and terror, not from the desire of reward. However, there are many of these. They asked her, "Why do you worship God? Have you no desire for Paradise?" She replied, "The neighbour first, and then the house.<sup>3</sup> Is it not enough for me that I am given leave to worship him? Even if Heaven and Hell were not, does it not behove us to obey Him? He is worthy of worship without any intermediary" (Attar 1996, 166).

From this anecdote it can be deduced that man should not love God for the sake of Paradise or Hell. She believes that God would be deserving of worship even if He did not have Paradise and Hell. To believe otherwise means that God is lowered to a degree by which He becomes an object of love like any others. God has no more value than a doctor that gives medicine or a person who helps man in some way or another. In this respect, other Sufis such as Shibli (d. 945), went to extremes by equating selfish love with polytheism. Shibli asserts that: "To love Him for His acts of grace means to be a polytheist" (al-Isfahani, 1935, X, 369).

Rabia's words on selfish love also attracted the attention of al-Ghazali. According to him, Rabia means by selfish love: "The love of God which is resulted from the material benefits that He showers upon His servants."

However, al-Ghazali asserts that compared to the eternal happiness from the favours of God, ephemeral happiness pales into insignificance. Al-Ghazali's commentary is also supported by al-Zabidi. He also states that by "selfish love", Rabia may have meant "the love of God because of the favour and worldly pleasures received from Him" (Hifni, n.d. 18).

From the Prophetic perspective, there is nothing wrong in loving God for the benefits that He bestows upon man. In one hadith the Prophet states: "Love God for His bounties on you" (Tirmidhi, *Manaqib*, 31).



The motive behind this love is in the nature of all creatures. Therefore, man too loves God for His favours and bounties. Rabia regards this love as selfish love, since it is self-centred and perceives everything from the narrow perspective of its own self. It regards the self alone as its point of reference. For Rabia, since this love is always tied to the favours received from the Beloved, it is not accepted with high regard. In a sense, it lacks the purity defined by Rabia's outlook.

There is nevertheless a place for selfish love in Rabia's scheme. Although love which evolves from one's self may be something despicable, it does have some benefits. For example, does it not show that the person is in fact capable of some kind of love, even if it is selfish love? Developing this train of thought further, one can view selfish love as a stepping stone toward real love, that is, disinterested love. Support for such a view can be derived from scholars such as al-Sakkakini, who stated: "At the beginning, Rabia was like any other ascetic, praying to God from fear of His punishment and in expectation of His reward; then she progressed from asceticism to Sufism..." (al-Sakkakini 1982, 53).

It might be thought that selfish love is a necessary step in the process of arriving at disinterested love for God. There is much evidence in Rabia's life to support this hypothesis, such as the fact that she fainted upon hearing the mention of Hell or the Fire. Her close friendship with the ascetics of her time also makes us think that she had been an ascetic before becoming an advocate of disinterested love.

However, this particular point concerning the interrelation between selfish love and divine love is developed into completed theories by the later Sufis like Ibn Al-Farid and Ibn Arabi. They remove the clouds of suspicion about physical love and make it one of the pillars of their theories of love.

Rabia's influence can be noted in later Sufi writings. As an illustration, Hujwiri writes: "Believers who love God are of two kinds: those who regard the favour and beneficence of God towards them, and those who are led by that regard to love the Benefactor..." (al-Hujwiri 1970, 307-8).

Thus far, we have relied upon Rabia's poetry as a source of her philosophy. In this respect, the researcher is faced with a problem of historical

accuracy. Did Rabia herself produce the poetry that is attributed to her, or is it the invention of her biographers and followers? Historically, it is not clear whether Rabia actually composed the poetry which is attributed to her, or whether she merely learnt the poems of various other poets and later recited them on appropriate occasions and in the company of her disciples. It seems that the latter conjecture is more likely, as the same poems are attributed to other Sufis as well (Baldick 1992, 81). Having said that, it does not change the fact that Rabia was vastly influential on the development of the concept of love.

At this point, the question arises: how does Rabia's view of love compare with the conceptions of love found within other faith traditions? This study focusses on the tradition of love found within the religion of Christianity, due to the fact that many similarities can be found between Rabia's love and the Christian traditions. Muslim scholars appear to have been aware of Jesus' message of love. The story that Jesus came across three groups of pious people, one said we worship for the fear of Hell, the other group said we worship for the hope of Paradise and the last group said we worship for our love for God. Jesus said: "You are the closest people to God on the day of the judgement" (al-Razi 1938, XII, 231; Makki, n.d. II, 56).

With regard to the Christian theologians, a similar idea was put forward by Gregory of Nyssa. There are some parallels between Rabia's notion of selfish love and love which is called "Eros love" in Christianity. Eros love is considered as human-centred and selfish. It regards the benefit and satisfaction of the lover (man) as the first priority. Therefore, Eros love is condemned by such prominent theologians as Nygren. Throughout his work *Agape and Eros*, Nygren strives to demonstrate that Eros is not compatible with the Christian concept of love. Instead, he claims that *Agape* is the only way to describe Christian love.

### ***Love of God Because of His Worthiness***

The first part of Rabia's theory of love, that is selfish love, was a starting point in the development of her system of love. It is not the central component of her system, but is rather the negative attitude that must be

cleansed from the heart of the one who loves. After this purification love becomes disinterested love, the real body of love that Rabia strongly defends. All Rabia's teachings about Sufism centre on the concept of disinterested love for God. Although this great achievement may not solely belong to Rabia, no other Sufi has given it as much emphasis. In many of the dialogues between her and her associates, and in her anecdotes, this side of love for God is strongly emphasised.

What does disinterested love for God mean? Rabia answers this question by stating: "God deserves (*ahlun*) being loved by His creation for Himself only, that is, without any additional motives. God is worthy of worship and love for the qualities of perfection and beauty that He possesses. Therefore, even if He did not have Paradise to reward or Hell to punish, He still should be loved" (Makki n.d. II, 57; Smith 1974, 126).

Hence Rabia's love originates from appreciation of the beauty, perfection, and other qualities possessed by God. Selfish love does not regard such high matters, but only considers the benefits that it receives from the benefactor. This conception of disinterested love is deduced from this following piece of Rabia's poetry:

I have loved You with two loves,  
 a selfish love and a love that is *worthy of You*...  
 As for that which is worthy of You,  
 therein You lift the veil that I may see You.  
 Yet is there no praise to me in this or that,  
 But the praise is to You, whether in that or this.  
 (Makki n.d. II, 57).

Regardless of the difficulty of determining from this short couplet her exact formulations, Rabia gained fame as one who distinguished between the selfish love of God which seeks Paradise, and the selfless love which considers only of the divine Beloved. One may think that this short couplet could not address so many diverse issues and could not be taken as the basis of disinterested love, but this couplet inspired many important Sufis, who always referred to it when explaining Rabia's theory of love. For example, Abu Talib al-Makki interprets this love in his *Qut Al-Qulub*: "This

is the sublime love for the majesty of God. It comes neither from ambition nor from any sensory joy. Nor does it deserve any reward for that. (Makki n.d. II, 57).

Al-Ghazali, who will be examined separately here, also comments on Rabia's couplet. According to him, Rabia's second kind of love, the one 'worthy of Him' is the love of God's beauty which was revealed to her. This love is considered to be the higher of the two loves, and the inner of the two. The delight arising from the beauty of the Lord is that which the Prophet of God explained, speaking of his Lord Most High: "I have prepared for my faithful servants what eye has not seen nor ear heard and what has not entered into the heart of man" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 267).

Al-Ghazali further illuminates the discussion by adding that when this vision is attained, all anxieties and sensual desires seep out from the heart and mind of man. In other words, they are completely annihilated to the point of non-existence. Furthermore, the heart becomes filled with its grace. Even if the gnostic were to be cast into the Fire, he would not feel the heat due to the absorption that he has attained in the path of divine love. It has in a sense made him oblivious to anything tied to his personal self. He recognises nothing, nor does he perceive anything apart from the majesty and beauty of God. Even if the favours of Paradise were spread out before him, he would not turn towards them because of the perfection of the grace he has received. In support of al-Ghazali's ideas, al-Zabidi added that this kind of love is the strongest kind of love, as it continues to exist under all circumstances (Hifni n.d. 18).

The analysis of Rabia's words by the Sufi authorities indicates that Rabia's love for God does not result from His generosity to her. This idea is also supported in numerous anecdotes about her. In a conversation related by 'Attar: Ja 'far asks her: "When is the servant satisfied with God Most High?"

The answer is given: "When his or her pleasure in misfortune is equal to his or her pleasure in prosperity" (Makki II, 40).

She means by these words that God must be loved not only in prosperous times but also in times of severity and hardship. In other words, the

person should not think of his or her well-being, but rather should pay full attention to God's praiseworthiness. This notion is more explicitly stated in her well-known prayer: "O My Lord! If I am worshipping you from fear of fire, burn me in the fires of Hell; and if I am worshipping you from desire for Paradise, deny me Paradise. But if I am worshipping you for yourself alone, then do not deny me the sight of your magnanimous face" (al-Sakkakini 1982, 54).

These ideas have very close parallels with the Christian understanding of love. It is interesting that Gregory of Nyssa has made a similar analysis to Rabia concerning the worship and acts of piety by man:

...The most perfect and blessed manner of salvation; I mean salvation through love. For salvation occurs through fear for some people, when we look at the threats of punishment in Hell and separate ourselves from evil for that reason. And there are others who also act in accordance with virtue through the hope of reward that is received for those who live well; they are won over not by the love of the good but by the expectation of the returns. But the one who achieves perfection casts aside fear (For, when it is not out of love that one stays with the master; but through fear of the beating that one does not run away: that is the condition of a slave). And he disdains the actual rewards that he might not seem to consider the reward as more important than the one who gives benefit. Rather, he loves with heart and soul and might, not one of the things that come from God, but of himself who is the source of the good things (Osborne 1994, 77).

There is a close resemblance between Rabia's disinterested love and *Agape* love in Christianity. Both of them are "God-centred", in contrast with selfish human love. This kind of love for God does not give priority to the interests of the human. Besides, it rejects the idea of any kind of benefit, whether it is material or spiritual. Therefore, Rabia's understanding of love is quite similar to the *Agape* motif in Christian theology. According to her, God is not a mere instrument to satisfy the desires of men in the hereafter. In Christian *Agape* the disinterested love originates from God; God loves His creation disinterestedly, and the Christian mystics imitate this.

Rabia also admits that God is the source of all the love:

It seems that Rabia's philosophy has in the modern era re-emerged. In modern times, a parallel of Rabia's disinterested love is found in the Quakers' understanding of love. They contend that love for God must be utterly and completely pure of all self-interest whatsoever. "We must be doing nothing for ourselves; nor take any personal satisfaction in making any contribution. We must leave everything to God in perfect trust. We may not desire to gain heaven or to avoid Hell for to do so would import an element of self-interest in our service of God" (Dicken 1963, 493).

A poem by the Lebanese Christian poet and philosopher of the modern era, Khalil Gibran, addresses the same issue in the following manner. Gibran portrays the covetousness behind worship and the shackles of self-interest as the driving force behind one's worship. It is not an unconditional love, but a love that expects rewards and benefits. In the absence of these, man will not worship God. One could characterise this as a *business relationship* with God based on worship and return of favours. In the words of Gibran, these "Rabiaistic" sentiments are echoed in beautiful poetic language:

"Religion is a field unplanted except by those who accomplish an interest from it -return.

If it were not from fear of Hell, none would worship any God;

And if not for the expected rewards, they would deny God" (al-Sakkakini 1982, 72).

Having examined the theoretical aspects of Rabia's philosophy of disinterested love, there remains one other issue regarding the practicality of this love, bearing in mind the weaknesses of the human species, especially the desire for self-promotion and self-interest. The question is, Rabia's disinterested love might be idealistic but is it realistically speaking capable of implementation in life? Is it really possible to love someone completely without self-interest? Is it possible to have no self-interest at all in loving God? Is it not absolutely necessary that the lover have a certain amount of self-interest in the relationship of love? A realistic view of human nature demands recognition of the fact that

without self-interest the soul will never have an adequate initial motive, although it is to be hoped that this self-interest will give rise to better motives. Therefore, the idea of self-interest should not be regarded as a kind of necessary evil (Dicken 1963, 497). It must be regarded as a step to disinterested love of God. In the Qur'an, there are many verses which explain in great detail the reward the obedient servants get as well as the punishment for the disobedient. In a sense the Qur'an accepts the self-fish behaviour of the servants as normal. It may be concluded that Rabia's disinterested love is not for beginners but for the Sufis who have traversed a long way on the Sufi path.

### ***Practical Examples of Disinterested Love in Rabia's Philosophy***

Rabia conveys her message of divine love through different channels: poetry, Arab proverbs, and short puns. In addition to these, she uses a distinctive method: Rabia, not only by her words but also by her actions, tries to communicate her disinterested love to her friends. Consider the following anecdote related by Aflaki:

One day a number of her friends saw Rabia walking hastily, carrying in one hand water and in the other fire. Upon being asked where she was going, she answered: "I want to throw fire into Paradise and pour water into Hell so that these two veils disappear, and it becomes clear who worships God out of love, not out of fear of Hell or hope for Paradise. What if the hope of Paradise and the fear of Hell did not exist? Not one would worship his Lord or obey Him" (Smith 1974, 98).

In this anecdote, Rabia tries to show vividly that worshipping God must be out of pure love, unadulterated with other thoughts. In this way, Rabia liberated the religious life from all kinds of shackles, including both spiritual and material.

Rabia did not reject Paradise completely as an evil. It was something good, but for her it was an obstacle to the highest good, that is, the love of God. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to note that Rabia did not

desire Paradise, as it acted as a hindrance to her devotion to God. Asked what she thought of Paradise, Rabia replied with an Arabic proverb: "First the neighbour, then the house".

To her, God is characterised by jealousy, and detests His servants' distractions away from Him. On one occasion, explaining the reason for her illness, she says: "All I know, I swear to God, is that recently He revealed to me, and I felt a slight inclination of the heart towards it. I realised that the Almighty's jealousy has chastised me through this sickness. It is a sort of divine reproof" (Nurbakhsh 1983, 45).

As a result, it is easy to get the impression that Rabia's philosophy of love is full of negative ideas, for example, the denial of any kind of self-satisfaction or any of the pleasures allowed in Islamic law. Nevertheless, there are positive elements in Rabia's philosophy, and it is to these that we shall now turn. It could be argued that Rabia's understanding of love was of a positive nature, but also had some negative elements. One example of the approach to seeing the positive in Rabia's philosophy is to consider attitude and outlook to the problems and vicissitudes of life which inevitably fall upon man at some time or other in his existence in the world. Like her contemporaries, she did not blame the world or other things to show her love for God. On one occasion, it is reported that she visited a man of knowledge from Basra who started talking about the wretchedness of the world. She gave a deep sigh and said:

You are a man who must love this world, for he who greatly loves something keeps talking about it... if you had completely freed yourself from this world, it would not have mattered to you: neither its wretchedness nor its goodness (al-Munawi n.d., I, 202).

In the same way, she reprimanded her spiritual brethren, Sufian Al-Thawri, Malik b. Dinar and Salih b. 'Abd al-Jalil, when in her presence they talked about the evils of the world (al-Sakkakini 1982, 56). She strove to change the negative approach of her friends to the world and its affairs. The mere asceticism of her friends which lacked any kind of flexibility and theosophy was gradually transformed by her philosophy. Therefore, she



was an activist and not a reactionist. Instead of blaming things she tried to change herself. She removed the word "hate" from her vocabulary.

Once she was asked: "Do you hold Satan as an enemy?" She replied: "No". The other, astonished, asked: "How is that?" Rabia said: "My love for God leaves no place for hating Satan" (Sells 1996, 163).

According to her, hating Satan wastes time and energy which might be used for more positive activities, i.e. loving God. Furthermore, Rabia's philosophy of love also shapes her understanding of other Sufi terms, and she explains them from the perspective of her love for God. For example she describes truthfulness in the following way: "Truthfulness is to forget punishment while seeing the Lord" (Nurbakhsh 1983, 48).

In other words, only those who truly love can be truthful, since they do not realise pain in the presence of their beloved. This "Rabianistic" idea not to feel pain in the presence of the Beloved appears to have influenced Hallaj. However, Hallaj developed the idea of forgetting punishment in the presence of God to extremes, as will be discussed later.

In these examples, it is clearly seen that Rabia always defines the spiritual states of Sufism from the perspective of love. Although at times al-Sakkakini exaggerates Rabia's position, it seems correct that she depicts Rabia as the mentor of her Sufi friends, and as always having the last say in discussions (al-Sakkakini 1982, 66).

Rabia's conception of love is inextricably bound up with her notions of worship and obedience to God. In this regard she seems to equate love with obedience to the Beloved. She seems to be in conformity with the perspectives of the Qur'an and hadith. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that Rabia's understanding was alien to the orthodox opinions of Islam. According to Rabia, love for God means obeying His commands. In the following couplet she states this clearly: "You rebel against God, yet claim to love Him. I swear by my faith that that is most strange. If your love were sincere, you would have obeyed Him, since the one who loves obeys the one he loves" (Smith 1974, 98).

Divine love in Rabia's understanding also serves another purpose. It is a method by which one not only attains proximity to God, but can also ac-

quire knowledge of him. This cannot be achieved by merely fearing God. To devote one's time to gaining an understanding and knowledge of something requires some form of love for that thing. Thus, it appears that her philosophy inclines towards the view that it is impossible to gain the knowledge of God in a state of despair and fear. God can only be known in that way the best way if His love for His creation is stressed. Rabia *rahimahullah* teaches to love God for His Sake and not for anything else.

Due to her contribution to Islamic understanding in general and to Sufism in particular, the verse: "He loves them and they love Him" (Qur'an, 5:59) became the central focus of Sufis and poets. They attempted to find out the secrets of this love instead of His wrath and punishment.

To sum up Rabia's teaching on love, she teaches first that love must shut out all but the Beloved; that is, the saint must turn his or her back on the world and all its attractions. Secondly, she teaches that this love must be disinterested love, and that it must look neither for reward nor for relief from punishment. Rather, it must seek only to do the will of God and to accomplish that which is pleasing to Him.

It is also necessary to look at the ultimate culmination of Rabia's divine love. In other words, it is necessary to understand the ultimate destination of the one who loves after having begun this journey of devotion and disinterested love, and whether it will result in being absorbed in the Beloved, for example, or whether it will be some form of closeness with the beloved without unification. According to Rabia, the Sufi mystic attains his or her goal through the stages of love when at last he or she beholds the divine beauty unveiled. Rabia thus combines her teaching on love with the doctrine of *Kashf*, the unveiling of the beatific vision to the one who loves.

This is in line with the hadith stating that the believers will see God in the hereafter as plainly as they see the moon in its fullness on a cloudless night (Bukhari, *Tawhid*, n.6882). By means of love, the Sufi attains to mystic gnosis and "the heart becomes filled with its grace". That knowledge comes as a direct gift from God, and from it the Gnostic proceeds to contemplation of the unveiled Essence of God. Throughout her life, Rabia had her eyes fixed upon that goal. In one of her poems she says:

“My hope is for union with You, for that is the goal of my desire” (al-Hurayfish AH. 1279, 214).

Rabia understands love as obedience and submission to the will of God. Sufyan Al-Thawri asked her: “Why don’t you ask God to alleviate your pain?”

She answers: “He Himself wills that I suffer, isn’t that obvious to you? Still despite your knowledge you urge me to pursue my own desire in defiance of His, though it is wrong to oppose the Beloved’s will” (‘Attar 1976, 40; Nurbakhsh 1983, 46).

Sufis who follow the path of love see death as the meeting time with God. Some even called it “the wedding night”. Rabia also found nothing to be afraid of in death: “Death is a bridge between friends. The time now nears that I cross that bridge, and friend meets Friend” (Nurbakhsh 1983, 66).

It may be said that Rabia’s understanding of selfish love is not consistent with the Qur’anic paradigm, as the Qur’an on innumerable occasions promises reward for the obedient and punishment for the disobedient. If Rabia, without criticising these two elements, had brought the third way of relationship with God, that is, of disinterested love, it would be perfectly suited to the Qur’anic paradigm.

### ***Love for God’s Sake***

Having surveyed Rabia’s love for God, there remains another perspective regarding the implications of Rabia’s philosophy of love as far as it related to the rest of mankind. Although Rabia does not provide a clear picture regarding her love for her fellow human beings, there are a few anecdotes which reveal that she had a negative attitude toward human love. For example, on seeing Rabah al-Qays carrying a relative’s child she says: “Never would I have imagined that there was a place in your heart available for other than God” (Nurbakhsh 1983, 62).

Had Rabia’s love excluded normal people from her system, she would not have faced any problems. However, there is one idea in Rabia’s philosophy of love which created a controversy amongst the orthodox scholars and theologians. This is related to her exclusion of the Prophet in her system of divine love. Although the traditions of the Prophet clearly comman-

ded to love him, Rabia states that her love for God left no space for love of the Prophet. Rabia loved God to the extent that there was no room for any other kind of love, even for the love of the Prophet. On one occasion she said that: "I saw the Prophet in a dream, and he said to me: 'O Rabia, do you love me?' I said: 'O Prophet of God, who is there that does not love you? But my love for God has possessed me so much so that no place is left for loving or hating any, save Him'" (Attar 1990, 103).

This concept is contrary to the orthodox understanding of Islam in which both the Prophet and God are loved. To have love for one and not the other contradicts the injunctions of the Qur'an. In addition, it can be argued that although Rabia had many similar – and at times identical – ideas as the Christian approach to love, she is singularly different in excluding the love of the Prophet. Turning back to Christian love, it is essential to love Jesus to the extent that the absence of love for Christ means that one cannot be accepted as a Christian. This idea differentiates Rabia's ideas from those of her Christian counterparts.

### ***Traces of the Other Sufis in Rabia's Ideas***

Rabia had a close circle of Sufis around her but none of the biographers identify any of them as her teacher or master. This would most likely have been due to the fact that she lived in the formative period of Sufism, and at that time Sufism had not established itself as an institution. It was rather a movement of individual ascetics who had renounced the worldly life in order to devote all their time to the worship of God. Later in the third century of the Hijrah these early ascetics tended to establish institutions for their followers, and the master-disciple relationship began to establish itself among the Sufi circles.

As the resources always showed Rabia as a leader among her contemporaries, it is possible that the poems which she used to express her ideas were borrowed from others. For example, we see traces of other Sufis such as Dhunnun in her poems.

The close resemblance between Rabia and some other Christian mystics might also be due to the influence of Christian mystics or Christian converts to Islam. However, taking her biography into consideration, the-

re is no historical evidence that Rabia herself came from a Christian background or that she was in any close relationship with Christians.

### **The Influence and the Contribution of Rabia on the Other Sufis**

Rabia undoubtedly had the utmost influence upon Sufism in the centuries that followed. But to narrow down the scope of this study, the focus of her influence will be restricted only those Sufis upon which this study is focussed.

Rabia's paradigm of love was received warmly by most Sufis. This was because Sufis found in her a different understanding of the Sufi way. She was a devoted ascetic, practising all manner of renunciation. On the other hand, she looked at God from the perspective of love. Almost all classical Sufi authors referred to her ideas concerning the love of God, and her ideas played an important role in both practical and theoretical Sufism. Supporting this idea, Smith writes: "As a teacher and guide along the mystic way, Rabia is greatly revered by the Sufis and practically all the Sufi writers speak of her teaching, and quote her sayings, as being the highest authority" (Smith 1974, 47).

All the classical writers, such as Abu Talib al-Makki, al-Qushayri, al-Suhrawardi, and al-Ghazali, refer to her teachings in general and to her understanding of love in particular. Abu Talib al-Makki, the author of *Qut al-Qulub*, a Sufi book which mainly deals with the practical side of Sufism, and others from these Sufi authors, elevate her to the peak of the mystical stations. In his chapter dedicated to the concept of love, al-Makki almost exclusively analyses the thoughts of Rabia. Furthermore, al-Makki gives her a more prominent position than Sufyan al-Thawri by describing Rabia as having reached the station of *al-Khullah* (friendship) with God (Makki n.d II, 55).

Hallaj's understanding of love is also similar in essence to Rabia's disinterested love. He accepts that the one should not think of one's own interests on the mystical path. However, he goes one step further than Rabia and defends the view that the one who loves God must sacrifice himself in the path of love.

Ibn Arabi places Rabia on the same level as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaylan and Abu Su'ud b. al-Shibli. They are accepted as the most important Sufis of their times. Ibn Arabi remarked of Rabia: "She is the one who analysed and classes the categories of love to the point of being the most famous interpreter of love" (Ernst 1993, 439).

Ibn Arabi also deals with issues Rabia spoke on. It can be argued that Rabia's division of disinterested love and interested love provided the material and basis for Ibn Arabi's spiritual love and natural love respectively. However, Ibn Arabi does not copy Rabia's ideas directly, but rather develops her ideas further.

Rabia's theory of love for God's sake without any other motive such as hope of Paradise or fear of Hell has become the central topic of Sufism, and this is particularly evident in Sufi poetry. Fariduddin 'Attar, the Rabia's biographer, states: "When He fills your mind with Paradise and *hours*, know that by certain that He keeps you far from Himself" (Schimmel 1975, 204).

Interestingly, Rabia's fame and influence are not restricted to the Islamic lands. The legend of Rabia was brought to Europe by Joinville, the chancellor of Louis IX, in the late thirteenth century. Rabia's figure was used in a seventeenth-century French treatise on pure love as a model of divine love (Schimmel 1975, 8).

Rabia was unanimously accepted as one of the earliest Sufis who spoke with such a strong emphasis on love. Her philosophy of love therefore overshadowed the theories of her contemporaries with regard to divine love. Rabia's originality and contribution to Sufi understanding of love lies in her division of love into the branches: *interested* (selfish) and *disinterested* love. This issue is the core of her philosophy. Her paradigm of love can be summarised in the simplest terms as "love God for His worthiness and do not expect anything in return for your worship."

Rabia's love is exclusive and absolute for God alone. In her paradigm of love there is no place for human love. She shows a negative attitude toward profane love, and her understanding of marriage is consequently also of a negative nature. She considers marriage to be an obstacle to full devotion to divine love. On the contrary, mainstream Islam encourages mar-

riage and dislikes negative attitudes toward the institution of marriage.

In Rabia's understanding of the mystical path, the concept of fear has also played an equally important role. She does not exclusively speak of love but also frequently introduces the element of fear. Therefore, she can be accepted as a bridge between two opposing poles of Sufism: fear-centred Sufism and love-centred Sufism.

Rabia's understanding of love is quite simplistic as a result, preferred over the complex theories of love like those of Hallaj or Ibn al-Farid. The latter's understanding of love has deep philosophical roots, and hence is open to the few who have a command of philosophical thinking. Simplicity of understanding is one of the reasons why Rabia's theory is accepted by the majority. Rabia's paradigm of love and worship is in harmony with that of the Qur'an, except in the understanding of the rewards. The Qur'anic paradigm "obedience versus reward" is not received warmly by Rabia. If we classify this concept, it could be understood as selfish love according to Rabia's understanding.

## Hallaj's Paradigm of Love

It seems that for the early Sufis, including Rabia, the concept of love was generally defined as a feature of their worship of God. In other words, the concept of love had been understood to be the exclusive motive behind worshipping God and obeying Him. These early Sufis thought that their worship and devotion to God were motivated either by the fear of God or by the love for God. The former motive can be illustrated by reference to the personality of Hasan al-Basri. His view was that the driving force behind his worship was the fear of God, coupled with God's chastisement of those who disobeyed him (al-Qushayri 1993, 118, 140).

These two different motives played different roles in the lives of the Sufis. As for the latter view, i.e. love as the basis of worship, Rabia is represented as the best example. Rabia's main achievement was to exclude the love for Paradise as a legitimate goal of mysticism on the grounds that it is a selfish desire and not a good motive for the Sufi wayfarer. However, Rabia and her contemporaries did not place the notion of love at the centre of their philosophy. As a consequence, Rabia was more or less an ascetic Sufi, who did not utter controversial utterances that caused quarrels among the mainstream scholars (al-Munawi n.d., I, 201). In general, what she preached about love did not conflict with Qur'anic principles. Her ideas are based on the Qur'an and Sunnah of



the Prophet, upon which she laid the foundations of her understanding of love. This fact meant that she received general acceptance by Sufis as well as the orthodox scholars with regard to this matter.

However, in the times that followed, the concept of love followed a dangerous path. This dangerous expansion was most acute where it concerned the nature of the relationship between the lover and beloved. In other words, do lover and Beloved preserve their independence? Or does love entail the complete obliteration of the lover's soul in the Beloved? If the answer leans towards the former position, then the Sufi's love is of a sober nature, for he or she still maintains his or her own separate identity. On the other hand, if the answer leans more towards the latter position, then the Sufi's love is of an "intoxicated nature", in that the lover has completely lost his or her identity and annihilated himself or herself in the Beloved. Therefore, it is possible to divide the Sufis into two broad categories: the sober and the intoxicated. Both of these groups are associated with some famous Sufis. For example, Junayd is known as the leader of the sober Sufis, and Hallaj as the protagonist of intoxicated love (Massignon 1936, 17).

Furthermore, Hallaj attempted to solve many theological questions on the basis of his conception of the role of love. Nothing escaped Hallaj, and in this connection he discussed issues such as the understanding of the unity of God, the motive behind the act of creation, and the status of Satan as far as love is concerned. Before a detailed analysis of Hallaj's methodology and views is put forth, it is useful to provide some indication of Hallaj's life and background. This will allow us to place Hallaj's ideas in context, and provides us with some insight into his ideas.

### **His Life**

Abu al-Mughith al-Husayn Ibn Mansur Hallaj was born around 858 A.D. in the southern Iranian village of Tur in the province of Fars. His grandfather was a Zoroastrian and a descendant of Abu Ayyub, who was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Baghdadi 1931, v.8, 112). At an early age, Hallaj went to live in the city of Wasit, a centre of Arab culture in

Iraq, which was important for its textiles and trade. As understood from the word "Hallaj" (meaning cotton carder), his father may have supported the family by carding cotton.

Hallaj's inclination towards an ascetic way of life began at an early age when he was sixteen. His intense curiosity and deep intellect propelled him further and further along the path of devotion. He was not content with just memorising the Qur'an, he strove to gain an appreciation of its deep and profound mysteries. This trend continued into his adolescence, during which he began to withdraw from the world and to seek the company of individuals who were able to instruct him in the Sufi way (Sadiq 1996, 50).

There are many accounts in the *Akhbar al-Hallaj* which report that he exposed himself to very extensive mystical activities such as fasting for days on end and worshipping in excessive heat in Mecca. This information from his biography should not be taken lightly, for it provides us with an insight into the nature of Hallaj's thinking. Contrary to the stereotype of Hallaj as a theosophical Sufi, these practices indicate that Hallaj did not reject the practical side of Sufism and the methods which were developed by those who preceded him (Massignon 1936, 18-19). Where Hallaj parted company was in his conclusions and the culmination of these practices. This will be explained in the following pages.

### ***His Masters***

Hallaj studied under many Sufi masters, the first of whom was Sahl b. 'Abdullah al-Tustari (d.896). Known as the author of the first Sufi exegesis of the Qur'an, al-Tustari taught Hallaj for two years from the age of 16. He subsequently moved to Basra, where he became a disciple of 'Amr b. Uthman al-Makki. Amr was a scholar of *Hadith* as well as an authority on Sufism. However, their relationship did not last long, and they soon separated due to disagreements between them. As a result of a dispute, Amr became a staunch enemy of Hallaj. In the end, Hallaj left Basra and sought the advice of Junayd of Bagdad, under whom al-Makki had also studied (al-Sarraj 1914, 499). Junayd advised him to be patient. For a brief time Hal-

laj stayed under the guidance and discipleship of Junayd. However, as had happened with previous masters, Hallaj broke away from Junayd as well (al-Khatib al-Baghdadi 1931 VIII, 112).

From this brief survey a few interesting deductions can be made. It seems that Hallaj did not have a conventional sheikh-murid relationship with his masters. In one way or another he always broke away from them. This attitude shows us that he had an uncompromising and rebellious nature with regard to the established customs. He did not accept the truths of others as his own but always stamped his own mark on these matters. As al-Hujwiri (1974, 180) states, it was not his beliefs which made him unpopular among the Sufi sheikhs of his time, but it was his rebellious and outspoken nature which did not allow him to develop an enduring relationship with his masters and colleagues. Hallaj's attitude is described by Mason as "individualism" (Mason 1992, 21). In sum, he was an original personality and was not easily influenced by his masters.

### *His Travels*

It would seem to be possible to find a connection between Hallaj's dynamic personality and his travels. It can strongly be inferred that his outlook on life was strengthened and reinforced by the experiences gained and contacts made during his travels. Furthermore, it is also true that Hallaj's dynamic character reveals itself in his lifestyle. He travelled extensively in Islamic lands preaching, teaching and writing between the years c. 895-910. He made a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he followed a strict course of mystical practices and exercises for a year. He travelled to such regions as Fars, Khuzistan, Khorasan, Transoxiana and Sistan. One distinctive characteristic of Hallaj is that he did not attach himself to any place he visited. He never settled in any place for a long time, just as he never settled with a master for any length of time (al-Khatib al-Baghdadi 1931 VIII, 113; 'Attar 1966, 266).

During his travels, he expounded his views to receptive audiences on the nature of the relationship between man and God. He preached and wrote about the way to an intimate relationship with God. Needless to say, in the course of his journeys he attracted large numbers of disciples, some

of whom accompanied him on a second pilgrimage to Mecca. Following this, he returned to his family in Baghdad, and shortly afterwards he set out by sea for a mission to territories hitherto not exposed to Islam, i.e. India and Turkistan. According to his own account, his aim was to preach Islam. However, his adversaries interpreted these visits as quest for the art of black magic (Ibn al-Nadim n.d. 283). Following a third pilgrimage to Mecca, he again returned to Baghdad and began to invite people to follow the path of Sufism (c.908).

It is quite possible that during his travels, he came into contact with sages and religious leaders from a number of other religious traditions. This could perhaps account for the nature of his ideas which to his orthodox contemporaries smacked of heresy. Indeed, one of the charges at his trial was that he had borrowed ideas which were alien to Islam, and had mixed them in with his own in order to come up with an outlook on Islam which was wholly out of keeping with its orthodox understanding (Ibn al-Nadim n.d. 283).

### *His Execution*

It would be no exaggeration to say that Hallaj is most commonly associated with his dramatic trial and execution. The inevitable conclusion of Hallaj's approach to Sufism meant that he offended the existing religious authorities of his time. This led him to live a life of suffering and constant rebuke, ultimately leading to his death. Although it is not necessary to go into great detail about the nature of the execution and the preceding events, it would be useful in passing to briefly highlight some of the events.

It was not merely the ideas of Hallaj which led to his execution; the impact and influence of his ideas were far more worrying to the religious authorities. Wherever he went, Hallaj succeeded in attracting people towards his ideas. After making his third and final pilgrimage to Mecca, he returned to Baghdad and attracted a large group of followers (al-Khatib al-Baghda-di 1931 VIII, 114). Because of his controversial personality and sayings, as well as his involvement in the political intrigue of the Abbasid court, he was imprisoned. After eight years of imprisonment, he was ultimately senten-

ced to death and executed in the year 309/913 ('Attar 1966, 264). There is an abundance of literature available which documents the minute proceedings of Hallaj's time in captivity and his subsequent execution. In the light of this, there seems to be no necessity to labour over the narrative of these events (al-Sha'rani 1993, 236).

From the perspective of this study, however, a few general comments about the execution can be made. The first thing that faces the observer is that the motives behind his execution are not clear-cut. In this respect, the historical issues surrounding his execution are complex and are far from providing a clear picture. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some underlying themes. For example, the general notion that Hallaj was executed because he claimed to be the "divine truth" (*ana al-haqq*) seems no longer to be popular, at least in modern scholarship, which favours a more political interpretation of the events. It was not the utterances of Hallaj, but the political implications and connotations of them which led to his trial. As Nicholson states, the legal members of the court insisted that he should be accused of having included the pilgrimage to Mecca amongst the class of religious obligations that are not absolutely binding. However, more important than this was the charge that Hallaj was a Qaramita agent. This was a major accusation pronounced in order to destroy Hallaj, bearing in mind the Qaramita were regarded as a heretical and dangerous sect at that time. Their importance can be seen from the fact that shortly after Hallaj's execution, the Qaramita sacked Mecca and carried off the Black Stone, the sanctity of which is great in the eyes of Muslims.

Such an interpretation of the execution of Hallaj is further supported if one compares him to other Sufis in former times like Abu Yazid al-Bistami, who made similar ecstatic utterances. In those cases, the owners of such statements did not suffer the fate that was allotted to Hallaj, and they were certainly not executed. In a similar manner, later Sufis such as Ibn Arabi, whose ecstatic utterances were widely known, were spared such treatment. Indeed, Sufis like Ibn Arabi gained support and encouragement from the political leaders of the time.

In the light of the above, it is possible to regard Hallaj's execution as

driven by political considerations under the pretext of religion and heresy (al-Saqqaf 1995, 58). Hallaj can therefore be seen as a victim of politics and it is open to speculation that had he been alive in more politically stable times, he would have been treated more favourably. The mixing of politics with the history of Sufism left a negative scar on the movement. The execution of Hallaj was seen as a landmark event. It provoked opponents of Sufism with support of the state in their animosity and rejection of the movement. However, it is unfortunate that very few people actually saw the political motives behind the execution at the time.

Another recurring theme in the Sufi literature is that although Hallaj genuinely experienced his divine ecstasies, he was wrong to divulge these experiences, and he certainly should not have proclaimed them in public. Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d.945) stated: "Hallaj and I are of one belief, but I kept silent while he spoke openly" (al-Khatib al-Baghdadi 1931 VIII, 121). It is also narrated that al-Shibli saw God in his dream. He asked God why He had allowed His devotee, Hallaj, to be executed so cruelly, and God's answer was: "Whom my love kills, I will be his blood money" (Schimmel 1994, 124).

From al-Shibli's words it can be deduced that the mysteries of the Sufis should be kept secret. This is because, he guessed, mainstream Islam and the jurists would not tolerate the open revelation of Sufi mysteries at that time. As for Hallaj, he violated this principle and went public. Similarly, the execution of Sheikh al-Ishraq al-Suhrawardi (d. 1191) confirms this attitude of mainstream Islam towards Sufis who openly reveal their inner states. However, persecution and execution often had counterproductive results, and in some ways helped to promote the ideas of the Sufis. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Netton emphasises the fact that the execution of the Sufis did not always succeed in curtailing their ideas. As an example, he highlights the position of Shihab al-Din and Hallaj, and states that their tragic ends increased the significance of their messages after their deaths (Netton 1996, 44).

Moving on to the second group of scholars, that is, those who opposed Hallaj, the views of Ibn al-Nadim are revealing as a representative example of this class. In his words: "Al-Husayn Ibn Mansur Hallaj was a crafty man and a conjurer who ventured into the Sufi school of thought, affecting

their ways of speech. He laid claim to every science, but nevertheless (his claims) were futile. He even knew something about the science of alchemy. He was ignorant, bold, obsequious but courageous in the presence of the sultans, attempting great things and ardently desiring a change of government. Among his adherents he claimed divinity, speaking of divine union..." (Ibn al-Nadim n.d. 284)

Because of prohibition and the burning of his books few texts have come down to us intact, although numerous anecdotes and aphorisms have been collected as the *Akhbar al-Hallaj*. Aside from these, we have a collection of poetry attributed to Hallaj, and a single sustained text, the *Tawasin*, with a very thin set of surviving manuscripts. The *Tawasin* was written in prison in his last years. It is therefore the most important document which transmits his philosophy.

### ***His Background***

The age in which Hallaj lived, namely the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century, may be seen as the pinnacle of the Islamic religious sciences. For example, the famous collections of the traditions of the Prophet were compiled in that period. The period also witnessed the systematisation of Sufi doctrines which were developed into fully-fledged theories. In other words, the ascetic teachings of the early Sufis gave way to the other theories and teachings such as *fana'* (annihilation), *wahdat al-wujud* (the unity of being), passionate love of God, and so on (Öztürk 1997, 18-21). Many of Hallaj's contemporaries played a crucial role in this process. The one common factor between them was that love was the primary way of approaching God.

Some of the views of Hallaj's contemporaries will be presented below in order to understand the intellectual climate in which he developed his theory of love. Yahya b. Mu'adh al-Razi (d.871) stated: "One mustard seed of love is dearer to me than seventy years of worship without love" (al-Qushayri 1993, 326). Yahya's preference for love is better understood in the context of the rigid understanding of the worship by jurists who emphasised the outward rituals and formalities of worship. He was against ritua-

lism and dry devotion which lacks sentimental dimensions. According to him, love is the most important thing behind devotion.

The views of Abu Yazid Bistami also provide us with an insight into the climate of mystical ideas which prevailed at the time. He is the closest person to Hallaj as far as the understanding of love is concerned. He is accepted as the representative of intoxicated Sufism, preferring ecstasy and loss of senses in divine love, to the sober understanding of Sufism (al-Hakim 1974, 219). Hallaj followed his footsteps, in other words, al-Bistami's understanding of love and unity paved the way for the rise of Hallaj. Abu Yazid's teachings insisted on the love of God, absolute unity of God and annihilation of the soul in God.

Although Abu Yazid was regarded as one of the first intoxicated Sufis to utter ecstatic words on divine love, he was overshadowed by Hallaj. Abu Yazid's expressions of the total identification of the lover with the Beloved such as "*Subhani*" (Glory be to me!) "*Ma Azama Shaini*" (How great is my majesty), were reflected more strongly in Hallaj's utterances. Al-Bistami's words about unity and love were accepted as being imparted in the state of intoxication, therefore they were not regarded as fully responsible utterances (al-Sha'rani 1993 175), whereas Hallaj, with his insistence on his words, accepted full responsibility for his philosophy. Therefore, none of the early Sufis were as daring as Hallaj in their exposition of the concept of love. This degree of daring reached to the extent that he is known as the first Sufi to shed his blood for the sake of his love. His own words that depict the lovers' devotional ablution as performed with their own blood (alluding to his bloody execution) also supports this notion, i.e. that he is a martyr of love (Attar 1966, 270).

To Bistami, pure love of God is only possible when the lover completely denies his or her own self. He states: "When I considered the world to be my enemy and I went to God, His love possessed me to such an extent that I became an enemy of myself." Similarly, because of his love Hallaj became an enemy to himself, and in one of his ecstatic utterances he asked the Muslims to kill him. Both Sufis understood the existence of the lover's identity as the biggest block that separates the lover from the beloved (Massignon 1936, 75).



Abu Hasan Sumnun al-Muhibb (d.905), as understood from his sobriquet "*al-Muhibb*" (the Lover), regarded the station of love to be higher than the station of gnosis on the path of God. He asserts that love is the foundation and principle of the way to God, that all "states" and "stations" are stages of love, and that every stage and abode in which the seeker may be admits the possibility of destruction, except the abode of love, which is not destructible in any circumstances so long as the way itself remains in existence" (al-Hujwiri 1974, 309). Quoting this statement of Sumnun, al-Hujwiri comments that this is a peculiar doctrine to the Sufi sheikhs. Al-Hujwiri's comments seem to be reasonable, since it is only Sufis who elevated the concept of love to such great heights. It is again Sufis who made love "cast out fear" (Rice 1969, 61). Contrary to mainstream Islam, they made the role of fear less and less important a subject in their books and talks.

Sumnun also states that the path of love towards God is full of affliction "so that every common man may not claim for love and may run away seeing its agony" (Bhatnagar n.d. 56). This concept of suffering for the sake of God's love would have an important role in Hallaj's system.

Another associate of Hallaj, Abul-Hasan al-Nuri, believes that real proximity to God is enjoyed by the seeker at the stage of Pure Love. He describes love as "the rending of the veil and the revelation of what is hidden from the eyes of men" (Smith 1972, 33). Likewise Hallaj reveals his love bravely, following al-Nuri's statement.

Amr b. 'Uthman al-Makki (d.909), one of the masters of Hallaj, was an eminent theologian and was considered a great authority in Sufi circles. Hujwiri even attributes to him *Kitab al-Mahabbah* (The Book of Love) (al-Hujwiri 1974, 309). This also shows the importance of the love among the Sufi sheikhs of the time. Although al-Makki is known to be an author who defends a kind of Sufism which does not conflict with mainstream Islam, he nevertheless gave much importance to the concept of love.

Abu al-Qasim b. Junayd of Baghdad was one of the most important personalities in Hallaj's time. He was recognised as a leading spiritual master of his time. The Sufis of later centuries were deeply influenced by his mystical views on the love of God, gnosis, self-annihilation, and the soul's

unification with God. Junayd developed the sober understanding of Sufism. His understanding of Sufism, and in particular love, is important. This is due to the fact that his ideas contrast with Hallaj's understanding, Junayd being a champion of the sober understanding of Sufism and Hallaj championing the intoxicated approach.

### Sobriety and Intoxication

The terms "sobriety" and "intoxication" connote two different facets of Sufism. Sobriety means keeping full control of one's consciousness in the presence of divine manifestations, as opposed to intoxication, which means losing consciousness. Intoxication involves a loss of personal identity. The soul is completely filled with spiritual power, and the boundaries of legal prescriptions are no longer observed. Sufis such as Hallaj advocated a spiritual life which was marked by ecstasy, and preferred intoxication over sobriety. Rumi refers to this intoxication as *mansuri* wine, not *amuri* wine, *anquri* wine meaning the wine which is made out of grape. It is also interesting that Schimmel states that the metaphor of intoxication and wine provide a strange paradox, since Islam prohibits all kinds of intoxicants (Schimmel 1994, 108). Even this offers us an idea about the controversial nature of intoxicated Sufism.

Against the intoxicated disposition of the Sufism of Hallaj and Abu Yazid, al-Hujwiri presents Junayd's methodology, which he refers to as *Junaidiyya*. Junayd's understanding of love is therefore presented here in order to provide a more lucid understanding of Hallaj (al-Hujwiri 1974, 225).

Junayd's understanding of love is very closely connected with his understanding of the concept of *fana'* (annihilation). According to him, before God created the world, our souls were with Him without our worldly bodies and senses. God gave bodies to our souls and sent us into this world in order to test us. Some souls forgot their pledge to God and engaged only with the affairs of this world, whereas some yearned to return to the state of unity with God, as was their situation before the creation. This return to the proximity of God in Junayd's understanding depends on the soul's progress on the path of the love. Love is the sole connecting link between

the Sufi and his Lord. In Junayd's teaching, love means that the attributes of the lover are changed into those of the Beloved (Smith 1972, 35).

Junayd, like Bayazid, understood love between God and man to be the annihilation of the lover's attributes in the Beloved. Up until now, whatever has been said about the mutual love between man and God by the Sufis did not contradict the Qur'an and Sunnah. In other words, it was not difficult to compromise between them.

However, Hallaj's statements about love were quite different. He was not speaking of the annihilation of the characteristics of the lover in the Beloved only. He went further, and in a sense said that the body of the lover should be annihilated in the body of the Beloved, which was anathema to the orthodox Sufis as well as to the scholars.

Secondly, what made Hallaj different from the other Sufi masters of his generation was that he insisted on announcing publicly his vision of mystical love. This was contrary to the cardinal principle that the accomplished mystic was never to divulge to the public, experiences that were beyond their comprehension. Such elitism did not conform to Hallaj's more populist notion of mysticism. As al-Baqli relates, Hallaj believed that "the intoxicated Sufi exposes all secrets" (al-Baqli 1973, 122; al-Sha'rani 1993, 235).

However, the attitude of Hallaj was unwelcome not only to the theologians but also by eminent Sufis of his time. For his lack of caution, he was ostracised by his former teacher Junayd. For Junayd knew very well that mystical experience and thought cannot be rationalised and that it is dangerous to speak openly about the deepest mysteries of faith in the presence of the uninitiated. Junayd, therefore, refined the art of speaking in *Isharat*, which means "subtle allusion (to the truth)". This trend was first attributed to Kharraz (d.890 or 899) but it became a characteristic of later Sufi writings (Schimmel 1975, 59). Hallaj did not comply with this rule of secrecy, and this was the cause of his separation from his master Junayd.

This brief survey of Hallaj's contemporaries and immediate predecessors indicates that before Hallaj's appearance in the Sufi circles, the concept of love was widely accepted as a cardinal way in the Sufi journey to

God. The abundance of their sayings provides enough evidence to support this. It can be argued that love had even won the upper hand in comparison to other Sufi concepts which were previously favoured, such as asceticism. This continuous rise of the role of love in the Sufi way from the ascetic- and fear-centred understanding of the early Sufis reached its peak with Hallaj. Now it was the time for Hallaj to come into the arena with a different kind of love. In the following pages his understanding of the concept will be surveyed in more detail.

### **Hallaj's Paradigm of Love**

Having briefly looked at Hallaj's background and the context in which he lived, it is now time to shed light on his paradigm of love. Following the structure of the previous chapter, his understanding of God's love for man is analysed. This is then followed by his understanding of man's love for God.

#### ***God's Love for Man***

The foundation upon which Hallaj builds his comprehensive system of Sufism is the concept of love. He takes as his starting point the mystery of creation. This also includes his ontology. In Hallaj's view the mystery of creation can be explained on the basis of God's love:

Before all things, before the creation, before his knowledge of the creation, God in His unity was holding an ineffable discourse with Himself and contemplating the splendour of His essence in itself. That pure simplicity of his self-admiration is Love, which in His essence is the essence of the essence, beyond all limitations of attributes. In His perfect isolation God loves Himself, praises Himself, and manifests Himself by Love. And it was this first manifestation of Love in the Divine Absolute that determined the multiplicity of His attributes, and His names. Then God, by His essence in His essence, desired to project out of Himself His supreme joy, that Love in aloneness, that He might behold it and speak to it. He looked in eternity and brought forth from non-existence an image, an image of Himself, endowed with all His attributes and all His names: Adam. He created

Adam in His own image, thus the human became the place of His manifestation (Massignon 1982, III, 103-104).

This lengthy passage is quoted directly, as it encapsulates the building blocks of Hallaj's paradigm of love. The fundamental notion which can be extracted from the above passage is that Hallaj's cosmological outlook links the existence of man with the attributes of God. The reasons for man's existence are closely tied up with the existence of God's love for man. God created man in order to see a manifestation of Himself. As a consequence, man will surely be loved by God, as he is a manifestation of God. In other words, the quote makes clear that God's love for His essence is manifested in the creation of man and His love for man. Therefore, God will inevitably love man.

Another point which is hinted at in the above quotation concerns the essence of God. The above quotation is distinctly characterised by the repetition of the word "essence" several times. According to Hallaj, the essence of God in isolation is to praise Himself and to manifest Himself through love. This leads to an important conclusion, namely, that the essence of God is manifested through love. Love is the distinctive characteristic and feature of God's essence. Therefore, God is all about love.

The significance of his paradigm of love is that it is very comprehensive and explicit. No Sufi before him had articulated such views in such clear and forceful language. This fact is acknowledged by many others. For example, al-Baqli notes that Hallaj was the first to put forward the paradigm that God created man to participate in his essential love without any motive other than that of pure, divine generosity. The consequence of this theory is that if God created us with love, then it must be love that He wants reciprocated. The other things he commands us to do such as worshipping, obeying, and fearing Him, must all comply with our love for Him.

However, Hallaj's ideas were not welcomed by everybody. Theologians and jurists thought differently, as Hallaj's words about creation carried various connotations. When these were combined with sayings of Hallaj on other matters, in particular, his poetry, his position seemed more heretical than ever, and he was accused of introducing concepts antithetical to the

essence of Islam. For instance, consider the following line from one of Hallaj's poems: "Glory to God who revealed in His humanity the secret of His radiant divinity" (Massignon 1936, 26).

Theologians such as Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani and Abu Umar Ibn Yariqit accused Hallaj of promoting the Christian concept of incarnation (Massignon 1993, 198). In their opinion, Hallaj's words remove the distance between the divine and the human. The end result of this is a type of pantheism which is out of character with the mainstream teachings of Islam. He was open to attack in this way, especially as he employed terms which were also utilised by the Christians. For example, terms such as *al-hayat* and "nasut"<sup>4</sup> were Christian terms used to identify Jesus' divine and human nature. He was, consequently, accused of believing in the incarnation of divine in man as in the case of Jesus.

To what extent are the criticisms of the theologians justified? This question can best be answered by bearing in mind the nature of Hallaj's utterances. When Hallaj's work is looked at as a whole one can find passages which show that at times he talks of the absolute transcendence of God, at others he discusses His incarnation, and at others still he expounds on the oneness of God. He very often admits that God is God and man is man and both are clearly distinct from each other. For example, he says: "Allah does not mix with the human, he does not resemble them in any respect" (Massignon 1936, 47).

However, all of these utterances were dependent on the mystical state that Hallaj was in at the time. Therefore, to focus only on one aspect of Hallaj and to characterise him into a single category is to fail to understand Hallaj as a whole. In sum then, Hallaj's thought is a complex mix of opposites and paradoxes which must be understood in the context of his spiritual state at the time of utterance.

Following such an approach leads to a clearer and more balanced understanding of Hallaj. This can be seen in the writings of some Sufi scholars who took this approach. Their treatment of Hallaj is not one of criticism but one of synthesis. They attempt to find a solution which will explain and excuse Hallaj's actions, whilst at the same time conforming to the

normative rules of the *Shari'a*. The most prominent of these is al-Ghazali, whose views are presented below.

Al-Ghazali tried to solve the problem of Hallaj by excusing his words in the state of ecstasy and excluding them from theological responsibility. In al-Ghazali's analysis, all the sayings of Sufis can be differentiated into certain types. Broadly stated, these are: firstly, statements which are uttered in a state of sobriety; and secondly, those uttered in a state of intoxication or ecstasy. Following his binary classification in the *Mishkat al-Anwar*, al-Ghazali classifies Abu Yazid, al-Bistami and Hallaj in the same group of ecstatic Sufis. He writes:

All the Gnostics have a consensus that after arriving to the sky of truth they have seen nothing as existent but the one reality that is Allah. The perception of plurality disappeared in their eyes and their reason stopped, in a state of bewilderment they could not think of anything but only God. In this state of intoxication, one of them said 'I am the truth' (alluding to Hallaj), the other one said 'Glory be to me' (alluding to Abu Yazid al-Bistami) (al-Ghazali 1964, 57-58).

However, al-Ghazali believes that these kinds of statements of intoxicated lovers should not be revealed for the public good. In sum, al-Ghazali wants to convey to the theologians that a mystic can have a different experience of *tawhid* (unity of God) in the state of divine intoxication and he cannot be held accountable for the expression of that experience as long as it is kept secret. In his *al-Futuhat*, Ibn Arabi also takes the same stance as al-Ghazali. According to him, Hallaj's ecstatic words were uttered when he was in the state of intoxication. Although many people deviated from the true path by such words, he did not deviate (al-Shaybi 1974, 180). Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Arabi's positions are echoed in the writings of other prominent Sufis. For example, al-Hujwiri also believes that Hallaj's words are true as far as their meaning is concerned. However, because he uttered them in a state of intoxication there might be some inaccuracy in the expression of these meanings by Hallaj. Al-Hujwiri also believes that Hallaj's words should not be accep-

ted as evidence to base a verdict against him, since most of the time he was an intoxicated Sufi (al-Hujwiri 1974, 181).

There is one other major component of Hallaj's paradigm of love that needs to be highlighted. This is the notion that God's love for man is eternal; it always existed and will always continue to exist. This corresponds to the Qur'anic notion that God's love precedes man (Qur'an, 5:54). According to Hallaj, as God has created man in love, it therefore follows that God's love for man precedes man's love for God. From this, we can infer that God takes the first initiative towards man.

Having established that God's love is antecedent to man's love for God, Hallaj, then, explores the nature of the manifestation of God's love: What does man experience in practical terms in this relationship as a lover? The key idea here is that God's love manifests itself in a negative manner. In the opinion of Hallaj, God tests the servants whom He loves; if God loves someone, He drives others to attack him. This is done so that the person concerned turns his face solely towards God. As a consequence, the lover of God faces enmity and hatred. (al-Shaybi 1974, 202). It is characteristic of Hallaj's theory of love that "enduring pain and calamities" plays an important role. In Ibn Arabi's terminology, this phenomenon could be described as God's manifestation of His love in the state of *Jalal*.

What are the motives behind the suffering of the lover of God? The answer to this has been partially hinted at in the last paragraph, namely, that the lover of God turns his attention solely to Allah. Linked with this is the idea that God sends these calamities in order to perfect the human soul that loves Him. The more the lover suffers, the more he will realise that others cannot help him, and in time he will learn to be pleased with the divine will, treating both suffering and ease alike. The lover is pleased with any condition as long as God has wished for it.

It is interesting to note the great similarities between this view and the Qur'anic view. In fact, it can be argued that this idea is in complete conformity with the Qur'anic and Prophetic paradigms of love. Many examples can be provided from the Qur'an to illustrate this point. God states that he will test His servants through trials and calamities (Qur'an, 3:154; 34:21). In the tradi-



tions of the Prophet, it is also stated that God tests his beloved servants. For Hallaj, love means to suffer in the way of the Beloved (Massignon 1936, 54).

Before proceeding, it is necessary to mention that Hallaj's idea of the suffering of the lover is in contrast to the notion of suffering in Christianity. In Hallaj's paradigm, it is man who suffers for the sake of God. However, in Christianity the roles are reversed and it is God who suffers because of His love for man. In both traditions, God loves man, but the nature and expression of this love manifests itself in a different way. As far as Hallaj is concerned, this difference helps to illuminate his position. If, as his opponents claim, Hallaj introduced Christian ideas into Islam, then there would be little difference between the notion of love and suffering in Hallaj's view and that of Christianity. However, as there is a great difference, this suggests strongly that Hallaj did not merely employ the Christian understanding of love.

### Man's Love for God

From a historical perspective, earlier Sufis such as Rabia and Dhunnun al-Misri had established the primacy of disinterested love towards God. The reason for this was that the early ascetic Sufis loved God for reasons that could be described as selfish. Although Rabia's attitude kept its relevance in Hallaj's milieu (3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century), Hallaj shifted the emphasis of love from practical matters of worship to theological discussions of *tauhid*. This position can be exemplified by Sufis such as al-Nuri, al-Bistami, and Junayd. This development reached its climax with Hallaj, and from then on, the concept of divine love took on a different character.

In Rabia's love, lover and beloved are separate entities, and the lover loves the Beloved for his or her own benefit. Rabia's love indicated as a target and end-result, the vision of God. According to the Prophetic paradigm of love, there was nothing wrong with desiring to see God. Only some groups, such as the Mu'tazilah, refused this.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Hallaj replaced Rabia's aims with something else. The target was to unite with God's essence by means of love. The lover only desired to annihilate himself or herself in the attributes of the Beloved in order to be united with Him. In

his famous book *Kitab al-Fa'wan*, Hallaj describes this kind of love beautifully with the metaphor of the moth and the fire, the moth signifying the lover and the fire signifying the Beloved.

"The moth flies about the flame until morning; then he returns to his fellows and tells them of his spiritual state with the moths, and of his visions. Then he mixes with the coquetry of the flame until he achieves perfect union." (Hallaj 1978, 24).

However, the path to achieving unity with God is not an easy task. The mystic has to pass through certain stages. According to Hallaj, the way to unity must be achieved in three phases. The first phase consists of ascetic practices, the second is the stage of passive purification, and the final stage is the life of union in love with God. Hallaj's method was documented by contemporary sources at that time. There follows one such statement which gives some insight into the method of Hallaj:

Hallaj maintained that he who trains his body by adherence to the rituals, fills his heart with pious works, endures the loss of pleasure, and masters himself by forbidding himself desires, thereby raises himself to the station of "those who are being drawn closer (to God)". Thereafter the distances of the steps that separate the lover from the beloved gradually reduce, until his nature is purified of what is carnal. Then if there is no carnal bond left in him, the spirit of God, by whom Jesus the son of Mary was born, descends upon him. Then he becomes "he whom everything obeys" (*amta*): he wants nothing more than what carries out the commandment of God; every act carried out by him from that time onwards is God's act, and every commandment of his is God's commandment. (Massignon 1982, 40).

It therefore appears that union with God can only come about by first ridding oneself of all carnal desires. Success in this leads to the spirit of God entering the lover. As a result, the actions of the lover cannot be separated from the actions of the Beloved. In other words, man loses his own identity completely and becomes a mere automaton, as it were, of God.

Indeed, similar concepts had been developed by the Sufi leaders before Hallaj, for example, in Junayd's definition of love as "substitution of the

lover's attributes with the attributes of the Beloved" (al-Qushayri 1993, 321). In other words, man should take on the characteristics of God. This approach alludes to the hadith of the Prophet which encourages the believers to adorn themselves with the attributes of God.

Junayd's way of expressing the fact of union with God limits itself to the attributes of God. Hallaj, on the other hand, expands his terminology to include the essence of God. The former's position can be described as more cautious, whereas the latter's can be seen as more outspoken and open to misinterpretation. The following couplet of Hallaj lends some justification to the view stated above (al-Suhrawardi 1966, 508):

I have become the One I love, and the One I love has become me!  
 We are two souls infused in a (single) body.  
 And to see me is to see Him, and to see Him is to see us. (Massignon 1982, 42).

On the other hand, al-Qushayri brings Hallaj's understanding of love closer to Junayd's. He writes: "To al-Husayn b. Mansur the inner reality of love is that you remain always with your Beloved and strip off your own qualities." (al-Qushayri 1990, 323). From this perspective, Hallaj did not say anything that contradicted the views of Junayd; the difference was only in appearance. Whereas Junayd hid the inner depths of his experience, Hallaj revealed the secrets, sometimes employing controversial words leading to misunderstanding by others.

### **Suffering in God's Love**

In the previous section, we alluded to the significance of suffering in Hallaj's paradigm of love with regard to God's love for man. This section will explore suffering from the viewpoint of man's love for God. For Hallaj, man's love for God involves suffering in God's love. The following dialogue between Hallaj and a dervish shortly before his execution reveals this aspect of Hallaj's conception of love. It is reported that someone asked Hallaj: "What is love?" He answered: "You will see it today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow." That day he was killed, the next day he was burned, and on the third day his ashes were scattered in the wind (Attar 1966, 270).

With these words, Hallaj implied that the lover should be ready to pay the price of his or her love, even if it leads to death. He personally gives a living example of such self-sacrificing love. For him, the pleasure of the Beloved is more important than his personal well-being. Hallaj is in this respect unique when compared to other Sufis. For him, the lover should not let his circumstances hide his love for the fear of offending others or revealing himself or herself. For example, the advice of al-Hujwiri and al-Ghazali that Hallaj should not have revealed his ecstatic experiences has no value in the eyes of Hallaj. If he had followed such advice, he would then have concealed his love for God and like many other Sufis would have escaped a tragic end. Even his last words on the scaffold reflect his deep devotion to the notion of self-sacrifice: "It is enough for the lover that he should make the One single." Al-Hujwiri explains this statement, remarking: "his existence should be cleared away from the path of love and that the dominion of his lower soul should be utterly destroyed." (al-Hujwiri 1974, 311). Hallaj carried this opinion to its extreme end, so much so that he asserted that the ablution of the lovers is not perfect unless it is performed with one's own blood. However, Hallaj's sacrifice does not stop at this point; he goes further and declares that the lover even prefers eternal punishment for the sake of His love. Hallaj alluded to the position of Satan in this respect.

Finally, Hallaj's concept of sacrificial love also has its parallels in the themes of Christian love. For example, Cowper says: "It is better to reign in hell with Christ than to be without him in heaven" (Moffatt n.d. 27). This indicates that suffering in God's love is a general subject, not only in Sufism but also in other mystical disciplines.

### ***Iblis***

It may be strongly argued that, Hallaj's most important contribution to the understanding of love is his *Satanology*. In *Tawasin*, Hallaj depicts Satan as a sincere lover of God and criticises previous Sufis for being silent with regard to his position in the scheme of love. He says:

The most eloquent of mystics kept silent about Satan, and the sages lacked the strength to utter what they learned about him. Satan is more in-

formed (arif) than they about worship; he is closer than they to the Being, he has devoted himself more zealously to serve Him; he has kept more to his vow than they; he has drawn nearer than they to the Beloved. (al-Shaybi 1974, 175; Hallaj 1978, 55).

Continuing in this manner, Hallaj boldly declares his beliefs about Satan, contrary to the silence of his contemporaries and predecessors. His account is in many ways unique and does not correspond with the traditional interpretations of the story of Iblis (Satan). The common interpretation of the Qur'anic story is that Iblis refused out of pride to bow down before a human being made of an inferior substance. Satan reasoned that Adam was created out of clay and he was created out of fire. As clay is inferior to fire, it must therefore follow that Adam was inferior to him. This was the logical conclusion of the syllogism based on those premises. As a result of this, Satan refused to bow down to Adam on account of his superior nature. The consequence of this refusal of a divine command was his banishment from Paradise (Qur'an, 2:34; 7:11,12,15).

In Hallaj's retelling of the story, the character of Iblis is portrayed in a different light. Satan is seen as a positive character in contrast with his negative portrayal in the Qur'an. Hallaj does not deny Iblis' pride and disobedience; these are clearly present in his version of the story. However, the themes of story go beyond the bare categories of pride and disobedience. They are expanded to include the further dimensions like intricacies of love, and love madness.

From the Islamic point of view, to prostrate before a human being is idolatry, even though Adam can be regarded as being a manifestation of the divine image. The reasons for Satan's refusal are interestingly explored by Hallaj. According to him, Iblis disobeyed the divine commandment because he would not acknowledge any object of adoration other than the one God. When God threatened him with everlasting punishment, Iblis asked: "Will You behold me when You are punishing me?" God answered "Yes". "Then," said Iblis, "Your beholding me will take away from me consciousness of the punishment. Do unto me as you wish!" (Hallaj 1978, 46; Nicholson 1922, 43).

On such grounds, Iblis refused to obey the command to prostrate himself before Adam. He cared nothing for threat of eternal condemnation.

Therefore, in the eyes of Hallaj Satan became a martyr of love and accepted the path of suffering in the knowledge that God will be beholding him eternally whilst punishing him.

Hallaj develops an interesting method by which to defend the action of Satan and to cast it in a more positive light. He achieves this by making an important and fundamental distinction between God's eternal will and His temporal command. Normally, God's eternal will and command are one and the same thing.

For Hallaj, however, this is not always the case, and on some occasions they may be considered different. Applying this to the story of Iblis, God's eternal will is that no one should be worshipped except Him. Therefore, His command that Iblis prostrate himself before Adam seems to be contrary to His will. Satan, having understood this divine will by his wisdom, faced two choices: either he could obey the eternal divine will or the divine command. He had to make a choice, as both of these were incompatible with each other. Satan decided, therefore, to obey the divine eternal will and as a result became a model of love sacrifice. This choice of Satan and the reasoning behind this is beautifully echoed in the words of Attar. Satan proclaims: "To be cursed by Thee is a thousand times dearer to me than to turn my head away from Thee to anything else." (Schimmel 1975, 195).

Iblis is not the only example employed by Hallaj to explain the concept of suffering in love. He adds Pharaoh to the list of his teachers and friends. In his choice of examples, Hallaj selects those personalities who are generally portrayed as disobedient and cursed by God. Hallaj transforms them into "martyrs of love" and strongly identifies himself with them. Pharaoh is one such character in addition to Satan. In the words of Hallaj: "Iblis was threatened with hellfire, yet he did not recant. Pharaoh was drowned in the sea, yet he did not recant, for he would not acknowledge anything between him and God. And I, though I am killed and crucified, and though my hands and feet are cut off, I do not recant!" (Hallaj 1978, 54-55). In conclusion, Satan, Pharaoh and Hallaj became outcasts who transgressed the

formal law to attain a higher goal. Yet the reason for the transgression was each one's love relationship with God. This bond functioned as a higher law for the Sufi who had attained perfection.

This idea was developed further by later mystics who followed Hallaj's approach to the status of Satan in the scheme of love. Among these the most important were mystics such as al-Ghazali, 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, Sarmad in Delhi, and Shah 'Abd al-Latif in Sind (Chittick 1992, 208; Schimmel 1982, 33).

Hallaj's suffering also had a noble and forbearing characteristic to it. If it was God's will that the lover should suffer, then, it was futile to blame and curse those who inflicted the pain on him. They were merely the means employed by God, and therefore instead of cursing them, they should be showered with praise. Hallaj demonstrated this when he spoke on the scaffold moments before he was executed. "...And these thy servants who are gathered to slay me in zeal for thy religion and in desire to win thy favour, pardon them and have mercy upon them. For verily if You had revealed to them that which you have revealed to me, they would not have done what they have done, and if you had hidden from me that which you have hidden from them, I should not have suffered this tribulation. Glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou doest, and glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou willest!" (Massignon 1936, 8; Nicholson 1922, 47).

However, Hallaj in his paradigm of love gives the lover a weapon which allows him to endure the pains and suffering inflicted upon him. This weapon is none other than the Sufi's love for God. Hallaj considers God's love to be a shield against all kind of difficulties and calamities. He claims that he does not feel the pain of the calamities and persecution of his enemies because of his love for God. The following couplet sums up this element of Hallaj's paradigm:

Nothing harmful effected me when the calamities attacked me  
No harm touched me because of my love. (al-Shaybi 1974, 206).

Rabia's emphasis on loving God for His own sake is also another component of Hallaj's love. In one of his prayers to God he says: "O God,

because of what I feel of the sweet breaths of thy love — I despise the solid mountains and hold the earths and thy heavens in contempt. By Thy truth, if Thou sell me Paradise in exchange for a single moment of my ecstasy or for one passing gleam of the least of my spiritual states, I would not buy it! And if Thou wert to set the hellfire before me — all the diverse kinds of torment that are contained therein, I would deem it no account in comparison with my suffering when Thou hidest thy face from me! (Massignon 1936, 68). These words are nothing but a paraphrase of the following prayer of Rabia: O My Lord! If I am worshipping you from fear of fire, burn me in the fires of Hell, and if I am worshipping you from desire for Paradise, deny me Paradise. But if I am worshipping you for yourself alone, then do not deny me the sight of your magnanimous face. (al-Sakkakini 1982, 54).

This also demonstrates that Hallaj did not refuse the heritage of his ancestors as far as the concept of love is concerned. Rather, he sealed them with his unique stamp. Therefore, he is not an imitator but an original thinker who added his own perspective to the ideas of others.

### **His Influence**

The execution of Hallaj by the authorities seemed to be counterproductive. It failed to put an end to the views and ideas of Hallaj. Indeed, his influence grew even stronger after his execution than it had been during his life time (Browne 1957, 436). His ideas seeped into people from all walks of life. Poets, theoreticians, public preachers, and other Sufis constantly referred to him. Sometimes they admired him and at other times they rejected him. Praise or blame did not matter; the important thing was that Hallaj was being discussed and his name became a symbol of “mystic love”. Furthermore, his influence was not confined to the Arab world only; he was equally well known in India, perhaps because of his travels in this region. The following folk song from Sind is a testimony to this:

When you want to know the way of love,  
Ask those who are like Mansur (Schimmel 1975, 76).



Nicholson remarks: "The power and vitality of this man's ideas are attested by the influence which they exerted upon his successors. His ashes were scattered, swept away, as he prophesied, by rushing winds and running waters, but his words lived after him." (Nicholson 1922, 26-37).

Hallaj's metaphors and symbols became a common feature of later Sufi poetry and literature. This is one of the lasting influences of Hallaj. As an illustration, the metaphor of the moth was often used by the later Sufis, especially in Persian poetry. Through these means, Hallaj's symbols entered the literature of the West. For example, Goethe used the metaphor of the moth in his *West-Ostlicher Diwan* (Schimmel 1975, 70).

In addition to his metaphors and symbols, the stylistic features of Hallaj's poems also trickled into later times. His most distinctive feature is the direct and intimate manner in which he addresses God. His poetry is sprinkled with the pronouns "I" and "you". In a sense this is the voice of love itself, in which the true intimacy of the lover and the beloved is conceived mutually. The gulf and distance between the lover and Beloved is minimalised. This unique feature of Hallaj is reflected and echoed in the love dialogues of the later mystical poets (Massignon 1982, III, 51-2). Even though much of his subtle theology is not properly understood by the general populace, his joy in suffering for love of God has made him a favourite symbol for those who believe in personal piety and for those who are willing to suffer for their ideals (Schimmel 1987, VI, 176).

Taking the major Sufis discussed in the present study, it seems that Hallaj had the most lasting influence upon Ibn Arabi and Ibn Farid (al-Munawi n.d., I, 548). In particular, three ideas recurred in a more refined way in both Ibn Arabi's and Ibn al-Farid's works: first, the idea that love is the motive behind the act of creation; second, man is the highest manifestation of God; and third, the positive portrayal of Satan and Pharaoh as martyrs of love. These ideas will be elaborated in subsequent chapters.

In Hallaj's paradigm of love, God is not a remote Potentate (Netton 1996, 76). In the relationship of love, God appears to be an equal partner to man. They share the same ecstasy of love. The second important element of Hallaj's paradigm is the idea of suffering. Love can be seen as synony-

mous to suffering. Only through suffering is man purified from all other false loves and is drawn into the direction of God's love alone.

Related to the last point is Hallaj's dislike of the elitism of the Sufi masters of his time who advocated that the lover must conceal himself from all others. On the contrary, Hallaj maintained that the experience of love should not be kept within the Sufi circles only, they were to be exposed to the public. This self exposure element of Hallaj's thought may also be interpreted as a result of his complete annihilation in God, and therefore his consequent loss of conscious control over himself. Hallaj's views may be clearly contrasted with that of Rabia. Contrary to her view, there is little if any mention of the fear of God in Hallaj's paradigm. Through Hallaj the concept of fear seems to lose its power in Sufi piety.

Hallaj was accused by his opponents of importing Christian ideas into Islam. This accusation was given added support by the similarities that existed between Hallaj and Jesus. For example, the similarities of their respective executions, their emphasis on suffering in love, their preaching of pure love and Hallaj's saying that "I will be killed on the religion of Jesus". For these reasons he was accused of secretly being a Christian (Sharaf 1976: 134).

Hallaj had a tolerant outlook to those who did not understand him. In this respect he had a magnanimous personality. For instance, although he claimed that he had the truth and love of God, he did not blame the general population of being ignorant. He tried to settle the dispute by explaining that those members of the general public who executed him were right in so doing, since the exterior of the law commanded this. This demonstrates that Hallaj respected the formal law. He did not believe that he was above it.

Hallaj can be viewed as the originator of the idea that *Satan* and *Pharaoh* were sincere lovers of God, and should therefore be seen in a positive way. This idea was viewed by his opponents as deeply controversial and dangerous. Hallaj's exposition of such ideas reveals his bold and daring nature.

Hallaj's influence was enhanced by his execution, whereby His ideas gained more popular acceptance seeping in to the cultural dimensions of

Islam, in the poetry and prose of later times. Furthermore, his symbols, metaphors and imagery became embedded in the thought and speech patterns of society.

Hallaj became a symbol of martyrdom in the path of divine love. His meeting with, and especially his attitude towards, his own death played an important role in this image. He showed himself to be a man utterly fearless of death. It is this notion that if a person does not fear his or her death, then the ultimate has been conquered. How can the mortal powers control the one who laughs in face of death? His execution set an unprecedented example of how Sufis should react to their own temporal demise.

It can be also argued that Hallaj, through his openness and bravery, paved the way for later Sufis to express their mystical union openly. By the time of Rumi, a more liberal age appears to have arisen, where intoxicated love was met with less controversy.

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## Al-Ghazali's Paradigm of Love

Among the Sufis we have covered so far, the clearest and most systematic idea of love belongs to the famous mystic and theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. In comparison with the Sufis discussed already, al-Ghazali's thought is presented in a more systematic way, using brilliant illustrations embedded in a strong psychological analysis. In his magnum opus, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, he presents his mystical teaching of love in an ordered sequence of thought which was original, profound and mature.

In addition to his methodical originality, there is another feature setting him apart from other Sufis. His predecessors did not concern themselves very much with reconciling Sufi ideas with mainstream Islam, but al-Ghazali strived to reconcile the two. This underlying theme permeates most of his writings. As a result of this approach, he succeeded to some extent in influencing the attitudes of both schools of thought. Before him, the orthodox scholars looked upon the Sufis with suspicion. They thought Sufis such as Hallaj mixed Islamic teachings with alien ideas and heresies. Al-Ghazali limited this hostile tension and made Sufism acceptable to the main body of Islam.

In addition, al-Ghazali attempted to prove that love for God is a necessary emotion from the point of view of human nature. This approach

places al-Ghazali within an important position as far as this study is concerned. The following pages will attempt to present and analyse his paradigm of love.

### His Life

His full name was Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Tusi al-Ghazali. He was born in Tus (near Mashhad in eastern Iran) in 450/1058 and was educated there. He continued his education in Jurjan and completed it in Nishapur. While in Nishapur, he was taught by al-Juwayni, who was known as *Imam al-Haramayn* (the imam of the two sacred cities of Mecca and Medina). After the death of al-Juwayni in 1085, al-Ghazali was invited to the court of Nizam al-Mulk, the powerful vizier of the Seljuk sultans. The vizier was so impressed by al-Ghazali's scholarship that in 1091 he appointed him chief professor at the Nizamiyah College in Baghdad (Watt 1963, 21-23).

During his time at the Nizamiyah College, he passed through a deep spiritual crisis which left him physically incapable of lecturing for a time. As a result, in November 488/1095 he abandoned his academic career and left Baghdad on the pretext of going on pilgrimage to Mecca. He disposed of his wealth and adopted the life of a Sufi. After spending some time in Damascus and Jerusalem, followed by a pilgrimage to Mecca in November 1096, al-Ghazali settled in Tus (al-Ghazali, 1956, 99-100). It is here that he began training disciples, with whom he led a kind of monastic communal life.

Al-Ghazali defends the abandonment of his career and adoption of a monastic life in his autobiographical work *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error). Therefore, we are fortunate enough to have first-hand information about his experience of Sufism. Most of al-Ghazali's biographers do not doubt the authenticity of this spiritual crisis. According to 'Umaruddin, the reason for the truthfulness of this experience is that al-Ghazali was inherently very inquisitive, and was filled with an intense yearning for truth. Hence such a spiritual crisis could be expected from al-Ghazali. Contrary to 'Umaruddin, Lazarus-Yafeh questions the originality of *al-Munqidh*. He holds that there are remarkable resemblances between

*al-Munqidh* and the opening pages of *Kitab al Wasaya* by al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 243/857). He thus contends that the *Munqidh* is not an original work, but rather a compilation of other works (Larsson-Yatch 1973, 19). On the other hand, Watt argues that the work is a synthesis of the two. He does not doubt that al-Ghazali had an actual spiritual experience. However, he believes that al-Ghazali added his intellectual findings to his experience. Hence, *al-Munqidh* is not solely a presentation of his experience, but also his intellectual studies.

Almost ten years later, in 1106 al-Ghazali was persuaded to return to teaching at the Nizamiyah College at Nishapur. One reason put forward to explain al-Ghazali's return to active teaching was that a "renewer" of the life of Islam was expected at the beginning of each century. His friends argued that he was the "renewer" for the fifth Islamic century. As a result he returned to his post a second time and continued lecturing in Nishapur until 1110. Later in that year he returned to Tus, where he died the following year in 505/1111.

The above-mentioned claim that al-Ghazali was the renewer of the century seems to have been accepted even by al-Ghazali himself. It is not within the aims of this research to determine whether al-Ghazali is a renewer or not. Nevertheless, it can be mentioned in passing that the scholars of the time believed that al-Ghazali revived Sufism and other Islamic sciences. Al-Ghazali's own belief regarding his role as a renewer might explain the motivation behind his prolific literary output encompassing a wide range of disciplines such as philosophy, theology, logic, Sufism, law and so on. However, this research will restrict itself to its main aim, that is, his understanding of love.

### ***His Works***

Al-Ghazali was a prolific writer. More than 400 works are ascribed to him, although he probably did not write as many as this number. Often the same work is found with different titles in different manuscripts. However, many of the numerous manuscripts have not yet been carefully examined. Furthermore, several works have also been falsely ascribed to him, and others are of do-

ubtful authenticity. Nevertheless, at least 50 genuine works are extant.

From al-Ghazali's vast collection of writings, the greatest work is the *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*. In forty chapters he explains the doctrines and practices of Islam, and shows how these can constitute the basis of a profound devotional life, leading to the higher stages of Sufism. Among these mystical stations, an entire chapter is devoted to the concept of love. Because of this, the *Ihya* will be the main reference for this study. Although he considers this concept in his other works, they are just a summary of what was originally written in *Ihya*.

The fact that al-Ghazali was a teacher by profession distinguishes his style and approach to the Sufi concept of love. Before him, Sufis like Rabia and Hallaj took for granted that God should be loved, without really providing any rigorous argumentation as to why this should be the case. Al-Ghazali's approach is quite different from that of other Sufis. He does not force the believers to accept blindly that God is the only real object of love. On the contrary, he persuades his readers in intellectual terms that we need to love God. As a result, the chapter he dedicated to divine love in his *Ihya* is presented in a logical and intellectually rigorous way. Although *Ihya* is a significant work regarding the Islamic concept of love, *Mishkat al-Anwar* (The Niche for Lights) is also important with regard to the subject of divine love, and sheds further light on the relationship between mystical love and knowledge.

### ***His Teachers and Background***

Al-Ghazali does not say much about his Sufi masters. Although he refers to many Sufis who lived before him, he does not admit to a master-disciple relationship. However he gives some clues in the *Munqidh* as to the sources of his Sufism. He states that he became acquainted with Sufi beliefs by reading their books. Among these books, he expressly mentions *Qut al-Qulub* (The Food of the Hearts) by Abu Talib al-Makki, the works of al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d.857), Junayd, al-Shibli (d.945), Abu Yazid al-Bistami and other discourses of the leading Sufis of his time (al-Ghazali 1956, 96). His works contain references to all the great mystics of his time. Indeed, Fazlur Rahman argues that al-Ghazali's writings are the culmination of

the movement to bring Sufism into the orthodox fold, a movement triggered by Sufi authors like al Sarraj (d.987), al Kalabadhi, and al Qushayri (Fazlur Rahman 1979, 140).

After comprehending the intellectual side of their fundamental teachings, al-Ghazali understood that what was most distinctive about Sufism is something that cannot be apprehended by study, but only through personal experience by ecstasy and by a moral change. His own writings and spiritual training indicate that his guides and masters were the Sufi writings that he had studied previously. In addition, his strong will allowed him to further his understanding and gain insight into the ecstatic experiences of Sufism. Therefore, after a period of indecisiveness he left Baghdad for Damascus to practise what he had learned from Sufi writings:

In due course I entered Damascus. And there I remained for nearly two years with no other occupation than the cultivation of retirement and solitude, together with religious and ascetic exercises, as I busied myself purifying my soul, improving my character and cleansing my heart for the constant recollection of God most High, as I had learnt from my study of Sufism. I used to go into retreat for a period in the mosque of Damascus, going up the minaret of the mosque for the whole day and shutting myself in so as to be alone (al-Ghazali 1956, 100).

Al-Ghazali's lasting influence can still be seen in the same mosque that he frequented. The "al-Ghazali corner" can be seen crowded with people to the present day.

However, some scholars disagree with the notion that al-Ghazali did not have Sufi masters. For example, M. Saeed claims that al-Ghazali did have masters, and he rejects the view that al-Ghazali's final resort to Sufism was merely the result of his disillusionment with philosophy and dissatisfaction with scholastic theology. He claims that this is only part of the truth. In support of this, Saeed presents the following evidence to show that al-Ghazali was not totally foreign to Sufism.

Firstly, after his father's death, al-Ghazali's guardian was a Sufi devotee. Furthermore, in his youth al-Ghazali studied and practised Sufism,



firstly under Yusuf al-Nassaj in Tus, and then under al-Farmadhi in Nishapur. Secondly, his brother Ahmad al-Ghazali (d.1126) made his name as a great Sufi, as did his teacher al-Juwayni. All of this indicates al-Ghazali inclined toward the Sufi way of thinking. As a result of this, Saeed accepts al-Ghazali's adoption of Sufism as the continuation of these early influences and not simply the consequence of his failure to find the philosophical solution to the problems of theology (Sharif 1963, I, 617).

Although al-Ghazali was acquainted with Sufis and Sufism in his youth, it does not necessarily follow from this that he would accept Sufi thought. While most people were acquainted with Sufism in that period, his real encounter and return to Sufism was due to the scepticism that he later experienced in life. As Macdonald rightly states, until the time of his conversion al-Ghazali's approach to theological and legal studies were to some degree business-minded, that is, as a means of gaining material wealth, fame, and respect (Macdonald 1899, 75).

With regard to al-Ghazali's background, he lived during the period of the Abbasid caliphate, which at the time was in decline, having lost much of its central power to local dynasties. These dynasties often invaded, and at times gained control, of the capital of the Abbasid Empire located in Baghdad. For example, a few years before the birth of al-Ghazali, Baghdad was under the control of the Buwayhid dynasty, a Shiite sect who believed in the infallibility of the Imam. In 1055, the Seljuqs overthrew the Buwayhids and effectively governed Baghdad during the formative years of al-Ghazali. The rule of the Seljuqs was a prosperous one and reached its peak under the reign of Alp-Arslan (1063-1072) and Malik-Shah (1072-92) (Watt 1963, 12-14).

During this period, Nizam al-Mulk (1063-1092), the Grand Vizier, played a crucial role in stabilising the educational atmosphere in the context of the great controversies and sectarianism of the time. In particular, the advent of Greek philosophy and the contact with different cultures had given rise to sects such as the Batinis. He did this by formalising Islamic education through the establishment of formal schools known as *madradas*, which followed a strictly prescribed curriculum. The first madrasa was opened around 960 A.D. followed by many others. This movement saw its

climax during the viziership of Nizam al Mulk, who founded at least nine Nizamiyya colleges, scattered from Mosul to Herat. In addition, he provided scholarships for students (Watt 1963, 27).

The purpose behind the establishment of these colleges was primarily to challenge the growth of the Ismaili movement. According to the Ismailis, revelation, i.e. the Qur'an, can only be understood through the mediation of an infallible Imam. In other words, the power and authority of the Qur'an and Sunnah was made subservient to the interpretation of the Imam. In contrast, Sunni Islam insisted that the Qur'an and Sunnah were supreme. The Caliph's duty was merely to oversee their implementation in real life.

It appears from the writings of the time that the Ismailis were propagating their ideas with some success. As a response, al-Ghazali, now a professor in one of the most respected Nizamiyya colleges, took up the challenge to defend Sunni Islam against these heresies. In doing so, al-Ghazali relied predominantly on the Qur'an supplemented by intellectual analysis. He did not speak with *isharat* or ambiguous words, since they might be construed to support Batini ideas. This background should be kept in mind in order to understand al-Ghazali's intellectual approach to the concept of divine love, which will be the subject of following pages.

### **Al-Ghazali's Understanding of Love**

In his *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din*, al-Ghazali devotes a large chapter to the study of the concept of divine love. It is entitled *Kitab al-Mahabbah wa al-Shawq wa al-Uns wa al-Rida*, which can be translated as "The book of Love, Yearning, Intimacy and Satisfaction" (al-Ghazali 1992, v.4, 311-81). In this chapter, al-Ghazali handles the subject by analysing the roots of human psychology. In particular, he studies the relationship between the human psyche and love. It can be argued that this is one of the most original contributions that he made. As a consequence, his analysis of love takes a distinctly intellectual approach to the problem. He explains the concept of love step by step based on rational methods and techniques of enquiry, *inter alia*, he tries to find answers to the question why do rational human be-

ings love one another? And what are the motives behind love? However, the downside of this approach is that it lacks the emotional elements that are generally associated with the concept of love. For example, we do not see the ecstatic utterances in his study of love, as featured in the works of Hallaj and Ibn al-Farid.

In previous chapters we presented God's love for man first, and man's love for God second. Al-Ghazali presents his theory in a contrary way. To reflect his theory more clearly, as an exception, we will follow his style and examine his ideas regarding man's love for God.

### ***Man's Love for God***

In order to understand the importance al-Ghazali places on the concept of love as a Sufi mode of relationship with God, it is necessary to begin with his theory of mystical states and stations. Al-Ghazali gives a long list of mystical states and stations. According to al-Ghazali, all mystical virtues need to be acquired by the disciple on the Sufi path. However, these mystical stations and virtues do not possess an equal amount of importance. Some virtues or stations act only as a means for higher virtues and stations. Hence, he divides them into two main groups: a) those which are "means stations" and b) those which are "end stations".

The first group are only means for the second group of states. Therefore the first group of states have a limited value as being channels in order to reach the end stations. Means stations prepare the disciple for the perfection that the end stations require. For example, the stations like repentance, patience, and asceticism are the means stations, which purify the heart and prepare it for the knowledge and love of God. Their only function is to help the novice acquire those stations regarded as ends.

The "end stations" are sought for their own sake and not for any other objectives. Consequently, they are an end themselves, and not a means to other ends. By the virtue of being end stations, they are eternal and everlasting. In contrast, the means stations are ephemeral. Whereas the means stations possess a temporary use and benefit to man in this world, the end stations are eternally valuable and will not leave the soul even at death.

They will remain in the soul eternally. Among these end stations, the most significant one according to al-Ghazali is the station of love. In addition to love, amongst the other end stations are gratitude (*shukr*), unity (*tawhid*), trust (*tawakkul*), love (*mahabbah*), yearning (*shauq*), intimacy (*qurb*) and satisfaction (*rida*) (al-Ghazali 1992, v.4, 311).

This division also determines the methodology of al-Ghazali's *tasawwufi* path. In close resemblance to his division of the states and stations into two groups, he divides Sufi training into two stages. The first stage is to remove the evil qualities of the soul that constitute obstacles on the path to God through self-mortification and self-training. After purification of the inner self, the second stage begins. This is the stage of acquiring praiseworthy qualities, namely repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, poverty, asceticism, trust, love, yearning, intimacy, satisfaction, intention, sincerity, truthfulness, vigilance, self-examination, and meditation. Without acquiring these virtues in perfection, no one can attain proximity to God. Many of these virtues are also called the stations of those who traverse the way to God (see al-Ghazali 1994). It can be argued that in the first stage, the Sufi concentrates on the means stations in order to cleanse the heart and the soul. Only after this preparation does the mystic become ready to acquire the end stations.

In order to demonstrate the gradual development of the mystic from one station to another, al-Ghazali presents the stages of the Sufi path in a gradually ascending order. He places repentance at the bottom of this ladder, as many Sufis do, and love at the top. In summary, two things can be deduced from al-Ghazali's approach to the mystical stations: firstly, love is not a "means station" used temporarily but is an "end station". Secondly, love as a station is the highest one among its sister stations. There is no higher stage than the acquisition of the love of God.

As a consequence of this general outlook, al-Ghazali ranks other mystical stations in their standing to love of God. In his view, repentance, patience, gratitude, hope, fear, poverty, asceticism, divine unity and trust, in this order, all lead to love, whereas yearning, intimacy, and satisfaction are the fruits or by-products of love. Therefore, his central focus is on love

when he evaluates the remaining mystical stations. In addition to this general role of love among all these stations, love also plays a special role in the evolution of each single stage. For example, he presents the evolution of the station of asceticism in three stages in relation to the concept of love. The lowest grade is the abandonment of the world in order to escape from punishment. This is the asceticism of those in whom fear predominates. The second stage is the abandonment of the world in order to enter Paradise, and is a little higher and more virtuous than the first one. Therefore, in the second stage the motive of asceticism is hope and not fear. There is, however, another stage of asceticism that constitutes the highest grade of all. This consists of forsaking the world for the love of God and not for any other reason such as fear or hope. In summary, only the lovers of God possess the highest grades of asceticism and the highest grades of other mystical stations (Muhammad, 1975).

This classification to some extent parallels Rabia's understanding of love. However, al-Ghazali is more realistic than Rabia. Unlike Rabia, he does not reject the motives of Hell and Paradise (fear and hope) completely in the worship of God. Rather, he stresses that the motive of pure love is the highest of all the motives in the Sufi path to God. Thus, he accommodates all sorts of lovers without excluding any of them, whatever their motivation may be.

It could be suggested that according to al-Ghazali the Sufi path can be divided into two stages: those placed before the station of love and those after it. The stations before love, such as repentance, patience, and asceticism, only prepare for it. Any station beyond the love of God, such as yearning and intimacy, are only manifestations of love and its by-products (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 311). It is clear that love is the central criterion in the evaluation of al-Ghazali's mysticism.

After this general introduction into the mystical system of al-Ghazali, we can confidently speak of the significance and place of love of God. In accordance with his general methodology of Sufism, he first starts to remove the doubts concerning the possibility of love between man and God. Hence, he starts the discussion from the theological side and quotes the argu-

ment of the theologians who claim that man cannot love God. Al-Ghazali describes these theologians as Zahirites,<sup>9</sup> citing their argument as being that "love is only possible among the members of the same genus, between individuals having the same degree and level of existence." As a direct consequence of this belief, the Zahirites understand the word *ma'habba* (المحبة) as meaning obedience. According to them, love is nothing but "obedience to God" (al-Ghazali 1980, 105). To al-Ghazali, this understanding is incorrect and those who hold such views do not have a solid grasp of the religion. Al-Ghazali presents their arguments and then sets out to refute them, arguing that love is perfectly possible between man and God.

In order to refute his rivals, al-Ghazali employs two main methods: one is rational persuasion and the other is reliance upon the revelation. Al-Ghazali uses the first method very effectively because of his grasp of the Greek and Islamic philosophical discourse of his time. In addition to this, he also employed human love and human psychology as a basis for his explanation of divine love. He often explains the concepts of divine love by way of illustration with the characteristics of human love.

In order to clarify the concept of love and worship, al-Ghazali first analyses the concept of worship. According to him, a person obeys someone only if they love that person. Obedience is dependent upon love, and therefore love precedes obedience. In other words, worship is not love itself, but only one of the fruits of the love for God.

In addition to this rational explanation, al-Ghazali includes evidence from the two sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet. This is the second part of his methodology. The existence of the love of God is mentioned in God's own words which supports the possibility of divine love (*mahabba*). The following verses form the basis of his evidence from the Qur'an: "He (God) loves them and they love Him" (Qur'an; 5:54). "Those who are believers love God much" (Qur'an; 2:165).

According to al-Ghazali, these verses clearly prove not only the possibility, but the necessity of a mutual love between God and man. Al-Ghazali buttresses these Qur'anic evidences with hadiths. He provides a number of examples from the hadiths that make love of God a condition of the Mus-

lim faith, an example of which is: "No-one can be a believer until God and his apostle become dearer to him than his family, riches and all mankind." In another hadith, the Prophet reminds the believers to love God because of His benevolence, and to love the Prophet because of God's love for him" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 312). Based on these sources of evidence and others similar to them, al-Ghazali contests the idea that love for God is not possible from a theological point of view.

Having argued for the possibility of divine love with evidence from the Qur'an and hadith, al-Ghazali sets out to investigate the rational and psychological reasons behind love. Thus, it can be argued that al-Ghazali is not a mere relator of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. He is actively engaged in seeking out deeper meanings from the textual sources by employing rational methods, coupled with a psychologically orientated approach. In order to examine how al-Ghazali harmonises the revelation with logic, one need only compare al-Ghazali's account of love of God with that of al-Makki and al-Qushayri, both of whom al-Ghazali studied. Contrary to these other scholars, al-Ghazali's originality lies in his deep analysis of human love and its application to divine love. The Sufis before him did not enter into a deep analysis of love, but rather chose to quote the words of others.

### *Nature of Love*

Before entering the subject of divine love, al-Ghazali first provides a background to the nature of human love. According to him, love is an instinctive emotion which exists in every human being. In his words: "Love is a natural inclination of the subject towards objects that give pleasure." Following this definition, the opposite of love, i.e. hate, is "a natural repulsion to objects that give pain." Thus, al-Ghazali regards pleasure and pain to be the underlying bases of the instinctive human emotions love and hate. In addition to these two essentials, there is another component of the emotion of love, namely knowledge. Both, love and hate imply knowledge of objects that give pleasure or pain. Unless objects become known to a human being there can be no occasion

for either inclination to or repulsion from them (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 313). Therefore, al-Ghazali's understanding of love is closely connected with the knowledge of the nature of the beloved.

From this perspective, knowledge means to know the attributes of the beloved. In order to decide whether the object of love deserves to be loved or not, one first needs to know the nature of the beloved. In other words, knowledge precedes love and determines its intensity. God possesses all the necessary requirements to be the object of man's love. Therefore, as far as divine love is concerned, knowledge of God is almost synonymous with love of God. In other words, without first knowing God no one can love Him.

Due to the importance that knowledge occupies in his theory of love, al-Ghazali further elaborates on his understanding of epistemology. According to him, knowledge is gained through two channels. The first revolves around the faculties of sense perception, *viz.* sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. These, he points out, are not in the sole possession of man, but are common to all living beings, humans as well as animals. The second channel, as far as he is concerned, is exclusive to mankind. He calls this sense "the sixth sense", and names this faculty alternatively as the intellect, light, and heart. This sense is centred in the heart.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Ghazali pays special attention to arguing that this internal perception is superior to the perception of the five senses. He holds that this internal perception is more powerful and reliable than the external eye that can be seen as the most potent means of acquiring knowledge. People who accept that the five senses are their sole means of perception are on the same level as animals. Since these people are habituated to the temptations of the flesh, their hearts are thereby burdened with hindrances which will not let them feel pleasure in the knowledge of God (Umaruddin 1962, 122).

After having presented the arguments to prove the superiority of the heart as far as epistemology is concerned, al-Ghazali goes on to utilise this position of the heart in his remaining discourses. He attempts to appeal to our sixth sense (the heart) whilst at the same time providing an intellectual underpinning for his arguments. For example, he examines the causes of



human love towards others and suggests that there are five causes. From these he demonstrates the necessity of divine love, since all these causes are fulfilled by love of God in the most perfect way.

### ***The Causes of Love According to al-Ghazali***

Al-Ghazali's uniqueness stems from his practical and realistic approach to mystical issues. In the hands of al-Ghazali, even a subject such as love, which is difficult to define, becomes structured, organised and coherent. At times al-Ghazali tends to take on the role of a psychologist, and in this regard he makes reference to human life and experience. He broaches and develops the psychological background of love, in particular the conditions in which love can prosper. The information and insight gained from this endeavour are later utilised to clarify divine love and to establish that loving God is as necessary as loving one's own self. Al-Ghazali's pondering and reflection at this stage culminated in his five causes that engender love in the lover. These will be dealt with here in the order that they are presented by al-Ghazali.

According to al-Ghazali, the **first cause** of love is love of the self and the conditions which enable one to survive. This is inherent in the nature of every living being. All living beings desire to exist and to be alive. In other words, this can be termed as the love of permanent survival (Smith 1983, 175). In connection with the love of survival, human beings desire to survive in a way that will maximise their enjoyment. *A fortiori* they long for things that will lead to this enjoyment and will despise the things that will diminish this enjoyment. As for the latter, the ultimate thing that is disliked by man is death. However, under extraordinary circumstances such as suicide, man prefers death to life. The reason for this is not because death is intrinsically good but because it enables one to escape pain, and escape is deemed to be more "enjoyable" than painful existence. In summary, life forms the basis of all kinds of pleasure for man, and it is an "end" *per se*. Moreover, all things that lead to this end are also loved and desired, things that help self-preservation such as wealth, health, offspring, friends, and relatives. These are only loved becau-

se they are bound up with the continuance of a man's own existence and perfection. Hence, if one has to prefer between his life and another person's life, one would choose his or her own life in normal circumstances (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 314).

The **second cause** of love is beneficence. It is in this type of love that we love one's benefactor or something giving benefit to him. We love a benefactor because of the benefits that we receive from that person. In fact, this too comes back to self-interest, for the benefactor is not loved as an end but as a means for the continuation and perfection of life. A person does not love his or her benefactor for its own sake as they love him or her own self. Therefore, if the benefits which are received from the benefactor are no longer forthcoming, the love for that person ceases. In a sense, this type of love can be characterised as conditional love. In order to clarify this, al-Ghazali provides the following example: a patient loves the physician, not for his own sake but because he is a means to the preservation of good health. Similarly, man loves money because of what it will buy, not because it is made out of paper. The love of these objects of means is directly proportionate to the urgency of a person's need for the benefit provided by the benefactor (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 314).

Loving God for the benefits he bestows upon us is always met with caution, because to love God for His favours is to make Him a means like the others for the good of man. In al-Ghazali's opinion, God must be the end of man's love, not a means for his satisfaction. In order to further this notion, he also refers to some Biblical sources to show that loving God for secondary reasons is unacceptable. He writes:

"God revealed to the Prophet David: The dearest of my servants are those servants who worship Me without receiving any favour from Me. Who is a greater sinner than one who worships Me in greed of Paradise and in fear of Hell. If I had not created Paradise and Hell, should I not be entitled to your worship?" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 323).

In addition to David, he relates a story regarding Jesus: Once Jesus was passing by a group of people worshipping God in devotion. They said: "We worship God for fear of Hell and for the hope of Paradise." Jesus ans-

wered: "You are afraid of a created thing and hopeful of a created thing." He showed his dissatisfaction with their understanding of worship. Later, he met another group of people saying: "We worship God because of our love for Him and His glory." He showed satisfaction with their approach to God and said: "You are, then, the real friends of God. I have been ordered to live in your company." (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 323).

Al-Ghazali's quotation of this incident indicates that he was aware that the essence of Christianity revolved around disinterested love. This episode also indicates al-Ghazali's broad approach to supporting his ideas, even drawing upon non-Islamic sources such as Christianity.

The **third cause** of love is to love well-doers and benefactors without taking self-interest into consideration. The love discussed in the preceding paragraph has a selfish cause, since the lover loved his beloved for the benefit he derived. However, a human being can love unselfishly as well. Humans love well-doers because of their good actions even if they do not benefit personally from the favours of these well-doers. As always, al-Ghazali illustrates this by way of example: "When you hear the good and just conduct of a certain king in a far away country, you love him even though his goodness or wickedness cannot reach you because of his distance or because the king died long before." (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 320). In this way, al-Ghazali shows that human nature loves well-doers disinterestedly.

Although disinterested love in Sufi circles is usually associated with Rabia's name, the argument was not presented in an intellectual and systematic way before al-Ghazali. He proved the shortcomings of loving God for worldly benefits and for His benevolence. He argued that because benevolence increases and decreases it is not a reliable motive as far as love of God is concerned.

The **fourth cause** of love is beauty (*jamaal*) and goodness (*husn*). Human nature loves beauty and goodness instinctively. Al-Ghazali's opinion is reflected in the words of the contemporary scholar Schuon, who states: "The soul loves beauty, and it is thereby constrained to virtue, which is the beauty and happiness of the soul; beauty and the love of beauty, give the

soul the happiness to which it aspires by its nature” (Schuon 1981, 94). In a sense “loving beauty” is a characteristic of mankind which differentiates him from the rest of creation.

Having asserted that human nature loves beauty intrinsically, al-Ghazali sets out to investigate the nature of beauty. According to him, beauty is of two types: external and internal beauty. External beauty is the beauty appreciated by the external eye, such as the beauty of birds, flowers, women, and so on. Al-Ghazali explains the concept of external beauty by giving the example of the enjoyment a person gets when he or she looks at green forests and running water. He argues that they are loved for themselves, not for the sake of drinking the water or eating the green plants in the forest. It is true that man loves drinking water, but the appreciation of the running water is a different sort of aesthetic pleasure.

In summary, where one perceives beauty it is natural to feel love for it. Consequently, if God is beauty He must be loved by the one to whom His beauty is revealed. Schuon refers to this as “sensible beauties” (Schuon 1981, 94), which is more to the point since they are the beauties perceived by the senses. However, God’s beauty is not sensory in this world but will be seen in the next world (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 320). Nevertheless, the lover of God indirectly learns from the Qur’an and the Sunnah that God is the most beautiful and the most perfect.

Al-Ghazali recognises the limits of external beauty in contrast to internal beauty. It is the beauty of inward qualities that do not have a physical form in the physical world, and cannot be comprehended by means of the five senses. It is, however, perceived by another sense; al-Ghazali refers to this sense variously as “the reason”, “the light”, or “the heart”. Internal beauty is difficult to understand. Most people only perceive and appreciate external beauty, since this is apparent to the eye and does not need to be perceived through any extra endeavour. Furthermore, since it is easy to detect external beauty, even children perceive it. However, only those who have equipped their souls with spiritual qualities perceive internal beauty; in other words, those who have been through mystical training. In his *Mishkat*, al-Ghazali also compares the degrees of certainty that we receive from the internal and ex-

ternal eye. He concludes that the perception of the heart is more reliable than the perception of the external eye, and he explains the details of the defects which characterise the perception of the external eye (al-Ghazali 1952, 83).

At this juncture it can be noted that the third and fourth causes of love are quite similar, in the sense that they do not benefit the lover physically and directly. Hence, they do not carry selfish motives for the lover. For this reason, Umaruddin, an important author on al-Ghazali, regards the third and the fourth cause as identical (Umaruddin 1962, 122). Although it may be reasonable to join these two causes under a single heading, such a reclassification contradicts the author's original classification (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 320). Thus, these two causes are analysed separately.

The **fifth and final cause** of love is similarity and affinity between the lover and the beloved. Love normally flourishes amongst persons of similar nature and habits. Al-Ghazali's final cause has psychological value as well. Furthermore, it indicates that al-Ghazali was a keen observer of his surroundings. To exemplify this cause of love he draws our attention to the phenomenon of how friendship forms and develops amongst people. He states: "The young make friends with the young and the elderly befriend others like themselves." This rule of friendship formation is not confined to humans alone; al-Ghazali even extends it to the animal kingdom. "The animals, too, make this distinction, so that the same species are drawn to each other, whereas different species attack one another" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 320).

Al-Ghazali's study of the psychological reasons behind love sets his paradigm of divine love on a rational footing. Therefore, its overall character is more intellectual than emotional in comparison with, for example, Hallaj or Ibn al-Farid. As a result, he apparently perceives love as something attainable by personal striving and effort. This opinion diverges from the popular view among Sufis that divine love is a gift of God and is not attainable on the basis of human effort alone.

### ***The Only Object of Love***

After explaining the causes of love, al-Ghazali concludes that a man should turn all his love toward the direction of God. For in reality, all love

is due to God. This is for the simple reason that in essence God perfects all the causes of love in their entirety and in perfection. These causes are fulfilled by God in a real sense, whereas human beings possess them only in a metaphorical sense. In other words, they do not intrinsically possess the aforementioned causes of love, but they do reflect divine perfection. Al-Ghazali enumerates these causes and attempts to demonstrate that all of these are fulfilled by God. His paradigm of love only God deserves to be loved in this extreme way. The explanations, illustrations and arguments are now presented.

Taking the first cause of love, namely, the love of existence and survival, al-Ghazali believes that the love of God is a logical corollary for mankind. If one loves his or her existence, then he or she must of necessity love God, its creator. Man is absolutely dependent on God not only for the initial act of creation, but also for the continuous maintenance of his life. Like everything in the universe, man only survives by the virtue of divine grace. Therefore, it is only through ignorance that one may love life alone and forget God, who creates life and sustains it, *i.e.* to forget that existence, perfection, and the sustenance of mankind are all from God. It is only God who gives life, and if He did not sustain this act of creation, man would have never survived beyond his own coming into existence. In summary, creation exists only through God's grace and mercy (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 318) hence the creation is obliged to love God for this great favour.

Moving on to the second cause of love, i.e. love for the benefactor in response to gifts and bounties, al-Ghazali maintains that it is God alone who bestows upon man all benefits and bounties. There is no equal to God who can provide man with sustenance and rewards. This fact is conveyed in the Qur'an, where God states: "If you count the favours of God, you will never be able to number them." (Qur'an, 14:34). Again, if one loves one's benefactor one must love God, who is the real benefactor and the sole cause of every benefit received by mankind. The benefits that men provide to each other are in essence from God. Man cannot be a real benefactor. He is only the means of God's beneficence.

It follows from these statements that every single person should love God. However, the reality is different. Al-Ghazali explains this as a result of man's lack of knowledge. Anyone who loves anything other than God loves that thing out of his or her of ignorance. The good deeds that people perform for one another are really deeds done by God through the servants' actions. Al-Ghazali, as always, provides illustrations to support his ideas and to make them clear to his readers. For example, he states: "Suppose a man donates all his wealth to you. From this you may think that he has brought benefit to you. This is a wrong notion. Who created the benefactor and his wealth? Who made you dear to him and turned his face towards you? Who threw the thought in his mind that in this donation which benefited you lies his worldly and after-worldly good? So the real benefactor is only God himself" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 320).

Moreover, benevolence can only be attributed in its true sense to God. Human benevolence is motivated by all kinds of expectations be they material or spiritual, but only God's benevolence is perfectly disinterested and consequently can be classed as true benevolence.

As for the third cause of love, namely, the love and admiration of a benefactor even though the beneficence does not reach the person, al-Ghazali asserts that God again deserves to be loved under this heading. The lover admires the qualities of the benefactor. For example, if one hears of a king who has been generous to his subjects, they will love the king for his quality of kindness even though the king's generosity has not affected them personally. Al-Ghazali claims a fortiori that God should be loved as He created the benefactor in the first place. The benefactor reflects only a small portion of the perfect qualities of God.

This line of thought leads to the fourth cause, namely, love of all that possesses beauty. One loves the elegance and the perfection of another even though there is no physical benefit to the lover. In a similar manner to the third cause, al-Ghazali believes that in reality God is the source of all beauty. The beauty of others was bestowed by God. In fact, their beauty is only a mere reflection of the divine attributes of God. Al-Ghazali goes to great lengths to stress the absolute perfection of God. The logical outcome

of all this is that "He is pure from defects and evils and therefore He alone deserves to be loved in the real sense" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 321-23).

The fifth and final cause of love is the love based on affinity and similarity between the lover and beloved. In al-Ghazali's view, this also necessitates the need to love God. Man loves God because of the affinity between the human soul and God. This position creates a dilemma from the perspective of mainstream Islam. This is due to the great importance attached to the concept of *tanzih*, which demands complete "separateness" between man and God. In order to arrive at a synthesis of these two apparently conflicting ideas, al-Ghazali relies on a source that must be accepted by all Muslims, namely the Qur'an. Al-Ghazali refers to the passages in the Qur'an in which God alludes to the affinity between man and God: "When I fashioned him (man) and breathed into him of my spirit" (Qur'an, 15:29). This relation or affinity is further amplified in the following verse: "I have made you My vicegerent on earth" (Qur'an, 38:26). For al-Ghazali, the reason why man may be the successor of God is due to the affinity between him and God. Al-Ghazali also relies upon hadiths to support this position: "God created Adam according to His image" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 324).

At this point, a few important points regarding al-Ghazali's position should be made. Firstly, it must not be assumed that al-Ghazali believed that man was created in the physical image of God. Rather, in his view man was created in the spiritual image of God, in the sense that man reflects God's attributes and perfection in the best way. It was for this reason that God commanded the angels to bow down to Adam. This interpretation distinguishes al-Ghazali from the alternative view that is most prominently associated with Christianity. In this view, man was created in the physical image of God. The Christians also further deviated in this matter and held Jesus to be the Son of God. It is only a small number of people who understand the secret of this affinity in its true sense. They are those whose only method is to follow the commands of God (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 324).

Secondly, al-Ghazali's conception of man being created in God's image must be distinguished not only from the Christian perspective but also from the perspectives of other Sufis such as Hallaj. There is a danger that



statements of al-Ghazali such as these could be misinterpreted. For example, in the case of Hallaj, such statements resulted in the dangerous consequences which were outlined above. Al-Ghazali clarifies what he intended by the word "image". He explains that the image (*surah*) is not the exterior appearance that is perceived by the five senses, but is the internal affinity. Al-Ghazali warns against misunderstandings about the nature of this affinity because, in his opinion, this notion has misled countless numbers of people before. Some inclined to anthropomorphism, whilst others turned to pantheism, some going so far as to make the claim: "I am God."

This notion that man was created in the spiritual image of God also had repercussions on the history of Sufi ideas and the thinking of Sufis of later generations. Most importantly, Ibn Arabi took up this emphasis and accorded it a prominent position in his conception of love. The details of al-Ghazali's influence and Ibn Arabi's ideas in general will be analysed in later chapters.

The preceding paragraphs detailed al-Ghazali's five causes of love and their application to divine love. Al-Ghazali did not accord all of these causes equal prominence or ranking. In his opinion, two of the above causes have a special significance. These are the second and the fourth causes. As for the former, namely love for the benefactor due to his bounties and gifts, al-Ghazali believes that this occupies a prominent position amongst the general population. As for the latter, namely love of God because of His beauty, al-Ghazali similarly accords this a high ranking. Furthermore, he goes on to rank these two causes in the order of their spiritual value. Quoting the words of Junayd, he states that the first kind of love belongs to the general population, whereas the few elect own the second. Hence al-Ghazali admits that most people love God for selfish reasons; those who love God only for the sake of God's worthiness and beauty are few in number. It seems al-Ghazali's dual classification based on benefit and beauty has its roots in the approach of Rabiya, for al-Ghazali held her in high esteem as a spiritual guide.

### ***The Relationship between Knowledge and Love***

According to al-Ghazali, all physical and spiritual senses are created for specific purposes. For example, the desire for food has been created so

that people may have the urge to earn food and preserve their lives, for without food one would die. In a similar vein, the aim behind the creation of the intellect is to recognise the creator and then to love Him. Hence, intellect has the power to understand the realm of the divine.

As a consequence, al-Ghazali gives precedence to knowledge of God (*ma'rifatullah*). This knowledge is essential, because without it there can be no love. The stronger the knowledge, the stronger the love. In al-Ghazali's parlance, love is not merely an emotion; rather, it is the highest form of cognition. Both emotion and cognition are united. To love God is to know Him, and to know Him in a real sense is to love Him. Al-Ghazali supports the conception of this relationship with Hasan al-Basri's words: "He who recognises the Lord, loves Him, he who recognises the world adapts to remuneration" (al-Ghazali 1980, 106). Hasan's neatly summarises al-Ghazali's understanding of love and knowledge. It follows from this statement that he who does not know that he comes from God cannot love God. For this reason fools cannot love God. With these sharp words al-Ghazali points to the significance of intellect in his paradigm of love.

Knowledge has various other functions in al-Ghazali's paradigm. For example, it is viewed as a seed of the next world's *mushahada* (beatific vision). He who does not sow this seed in this world cannot expect fruits in that world. For al-Ghazali, the fruit of knowledge is love and its fruit is beatific vision. Beatific vision is only given to the believers who acquire knowledge and love of God in this world. The faithful who did not arrive at that level remain content only with the beauties of Paradise (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 331).

Al-Ghazali presents Rabia as the model of a perfect lover of God who desires the vision of God rather than the beauties of Paradise. He quotes her famous words regarding Paradise: "First the neighbour then the house." He also asserts that the rewards of Paradise are in proportion to the love of God. Similarly, love of God is in proportion to the knowledge of God. So *ma'rifa* (gnosis) is the source of eternal bliss (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 331). The happiest man in the hereafter is the one who has the most love for God during this life.

An important distinction must be made between al-Ghazali and other Sufis regarding the vision of God. According to al-Ghazali, the vision of God is only possible in the hereafter and not in this world, as some of the Sufis had supposed. Even the Prophet himself did not see God on the night of the ascension. On this matter, al-Ghazali agrees with Rabia al-Adawiyah and refutes Hallaj. Although he does not denounce Hallaj and the likes of him as verging on infidelity, he believes that the controversial utterances of such Sufis were uttered in moments of ecstasy. Hence, they must be excused and their statements should be ignored.

This position of al-Ghazali is closely connected with his conception of the hereafter. It leads him to describe the hereafter as the day of meeting with God. It is therefore a joyous day in which the lover meets his or her Beloved. For the lover of the life of this world, in contrast, it is like a life of imprisonment in the cage of the world. Death is a release from this cage (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 333).

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### ***Causes of Increase in the Love of God***

It was mentioned earlier that al-Ghazali's love is of a more intellectual nature. Hence, he explains the rationale behind different aspects of love. In this context, he also mentions the methods by which love of God is acquired and increased. There are chiefly two ways by which love of God is strengthened in man. In accordance with his general Sufi training, one of these ways is negative and the other is positive.

1. Ousting the love of mundane concerns other than God from the mind is the first cause of increasing divine love. Al-Ghazali likens mundane concerns to weeds. For a good harvest, all weeds must first be plucked out. He further explains his argument: "The mind is like a cup, if it is full with water you cannot fill it with vinegar; that is to say, if it is full of worldly concerns and with their love there will be no space left for divine love" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV 334). Al-Ghazali regards love of the world to be not only a great vice, but in fact the vice from which all other vices proceed (Muhammad 1975, 124). For al-Ghazali, the words of divine unity: "There is no Deity but God" are equivalent to "*La Mahbuba illa Allah*" (There is no

object of love except God). Concerning worldly desires, God says: "Have you seen a person who took his low desires for his god?" (Qur'an, 25: 14). From this verse, it is understood that all the low desires that cause the servant to deviate from God are considered metaphorically to be deities even though they are not worshipped in a literal sense.

The more a Sufi inclines to worldly desires and concern for himself or she is distanced from the love of God. Al-Ghazali draws our attention to the practice of *zuhd* (renunciation of the world) to achieve the goal (al-Ghazali 1979, 33). Al-Ghazali is not very different from the early Sufis in employing asceticism, although for him this had a different purpose. The early Sufis renounced the world because of their fear of Hell or hope for Paradise, whereas al-Ghazali advises that renunciation should be for the sake of God's love.

2. The second way of increasing love is to increase one's *ma'rifa* by reflecting upon the creation of God. In his characteristic style, al-Ghazali gives a further example from the animal world: "Consider the creation of a mosquito; think of its power in spite of its smallness in size, and how God created it in the form of an elephant, the largest of animals. It has been given a trunk like that of an elephant. In addition, a mosquito has been supplied with two wings. Everything an elephant has was given to it as well. Although it is a petty creature, there are yet lessons to be learnt by mankind" (For more see al-Ghazali 1978).

Apart from these suggestions, al-Ghazali accepts the legitimacy of the use of music and dancing to stir the emotion of love. In *Kimiya'* he writes: "We come now to the purely religious use of music and dancing: such as that of the Sufis, who by this means stir up in themselves greater love towards God, and, by means of music, often obtain spiritual visions and ecstasies, their heart becoming in this condition as clean as silver in the flame of a furnace, and attaining a degree of purity which could never be attained by any amount of mere outward austerities" (al-Ghazali 1980, 69). This statement clearly indicates that al-Ghazali differs from the early ascetics by regarding asceticism alone to be insufficient in the Sufi path.

From al-Ghazali's above-mentioned advice it seems that according to his understanding, love is something that could be acquired by human endeavour and not simply something bestowed upon man by God. For if that was the case, then he would not indicate ways in which this can be increased. This distinguishes him from the Sufis who believe that attaining love is out of reach of man's personal efforts, and is God's gift to His elected servants.

### ***Signs of the Servant's Love for God***

Al-Ghazali establishes some criteria for determining the validity of those who claim to love God. In his *Kimiya'* he writes: "Many profess to love God; However, a man can easily test himself by watching which way the balance of his affection inclines when the commands of God come into collision with some of his desires. The profession of love to God which is insufficient to prevent him from disobedience to God is a lie" (al-Ghazali 1980, 59). According to him, love should show its signs on the mind, tongue and bodily limbs of the lover. These are presented in the following paragraphs.

One may desire to meet God by, for example, longing for death in order to meet with Him. "A lover does not feel difficulty in going from his house to the house of his Beloved to meet Him. Death is the key to this meeting. On the other hand, if a lover dislikes death because he is not prepared to meet God yet, it is not a sign that he does not love God." Al-Ghazali often relates the story of Abraham: "When the angel of death came to take the soul of Abraham, he said: "Have you ever seen a friend take his friend's life?" God answered him: "Have you ever seen a friend unwilling to see his friend?" (al-Ghazali, 1992, v.4, 348-350). This notion was later developed in the poems of Rumi, who sees death as a day of meeting between a bride and bridegroom.

Another sign of love for God is to prefer God's will over man's base desires; for a true lover's will is in harmony with that of his Beloved. That is he or she refrains from committing sins and persists in good deeds however difficult they are. Answering the hypothetical question whether committing sin is compatible with love or not, al-Ghazali responds by saying that committing sin is incompatible with the perfection of love. However,

when love is weak it is possible that a man might commit sin. Further, al-Ghazali clarifies this dilemma with an example:

A sick person, despite loving his health, still eat things which harm his health. One cannot infer from this that he does not love his health. The real fact is that he cannot overpower his baser desires. Similarly, a lover in the beginning commits sin but when his love reaches perfection, he does not commit sin.

However, these words should be understood cautiously in the Islamic context, since in Islamic thought everybody is prone to commit sins and nobody is considered perfect. Hence, what al-Ghazali means is that the lovers of God do not commit sins deliberately.

Another sign of love is to remember God at all times. A lover's tongue does not become tired of mentioning the name of the Beloved. The lover's love encompasses the Beloved's works and friends, indeed everything which has any connection whatsoever with the Beloved. For example, to love the Prophet because he is God's messenger or to love the Qur'an because it is His word indicates the perfection of love. On this matter, al-Ghazali argues against Rabia's understanding of love. Rabia had maintained that her love for God did not leave any place even for His messenger. In contrast, al-Ghazali says that the lovers of the Beloved must be loved as well. This does not imply a division or distribution of the love that is due to God, since in reality all these loves go back to Him. Man's love for God necessitates the need to love all creatures of God, even sinners, because they are God's creation. He loves sinners for they are God's creatures, though he hates their bad conduct (al-Ghazali 1992, v.4, 348-351). It can be argued that this positive approach prepared the way for al-Ghazali's success and fame.

Another sign of the true lover is the performance of devotional acts in solitude. The night must be most desired because it does not contain distractions and obstacles in his or her prayers to God. If the lover enjoys the company of others and enjoys sleeping, his or her love is considered imperfect (al-Ghazali 1980, 119-20).

Fear also plays a role alongside love in al-Ghazali's paradigm of love. Both love and fear of God are compatible and can exist simultaneously. However, the conception of fear in al-Ghazali's teaching is very different from that of the early Sufis. It is not the fear of the hellfire but the fear of being veiled from God, that is, God's distancing the lover from Himself. Only the lovers of God experience this fear, since the people who have not tasted the closeness of God have never known its pleasures. In short, this fear is the fear of losing the Beloved. Al-Ghazali is in favour of balancing the love of God with fear. He thinks that if the worship of God lacks fear, the worshipper deviates through laziness, and if the worship of God only involves fear and lacks love, the worshipper becomes alienated from God.

Finally, the lover of God must keep his or her love secret. They must not publicise it or make any claim to it. The disclosing of the secret is improper as well as disrespectful to the Beloved. It is only excused when the lover is intoxicated by his love and unintentionally reveals it. However, it is important to note that al-Ghazali reveals the love of God with words alone. Therefore, disclosure which becomes apparent via one's character and actions does not fall under the ambit of this prohibition. This distinction seems to be an allusion to Hallaj and al-Bistami. He excuses them for revealing their love for God as being due their state of intoxication. However, it seems that he indicates a preference for Junayd's teachings regarding this matter, namely that a state of sobriety is preferable to a state of intoxication (al-Ghazali 1992, v.4, 353-55).

### God's Love for Man

In the preceding chapters we began our discussion of each individual with their conceptions of 'God's love for man'. However, since al-Ghazali places this discussion after the discussion of 'man's love for God', we will follow his sequence here.

Al-Ghazali begins his discussion on this subject by examining the Qur'an for evidence of God's love for His servants. He cites one such verse: "He loves them and they also love Him." (Qur'an, 5:54).

In this verse it is clear that God loves humans as humans love Him. However, the nature of God's love is not same as man's love for God, even

though the Qur'an uses the Arabic word "*hubb*" for both kinds of love. Al-Ghazali, as was mentioned above, describes love as an "inclination towards an object which gives pleasure to the nature of man". This inclination is an impulse to satisfy a need, and having a need logically implies the presence of a defect, the urge of an imperfect being towards perfection. Since God is far from all kinds of imperfection, the attribute of "*hubb*" cannot be applied to God. Only in a metaphorical sense it can be said that "God loves His Servants". On the other hand, man's love for God is used in a real sense.

Al-Ghazali elaborates on this point and argues that all instances of the concepts used in the Qur'an to describe God and man are not used with identical shades of meaning. For example, the attribute of God's existence is also used for man, but the existence of man is very different from the existence of God. Whereas our existence is dependent on God, His existence originates from Himself. Therefore, the meaning of existence with regard to the Creator and the created are very different. This rule applies to all other attributes of God such as His knowledge, will, and power. When used for God, they carry different meanings from their normal usage. God possesses these attributes in an absolute and perfect manner, whereas man possesses them imperfectly (al-Ghazali 1992, v.4, 345).

The reason for this variance in meaning is due to the shortcomings of human language. The languages we use today are created according to human capacity, and are deficient in their capacity to describe the Divine. Thus, when they are used for the Creator, they are further restricted and explained through the divine revelation. Therefore God's love for man cannot merely be understood from the everyday usage of the word *hubb* (love). The Qur'anic data defines God's love as God's forgiveness, His purification of the believers' hearts from worldly desires. Hence God's love towards us signifies His removal of the veils between Him and man, so the lovers' hearts may gain a clear vision of Him (Umaruddin 1962, 125).

In addition to this, al-Ghazali holds that when God loves his creatures, He loves them not as separate beings from Himself, for affection toward anything other than Himself would imply an imperfection or need in Him.



It may be said that God's love for man is like His love for His own work (Umaruddin 1962, 125).

Unfortunately, al-Ghazali did not say much in his commentary on God's divine names, *Maqsad al-Asna'*. Commenting on the name *al-Wadud* (the lover), he says only that this divine name means that God desires only goodness for his creation (al-Ghazali 1971, 132). This can be an indication that al-Ghazali's understanding of God has more positive features.

To conclude, al-Ghazali believes that God's love is attained after man has purified his heart. It is only then that God admits him to His close proximity and removes the veil from his heart in order to enable him to observe Him with his heart's eye. However, nearness to God does not mean that any change takes place in God, for God is unchangeable. So whatever changes that take place, take place in man. Man achieves proximity to God, but not in a physical or spatial sense. Proximity to God can only be achieved through the goodness of the man's character. Al-Ghazali explains this proximity to God with the example of a student approaching his master through learning and acquiring his knowledge. The teacher does not descend to the level of student, but the student ascends gradually to the level of the teacher. It is even possible that the student may surpass his teacher in knowledge. In the same way, the servant approaches God in proportion with his striving; however, the difference is that this movement of man towards God never ends, since God is infinite. This means that man cannot be an equal of God (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 347). Therefore, al-Ghazali's teaching of love rejects Hallaj's claim that he and his Beloved are one and the same. Al-Ghazali adheres to the mainstream Islamic view which always stresses the transcendence of God.

### ***The Signs of God's Love for Man***

Just as he presents criteria for establishing whether a man loves God or not, al-Ghazali presents some criteria which may be employed to determine whether man is loved by God or not. In this connection, he enumerates some signs of God's love for His servant with the words of the Prophet, who said: "When God loves a servant, He throws him or her into dangers and difficulties. If the servant loves Him with full love, He purifies the ser-

vant by making him or her sincere". The Prophet goes on to clarify the meaning of "making him or her sincere" as "God does not leave for him any family and property to distract his attention away". So the sign of the love of God for His servant is that He separates him or her from other "and come between the servant and other people and things".

Another sign is that God takes responsibility for his servant's "secret deeds upon Himself, admonishes the servant and makes his servant's conduct beautiful. God creates in the servant hatred toward the world, gives the servant a taste for invocation in solitude, and lifts the veil from the servant's heart" (al-Ghazali 1992, IV, 347).

These are just a few of the many examples of the signs of God's love for man. They all turn around the concept of testing the lover through tests. The lovers of God prevail over all of the difficulties. Furthermore, they possess all the beautiful characteristics outlined in the Qur'an and the hadith.

### **The Influence of Other Sufis on al-Ghazali**

From the foregoing discussion on the various aspects of al-Ghazali's paradigm of love, it is apparent that he was not a pioneer who struck out a totally new path concerning the concept of love. Rather, he built upon and refined the ideas of his predecessors. For instance, al-Ghazali in his large chapter on "love" refers to many Sufis who lived before him. Among these Sufis, Rabia al-Adawiyyah's disinterested love has an important place. Although he quotes some sayings of Sufis about love such as those of Suleiman al-Darani and Ma'ruf al-Karhi, he specifically relates and comments on Rabia's statements on love. His explanation of Rabia's two types of love indicates how much he benefited from her understanding.

The ideas of Harith al-Muhasibi, who composed a book on the issue of love, were also employed by al-Ghazali to the extent that he reproduces almost to the letter much of al-Muhasibi's teaching on the subject. Alongside these sober Sufis, al-Ghazali refers to intoxicated Sufis like Abu Yazid al-Bistami and Hallaj, and defends these Sufis from the criticism of the theologians.

Al-Ghazali had found such teachings on mystical love available to him. It was therefore not a new doctrine. However, what al-Ghazali did was to

develop and systematise these existing ideas in a new and unique fashion. He analyses the types of love and the causes of love, not only employing his Sufi experience, but also by resorting to non-mystical resources such as psychology, philosophy, and so on. There is a strong possibility that al-Ghazali not only benefited from the systematic fashion of the philosophy books, but also derived some of his teachings from them. For example, it is possible that he took the idea from Neo-Platonism that God is Supreme Beauty and love is the natural inclination of the soul towards beauty, whether terrestrial or divine. Although he does not admit it, it is known that he studied philosophy and even mastered it to the extent of refuting the Muslim philosophers.

As well as employing materials from the Sufis, al-Ghazali also refers to Christian sources. He always depicts Jesus as a defender of disinterested love of God. However, this reference to Jesus must not be misconstrued in a Christian sense as "the Son of God", but as a prophet of God in line with the rest of the prophets (al-Ghazali 1992<sup>2</sup>, IV, 323).

Al-Ghazali systematised the concept of love for the first time with clarity, and by his great influence made divine love acceptable to the public and scholars alike. This development was aided by the clarity of al-Ghazali's works, which were accessible not only to scholars but also to the lay people. In this regard, his ideas are in stark contrast to the complex systems of Hallaj or Ibn Arabi.

Al-Ghazali discusses and analyses the concept of love in depth and with great breadth, that is, from the religious, mystical, philosophical and psychological perspectives. This is the most prominent feature of al-Ghazali's thought. Before and even after al-Ghazali, most Sufis discussed the concept of love from only mystical or religious perspectives. Hence, they were never as comprehensive as al-Ghazali.

Al-Ghazali's teaching of love utilises the legacy of the earlier Sufis who had contributed to the concept of love. This makes him into a sound transmitter of the views of his predecessors on love. He enabled others who came after him to build on the foundations he had laid, especially his method of using psychological knowledge.

Al-Ghazali's study of love is predominated by his well-reasoned psychological and philosophical analysis of the subject. The emotional elements and the *shatahat* (excessive claims) of Hallaj or Ibn al-Farid will not be found in his paradigm of love. Hence, the mainstream theologians and scholars found little to dispute or reject in his understanding of Sufi love in general and his understanding of love in particular.

His teaching on love hovers between the sober and intoxicated Sufis. However, in general terms he inclines towards Junayd's sober way on the matter. He does so without severely criticising the intoxicated Sufis. He finds mitigating circumstances for the conduct of those intoxicated Sufis like Hallaj and al-Bistami, saying that their words of *shath* are not condemned because they were uttered in a state of ecstasy, and therefore they were not accountable.

As a result of this attitude, al-Ghazali brings Sufi love into the realm of orthodox Islam. In his paradigm of love, there is no *mad love* and its eventual aberrations as in Hallaj (Chodkiewicz 1993, 45). Al-Ghazali believes that sensual love is an essential part of human development, and for this reason he imports the explanations of the sensual love into the realms of divine love.

Al-Ghazali's love is a sort of intellectual love, as opposed to Ibn Arabi, who said: "I call God to witness that if we confined ourselves to the rational arguments of philosophy, no creature would ever have experienced the love of God." In spite of al-Ghazali's intellectual focus, however, al-Ghazali's paradigm of love also contained emotional elements.



## Ibn Arabi's Paradigm of Love

It has generally been accepted throughout the history of Sufism that Ibn Arabi was one of the most influential, but controversial Sufis. For most of the Sufis after the 13th century A.D., his writings constituted the apex of doctrinal Sufism. In particular, through his extensive works on Sufism many loose ideas which were cherished by Sufis were transformed into well-defined doctrines. Dr. Austin, a translator of Ibn Arabi's works states in this regard:

Ibn Arabi gave expression to teachings and insights of the generations of Sufis who preceded him, recording for the first time, systematically and in detail, the vast fund of Sufi experience and oral tradition, by drawing on a treasury of technical terms and symbols greatly enriched by centuries of intercourse between the Muslim and Neo-Hellenistic worlds... all who came after him received it through the filter of his synthetic expression (Ibn Arabi 1988, 48).

His thoughts have attracted the attention of many scholars and Sufis throughout history. Due to his immense contribution to Sufi thought, he is referred to as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the greatest master), a title that has not been given to anyone else after him. What Dr. Austin stated about Ibn Arabi's position within Sufi doctrine is also true concerning the Sufi concept of love. Ibn Arabi composed a very long chapter on the nature and different

kinds of love. He transposed love as the central focus of his philosophy. Therefore, no study of the concept of love would be complete without referring to his works.

### His Life

Muhammad Ibn 'Ali Ibn Arabi was born in Murcia in southern Spain in 1165 A.D. (560 AH). He came from an ancient Arab family, Banu Tayy, who had migrated to the Iberian peninsula. His father Ali Ibn Arabi was a man of standing and influence, and was a friend of the renowned philosopher Ibn Rushd (d.1198), who was referred to in Christian Europe as Averroes.

Ibn Arabi lived in the far west of the Muslim world of his time. He grew up in an atmosphere steeped in the development of the most important scientific, religious, and philosophical ideas of his day. The Iberian Peninsula was invaded by the Moors in 711 A.D. and the southern half of Spain had been Arabised under Islamic rule. Arabic became the common language of all educated people. In al-Andalus, the three major traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam flourished side by side. The result of this was an immensely rich and culturally developed world, the evidence of which can still be seen today in buildings like the Alhambra in Granada and the Great Mosque at Cordoba. This was a world where the great classics of Greek literature, especially Aristotle and Plato, were translated (first into Arabic and then into Latin) and studied alongside the spiritual teachings of the three Abrahamic religions.

After the occupation of Murcia by the Almohads, Ibn Arabi's family moved to Seville, which became his home for nearly thirty years; although he spent some ten years in various towns of Spain and North Africa. Through his family connections, Ibn Arabi seems to have met several of the celebrated scholars and philosophers of his time. He writes of his meeting with the chief judge of Seville, the celebrated jurist and philosopher Ibn Rushd.

As several comprehensive works have been written regarding Ibn Arabi's biography, it is not necessary to dwell upon these issues in the present study. A brief snapshot of the important milestones in Ibn Arabi's life will suffice for our purposes. One factor overshadowing the life of Ibn Arabi

was his passion for travel. In this connection, a parallel can be drawn to another great Sufi traveller, Hallaj. Both of them travelled extensively in the direction of their respective "East". However, there is one important difference between them: Hallaj always returned to his hometown, whereas Ibn Arabi left his homeland at the age of 35 never to return.

Ibn Arabi made his way via Cairo and Jerusalem to Mecca where he performed his first pilgrimage in 1202 A.D. There he spent some twelve years in the company of the most influential and learned families in the city studying and writing. It was here that he was inspired to compose his famous collection of poems, *Tarjuman al-'Ashwaq* (The Interpreter of Desires) - love poems that give astonishing insight into the moods and conditions of the spiritual path.

### ***His Works***

Among many other characteristics, Ibn Arabi is also distinguished from other Sufis by the large volume of work he produced. He is described by Brockelmann as a writer of "colossal fecundity" (Affifi 1964, 12). Ibn Arabi is one of the most prolific authors of Sufism both quantitatively and qualitatively. He wrote over 400 works including the *Fusus al-Hikam*, an exposition of the inner meaning of the wisdom of the prophets (Farrukh 1985, V, 720).

However, his seminal work is assuredly *al-Futuh al-Makkiyya*, a vast encyclopaedia of spiritual knowledge. In addition to the prose works, he wrote poetry as well. In his *Diwan* and *Tarjuman al-'Ashwaq*, he wrote some of the finest poetry in the Arabic language. Many people were scandalised by the apparently erotic and sensuous imagery in these poems, and he was compelled to write a commentary on them in his own defence. It is fortunate for us that he did so, since his comments do much to illuminate the extraordinary depth of meaning that he brings to bear on poetic images.

Whilst it can be accepted that Ibn Arabi's views were based upon his own experiences, it should be borne in mind that the experiences were deeply rooted in the textual sources of Islam. This is evidenced by the abundant use of the Qur'anic verses and Hadith traditions, which are generously distributed in the works of Ibn Arabi.



His full dependence on the Qur'an and Hadith gives Ibn Arabi a different quality from the philosophers of Islam. The philosophers' main sources of inspiration were their intellect and the principles of Greek philosophy. In contrast, Ibn Arabi gave little consideration to the intellect as an epistemological tool. He did not regard the intellect as being capable of providing answers to spiritual and mystical problems. However, this does not mean that the intellect played no part in his system of belief. In fact, it can be argued that the intellect played a crucial role in that it allowed Ibn Arabi to communicate his visions in the most refined language of his time. Ibn Arabi's approach to divine love is not purely emotional. His approach is more intellectual in comparison with Rabia or Hallaj (Burckhardt 1990, 31).

### ***His Masters and Students***

Ibn Arabi was eight years old at the time his family moved to Seville, where he received his formal education. He studied with contemporary scholars subjects which constituted the normal curriculum of Muslim students: Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, law, and Arabic grammar. He seems to have benefited from the best of the teachers.<sup>9</sup> His knowledge and frequent references to Qur'anic verses, the analysis of vocabulary with linguistic methods and his deep knowledge of hadith, all show that he had the rigorous formal education of his time. Even a quick glance at his works proves that Ibn Arabi had a very good education.

It is also important to note that among the teachers during his early education were Sufi scholars as well. However, his real contact with Sufism came when he was older. According to his own account, he was initiated into the Sufi path in 1184, when he was twenty years of age. The early stage of his life prior to his initiation was called by him a time of *Jahiliyya* (ignorance), this was the period in which the young Ibn Arabi remained divided between the attraction of this world and the hereafter. In this way, we are reminded of the work of another great Sufi: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's autobiography, *al-Munqidh*. Ibn Arabi, like al-Ghazali, describes this time of *Jahiliyya* in the beginning of his *Ruh al-Quds*.<sup>10</sup>

Another important aspect of his mystical training is what is called "*Uwaysi*", since in many places he states that his path to conversion was initiated through visions. *Uwaysi* is the mystic who has attained illumination outside the regular mystical path, with the mediation of a dead master, mostly through visions. Ibn Arabi claims that in his vision many important personalities became his masters such as the Prophet  $\text{ﷺ}$  and Muhammad. For example, he relates in the *al Futuhat* that he was initiated at the hands of Jesus. He says: "He (Jesus) prayed for me and commanded me to practise renunciation and self-denial" (Ibn Arabi, 1972, II, 19). All these show that Ibn Arabi's mystical training has two sides which are always apparent in his writings. In many places he relates a truth that he came to realise through a vision.

As to his terrestrial masters, Ibn Arabi benefited from many of them from an early age. It is clear that much of his early youth was spent in the company of the Sufis of his time. For example, among some of the masters whom he names in his books are Abu al-'Abbas al-'Uryabi, Abu Ya'qub al-Kumi, Salih al-Adawi, and Abu Hajjaj Yusuf al-Shubarbuli, among many others (Ibn Arabi 1988, 69). In addition to these masters, it is interesting that he also refers to Jesus as his master. His books *Ruh al-Quds* and *al Durrat al Fakhira* provides a more detailed account of the Sufi masters he met.

It must also be added that Ibn Arabi's understanding of what a master is, is not quite the same as that which we normally understand in Sufism. It might be argued that for him the master is not a guide to the divine being. He seems to have rather found that Reality by himself. The masters only served Ibn Arabi by explaining whatever visions he received. In this light, it is possible that Ibn Arabi did not have just one master, as was the custom of later ages, but rather he benefited from all the masters he could come into contact with. In this sense he reminds us of Hallaj.

One final point concerning Ibn Arabi's mystical teachers is that they were not restricted to men. Many female Sufis also played an important role in his upbringing. In particular, Ibn Arabi mentions Fatima b. al-Muthanna (Ibn Arabi, 1988, 143) and Shams Umm al-Fuqara'. This factor is of immense significance in the formation of Ibn Arabi's mystical

thought. Ibn Arabi, unlike his predecessors, views women in a very positive light. Furthermore, this explains the significant use of feminine symbolism in his works.

### **His Understanding of Love**

In his *Futuhat*, Ibn Arabi gives a detailed, involved and protracted exposition of love. He begins his discussion by looking at the question of whether love may be subject to definition. The answer in his view is that the essence of love is indescribable; it is a phenomenon that can only be understood through experience, and what Sufis refer to as *dhawq* (tasting). The corollary of such a view is that Ibn Arabi takes a somewhat sceptical attitude towards those who put their love experiences into words. According to him, those who claim to describe love are in reality ignorant of the true nature of love. In effect it is not love that they are describing, but rather the mere appearance or a reflection of love.

The conclusion above comes as a direct result of Ibn Arabi's epistemological approach. Ibn Arabi's epistemological framework is characterised by a dual classification. He divides the objects of perception into two parts: the definable and the indefinable. The former, as the name suggests, are susceptible to language and can be imparted to others without any loss of meaning. The opposite is true with regard to the latter, in that they transcend forms of language and cannot be translated into such terms. They are in fact in a class of their own. In other words, they can be described as *su-i generis* (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 325).

Before going further, it is crucial to point out that Ibn Arabi's understanding of love is intimately contingent upon his general philosophical outlook, which is based firmly on the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being). Indeed, it could be said that his philosophy of love is the natural conclusion of his teaching of *wahdat al-wujud*. In order to fully grasp Ibn Arabi's approach to love, it is first necessary to define this concept in some detail.

### ***Wahdat al-Wujud***

*Wahdat al-wujud* is the concept at the heart of Ibn Arabi's cosmological outlook. It is too an immense subject to examine in great detail in the

limited space of this research. However, some insight is needed in order to grasp the concept of love in Ibn Arabi's system. In this regard, a limited amount of this discussion will focus on the intricacies of *wahdat al-wujud* insofar as this furthers our understanding of love.

This concept created an immense dispute among scholars and lay people alike. As a result, many scholars charged Ibn Arabi with heresy. The phrase *wahdat al-wujud* literally means "unity of being", and is an approach to the understanding of the relationship between God and the creation. To place the discussion in context, it is useful to say a few words on the mainstream Islamic understanding of creation and to examine the extent to which Ibn Arabi differed from this. The mainstream position was predicated upon the premise that God created the universe out of nothing, that is, *ex nihilo*. It follows from this premise that there is a duality between God and man, i.e. they are separate entities. It is not possible for any intermingling to occur between them. They remain in their respective domains of existence. Furthermore, the creation has an objective existence, i.e. it exists *per se*, and is real as opposed to being imaginary. In Ibn Arabi's view, however, creation does not really exist of itself. It can be compared to the rays of the sun, wherein the real existence belongs to the sun and the rays do not possess any existence *per se*. Ibn Arabi is quite unique when compared to his Sufi predecessors such as Hallaj and Abu Yazid Bistami, who also held similar views to *wahdat al-wujud*. Ibn Arabi distinguishes himself from them by being the first to systematise their disjointed utterances.

Expounding his concept further, Ibn Arabi suggests that there is only one Being, and all existence is nothing but the manifestation or outward radiance of that one Being. Hence, everything other than the one Being, that is the whole cosmos in all its spatial and temporal extension, is non-existent *per se*. However, it may be considered to exist through the self-existent Being (Chittick 1989, 79).

As far as the concept of love is concerned, the natural consequence of this teaching is that it is not possible to love something exclusive of God. Loving any created object automatically entails loving God, since He is hid-

den in all the objects manifested in the universe. There is only one Being in reality; and there is only one real Beloved, that is, God. From this, Ibn Arabi's view of *wahdat al-wujud* can be more accurately described as *wahdat al-hubb* (unity of love). Therefore whatever it is we love, we love God within it. In the words of Ibn Arabi, these objects of love are only veils between man and God: "In reality everybody only loves the Creator, but God is veiled by Zainab, Suad, Hind, money or position" (Hifni 1992, 290).

It may be understood from this remark that all mankind loves God and are therefore all Gnostics. However, Ibn Arabi does not imply this. According to him, the important thing is that man needs to be consciously aware of the relationship between the Creator and the creation. It is by recognising this that men are distinguished from each other as far as divine love is concerned. Ibn Arabi's position on this issue makes him a unique contributor to the paradigms of divine love. However, this love must be brought to the level of consciousness. In other words, man must realise that, in essence, all his love is directed to God even though on the surface it appears to be love for a non-divine object.

This paradigm of love also has another corollary in that it shapes the choice of language employed by Ibn Arabi, as is apparent in the quotation contained in the previous paragraph. As divine love is interconnected with creation, and it is evident there exists among mankind a body of language used to describe love towards his fellow creatures, it raises the issue of whether the language of profane love can be utilised to explain the experiences of divine love. Ibn Arabi resolved this conflict by accepting that it can. In Ibn Arabi's writings, the language of divine love is mixed with the language of profane love, since the profane objects of love are in reality divine.

This aspect of Ibn Arabi's writing necessitates that those who approach it must do so cautiously, for it can easily lead to misinformed conclusions derived from the face value of the terminology employed by Ibn Arabi. Many people were scandalised by his writing's apparently erotic and sensuous imagery, and he was compelled to write a commentary on them in his own defence (Ibn Arabi, 1986, 4-5). Ibn Arabi's use of profa-

ne language, such as in his the praise of feminine beauty, has always alluded to divine realities. One can then answer Nicholson's question regarding the *Tarjuman al 'Ashuq*: "Is this a love poem disguised as a mystical ode, or a mystical ode expressed in the language of human love?" (Ibn Arabi 1978, 7). It is both, since in Ibn Arabi's paradigm of love all kinds of love are divine.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to make a comparison of Ibn Arabi with Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in order to illuminate Ibn Arabi's approach. One can detect a clear contrast between both these personalities. Al-Ghazali strove to persuade people that God is the only being which is deserving of love, by arguing that it is God alone who fulfils all the causes of love in perfection. Ibn Arabi's concerns were different. To him, all the lovers already love God in different manifestations, and they have no power to exclude God from their love. However, the people are not aware of this love, hence the duty is to awaken them and make them conscious of God's presence everywhere and in everything. Only this conscious love makes the lover see God in his or her beloved in Zaynab or Fatima or Laila.

To give another example, God states in the Qur'an "We are closer to man than his jugular vein" (Qur'an, 50:16). However, most people are not aware of this proximity and as a result do not benefit from it. Only those who feel this affinity attain a higher status in the mystical path. In contrast, those who are heedless of this closeness do not benefit from divine love simply because they are not realising or internalising their profane love.

As well as dwelling on the choice of language, Ibn Arabi also deals with the domain of love within the human being. He deals with the question as to whether this originates as a result of intellectual activity or from the depths of the heart, in short, whether it is the heart or the mind that generates and accommodates love. According to Ibn Arabi, love relates to the heart, that is, the spiritual part of man, and not to the intellectual faculties. Because reason has no power to generate love, it is a product of the heart only. The rational arguments of philosophy, though they enable us to know the divine essence, do so in a negative way; that is, God is not like one thing or another. Due to the negative nature of rational thought, no creature will

ever have experienced the love of God through rational arguments (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 326).

This problem relates to the epistemological outlook of Ibn Arabi, in which reason plays a secondary and limited role. In fact, reason plays no part at all in the generation of love. Furthermore, reason is powerless in the face of love, for love curtails the functioning of reason. If a lover can still manage to use his or her reason after falling in love, then that love is not genuine. This conflict between reason and love will be dealt with in the following pages.

### *Love as the Purpose of Creation*

The concept of the purpose behind creation has engaged the minds of philosophers and theologians for centuries. This question has been dealt with in different ways, depending on the sources employed by the disputants in this debate. As a universal religion, the holy book of Islam did not remain aloof from providing an answer to this question. From the Islamic point of view, God created mankind in order to worship Him. The focus is on worship, around which everything else revolves (Qur'an, 51:56). As far as the purpose of creation is concerned, this seems to be the only answer that the Qur'an provides. However, Ibn Arabi, by his analysis of the meaning of worship, arrives at a more refined interpretation which is embedded in his philosophy of love. According to this interpretation, he proposes that the motive behind God's creation of the universe and mankind is His initial love. It is solely His love that triggered the process of the creation. To support this position, he relies on two main sources as evidence.

Firstly, Ibn Arabi draws support from the following Qur'anic verse: "I have only created mankind and the jinn to worship me." (51:56). On the face of it, there appears to be no direct relation between this verse and the concept of love. However, for Ibn Arabi this verse has a more profound meaning. By analysing the word "worship" he arrives at an understanding which is in harmony with his ontological outlook. He draws a direct connection between worship and love. For him the word worship means "to love in the extreme".

Consequently, the verse means: "I have created man and jinn so that they should love me in the extreme." Ibn Arabi's interpretation of this verse can be contrasted with the opinion of the mainstream exegetes, who following the interpretation of the Prophet's companion Ibn Abbas, interpreted "to worship Me" to mean "to know Me" (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 318).

The second major strand by which Ibn Arabi supports his *al-Futuhat* is independent on the hadith narrations. Throughout his books there is a constant reference to a hadith widely quoted among Sufis: "I was a hidden treasure and wanted to be known."<sup>11</sup> In his *al-Futuhat*, Ibn Arabi explains this hadith in the following way: "God described Himself by saying that He loved to be known by the possible things, since He was not known." We can infer two possible conclusions from this: firstly, that God is constantly being known and praised by His creation; and secondly, God's love is equal to His act of creation. Where there is the act of creation, it is inevitable that the act of God's love will also be present. They are simultaneous and interdependent. Therefore, Ibn Arabi concludes that everything in the Universe is either a lover or a beloved.

One possible consequence that can be inferred from the preceding discussion is that if one considers that the manifestation of creation began through love, then it follows that the channel of love provides the most suitable way of returning to God. The purpose of creation merely provides the context of Ibn Arabi's philosophy of love. What needs to be looked at is the nature of this love. In the section that follows, an attempt will be made to address this issue.

A close resemblance can be made between Ibn Arabi and Hallaj, who also claims that the ultimate cause behind creation is love. It can be said that Ibn Arabi develops this basic idea of Hallaj into a universal principle. By extending the scope of this principle to encompass the actions of all creation, he makes love the absolute basis, by which all phenomena are explicable. In his own words: "Every movement, every action in the universe is only directed by love." He summarises all of his philosophy in the magnificent verse: "We came from love, we are created in love" (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 318).



Ibn Arabi's teachings have two facets: *tashbih* (immanence) and *tanzih* (transcendence). He always mentions these two facets of the Divinity side by side. Concerning the transcendental side of love, he holds that although God created us out of love, we cannot attribute a beginning or a purpose to God's love for us. As we were always in his divine knowledge, we have always been within the realm of His love, even prior to our existence. As there is no beginning to His existence, there is no starting point at which His love for us began, and hence God's love is eternal. We cannot attribute changes to God. Thus it seems that Ibn Arabi balances his immanental words mentioned above by these transcendental words.

### God's Love for Man

In the beginning of chapter 178 of *al-Futuhāt*, which is dedicated to love, Ibn Arabi states that love is a characteristic which is attributed to both God and man.<sup>12</sup> However the reality of this mutual love is unknown to us. Ibn Arabi calls God's love for man *al-Hubb al-Ilahi* (divine love). Ibn Arabi, like many other classical writers and Sufis such as al-Ghazali and al-Qushayri, attempts to prove the existence of a mutual love firstly by referring to the Qur'anic verses and then to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. The verses he refers to are 3:31, 5:54, and many others, which stress the existence of a mutual love between God and man. In addition to these verses, he also lists another group of verses that inform us of the characteristics which attracts God's love towards His slaves. This style is very similar to the Qur'anic paradigm of love as far as methodology is concerned.

Having looked at the general outlook of his philosophy of love, it would be useful to determine the role of love in the process of creation in Ibn Arabi's ontological framework. Ibn Arabi's understanding of love is the direct result of his understanding of God. These are both inextricably linked, and for him God is in some respects a God of love, whose most fundamental activity is underpinned by love. The essence of his God is love and not wrath. This approach can be contrasted with that of the early Sufis, who thought of God mostly as wrathful and vengeful. The understanding of God held by the early Sufis was "a God of punishment who disliked the world so

much that He even did not give a second glance to the world." As a result, the concept of fear was the dominant emotion towards God. For example, some of these Sufis went so far as to wish that they had not been created, so as not to suffer the tribulations of Judgement Day. Gradually, the pessimists' understanding of God and the world was replaced by a more optimistic view, and with Ibn Arabi's unique contribution love became the prime reason behind creation, not to mention worship.

Another interesting facet of God's love for man is its analogical nature with love between humans, which is characterised by reciprocity. If the lover is to submit himself to his Beloved, then in the same way the Beloved must submit Himself to the lover. Ibn Arabi does not refrain from charging God with fulfilling His responsibilities as a lover. According to him, the act of creation is God's submission to His beloved. In other words, the creation constantly asks God, with the "tongue of its state" to do this or that, and God constantly creates these things. This is the necessity of God's name *al-Wadud* (al-Ghurab 1983, 14). Therefore, because God is *al-Wadud* (the lover) this makes God satisfy the needs of His beloved. This does not mean that God is being coerced to obey the commands of another being. However, in reality He only submitted to Himself since the *possible thing* is a means of divine seeking (Chittick 1989, 82).

Having established that God indeed does love man, the question now arises as to how this love manifests itself. In answer to this, Ibn Arabi divides God's love for man into two branches: the first is God's love for man for His own sake, and the second is God's love for man for man's sake.

### ***God's Love of Man for God's Sake***

Ibn Arabi distinguishes three kinds of love. The first kind is called divine love, and God's love for man falls within this group. Interestingly, man's love for God is also placed within this category. This is important, since Ibn Arabi believes that this mutual love between God and man is in reality a unilateral love. *Al-Hubb al-Ilahi* is on the one hand the love of the Creator for the created being in which He manifests Himself, and on the other hand the love of the created for his or her Creator. This is nothing ot-

her than the desire of the revealed God within the creature yearning to return to Himself (Corbin 1969, 149). Ibn Arabi bases God's love for man on the Prophetic tradition: "I loved to be known therefore I created the creation," and the Qur'anic verse: "I have only created mankind and the Jinn that they should worship Me" (Qur'an, 51:56). Ibn Arabi holds that God created the world in His image as a mirror to see His own greatness and beauty. Therefore, for Ibn Arabi the Qur'anic verse which reads "..He loves you." means "He loves Himself" (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 326-27).

This theory is exemplified by an analogy contained in the *Fusus*, wherein Ibn Arabi makes an interesting comparison and analysis between man's attraction to women and God's attraction to man. Ibn Arabi obtains inspiration from a hadith in which the Prophet remarks that there are "three things made beloved to me in this world: women, perfume, and prayer in which I find solace." (Nasai, *Sunan, Ishrat al-Nisa'*, n.3878). This hadith makes clear that women are beloved of the Prophet. However, the question that needs to be asked is why this is the case. The Prophet would not have mentioned this in the above-quoted hadith unless it had some spiritual significance. Ibn Arabi's explanation revolves around the idea that man loves woman because woman is a part of man. For is it not true according to a hadith of the Prophet that she is created from the left rib of Adam? Transposing this analogy to God, Ibn Arabi believes that God loves man because man is a part of Him. Ibn Arabi bases his evidence on the verse in which God says: "We breathed into him (man) of My spirit" (Qur'an 15:29). In summary, the whole longs for its part as the part longs for the whole.

Ibn Arabi further illuminates the analogy drawn in the last paragraph. He draws a close connection between God's love for man from a different perspective: God loves man because in him He contemplates His own beauty and perfection, since He created man in His own form. This is similar to the reason why man loves woman. Through her, he produces his offspring which is in man's own form.

The culmination of this is that God describes Himself as having a deep longing for contact with man. As an illustration, He says in answer to a supplication by David: "O David, I long for them even more than they long

for me". Ibn Arabi sheds light on this in the following manner: "Since God has explained that He breathed into man of His spirit, He is yearning in reality for Himself." (Ibn Arabi, 1980, 272-273). Dawud al-Qaysari, a prominent interpreter of Ibn Arabi's works, explains the reason why God longs for man more than man longs for Him. He writes that the intensity of longing depends on the knowledge of *mushtaq* (the one who is yearning for). Since God is the source of all knowledge, His knowledge about the beloved (man) is more perfect (al-Qaysari 1996, II, 450). Therefore, God's love is stronger for those who long for Him.

This kind of love is for the first time defined by Ibn Arabi. However, traces of it can be found in the works of al-Ghazali, who vaguely pointed to this. A contrast can thus be made: al-Ghazali thought of creation as God's handiwork, whereas Ibn Arabi considers creation as God's manifestation.

Secondly, God loves mankind because they worship and praise Him. Many verses of the Qur'an declare that everything in the universe, in the seven heavens and the seven Earths worship and praise God constantly. All have their own praise for God, so much so that no existent being is excluded from this system of "natural worship" of God (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 328). In short, God loves us primarily for two reasons: firstly as his handiwork; and secondly due to the fact that mankind constantly praise and glorify His greatness. In this love, man's role is as a kind of mirror reflecting God's beauty, and secondly to worship and praise Him. In his terminology, this kind of love is called "natural love", the love which emphasises the interests of the Lover, that is, God.

It must not, however, be thought that these are the only reasons why God loves man. The above-mentioned reasons seem to be "God centred", in that God is taken as the starting point. However, there are other more altruistic reasons: God also loves man for man's own good as well. This love can be classified within the category of spiritual love. In other words, God also loves man spiritually by taking into consideration the interests of man.

### ***God's Love for Man for Man's Sake***

According to Ibn Arabi, God also loves man for man's own sake. The proof of this love is that even though mankind serves Him, it could be said

that in a sense God too “serves” man. Ibn Arabi illustrates this by enumerating a long list of favours which God bestows upon us. These favours are further classified into two kinds: those that concern this world and those that concern the next world. With regard to the former, whatever we have in this world is God’s favour to us, for example, wealth, health, sustenance, and most importantly our lives (having been created by God). Concerning the favours that are concerned with the hereafter, these manifest themselves in many different ways: He sends prophets, gives guidance, and keeps supplying whatever we need both in this world and the next. Despite the fact that only a few people give thanks or show any gratitude in return for these favours, God nevertheless continues to shower these blessings on mankind. This is God’s love for man for man’s own sake, because He wants good for man by guiding him to the truth. Furthermore, out of His love for man He has shown the proofs of His existence to him. The extent of this love is such that God has given us all manner of bounties, even though we could never return a sufficient amount of gratitude to God however hard we try (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 328).

From another perspective, this kind of love could be seen to be synonymous with God’s mercy for man. In the preceding chapter it was shown how God loves man for the praise that he gives to Him. However, with the second kind of love God loves man for his intrinsic value: man is worthy of being loved because of the (apparent) similarity he has with God. This is irrespective of the goodness or badness of man’s actions. God loves man *qua* a man. In this respect, Ibn Arabi does not see man as being merely another creature like the rest of the creation. He attributes to man a kind of “added value”, making him valuable in God’s eyes without a secondary motive. In fact, in his system man’s place with respect to God can be compared to that of the eye of a man. Man is the pupil of God’s eye (Uludag 1995, 165).

If God’s love is synonymous with His mercy, this leaves the phenomenon of God’s wrath unexplained. For Ibn Arabi, God, out of his love for man, manifests Himself mainly through His mercy; His wrath is minimal indeed. Ibn Arabi utilises the following verse in order to support this contention: “God’s mercy encompasses all things.” (Qur’an, 7:156). Ibn Arabi

goes so far as to suggest that even God's wrath can be described in terms of His mercy. This unique outlook led the Sheikh, for the first time among the Sufis, to extend God's love even to the people who are punished eternally in Hell. These inhabitants who are doomed to eternal suffering in Hell are shown mercy within it. For after a while they become accustomed to the fire and torture and even enjoy it. This is because it is not better for them than the punishment of their Lord. Ibn Arabi's God, in the light of His mercy, to mete out eternal punishment (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 329). It must be noted that Ibn Arabi does not reject the idea that some people will stay in Hell for eternity; what he does is to change the nature of Hell so that it becomes a more comfortable place for sinners. The concept that even the people of eternal punishment will be shown mercy in Hell is peculiar to Ibn Arabi, and is a very controversial theme among both Sufis and mainstream scholars.

From Ibn Arabi's terminology, it thus appears that this kind of love is God's spiritual love for man, a love that considers the well-being of the beloved, namely, the well-being of man. With this dual expression of God's love towards man, Ibn Arabi seems to combine the thought of the two groups of exegetes mentioned earlier in this study. His explanation of God's love for man for man's sake corresponds to the first group of exegetes such as al-Zamakhshari and al-Qasimi, who interpreted love as "mercy". On the other hand, his first branch that is God's love for man for His sake corresponds to the second group of exegetes such as al-Razi and al-Qushayri. With this division, Ibn Arabi has done what they clearly could not do. By joining both groups he created a unique new philosophy of God's love for man.

### **Man's Love for God**

Ibn Arabi also refers to man's love for God as "divine love". So the mutual relationship of love originating both from man and God are called divine love. He gives these names, possibly because these two loves are mentioned together in the verse: "He loves them, and they love Him" (Ibn Arabi 1988, XII, 564). In the present section, Ibn Arabi uses exactly the same paradigm that he used for God's love. However, he does this by reversing

the paradigm. The two main reasons outlined in the preceding section are reversed. Firstly, it was stated that God loves man because he is a part of God's spirit, namely, God loves man as the whole loves its part. The corollary of this is that the same must be true for the part. The whole longs for the part in the same way the part must also love the whole. The relationship of "wholeness" with "partness" depends on the Qur'anic verse which states: "I (God) have breathed into him (man)." (Qur'an, 38:72; 15:29).

The second element, which was also reversed and which confirms man's love for God is the oft-mentioned hadith: "God created Adam in His own form." (Bukhari, *Isti'zan*, n.5759) For Ibn Arabi, this means that man has similar attributes to God. If God has the attribute of love, then man necessarily needs to have this attribute as well, since he is created in God's image. As God's love for us comes first, it follows that we also have the ability to love. In this sense, our love for Him is like the reflection of the divine attributes (Ibn Arabi 1981, VII, 152).

Ibn Arabi draws some important conclusions as to the full realisation of love, in other words, the circumstances in which man can activate and realise his capacity to love to its fullest possible extent. Ibn Arabi states that love can only be fully realised if man directs his love towards God or towards another human being. In the former, as a result of the afore-mentioned resemblance, love engulfs the lover absolutely, whereas other loves such as love of wealth and position only partly engage man's potential and do not engulf man's full potential of love. Hence he only loves created things with a part of his self. The position of other human beings is different, as man can love another human being with his whole self. This is possible due to the fact that the other person is also created in God's form. It can be inferred from Ibn Arabi's words that a human being and God can equally be the objects of man's love.

To illuminate the relationship further, Ibn Arabi gives the example of woman and man's love for each other. Ibn Arabi claims that the love between man and woman, especially in sexual intercourse, is the highest point of man's love, and the most similar to divine love. This similarity is not from the perspective of pleasure, but is from the perspective of the annih-

lation of the two personalities in each other. However, man and woman and all their limbs are annihilated, and completely lost in each other as a result of the pleasure derived from the act of sexual intercourse. This impinges upon the love that is due to God, and therefore, the divine law prescribes a major ablution to be performed following the act. In Ibn Arabi's interpretation, this is a form of punishment. This is because Ibn Arabi (1992) is a jealous God who does not like man to enjoy and give his full attention to another human being (al-Qaysari 1996, II, 464-469). Therefore, complete annihilation in love is only due to God.

Ibn Arabi's view also has a bearing on the way that profane love can be described. For with these words he brings a new dimension to the concept of profane love, namely, that the love between man and woman is a direct consequence of their divine forms. This idea is in stark contrast to the general view that love between men and women is a result of a contemplation of beauty in the other. In Ibn Arabi's view, the essential basis of this love is because men and women are created in the divine form, and thus beauty is relegated to a secondary role. Moreover, Ibn Arabi believes that man's love is fully satisfied only when the object of love is God. On the other hand, if the object of love is another human being this love will not attain its complete fulfilment. The reason is that the similitude between God and man is stronger than between man and another human being (Ibn Arabi 1992, XIV, 64). Ibn Arabi implies in a sense that if we think in human terms, God is the original form, whereas man is a copy of this form. It is therefore more probable that the copies will more closely resemble the original than other copies.

Affifi comments that Ibn Arabi's mystical system is the full realisation of the union of the lover and the Beloved. If we look deeply into the nature of worship, we find that love constitutes its very basis. According to Ibn Arabi, the meaning of our worship is to love God in the extreme. No object is worshipped unless it is invested with some sort of love. It therefore seems that for Ibn Arabi the worshipped (*al-Ma'bud*) is a synonym of the Beloved (*al-Mahbub*). This is summed up in the following verse: "I swear by the reality of love that Love is the cause of all love. Were it not for love (residing) in the heart, Love (God) would not be worshipped" (Affifi 1964, 171). The first and fo-



remost motive behind worship is love, and not fear or any other feeling. Hence God, as an object of worship, resides in the heart as the supreme object of love. For Ibn Arabi, love is not only a decisive factor behind the divine will but also the most important motive behind human actions. Ibn Arabi believes that all actions and activities at any movement in the universe, including the actions of man, is without exception fuelled by love for perfection. Therefore, there is no motive behind any action but love. Providing an example from the life of the Prophet Moses, he says: "Moses escaped from Egypt when he killed the Copt not because he feared retribution but because of his love of salvation" (Ibn Arabi 1980b, I, 204). Ibn Arabi's contribution is very important, since he relates all the actions of man, however seemingly negative, to love. As love is the main motive behind the actions of man it is also the main factor in the relationship between God and man.

In our relationship with God, the dominant factor is love. The superiority of love over fear is clear. Furthermore, the concept of love is much more comprehensive in its scope than the concept of fear. We can attribute the concept of love to both God and man, whereas fear cannot be ascribed to God but to man only. In addition, love explains both the existence of creation as well as the return of creation to its original source. None of these qualities exist in a relationship of fear between the two. Therefore, Ibn Arabi calls his religion the religion of love:

I follow the religion of love whichever way its camels take,  
For this is my religion and my faith. (Ibn Arabi 1978, 67).

Commenting on this verse, Ibn Arabi states: "No religion is more sublime than a religion based on love and longing for Him whom I worship and in whom I have faith" (Ibn Arabi 1978, 69). In this way, he indicates in very strong terms that he prefers love as a relationship between man and God over other concepts. He even places a mystical station in his system called "the station of abandoning fear", and in Chapter 101 of *al-Futuhat* he discusses the abandonment of fear. In other words, Ibn Arabi does not give the concept of fear a permanent place as a mystical station. All of this indicates that love is the most prominent relationship between God and man in his system.

In addition to the relationship of "partness" and "wholeness", and likeness between the lover and the Beloved, Ibn Arabi presents two further explanations of love in general: beauty and beneficence. These are common motives accepted by many Sufi authors such as al-Hujwiri, al-Ghazali, and Rabia.

A lover loves someone because the beloved seems to him to be the most beautiful. In other words, beauty is the fundamental element of the relationship of love. The Sheikh presents a hadith to support this notion further, where the Prophet states: "God is beautiful and He loves beauty." It thus appears that Ibn Arabi regards beauty as the cause of love as an explanation for both God and man. God loves man because he is the manifestation of His own beauty. There is nothing more beautiful and perfect than God's creation. Otherwise this would be an imperfection for God. If God did not possess beauty there would not be any beauty in creation. Likewise, if the creation had no beauty, His beauty would not have been known. Man needs to love God because He is the owner of absolute and real beauty. In his book *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*, Ibn Arabi deals with this relationship, employing Nizam as the manifestation of divine beauty (Austin 1988, 35-48).

Beauty is not the only factor that attracts love. It is rather a motive for the few chosen people who are endowed with the intellectual and emotional faculties to understand and appreciate beauty. There is another motive which motivates love in most people: beneficence (*ihsan*). Beauty satisfies the spiritual needs of man. However, it does not satisfy the physical requirements of man. For example, a man's hunger will not be satiated by the mere contemplation of beauty. In this light, the element of beneficence is introduced to fill this vacuum. In this sense, love is described in less spiritual and less elevated terms, and more on a pragmatic basis. This line of thinking is captured beautifully in the Turkish saying: "Beauty does not satiate the stomach". Ibn Arabi's concept of beauty and beneficence as motivating love in some ways strikingly parallel the views of al-Ghazali. He makes these factors focal points of his theory of love. However, for Ibn Arabi these matters are of a more peripheral importance. In summary, Ibn Arabi believes that God is the only pos-

essor of beauty, and in reality the only benefactor. He is therefore the only real object of love (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 326).

A few words regarding the perception of beauty are pertinent at this point. Beauty as a concept is directed primarily to the visual faculty of man, in other words to the eye. The majority of Muslim theologians accept that man cannot see God in this world. How, then, can man love God without first seeing Him? Ibn Arabi deals with this issue in an interesting way. He believes that the origin of our love for God is not vision but audition. Hearing the word "*kun*", God's command to us to appear in the phenomenal world. Ibn Arabi alludes here to the Qur'anic verse: "When God wants to create something, He just says "Be", and it is" (Qur'an, 16:40).

Evidently the souls heard God's command even though they did not see Him. In consequence, our love for God is not motivated through us seeing Him but through our hearing Him (His words). The Sheikh believes that this is the reason why people are moved upon hearing music; music reminds us of the divine command which<sup>3</sup> was directed to us during the process of our creation (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 331).

The motive of beneficence which is received from the beloved naturally raises the question: "Is it for the sake of benefit that the lover loves the Beloved, or is it possible to love in total disregard of the benefit to the lover?" Ibn Arabi answers this question in a unique way. Sufis before him like Rabiya and Hallaj thought that the lover should totally disregard his or her own interests. Love should only be for the sake of the Beloved without any other motive. In the following pages we examine Ibn Arabi's own account of the problem of interest in the relationship of love. He classifies mankind's love for God according to its motives as spiritual love and natural love. In essence, this division is similar to that of Rabiya's classification.

### ***Spiritual Love***

Pure spiritual love is to love the Beloved for His sake. However, Ibn Arabi's version of spiritual love includes love for the lover's sake as well. As such, there is in a sense a unification of the interests of the lover and the Beloved. Humans worship God because of God's worthiness of being wors-

hipped. Furthermore, they also worship Him for the benefit they can receive from God for their well-being. Due to this characteristic, people are distinguished from animals because animals can only love something for their own interests, whereas man can combine these two at times contradictory kinds of love.

This concept of love would appear to be identical to that of *ḥubb*. It could be argued that with his spiritual love, Ibn Arabi combines Rabi'a's selfish love with selfish love. However, an important distinction from Rabi'a needs to be highlighted. The Sheikh does not totally disregard the interests of the lover. Furthermore, unlike Rabi'a, he does not see natural love in a negative way. In this sense he is more realistic than Rabi'a, for he recognises that it is against the nature of man to turn a blind eye to his own interests no matter how slight.

How is spiritual love tied to natural and divine love? It seems that in Ibn Arabi's understanding spiritual love is a middle way between divine and natural love; it contains elements of both. In his own words, the possessor of divine love has a soul without a body. The possessor of natural love, on the other hand, has a body without a soul. In contrast, the possessor of spiritual love has both a body and a soul (al-Ghurab 1983, 170). In this regard, he believes that the most perfect of mystic lovers are those who love God for both Him and for themselves simultaneously, as this reveals in them the unification of their two-fold nature (Corbin 1969, 150). This is due to the fact that the objective of spiritual love is to attain unity with God (*ittihad*), in other words, the uniting of the essences of the lover and the Beloved (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 334). Spiritual love aims at "becoming like the Beloved, accomplishing what is the Beloved's due and knowing His decree". It implies a knowledge of what the Beloved is like and what He is not like – what qualities are proper and what are not – and of what the Beloved desires or does not desire (Hirtenstein 1999, 197).

### ***Natural Love***

Natural love is of two types: the natural and the elemental (*ʿunsuri*). Although there are some similarities between them in their nature, they

differ in their objects. With natural love, the lover only regards the fulfilment of his self-satisfaction. The lover does not love the beloved, but loves their own good in the body of the beloved. Therefore, natural love has been built on the benefits and pleasure which are received from the beloved. The love for the beloved is only a means of self-satisfaction, and not an end in itself. If the benefits cease, then the lover ceases to love the beloved. Such a love is in the nature of all creatures; Ibn Arabi calls it *natural love*. This love is innate in human nature since it cannot love things exclusively for their sakes. Natural love is a common point between human beings and animals, since man also has partially an animal nature.

Natural love targets self-satisfaction, regardless of the object that is loved. Therefore, through natural love man worships God for the reward of Paradise or to escape the punishment of the hellfire, since there is a tendency in man's nature to strive for pleasurable things and to escape harmful things. Ibn Arabi calls these people the slaves of the fire and slaves of Paradise, meaning that the motive behind their obedience is these two elements and not love of God's pure beauty (Ibn Arabi 1972, II, 219).

In contrast, through spiritual love the "self" and all its desires are sacrificed in the interest of the Beloved; that is, the lover is sacrificed for the sake of the Beloved. However, with natural love the beloved is sacrificed for the sake of the lover. With regard to the object of the natural love, the beloved is also from the realm of the material world, because natural love is a product of hearing or seeing. Natural love is the love of the people in general, who have no grasp of mystical knowledge. Its aim is to be united with the beloved through the animal soul (Ibn Arabi 1988, XII, 565). These negative statements about natural love do not contradict the general spirit of Ibn Arabi's concept of love, that is: "God is the real Beloved behind all illusionary beloveds." Therefore, Ibn Arabi regards natural love as a manifestation of divine love in its lowest and crudest form.

### ***Elemental (Unsuri) Love***

Another type of natural love proposed by Ibn Arabi is "elemental" (*unsuri*) love, which is similar to natural love. The difference is that elemental

love is limited by only one natural form, generally from the opposite sex. For example, Qays and Laila, Qays and Lubna, Jamil and Buthayna are examples of this kind of love.

Ibn Arabi, unlike other Sufis such as Rabi'a, does not reprimand elemental love as a necessary evil. He even suggests that for the true Gnostic it is necessary to love women. This is quite a revolutionary idea compared to the early Sufis, who hated the world and marriage. For Ibn Arabi, the real Gnostic loves women because, as stated in the hadith, the Prophet declared that he loved women. Ibn Arabi's argument is that the Prophet would not love something that would distance him from God. Therefore the idea "Marriage or love of women in general are the cause of separation from God" is an error which is inconsistent with the Prophetic paradigm of love (Ibn Arabi 1992, XIV, 67-68).

Furthermore, he states in the commentary of the *Tarjuman* that the nature of elemental love is the same as divine love, that is, the love with which we love God. The only difference is in the object of that love. With elemental love, the lover directs their love toward a material entity, whereas with divine love the lover loves the essential, the real. In his opinion, God afflicted them with love for human beings like themselves in order that He might show, by means of them, the falseness of those who pretend to love Him. In the elemental, there have always been the most excellent examples of ecstasy, rapture and losing consciousness and reasoning in their love of the human beloved (Ibn Arabi 1978, 69-70). Therefore, the claimants of love of God should at least love God to the same degree as those lovers of human beings, otherwise God will show them as proofs against those who feign to be lovers of Him.

Another important conclusion from Ibn Arabi's remarks is that we do not need to change the whole nature of our love when it is directed towards God. Only changing the object of love from a profane object to the divine is enough. The transfer of the feeling of love from mortals to God is not specific to Ibn Arabi only since in Nifari's work on *Mahabba* there are similar themes (Young 1990, 72). However, this concept is in complete harmony with Ibn Arabi's overall mystical system. Spiritual and natural love are in-

terrelated with one of God's most beautiful names, *al-Wadud* (the Loving). Therefore, since God describes Himself as loving then love is one of God's attributes. However, when man is put into the picture, he also possesses the capacity to return this love. In summary of this section, we may say that this love is projected back mainly for two reasons: firstly, man is created in God's form; and secondly, he is commanded to adorn himself with God's attributes. Therefore, all the different kinds of love in the universe originate from divine love. If God did not possess the attribute of love then man's love would not have manifested itself.

In conclusion, Ibn Arabi believes that humans love God for four reasons:

1. We love Him for His sake. That is, if we love things because they are loved by God and if we dislike things because they are not liked by God. We freely and happily obey what He wants us to do as our limbs obey us without having any choice in the matter.

2. We love Him for our sake. That is, if we love God because of the bounties He has bestowed upon us.

3. We love Him for both reasons. That is, both for the sake of Him without regarding our interest in God, as well as for the sake of our interest in God.

4. We love Him with a love which is totally different from the aforementioned reasons. Unfortunately, Ibn Arabi does not provide details about this final reason.

### Stages of Love

Ibn Arabi classifies the concept of love from a number of angles. The first one was made according to the object and subject of love. The second one was considering the issue of interest in love. In the third one, Ibn Arabi classifies our love towards God according to its intensity, strength, and continuity. Therefore, this classification can be considered to be under the branch of mankind's love for God. Ibn Arabi studies love in its different stages of strength, and as such he has a quatrain grouping. These are: *hawa*, *hubb*, *'ishq* and *wudd*.

### ***Hawa***

The first stage of love is called *hawa*. Literally *hawa* means to fall, i.e. the falling of love or any kind of passion into the heart. A man falls in love for three reasons: 1- seeing, 2- hearing, and 3- bounties received from the Beloved. The strongest cause of *hawa* is seeing, since this does not change upon meeting the Beloved. On the other hand, the second and third causes of the *hawa* are not so perfect, because love caused by hearing changes with seeing, and love caused by beneficence can cease or weaken with the ceasing of the bounties.

The objects of *hawa* might be many things, and not necessarily God. Therefore, in the Qur'an God commands the believers not to follow *hawa*. *Hawa* is a kind of love for God polluted with associating partners with the love of God. It is therefore not a pure love of God.

Knowing that Allah commands His servants to purify their *hawa* and direct it to God, Ibn Arabi admits that it is impossible to eradicate *hawa* from the heart, since it is nothing but a natural sentiment. All human beings have *hawa* for a different beloved. Allah commands His servants to direct this *hawa* to Him. In spite of God's prohibition on following *hawa*, it is impossible to eradicate its existence (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 336).

Ibn Arabi believes that the non-believers possess this kind of love, since their love for God is mixed in with the love of the partners they associate with God.

### ***Hubb***

*Hubb* is the purification of *hawa*. Purification of *hawa* is realised by eliminating other loves and directing it only to God. Therefore, *hubb* is a pure and unpolluted love for God cleansed from all kinds of spiritual dirt. Ibn Arabi justifies this meaning of *hubb* from its etymology: In Arabic a water pot is called *hubb* since water rests in it and its dirt sinks to the bottom. In this way the water becomes purified from dirt. Ibn Arabi says that because the believer's love for God is pure, it will remain even in the hereafter, whereas the unbeliever's love which is contaminated by other loves will be cleansed.



### **'Ishq**

Ibn Arabi accepts *'ishq* as an excessive form of *hubb*. When *hubb* pervades all the body and blinds the lover's eyes except to the Beloved and circulates in the veins like blood it is called "*'ishq*". The lover sees nothing but his Beloved in everything. He or she hears only the voice of the Beloved in all sounds. When the lover speaks, he or she only speaks to his or her Beloved. Wherever he or she looks, he or she sees only the Beloved, and whatever he or she sees leads to the statement: "This is Him." The word *'ishq* does not occur in the Qur'an, but Ibn Arabi states that the phrase mentioned in the Qur'an "*ashaddu hubban lillah*" (Those who believe are stronger in their love for God) means *'ishq*, or excessive love for God.

Ibn Arabi gives us two examples: one is the story of the prophet Joseph and Zuleykha, and the other is of the famous Sufi Hallaj. As such, he confirms Hallaj's much debated position as a martyr of *'ishq* (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 337).

### **Al-Wudd**

*Al-Wudd* is an attribute general to the three above-mentioned stages of love. It is the permanency of *hubb*, *'ishq*, or *hawa* in the heart of the lover. The word *wudd* is used in the Qur'an to mean "firmness". When love attains to the degree of *wudd*, nothing can harm that love.

### **The Characteristics of the Lovers**

According to Ibn Arabi, the lovers have certain features that distinguish them from others who claim to be lovers. These are as follows:

*al-Bass*: Love impairs the functions of the intellect. *'Aql* has the power of collecting the thoughts and restricting the behaviour of a person. On the other hand, love distracts one's attention and causes the lover to fall into bewilderment.

*al-Nuhul*: This literally means thinness of the body because of the lovers' preoccupation in striving to attain the satisfaction of the Beloved. While they do so, they ignore their own needs and they do not give enough care to themselves. Their only concern is to keep their covenant with their

Beloved (God), as mentioned in the Qur'an (5:1, 2:10). As a result of the preoccupation with the Beloved, their bodies become thinner. To explain the *nuhul* of the existence of the lovers, Ibn Arabi uses the Qur'anic metaphor of the mirage (Qur'an, 24:30). In the Qur'an, God describes the deed of the unbelievers as "a mirage seen in the desert, having no water in it, but only a reflection in reality." Similarly, the lovers of God understand that their existence will be in reality a mirage; their existence will one day end and only God's existence will remain (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 338). The interesting point in this example is that Ibn Arabi applies a verse originally intended to refer to the unbelievers to the lovers of God. This demonstrates that Ibn Arabi uses a special kind of exegesis to support his ideas.

*Gharam*: This means annihilation in the Beloved with constant grief. It is the most effective attribute of love, and can be applied to all stages of love, since it connotes continuity (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 340).

*Shawq*: This is the motion of the spirit towards the Beloved. If the lover and the Beloved are from the same genre, this motion may be physical as well as spiritual. If the love is profane, the lover feels the fear of separation from the Beloved after meeting. But in divine love there is no such fear of separation, as the Qur'an states: "God is nearer to the lover than his jugular vein," and the lover of God feels this nearness (Qur'an, 50:16). Ibn Arabi's belief in the unity of being shows itself here. He says: "There is nothing in the universe except the existence of God." Therefore, the lover never feels separation.

### **The Attributes of Lovers in the Qur'an**

Ibn Arabi provides a comprehensive list of the characteristics loved by God in His servants. These include repentance, purification, and graciousness, along with those which God does not love, for example corruption and cheating. However, in Ibn Arabi's paradigm of love, attaining these characteristics is not considered to be the pious act that it is in mainstream Islam. This is not a simple scriptural validation for what he states in the chapter, but rather a pointer to the necessity of discrimination if we are to "become like the Beloved". All are loved, but essentially only those who ex-

hibit good and loveable qualities worthy of attracting love are able to be perfect loci of God's manifestation. Desirable qualities are nothing but the positive characteristics of existence, such as beauty, truthfulness, and generosity. These are epitomised in the lives of the prophets; Abraham is identified with the principle of thankfulness, Job with the quality of patience, and so on. The most desirable is to be among the beloved, as Muhammad is called beloved of God. The most beloved of God is the "manifestation" which reflects Him as He is, without the slightest deviation or distortion. Thus, on the one hand all divine qualities are manifested and savoured, while on the other, there is no "place" that interposes itself as other. Ibn Arabi's list is given below and the important ones will be analysed further (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 340-45):

1. To follow the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad, as stated in the Qur'an God declares: "Say: "If you love God, follow me. God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is forgiving and merciful"" (Qur'an, 3:31). Following the Prophet means to obey his commands and refrain from what he forbids. He does not speak out of his own desires; what he says is a revelation from God (Qur'an, 53:3-4). Ibn Arabi says: "Even if God did not ask us to follow him we needed to follow him" (Ibn Arabi 1911, II, 341). According to Ibn Arabi, one's love for God is in proportion to one's following the Prophet's Sunnah. The more one follows the Prophet, the more one loves God.

2. God loves the repentant one who returns to Him. One of His divine names is "*al-Tawwab*" meaning "He who accepts repentance". Therefore, Ibn Arabi concludes that God in reality loves His own attributes. The repentance of lovers is to turn from rejection to acceptance, from disobedience to obedience. This is important, since it indicates that Ibn Arabi's system of love does not ignore paradigms of love which are manifested in piety and asceticism.

3. God loves those who cleanse themselves from all spiritual vices, such as ignorance, pretentiousness and so on. Whoever cleanses himself or herself from these vices will be loved by God, as stated in the Qur'an: "God loves those who cleanse themselves." (Qur'an, 2:222).

4. God loves believers who are patient in the face of calamities, and who only ask help from God.
5. God loves those who are thankful for the favours of God.
6. God loves those who are charitable and give gifts to others.
7. God loves those who fight for His cause.
8. God loves beauty, since the universe is the manifestation of the beauty of God; in reality God loves Himself.

Although this list has an ethical nature, Ibn Arabi gives another meaning to these verses by alluding to the hadith: "Assume the traits of God" (See Chittick 1989, 21-26). Of the above-mentioned commandments many are also "divine attributes" such as the repentance of man, which corresponds to the divine attribute *al-Tawwab*; man's generosity, which corresponds to *al-Karim*; forgiveness, which corresponds to *al-Ghaffar*; and love, which corresponds to *al-Wadud*. Only by actualising and internalising such qualities can one participate in the fullness of existence and reflect the qualities of the real Being. The more one assumes these divine characteristics, the more one draws closer to God, in the sense that the lover reflects the divine qualities in the mirror of his or her body and soul. Hence mankind becomes the locus of God's love.

Another way in which following these commandments is connected to love is that most of these names correspond to the beautiful attributes of God. By assuming these qualities, man increases in beauty. And beauty, according to Ibn Arabi, is the basis and the cause of all love. "We love God because God is beautiful, and He loves us and all his creation because He loves the beautiful." Here, he refers to the Prophetic tradition: "God is beautiful and loves the beautiful."

Ibn Arabi in this connection also emphasises the importance of the *fara'id* (obligatory acts of worship) and *nawafil* (voluntary acts of worship), referring to the hadith Qudsi which states: "My servant seeks to win My favour by works of supererogation until I love him; and when I love him, I am to him an ear, and an eye, and a hand, and a helper. Through Me he hears, through Me he sees, and through me he takes (Bukhari, *al-Sahih, Rikak*, 38). According to Ibn Arabi, voluntary acts of worship at-

tract God's love more than the other, as in the voluntary act there is the role of will, whereas the *fara'id* are obligatory and there is no place for free will. Since free will is one of God's attributes, by performing the *na-wafil* man reflects more of God's attributes. Secondly, the outcome of voluntary worship is that God becomes the hearing and seeing of the worshipper (Ibn Arabi 1990, XIII, 483-85). This also reveals that Ibn Arabi values more the voluntary acts of worship, since the voluntary acts are only the result of love, whereas the obligatory ones might be the result of fear and other motives. In this theory of love, he sums up his whole system as being based on the notion that love is the cause of the return of all manifestations to the One.

Ibn Arabi seems to have benefited from many of Hallaj's ideas in his system of love, especially concerning the perfection of man of all creation in responding to God's love. The concepts of the *lahut* and *nasut* are also taken by Ibn Arabi and developed. However, unlike Hallaj, Ibn Arabi regarded not only man but the rest of the creation as possessing *lahuti* and *nasuti* qualities. The *nasut* represents the material aspect of a thing, the *lahut* represents the divine aspects of the creation (Sharif 1963, I, 415).

### Influences of Other Sufis on Ibn Arabi

Among the Sufis discussed in this study, it is possibly Hallaj who played the most significant role in Ibn Arabi's building the paradigm of love as well as his mystical theology. The concepts of "*Nur al-Muhammadi*" and the unity of religions are taken from Hallaj and developed further by Ibn Arabi (Doğrul 1948, 106-7; Chodkiewicz 1993, 87). Although he quotes many verses generally attributed to Hallaj which point to a theory of incarnation or fusion, Ibn Arabi explains these in his own pantheistic way. So it could be said that Ibn Arabi improved upon Hallaj's theory of love to a great extent and did not merely imitate him.

It can be also argued that Rabia's selfish and unselfish love is at the root of Ibn Arabi's classification, but with a different name. Selfish love is natural love, and unselfish love is spiritual love. The terminology he uses shows that Ibn Arabi gives a completely new colour to Rabia's division.

That is, referring to her "selfish love" as "natural" signifies that he does not reject and reprimand profane love. For him, it is not an obstacle in the Sufi path of love. On the contrary, it is one of the most efficient ways of arriving at the Real Beloved.

Ibn Arabi's systematic approach also corresponds very much to al-Ghazali's methodology. Both very much take an intellectual approach to their analyses of love. However, unlike al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi's theory of love is not restricted to certain intellectual boundaries. His theory of love is distinguished by existentialist ecstatic approaches. In this sense, al-Ghazali's methodology plays a partial role in Ibn Arabi's system.

Asin Palacios claims that Ibn Arabi borrowed many ideas from the Neo-Platonic and Christian concepts of love. Firstly, from an Islamic point of view there is no borrowing, since all religions derive from the same source. Secondly, Ibn Arabi's approach to the prophets permitted him to take this approach. He clearly states in many places that among his masters are Jesus, Moses and many other prophets (Palacios 1979, 246-247).

### **His Influence**

Ibn Arabi indeed left his mark on the Sufism of later generations. His ideas about the universality of being, love, and religion may be considered landmarks in the history of Sufi thought. Even though some of his theories are very controversial, the fact remains that in production and influence he is one of the greatest Arabic-speaking mystics Islam has ever produced (Sharif 1963, I, 420).

The title given to Ibn Arabi by his admirers, *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (the greatest master), has not been conferred upon any other Sufi since his time. In his introduction to *Fusus*, Affifi confirms that Ibn Arabi's influence is most clear in the delightful works of the mystic poets of Persia and Turkey (Ibn Arabi 1980b, I, 8). For example, Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi (d.1289 A.D.), Mahmud Shabistari (d.1320 A.D.), and 'Abdu'r-Rahman Jami (d.1492 A.D.) were all inspired by Ibn Arabi. Their odes reflect Ibn Arabi's teaching of divine love and Beauty through the subtle genius of the Persian mind (Sharif 1963, I, 408).

Ibn Arabi's understanding of love had a great impact on Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273 A.D.) through his disciple Sadr al-Din Qunawi (d.1274 A.D.). Even some have called the *Mathnawi* the *Futuhāt* translated into Persian verse. In modern times, the influence of Ibn Arabi can be seen wherever Sufism continues to flourish. In the East, his writings are still taught and read in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Persia. In addition, commentaries continue to be written on them (Nasr 1964, 118).

Ibn Arabi's paradigm of love is the most comprehensive metaphysical, cosmological and psychological paradigm of love (Nasr 1964, 90). In Ibn Arabi's cosmology, the concept of love plays an important role; it is the unique motivating factor behind the creation. According to him, it is God's eternal love that is the ultimate cause behind the creation.

At the most basic level, Ibn Arabi divides love into two branches: natural and spiritual love. The dual interpretation of love, both from the point of view of the lover and the Beloved as spiritual and natural is applied to God and man. This is quite unique in the theories of love, as nobody before him attributed selfish motives to God in their paradigms of love. The most important factor concerning God's love for man is that man is created based upon God's attributes. Man has the most traits resembling God among God's creation. In other words, God manifests Himself most fully in man of all creatures.

According to Ibn Arabi, God loves man as a part of His spirit. Man is nothing but a *nafkh* (breath) of God, and the whole longs for its part. In this regard, it is interesting that he gives the example of love between man and woman in which man loves woman as his part. In addition, God also loves man for man's own sake. Therefore, in His dealings with mankind His mercy exceeds His wrath. This love manifests itself to the extent that God will not punish His servants eternally.

Ibn Arabi stresses that God manifests Himself best in woman. In contrast with early Sufis who held women in contempt by equating them with the evil of the world, Ibn Arabi completely denies this, declaring women to be the most perfect locus of God's manifestation.

Man loves God because he is created in God's form. Man is attracted

to God as a part is attracted to its whole. Man's love is fully fulfilled only when the object of his love is God or another human being, since all human beings are created in God's form. Man always loves God in different manifestations even though he is not aware of it. This can be likened to a fish living in the ocean which does not realise the existence of water. However, to fully benefit from such a love, man needs to realise that all points lead to God.

As a result, for the true mystic all love is divine, and the division between profane and divine love is only a surface phenomenon. If men love women because of the divine manifestation in her, this love becomes divine love, while those who love them only out of natural lusts are ignorant of the reality of creation.

Ibn Arabi employed all the preceding paradigms of love very efficiently. The ideas of the exegetes, the philosophers, the theologians, and the poets form a synthesis in his thinking. Therefore Ibn Arabi's paradigm of love reflects the diverse tastes of the above-mentioned disciplines.





## Ibn al-Farid's Paradigm of Love

One cannot fail to notice the titles and appellations which adorn the names of the great Sufi masters, such as *Shahida al-'Ishq al-Ilahi* (Rabia), *Imam* and *Mujaddid* (al-Ghazali) and *Sheikh al-Akbar* (Ibn Arabi). From these, perhaps the most striking appellation belongs to the Sufi poet Ibn al-Farid: *Sultan al-'Ashiqin*, or the "Prince of the Lovers". This may be explained by the fact that Ibn al-Farid was regarded by many authorities on Sufism, as the greatest and finest poet to write mystic poetry in the Arabic language (Arberry, 1950, 94; Amin n.d., 242; Dayyah 1987, 111). This reputation of the "Prince of Lovers" justifies his inclusion in this research.

It must be pointed out that this research does not aim to illuminate this Sufi master's poetry from a literary point of view, as this has been studied quite sufficiently (Nadeem 1979, 184). Instead, it aims to illuminate and analyse his understanding and conception of love. This aim will be tackled according to the same binary classification adopted in the previous chapters, namely, God's love for man followed by man's love for God. However, before this is done it would be helpful to provide a brief account of Ibn al-Farid's life and background. This will allow us to see this eminent Sufi in context, and will provide some clues as to the origin, formation, and development of his ideas.

### His Life

There are a number of important sources which provide details about Ibn al-Farid's life (Homerin 1994, 38-56). From among these sources, the *Wafayat al-A'yan* of Ibn Khallikan appears to be the most objective, in the sense that it does not rely heavily on mere anecdotes and stories for its coverage. However, one limitation of this source is that it is rather brief in its discussion of Ibn al-Farid, and thus does not provide a great amount of detail. Nevertheless, the *Wafayat al-A'yan* is the main source for the biographical sketch.

The other major source of Ibn al-Farid's biography is the account of his grandson. However, this source must be approached with a certain amount of caution, as the author may have a personal interest in portraying the greatness of his grandfather, and may at times show some bias. For example, in his introduction to Ibn al-Farid's *Diwan*, one finds the pages filled with fantastic and exaggerated tales, which may stem from a desire to exonerate the poet from the accusations of heresy at that time. However, it would be unfair to reject everything that comes from Ibn al-Farid's grandson for this reason. An alternative and more constructive approach would be to accept only those parts which can be corroborated by other evidence.

Ibn al-Farid was born in Cairo 576/1182. His father's name was 'Ali, and he originally migrated from Hama in Syria, although we do not know why and when he arrived in Egypt. Ibn Al-Farid's full name was Abu Hafs or Abu l-Qasim 'Umar b. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. al-Murshid b. 'Ali. His honorific title is *Sharaf al-Din* (Nobility of Religion) and he is generally known as Ibn al-Farid or "son of the distributor of estates", a reference to the profession of his father (Ibn Khallikan 1961, I, 383).

Ibn al-Farid spent his childhood in a deeply religious atmosphere, mainly due to the influence of his father. At an early age he was attracted to Sufism and its practices such as solitude and asceticism. As far as his personality is concerned, he had a strong character. This fact is confirmed by Ibn Khallikan who states that he was a righteous and virtuous personality, with a strong sense of self-assurance.

Ibn Khallikan ends his biographical notice by stating that Ibn al-Farid

died in 632-1235 and was buried at the foot of Mount al-Muqattam (Ibn Khallikan 1961, I, p.383).

### *His Works*

It may come as some surprise to note that the volume of Ibn al-Farid's work is not proportional to his fame. Unlike Ibn Arabi, Ibn al-Farid's most important work is his *Diwan*, which constitutes a major source of his ideas and understanding for the purposes of our study.

Focusing particularly on the issue of love, the *Diwan* contains two important odes which give an insight into Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of love. The first, entitled *Khamriyya*, can be categorised as falling under the accepted Arabic genre of Bacchic or wine poetry. This reflects the general Sufi approach of taking possession of a well-established framework and reforming it by substituting hedonistic motivations with religious undertones, such as the decisive quest for happiness in God. Ibn al-Farid does exactly this: he reinterprets the whole bacchic theme and deepens its symbolic range. For example, the phenomenon of "drunkenness" is employed in the sense that the Sufi is drunk with his love for God, thus giving a new impetus to the genre of *Khamriyya*. Furthermore, in the *Khamriyya* Ibn al-Farid employs conventional language and imagery of the Bacchic poets, especially that of Abu Nuwas and 'Umar Khayyam, both of whom are regarded as the finest wine poets in this genre of Arabic poetry. In sum, in the *Khamriyya*, the Sultan al-'Ashiqin develops a symbolism based on Bacchanalian imagery of wine charged with a spiritual sense. In this respect, Ibn al-Farid continues in the tradition of the early profane poets with the added dimension of mystical love.

Moving on to the second important ode, which is entitled *al-Taiyyah al-Kubra* (poetry containing verses ending in the letter *ta*), Ibn al-Farid shows his poetical genius. It contains 761 verses and is nearly as long as all the other poems put together. According to some commentators such as Arberry, the *Taiyyah* is considered Ibn al-Farid's magnum opus. The contents of both the *Khamriyya* and *Taiyya* are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Not only is the content of his *Diwan* significant, but also the method by which it was written. The latter provides some insight into the character of Ibn al-Farid. It is said that he dictated his *Diwan* in times of ecstasy and intoxication. In other words, it was not the result of a conscious effort on the part of Ibn al-Farid. In this connection, it is of interest to note the similarities which exist between mysticism in other religions and Islam. For example, it appears that this method is also found in the mystical experience of other religions. As an illustration, Nicholson mentions that St. Catherine of Sienna dictated her great Dialogue to her secretaries whilst in a state of ecstasy. Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, Jalaladdin Rumi whilst drowned in the ocean of love used to take hold of a pillar in his house and set himself turning around it. Meanwhile, he versified and dictated, and people wrote down the verses of his great work *Mathnawi* (Nicholson 1967, 167).

### ***His Teachers***

Ibn al-Farid's grandson relates that Ibn al-Farid went through a long period of ascetic practices in order to seek some kind of self realisation. However, he experienced no illumination or revelation during his time in Egypt. This raises the question as to whether Ibn al-Farid was given support or guidance by any Sufi Master in his quest for divine illumination, or whether was he merely "experimenting" on his own. There is little evidence to suggest that the former was the case, especially during his early period in Egypt. On the other hand, if we were to accept the account related by his grandson 'Ali, then Ibn al-Farid's first Sufi master was a certain illiterate old man. According to his report, one day in the *Suyufiyya madrasa* in Cairo, Ibn al-Farid met an old man who was a green grocer (*Baqqal*). He advised him "O 'Umar, you will receive no revelation in Egypt but rather in the Hijaz, in Mecca (may God bestow honour upon it). Go there then, for the time of your revelation has come." The name of this old *Baqqal* is not given by 'Ali. However, Ibn al-Zayyat (d.814/1411) states his name to be Sheikh Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Baqqal. Furthermore, Ibn 'Iyas (d.1524 A.D.) states that Ibn al-Farid was buried at the feet of his sheikh, whom he refers to differently as "Muhammad al-Baqqal" (Ibn al-Zayyat n.d, 297). This in-

consistency casts some doubt on the narration of Ibn al-Farid's grandson. It seems possible that this name might have been invented by Ibn al-Farid's grandson in order to mystify and magnify the reputation of the great Sufi poet. In summary, the contradictory historical evidence makes it difficult to say definitively whether this old man was a true historical figure or merely a figment of Ibn al-Farid's grandson's imagination.

Other commentators, too, have grappled with the issue of Ibn al-Farid's masters and teachers. For example, Nabulusi suggests that the great Sufi of Andulus, Ibn Arabi, was his teacher. However, Nabulusi's position rests upon tentative interpretation of a couplet of poetry from the *Diwan* of Ibn al-Farid:

O camel-driver crossing the wilderness with howdahs,  
Kindly halt beside the hills of Tayyi! (Ibn al-Farid 1956, 41)

In this verse, Nabulusi detects an allusion to Ibn Arabi, who belonged to the tribe of Tayyi'. This may be a possible interpretation of this verse. However, it must be pointed out that it is the nature of poetry to be vague and suggestive of many alternative meanings. To rely upon this as a source of solid historical fact clearly ignores the nature and function of poetry. In addition, there is not a single piece of historical evidence to suggest that they ever met. Nevertheless, Nabulusi's view may have been influenced by the close resemblance between the ideas and styles of these two great Sufis.

Leaving aside Ibn Arabi, there is evidence to suggest that Ibn al-Farid met important Sufis of his time, for example, Burhan al-Din al-Ja'fari (d. 687A.H.), an ascetic with miracles and high states attributed to him; Shihab al-Din Muhammad b. al-Khaymi (d.685 A.H.), a prominent poet; and Shihab al-Din Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi (d.632/1234), the author of the *'Awarif al-Ma'arif*. These are a few names indicated by the sources. However, it should also be borne in mind that the long years Ibn al-Farid spent in the Holy lands raise the possibility that he may have met with the important Sufi personalities of his time. Mecca was a focal point for the Muslims and a place regarded as a source of spiritual blessing.

### ***His Travels***

The role that travelling played in Ibn al-Farid's life is significant. In terms of his travels, he can be compared to Ibn Arabi and Hallaj. For example, he spent some important part of his life in Mecca for his training in Sufism. The majority of sources confirm that he stayed in the Holy Land for 15 years, from 1215 to 1230 A.D. This period involved an important part of his Sufi training and development as he engaged himself in all kinds of religious worship and ascetic practices. It appears that travelling in itself is an important aspect of mystical training in the Sufi path. For instance, Rabia used to go to the desert; Hallaj travelled to India; al-Ghazali emigrated to Damascus and had his Sufi illumination there; and Ibn Arabi travelled the Islamic world from Spain in the West to Damascus in the East. It can thus be seen that travelling holds a prominent part in the Sufi's quest towards his goal. This is not explicitly stated by the Sufis, but on closer analysis a possible rationale can be suggested. Being distant from one's relatives and loved ones results in a feeling of solitude. Consequently, all the distractions which tie Sufis down and hinder their progress on the spiritual path are removed, freeing them to become more sensitive to divine illumination and to focus their attention only on their Beloved (God).

### **His Understanding of Love**

#### ***God's Love for Man***

In contrast with Ibn Arabi, one does not find an abundance of material shedding light on Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of God's love for man. In a similar fashion to other Sufis before him, the "Prince of Lovers" attempts to establish a strong relationship of love between God and man. Furthermore, he supports his position by making reference to the Qur'an and the Hadith. As an illustration, he alludes in his *Taiyya* to the well known hadith qudsi:

"Whoever despises any of My Friends has declared war against Me. I do not hesitate in anything as I hesitate to seize the soul of My faithful ser-

servant who dislikes death and whom I dislike to hurt, but he cannot escape therefrom. My servant seeks to win My favour by works of supererogation until I love him; and when I love him, I am to him an ear, and an eye and a hand and a helper. Through Me he hears, through Me he sees, and through me he takes" (Bukhari, al-Sahih, Riqaq, n.38).

It is worth noting that this hadith is regularly referred to by *mufasss* to show the mutual nature of love between man and God. Ibn al-Farid follows a similar pattern and draws some conclusions from the aforementioned hadith. Firstly, relying upon the first part of the hadith he concludes that God loves his creation as His creation loves Him. Secondly, Ibn al-Farid finds a basis for his "love leading to unity" in the last part of the hadith which says "I (God) am to him (mankind) an ear and an eye...". He infers that when God loves man, He becomes man's sight, hearing and so on. For Ibn al-Farid this means that when God loves His servant, He opens the door to unity with him.

The following couplets of Ibn al-Farid's poetry allude to the preceding hadith:

"And touching my oneness (*ittihad*) there hath come down a sure Tradition, whose oral transmission is not infirm."

"Declaring that God loves (His creatures) after they draw nigh unto Him by works of voluntary works or by the observance of that which is obligatory" (Nicholson 1967, 262).

The term "*ittihad*" aroused contempt and suspicion among the theologians because it was perceived as easily leading to the doctrine of incarnation. In fact, Ibn al-Farid was charged with this heretical belief after his death by Ibn Taymiyyah (Ibn Taymiyya 1992, 25-44). However, during his lifetime, Ibn al-Farid vehemently opposed this accusation, and openly rejected the idea of incarnation.

"And in the truer of the two visions I find a hint that removes my creed far from the doctrine of incarnation."

On the contrary, he bases the idea of *ittihad* with another Qur'anic concept, that of *labs* (covering):

"In the Qur'an there is mention of *labs*, and it cannot be denied, for I



have not gone beyond the double authority of the Book and the Apostolic Traditions" (Nicholson 1967, 187).

It follows from this quotation that the word *labs* is of utmost significance in the establishment of the true limits and definitions of his paradigm of love. By relying on the authority of the Qur'an and Hadith, Ibn al-Farid attempts to defend himself. His claim is that whatever he has written he has done so within the boundaries of the Shari'ah. With particular reference to the above verse, it can be inferred that the love relationship between man and God is hidden from others, just as God is hidden behind creation. The nature of this relationship can be described by words which appear to resemble the concept of incarnation but are in fact quite different. Ibn al-Farid is aware of the Christian concept of incarnation and its followers' intoxication with love of God. However, he regards their doctrine of God revealing Himself in Christ as a mere glimpse of the truth which is more fully realised by Muslim saints, who believe that God reveals Himself in every atom of existence.

Reference to the creation leads to another element found in Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of love, namely the explanation that the cause of Creation is God's love for man. This idea was also central to the paradigms of Hallaj and Ibn Arabi. Hilmi, a modern researcher of Ibn al-Farid, suggests that the second verse of the *Khamriyya* states in metaphorical language the idea that divine love is the motivation behind the creation:

"Its cup the full-moon; itself a sun which a new moon causes to circle. When it is mingled (with water), how many stars appear."

According to Hilmi, the sun symbolises divine love, and the stars signify creation. As the sun is a source of life, in the same way divine love, too, is the cause and sustaining force behind creation (Hilmi n.d. 40). Although this interpretation of the verse may seem quite far-fetched, it does not in a general sense contradict Ibn al-Farid's philosophy.

Ibn al-Farid also deals with the issue of whether God's love precedes man's love or vice versa. The former position assumes God's love to be eternal. This important notion is also held by Abu Yazid al-Bistami and Hallaj. "God's love for man is eternal and without beginning" is ex-

pressed in the very first verse of the *Khamriyya*: "We quaffed upon the remembrance of the Beloved a wine where with we were drunken, before even the vine is created" (Ibn al-Farid 1956, 81). According to Arberry, wine symbolises the source of holy rapture: the love of God manifested in His creation. The phrase "before even the vine is created" refers to the timelessness of God's love for His creation (Ibn al-Farid 1956, 85). This issue was always emphasised by the Sufis before Ibn al-Farid and thus it was not a novel concept. However, Ibn al-Farid's difference from his predecessors lies in his use of the language of poetry. As an illustration the following verse is worthy of note:

"Before it is no "before" and after it is no "after"; it is the "before of every after" by the necessity of its nature" (Nicholson 1967, 187).

In the ode of *Khamriyya*, Ibn al-Farid provides further clues as to the nature of God's love for man, but adds another dimension: God's love for man is not a material but a spiritual love:

"They say to me, "Describe it, for thou art acquainted with its description." Ay, well do I know its attributes:

Pure but not as water; subtle, but not as air; luminous, but not as fire; spirit, but not (joined to) body" (Nicholson 1967, 186).

From this verse the conclusion that love is non-material becomes clear. For instance, Ibn al-Farid selects the qualities of material, corporeal objects but denies their materiality and instead focuses on the abstract qualities derivable from these. By implication, love too is spiritual while at the same time containing all the abstract qualities of the material. This definition of love is interesting, as it clearly sets itself apart from the "worldly" loves which are embedded in a material source and can be defined by reference to the material. From a different angle this position is full of irony, for Ibn al-Farid utilises the worldly or profane language which is embedded in the material, and transforms its essence into a spiritual reality. In short, the profane is utilised for the service of the spiritual.

Finally, there is strong evidence in the *Taiyya* that all the actions of man are derived from the power and will of God. In the following verse Ibn al-Farid states: "None lives but his life is from mine, and every living soul

is obedient to my will". This idea is of profound importance, for it implies that the Sufi's actions are not his own but are from God, and consequently, it is God who motivates man's love.

Having studied God's love for man, it is now time to turn to the related issue of man's love for God. However, before looking at man's love for God, it is essential to look at the language Ibn al-Farid uses to refer to God, as this has further implications for his paradigm of love.

### *His Language*

The most important feature in Ibn al-Farid's style is that he expresses his love for God by employing the vocabulary and style of profane love. His odes have all the characteristics of profane love, but are loaded with spiritual meanings. As a result of this, he uses both masculine and feminine pronouns to refer to God, even though the generally accepted pronoun for God is the masculine. He refers to his Beloved (God) by the names of women mentioned by the Arab poets such as "Laila", "Suad", "Salma", and so on. This novel usage of feminine imagery from Arabic poetry sets Ibn al-Farid apart from other Sufis. From a modern perspective, the employment of the feminine pronoun and the feminine imagery for God hints towards what might be termed a "feminist" side to his paradigm of love. By freeing God from being referred to solely with the masculine pronoun, he in a sense undermines the position of men as the ones who can attain closeness to God alone. On the other hand, it must be said that Muslim theologians were at pains to point out that the use of a masculine pronoun did not imply that God had male attributes; it was a mere convention. Nevertheless, it was indeed the case that reference to God in the masculine gender conveyed the wrong message to the general believers, hinting that women have only a subsidiary status. Thus, by his use of the feminine pronoun Ibn al-Farid was indirectly challenging the presumed ascendancy of men over women in the spiritual realm.

Ibn al-Farid is therefore an original and unique poet among the Sufi poets. There are some commentators who consider Ibn al-Farid's greatness to lie in his application of the existing frameworks and ideas of the time.

For example, Homerin proposes that Ibn al-Farid's importance as a mystical poet and saint does not lie in his beliefs, as he was not an original thinker. Rather, his genius lies in his ability to use the largely secular Arabic poetic tradition for religious ends, and to voice a mystical view of existence that was shared by much of his audience, if not by the more formal scholars and theologians of that time (Homerin 1993, 85). However, it should not be forgotten that during Ibn al-Farid's time Arabic erotic poetry had already been adopted by Sufis to express their mystical love. For example, the poetical romantic lovers Majnun and Layla, the famous symbol of lovers in Arabic literature, had already become the symbol of the Sufi lost in the love of God (Scattolin 1992, 285).

Homerin's argument regarding Ibn al-Farid's genius needs to be examined in further detail here. There is a possibility that Homerin's reasoning that Ibn al-Farid was not an original thinker may be somewhat flawed. Firstly, Homerin's assumption that Ibn al-Farid has contributed no new ideas ignores the fact that Ibn al-Farid was a Sufi of "experience". In other words, his greatness lies in his ecstatic experiences. This kind of genius can be contrasted with that of other Sufis, such as Hallaj, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Arabi, whose geniuses lay within the intellectual sphere. We can thus conclude that it would be wrong to expect Ibn al-Farid to produce voluminous amounts of prose and writing which illuminate and categorise his paradigm of love. On the contrary, what can be expected of a Sufi whose greatness lies not in his theory but in his practice is that he should write about what he experiences. This is precisely what Ibn al-Farid did.

Secondly, assuming for the sake of argument that Ibn al-Farid did not produce any original ideas, the fact that his *Diwan* has attracted a great amount of commentary and has been frequently referred to in later Sufi writings, points in reality to the genius of the single work of Ibn al-Farid. It therefore appears that Homerin's position becomes untenable in the light of the comments shown above.

We have so far frequently mentioned in our analysis that Ibn al-Farid employed the vehicle of profane love to promote and convey his spiritual experiences as far as his paradigm of love is concerned. A question arises from

this as to what the motives were behind the use of the language of profane love poetry in order to convey divine meanings. The answer to this question cannot be definitively given, and can inevitably only be a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, some commentators have attempted to provide an explanation. For example, in his extensive study of Ibn al-Farid's life and work, Hilmi holds the view that Ibn al-Farid employed love poetry on the grounds that he found it easy to express his internal experiences through the utilisation of this poetry. There are a number of reasons for this, such as the fact that the experiences of Sufis cannot be explained by the use of precise and clearly defined terminology. Poetry, by its very nature, is not confined by logical categories, and is thus amenable to conveying ideas which are beyond the confines of logic and reason. Furthermore, Sufis in general do not target the minds or reason of their listeners. Rather, their focus is on the heart, or the emotional aspect of the human being. For this reason the vehicle of poetry is an ideal tool, as it has the magical quality of moving the feelings and hearts of its listeners. This interpretation may also help to explain the popular appeal that Sufis had during their time (Hilmi n.d. 144-45).

The positive aspects of using poetry mentioned in the preceding paragraph must be balanced with the possible negative effects of utilising profane poetry for the service of the divine, especially from the Sufi point of view. The most obvious disadvantage appears to be the scope for confusion and misunderstanding that could potentially occur in the minds of the ordinary recipients of the Sufis' poetry. Since the vocabulary used to describe the divine realities are borrowed from the realm of mundane love, such as separation and union, wine and goblet, tavern and drink companions, it is easy for the layman to misunderstand the real meaning behind such words. Furthermore, due to the ambiguous nature of the poetry, which is open to many conflicting interpretations, the mainstream theologians of the time were provided with ample ammunition to accuse Sufis of heresy, and the worst possible crime in Islam, that of associating partners with Allah.

It was for reasons of this nature that Ibn Arabi felt compelled to write a commentary on his *Tarjuman al-'Ashwaq* in order to clarify his intentions. In contrast to this example, Ibn al-Farid did not take up the task of

writing any commentary or explanation to illuminate readers as to his intentions. As a consequence of this, his poetry remains open to diverse interpretations. In other words, it means different things to different people: divine to the spiritual and profane to the worldly.

On the other hand, some portions of Ibn al-Farid's poetry are such that it is necessary to have a spiritual interpretation to the imagery and symbolism that they contain. To do otherwise would result in the poetry appearing mere nonsense. The two famous odes which have formed the backbone of his chapter, the *Taiyya al-Kubra* and *al-Khamriyya*, are of this nature. These are mystical poems in which he conveys his love for God. The elements of human love present in these two poems only make sense when they are understood with reference to divine love.

In addition to this, Ibn al-Farid gives clues as to the workings of his mind within his poetry. For example, in the following verse Ibn al-Farid justifies his use of allegorical language where the plain words are not capable of conveying the desired meaning:

I have indicated (the truth concerning phenomenal relations) by the means which language yields, and that which is obscure I have made clear by a subtle allegory (Nicholson 1967, 245).

With particular reference to Ibn al-Farid's use of allegory, another alternative rationale is possible. Indications of this can be found in his poetry. In order to disguise his love and to guard himself from the reproach of his friends who are alien to such intimate love relationships, Ibn al-Farid utilises ambiguous and allegorical language. As an illustration of this, consider the following poetic utterances:

And in my drunkenness, by means of a glance I caused my comrades to fancy that it was the quaffing of *their* wine that gladdened my soul (Nicholson 1967, 199).

From this, it appears that Ibn al-Farid is engaged in a form of deliberate "deception" by trying to conceal the true nature of his happiness and joy from his comrades, that is, the votaries of vulgar love, consequently enabling himself to hide his love from the ignorant. This strategy can be seen as one way of safeguarding himself from their attacks.

In order that our analysis of Ibn al-Farid be objective as possible, it is important to make explicit some of the assumptions made in the course of the previous analysis. The most fundamental assumption would appear to be that we have accepted without question the fact that Ibn al-Farid was a sincere Sufi and lover of God. We have not, for example, interpreted his profane poetry to be the consequence of Ibn al-Farid's love for someone other than the Divine, in other words, that Ibn al-Farid's love was purely temporal and had nothing to do with divine love. One possible line of argument may be that Ibn al-Farid was passionately in love with another human being and his poetry was all about profane love, but later his beloved became God and therefore his poetry took on a dual dimension.

To provide a satisfactory response to this argument, it is necessary to refer back to the historical sources relating to the life of Ibn al-Farid. Such an investigation reveals that there is not a single testimony to substantiate the idea that Ibn al-Farid fell in love with a human being and that this love later changed into divine love. From a logical standpoint, if such an incident had occurred, then it is more than likely that Ibn al-Farid's critics, especially his enemies, would have made great capital of this fact. On the other hand, it is equally possible that such an incident may have occurred and that Ibn al-Farid kept it a closely guarded secret. On balance, however, it would appear that the argument against such an incident occurring and being reported is of a more persuasive nature. Nevertheless, there is also a strong possibility that Ibn al-Farid used profane love as a stepping stone to divine love as many Sufis before him had advocated. However, all this does not alter the fact that whatever the source and cause of Ibn al-Farid's love, the vocabulary of profane love is used to express mystical love.

### *Man's Love for God*

According to Ibn al-Farid, love is the most perfect relationship between man and his Creator, and he refers to the "religion of love". The believers of this religion are the lovers of God: "And I was never bewildered until I chose love of thee as a religion. Woe to me for my bewilderment, had

it not been on account of thee" (Nicholson 1967, 208). In another verse of *Taiyya* he implies that he is the *Sultan al-'Ashiqin* (prince of lovers) by mentioning that to him belongs a kingdom which contains subjects:

"And the realm of the high degrees of love is my kingdom, the realities (of love) are my army, and all lovers are my subjects" (Nicholson 1967, 208-9).

Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of love is not merely an isolated and specific experience. Rather, it pervades all aspects of life and in fact acts as a *remedy* which heals many problems, both material and spiritual. In Ibn al-Farid's kingdom, love is a solution to all kinds of problems which might obstruct the path that leads to God. It seems that love is not merely the best solution to those problems, but it is in fact the only solution. Ibn al-Farid asserts the power of love in strong terms, claiming that love brings the dead to life, heals the sick, makes the paralysed walk, and the dumb speak. Love's sweet perfume gives the sense of smell to the one who had lost it, illuminates the lover's way in the darkness, and restores sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, even writing the letters of love on the forehead of one who is afflicted by madness will cure him. Love amends the manners of the drinking friends and guides the irresolute to the path of firm resolve. It turns the meanest man into the most generous, and provides the strength to be patient during times of anger and outrage. It also turns the most ignorant of the tribe into the wisest (Nicholson 1967, 180-82). In short, for Ibn al-Farid, love for God is a unique solution to the spiritual and material needs of mankind.

It is interesting to note that Ibn al-Farid's position in this regard distinguishes him from other Sufis such as Rabia, who emphasised the ascetic side of Sufism. For Ibn al-Farid, all other states in the mystical path such as fear, asceticism and the like, can help the Sufi to some extent, but in some limited measure. Love, on the other hand, has endless power and brings limitless solutions for all kinds of spiritual diseases.

Ibn al-Farid's poetry does not confine itself to mere narration of his spiritual experiences. It also exhorts, at times quite strongly, his listeners to follow his way and to drink the wine of love. This is not mere advice, for it is also backed up by the threat that to drink from this wine of love is no sin. It is rather an unforgivable sin not to taste this wine of love:



“They said: “Thou hast drunk the draught of sin.” Nay, I have only drunk what, in my judgement, ‘twere the greatest sin to renounce.” (Nicholson 1967, 287).

Another dimension of Ibn al-Farid’s paradigm of love, as far as man’s love for God is concerned, is that God does not accept any partner in the love that is due to Him. When man claims to love God he should not keep any equals in this love. In other words, man’s love must be pure and focused only on the Divine, and it must admit of no partners. Speaking on behalf of the Beloved, Ibn al-Farid proclaims:

“She said: “Another’s love thou hast sought and hast taken the wrong path, forsaking in thy blindness the highway unto me.” (Nicholson 1967, 208).

### *The Causes of Love*

Ibn al-Farid’s love is born out of contemplating divine beauty in all things. According to him, all beauty originates from the beauty of God.

“And declare the absoluteness of beauty and be not moved to deem it finite by thy longing for a tinselled gaud,

For the charm of every fair youth or lovely woman is lent to them from her beauty” (Nicholson 1967, 222).

God manifests Himself in all of his creation. However, at the same time He veils Himself through this creation. This means that people are ignorant to the fact that everything, including themselves, is nothing but a manifestation of God. As a consequence, Ibn al-Farid loved beauty in all its forms and his love was sometimes inspired by beautiful human beings. One example of this cited by Ibn Khallikan is when he wrote a verse about a handsome butcher boy. This idea is similar to what Ibn Arabi and Abdulkarim al-Jili thought of created beings and creation in general. All of these eminent Sufis are inclined to the view that the beauty in creation is derived from the beauty of the real Beloved (Hilmi n.d. 168).

To illustrate Ibn al-Farid’s approach, it is instructive to examine his views on *sama’*, or music. For Ibn al-Farid, *sama’* is an acceptable practice, since it is a cause which reminds one of the Beloved. Ibn al-Farid justifies

it on the grounds that it is an anodyne to the fever of the soul, its violent movements calm the agitating reminiscences awakened by miracle, and rock the soul to rest. He says:

"I have felt, when She is called to mind by the beautiful tones of a reciter (of the Qur'an) or the piercing notes of a singer" (Nicholson 1967, 197-8).

Even if one accepts that the contemplation of beauty is a *kasbi* state of love, and that the beauty exhibited in creation is a manifestation of divine beauty, there remains the important issue regarding the attainment of love. In other words, is love attainable by human endeavour or is it only attained by the grace of God? Ibn al-Farid does not give a clear idea whether love is a *kasbi* state, acquired by human endeavour, or a *wahbi* one given by God through His grace. However, concerning his own love there is strong evidence from his poems that it is God-given (*wahbi*) and not a result of endeavour.

"I gained my fealty to Her neither by hearing nor by sight nor by acquisition nor by the attraction of my nature,

But I was enamoured of Her in the world of command where is no manifestation, and my intoxication was prior to my appearance (in the created world)" (Nicholson 1967, 214).

It is possible to infer from these remarks that Ibn al-Farid believes that God's lovers are chosen pre-eternally. Hence, the attainment of divine love is *wahbi*, that is, God-given, and not *kasbi*, i.e. the result of personal endeavour.

This fact is important, as it gives legitimacy, allowing the Sufi to feel secure in the face of criticism and abuse. In Ibn al-Farid's understanding of love, therefore, there is no room for formality and pretence. In his religion of love, his friends are those who approved of his ignominy. As a result, the lovers of God should not think of their honour and well-being over that of the Beloved. The lover should not care for the insults and criticism of others which he suffers in the way of love. In short, Ibn al-Farid inclines towards the sect of *Malamatiyya* who were of a similar persuasion. In addition, a striking comparison can be drawn between Ibn al-Farid's conception of ignominy and that of Hallaj, who was also unmindful of the criticism of his friends.

### ***Love and Fana' (Annihilation)***

Due to the importance of the concept of *fana'* (annihilation) in Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of love, it is necessary to deal with this concept here in some detail. This sub-section will begin by surveying the definitions of *fana'*, the nature of *fana'*, textual evidence for the concept, and the different stages of *fana'*.

According to al-Jurjani, *fana'* can be classified at two levels: the first level of *fana'* is the eradication of the vices through worship and striving; the second level is the loss of the senses through absorption by God. In the first level, it is the action of man which is dominant, whereas in the second it is love that causes the loss of the senses. According to this classification, Ibn al-Farid's *fana'* is that of the second kind, i.e. losing oneself in contemplation of God.

According to Ibn al-Farid, real love is nothing less than *fana'*, passing away in God. What this means is that God's attributes are reflected in the lover, i.e. the lover gives up his or her own will and surrenders to the will of the Beloved (Nicholson 1967, 210). *Fana'* is a return to the original state in the "*alam al-amr*" (world of command), where we existed in God's knowledge without bodies. According to Ibn al-Farid, during that period of our existence the soul was not alloyed with the shadow of the clay (Nicholson 1967, 206). He maintains that after the souls are dressed with the clay of the body in this created world, they then became an obstacle between God and man. The only way to clear these obstacles is by loving God.

The attributes dividing us which were not subsistent *there* (in the world of command). Love caused to pass away *here* (in the created world) and they vanished." After the removal of the attributes the lover and the beloved become the same: "And I saw that I was indubitably She whom I loved" (Nicholson 1967, 214-15).

With these verses Ibn al-Farid alludes to the passage in the Qur'an (7:171) where it is stated that God, having drawn forth from the loins of Adam all the future generations of mankind, said to them, "*Alastu bi Rab-bikum*" "Am I not your Lord?" The reply was "Indeed, yes". This, in the view of Ibn al-Farid, was the first covenant of mutual love between God and

His created beings (Nicholson 1967, 206). In other words, Ibn al-Farid's conception of love is not new. It is merely a return to the primordial covenant made by all human beings with God.

These words have a striking similarity to the conception of love according to Hallaj. The only difference is that what Hallaj said secretly and publicly is said by Ibn al-Farid under the guise of poetry and erotica.

Ibn al-Farid's conception of *fana'* must not be seen as the complete annihilation of the lover in the beloved. On the contrary, by passing away (*fana'*), the mystic wins immortal life in God which is called *baqa'*: "By my life, though I lose my life in exchange for Her love, I am the gainer; and if She wastes away my heart, she will make it whole once more" (Nicholson 1967, 211).

According to Ibn al-Farid the processes of *fana'* and *baqa'* in God are realised through three stages:

- a. *sahw* (sobriety).
- b. *sukr* (intoxication).
- c. *sahwu'l-jam'* or *al-sahw al-thani* (the sobriety of union).

These levels must not be seen as unified, indivisible chunks. Within each of these three levels are sub-levels. A brief discussion of each of the stages will now follow.

Taking the level of sobriety first, this level is characterised by multiple and shifting consciousness as exhibited by ordinary men. This stage is the foundation upon which the other levels and stages are built.

Moving to the second stage, the stage of intoxication is characterised by the loss of consciousness in ecstasy. Its highest level is called "the greatest absence [from the self]" (*al-ghaybiyya al-kubra*), to the extent that he would not even realise his death even if he died that very moment. The following verses aptly explain this situation:

"Through Her I became oblivious of myself, so that I thought myself another and did not seek the path that leads to thinking myself existent."

"And I was so preoccupied with Her as to forget the preoccupation that made me forget myself: had I died for Her, I should not have been aware of my departure (from the world)" (Nicholson 1967, 246).

According to Ibn al-Farid, Moses represents this state, since he fainted upon hearing God's voice.

This leads on to the last and highest mode of experience for Ibn al-Farid: *sahwu'l-jam'*, that is, returning to normal consciousness after intoxication (Nicholson 1922, 26). This state belongs to the Prophet Muhammad, since he visited the celestial realm in his *mi'raj* (miraculous ascension) whilst he was sober. He bore the majesty of the world of *amr*. Ibn al-Farid also claims this state for himself, saying:

“All men are the sons of Adam, (and I am as they) save that I alone amongst my brethren have attained to the sobriety of union” (Nicholson 1967, 229).

Ibn al-Farid illustrates his experience of *fana'* by giving an example of a woman possessed by a *jinn*. Such a woman may foretell the future, speak a language that she did not speak before, or perform numerous other miraculous feats. If this relationship can exist between a woman and a *jinn*, notwithstanding the difference of their forms and qualities and despite the fact that both of them are contingent beings, surely no one will deny that it may exist between the omnipotent Creator and the creature whom He has created in His own image (Nicholson 1967, 219).

Having examined some aspects of the conception of *fana'* in Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of love, it is necessary to look briefly at the position of *wahdat al-wujud* within his framework. Contrary to al-Affifi's opinion, it seems that Ibn al-Farid employs Ibn Arabi's terminology regarding the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*. Al-Affifi considers Ibn al-Farid to have been a believer in *wahdat al-shuhud* (unity of vision) (Affifi n.d. 216). However, there is strong evidence in his poetry of Ibn Arabi's approach in this matter, as in the following sample of his poetry:

“She was appearing to Her lovers in every form of disguise in shapes of wondrous beauty,

Now as Lubna, anon as Buthayna, and sometimes She was called 'Azza, who was so dear (to Kuthayyir)” (Nicholson 1967, 223).

It is clear that the worldly beloveds are manifestations of divine beauty in physical form. This is evident in the following verse:

“They (fair women) are not other than She; no, and they never were. She hath no partner in Her beauty” (Nicholson 1967, 223).

In sum, therefore, it is apparent that Ibn al-Farid has leanings towards Ibn Arabi's conception of *wahdat al-wujud*. However, if one tries to find the exact terminology of Ibn Arabi, then this is not possible. Nevertheless, the essence and form of his poetry can be interpreted in a way which conforms with the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*.

Not only can Ibn al-Farid be compared with Ibn Arabi, he can also be compared with Hallaj. For instance, he believes in a kind of self-giving love in a similar fashion to Hallaj, giving away the *nafs* freely without expecting anything in return. Consider the following verse:

"What should I hope to be said of me except "Such a one died of love? Who will ensure me of that (death)? For it is that I seek" (Nicholson 1967, 210).

The position of Satan is another common point between Hallaj and Ibn al-Farid. For example, Hallaj considered Satan to be a true lover of God because he did not prostrate before Adam. Similarly, Ibn al-Farid says:

"A soul [Satan] that would not let go the true love I bear, even though it were removed far (from Thee) by scorn and absence and hatred and the cutting-off of hope" (Nicholson 1967, 206).

This verse clearly reminds us of Satan's love in Hallaj's paradigm: Satan was prepared to be hated and scorned if this was the price demanded by love. It might be said that Ibn al-Farid, among the Sufis whose philosophies of love have been considered in this study, is closer to Hallaj than to the others.

### Love and Asceticism

Ibn al-Farid, like many Sufis, led an ascetic lifestyle. His early retreats to Mount Mukattam and his solitude later in Mecca show us that he was an ascetic. In his *Taiyyah*, he mentions the difficult tasks and worship he went through, such as denying the pleasures of the body, fasting continuously, solitude and isolation (Nicholson 1967, 216-17). However, the ascetic way of life was not an end in itself; it was a means to attaining closeness to God.

Ibn al-Farid provides us with a rationale for asceticism: love was given to the spirits in the world of *amr*. However, this love later became

adulterated with vices when the spirits descended into their worldly forms. Therefore, in order to cleanse these, it is necessary to undertake ascetic practices.

Although Ibn al-Farid led an ascetic life, he nevertheless deemed ascetic practices alone to be an insufficient way to attain closeness to God. On the contrary, he believed that if one has a choice between love and asceticism, then love alone is sufficient. In other words, love is far superior to all other methods, including asceticism, philosophy, and theology. In his view, lovers are kings over others:

“But do thou be happy with love, for (thereby) thou hast been made a chief over the best of God’s creatures who serve Him (by devotion and piety) in every nation.” (Nicholson 1967, 227).

He even finds nothing wrong in lovers teasing the ascetics:

“Win those heights and vaunt thyself above an ascetic who was exalted by works and by a soul that purged itself (of worldly desires)” (Nicholson 1967, 227).

Ibn al-Farid provides a justification for the superiority of love over asceticism. In his opinion, ascetics love God for the mercy and reward which He bestows on them, but true mystics love Him for all His attributes, His wrath and vengeance no less than His mercy and forgiveness. From this perspective he criticises the ascetics. For example, he addresses God saying:

“If the ascetics are fascinated by some of the beauties that are Thine, everything in Thee is the source of my fascination.” (Nicholson 1967, 228).

This approach bears a close resemblance to Rabia’s paradigm of love, which excludes any kind of self interest in one’s devotion to God. For example, he proclaims:

“Thou are worthier of this glory than one who strives and exerts himself in hope (of reward) and in fear (of punishment)” (Nicholson 1967, 228).

In short, Ibn al-Farid’s love is not the result of any kind of interest or benefit received from the Beloved. His love for the Beloved is above any kind of worldly concern.

### The Characteristics of Lovers According to Ibn al-Farid

Ibn al-Farid's paradigm of love can be encapsulated in his description of the characteristics of the lovers of God. These are enumerated in the following:

The lover of God must be happy with the actions of God. He or she must be thankful even for calamities, instead of complaining as usual, because calamities do not affect his or her love. Ibn al-Farid sees the possibility that these calamities can play in strengthening one's love (Nicholson, 1967, 204).

The lover of God must be annihilated in God's love, and nothing should remain extant. The annihilation must be such that even if death seeks the lover, it should not be able to find him. The lover must show his or her weakness and sense of need to the Beloved. In addition, the lover must be modest in the presence of the Beloved (Nicholson 1967, 204).

The lover's whole attention must be directed towards the Beloved:

"Verily, thou art the desire of my heart, and the end of my search, and the goal of my aim, and my choice and my chosen" (Nicholson 1967, 207).

In sum, the lover should present a picture of complete devotion, loyalty and longing. The life of the lover must cease to exist for his or her own self; only the existence of the Beloved must be affirmed.

### The Influence of Other Sufis on Ibn al-Farid

This section provides some insight into the sources that influenced Ibn al-Farid, not from a poetical point of view, but from the evolution of his understanding of love.

Beginning with Rabia al-Adawiyya, although there is no direct reference to her by name in Ibn al-Farid's work, he appears to share certain aspects of her paradigm of divine love. For example, Rabia's notion of disinterested love is reflected in Ibn al-Farid's *Taiyya*. This resemblance alone does not definitively prove that Ibn al-Farid was influenced by Rabia. It is possible that they both reached the same ideas independently.



The influence of Hallaj on Ibn al-Farid was hinted at earlier in connection with the former's notion of suffering in love. Therefore it is not necessary to repeat our discussion on this point here.

Moving on to Ibn Arabi, there seems to be a very close resemblance between his and Ibn al-Farid's paradigms of love. Although Ibn al-Farid's poetry, especially his *Taiyya*, reflects the doctrines of Ibn Arabi, there is some controversy as to whether or not they ever met. There is an accepted assumption by the Arab commentators and scholars that in fact they did meet. However, Scattolin and other orientalisks dismiss the idea on the grounds of a lack of solid historical evidence (Scattolin 1992, 275). In al-Maqqari's (d. 1632) account of this relationship, he states that al-Maqrizi (d.1422) related that Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) sent word to Ibn al-Farid asking his permission to write a commentary on his *Taiyya*, and the latter replied: "Your book entitled *al-Futuh al-Makkiyya* is such a commentary on it". This report could be either true or false, but it proves that there are close similarities between Ibn al-Farid and Ibn Arabi. The influence of Sheikh al-Akbar is evident to even the casual reader of both of them. However, even if one does not incline to believe in the influence of one on the other, it is logical to conclude that they held similar views independently from each other as proposed by D. B. Macdonald and Scattolin (Scattolin 1992, 285; Nicholson 1979, 23).

As for the similarities between the two sheikhs, they both believe in the concept of religion of love and accept the primary importance of love in the religion. In addition, they both utilise the terms of profane love in their poetry when referring to their mystical love for God. However, the important difference between them is that Ibn al-Farid, like Hallaj, is intoxicated in his love; his poetry cannot be regarded as the fruit of rational thinking. On the other hand, Ibn Arabi, besides his mystical experience, shows traces of philosophical and rational thought.

### His Influence

Having briefly examined the influences which shaped Ibn al-Farid's thinking, we turn now to the influence of Ibn al-Farid upon others. As a general comment, Ibn al-Farid left a lasting influence on many of the Sufis af-

ter him. For example, his *Tamgha* and *Khamriyya* are among the pieces of poetry most commented upon in the Sufi tradition. Furthermore, his tomb, which is located at the foot of al-Muqattam mountain, is an attractive centre for pilgrimage. The following verses often recited at his tomb bear witness to his influence even today:

Pass by the cemetery at the foot of al-Farid,  
 Say: Peace upon you, oh Ibn al-Farid!  
 You have shown in your *Nazm al-Suluk* marvels  
 You have revealed a deep, well-guarded mystery  
 You have drunk from a Sea of love and friendship,  
 You have quaffed from a bounteous, unlimited Ocean. (Scattolon 1992: 274)

Although slim in size, his *Diwan* attracted great interest in later times. Many important Sufis such as al-Farghani (d.1300), al-Qashani (d.1334), al-Qaysari (d.1350), Jami' (d.1492), al-Biruni (d.1615), and al-Nabulsi (d.1730) have written large volumes of commentary on Ibn al-Farid. As a result of these continuous commentaries, his conception of divine love reached all the corners of Islamic world.

However, one point to note is that Ibn al-Farid's poetry is overshadowed by Ibn Arabi's philosophy. Due to overwhelming influence of Ibn Arabi, Ibn al-Farid's commentators noticed the same mystical philosophy in his poetry. In this way, concepts and terms foreign to Ibn al-Farid's philosophy were introduced into his work.

Ibn al-Farid is considered a master of the genre of mystical love poetry in the Arabic language. He showed that poetry can be used to express the most delicate feelings and beliefs as much as prose can. He employs the metaphors of wine and profane love poetry. These meanings are so interwoven into his poetry that they may be read either as love poems or as mystical hymns. Although this style was very common in Persian literature, in Arabic literature it was rare, and Ibn al-Farid was a pioneer in the use of profane love poetry to express love for God.

For Ibn al-Farid, love is not merely a means for worshipping God, but also a vehicle to reach unity (*ittihad*) with God. Although there appears to

be some similarities between Ibn al-Farid and Sufis such as Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, there is no concrete evidence that Ibn al-Farid was directly influenced by such Sufis. It is possible that Ibn al-Farid reached these similar ideas independently.

## The Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse the paradigms of love that appeared during the historical development of Islam. A popular conception of Islam is that in comparison with other religions, particularly Christianity, it is a cold and abstract religion with little room for love. In order to determine the validity of this assumption, this study set out to explore the phenomenon of Sufism, which appears to contradict this common perception. It can be said without any exaggeration that Sufism has had a far-reaching impact not only on Islamic ideas and theology, but also on the Islamic way of life.

The originality of this research lies in the fact that it is the first attempt to present the Sufi concept of love within a paradigmatic framework. Although there are many references in books to Sufism, until now no research has been fully devoted to the study of love in the Sufi tradition. The present study attempts to exclusively present different conceptions of love within this paradigmatic framework. Hence this may be used as the basis for further research in this area.

Among Islamic sciences, Sufism has traditionally been equated with the notion of *zuhd*, that is, extreme fear of God and renunciation of the world. As was indicated in the introductory chapters, the derivation of

the term *tasawwuf* (Sufism) from *suf* (woollen dress worn by ascetics) supports this notion. However, the fundamental thesis of this study is that this conventional depiction ignores a very important facet of Sufism: the role of love. In fact, a closer analysis of Sufi thought reveals that the notion of love is the fundamental basis of Sufism, since it permeates all aspects of a Sufi's life. Furthermore, it has trickled down into popular culture and showed itself in various domains such as poetry. Therefore, it can be said with a certain degree of conviction that it was the Sufis who developed Islam as a religion of love. The concept of love in their paradigms reached a peak which has not been paralleled in any other movement within the Islamic tradition.

The Sufis built what we have characterised as their paradigms of love on the foundations of the Qur'an and hadith. Although the Qur'an cannot be viewed purely as a book of love, as was shown in chapter three, it nevertheless makes reference to the concept of *hubb* (love) and several synonyms such as *wudd*. Furthermore, its verses convey the possibility that a relationship of love can exist between man and God. The Qur'anic paradigm of love was defined in terms of obedience to God and the Prophet. In the early days of Islam, these verses were not given prominence, as much emphasis was laid upon strict obedience to the laws of Islam. However, later Sufis read their own interpretations into the Qur'anic paradigm and sought to legitimise their positions by referring to the Qur'an, thus bringing these verses into prominence.

For Sufis, the hadiths were an even greater source of inspiration. These supplied additional information which was apparently absent from the Qur'an. Love between God and man was described in human terms, and even the possibility of becoming one with God was implied. For example, the hadith that "God becomes the eyes and ears of man" provided a strong basis upon which Ibn Arabi and Hallaj developed their paradigms of love centred on the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*. Furthermore, the Prophetic traditions also provided the Sufis with the fundamental basis of their cosmological approach. For example, the foundation for the Sufis' system of love was the hadith: "I was a hidden treasure and loved (*ahbabtu*) to be known, therefore I created the creation so that they may know me."

Although the Sufi paradigms of love relied upon the Qur'an and hadith they did not remain uniform. The Qur'an and hadith were open to interpretation, and each individual Sufi brought their own personality and social conditioning to bear on these interpretations. For example, Sufis such as al-Ghazali were inclined toward a cautious and intellectual approach, whereas the likes of Rumi and Hallaj exhibited a bold and strongly emotional one. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify key phases in the development of the Sufi paradigm of love. In this conclusion, the outline of the different stages of the concept of love will be presented in its developmental continuum. In addition, the general features of each particular stage will be outlined.

### **The First Stage**

This stage is that of the early ascetics. It was predominantly characterised by the ascetic movement, which gained ascendancy during this period. The early ascetics did not employ the concept of love as often as they did the concept of fear. The love of God was overshadowed by the fear of God. The social circumstances of the time certainly had a role to play in this, and Sufism was a reaction to the corruption and decadence of the society which came about as a result of the Islamic conquests and their resultant prosperity. As a result of this, the Sufis employed the tool of excessive fear in order to turn people away from indulgence in the pleasures of the world.

However, this excessive use of the concept of fear proved somewhat transitory, as it failed to retain its appeal for long and alternative paradigms began to appear. The early Sufis' one-sided promotion of the concept of fear did not reflect a balanced view of the Qur'anic verses. As a result, some Sufis presented the concept of love as a new dimension to the conventional Sufi teachings of the time.

### **The Second Stage**

This stage in the development of love was a direct reaction to the paradigm of fear. A strong emphasis on fear resulted in a very egoistic outlook to religious life; everyone was concerned with saving themselves from the pu-

nishment of Hell and gaining the reward of Paradise. To some Sufis, the essence of religion was being ignored with this emphasis on personal interest. This state of affairs evoked a powerful reaction from certain individual Sufis. The most prominent was that of Rabia, who reacted to the approach of these Sufis on the basis that they worshipped God because of their own selfish interests. For her, it seemed that the early ascetics used God to protect themselves from His punishment or to attain His Paradise, and hence their sole purpose was their own salvation. The beauty, majesty and glory of God was ignored.

In response, Rabia developed the concept of disinterested love. As the forerunner of the concept of love Rabia developed a dual classification of love: "interested" (self centred) love and "disinterested" (selfless) love. Rabia's paradigm of love had the advantage of being simple and easily understood. In the centuries that followed, the influence of Rabia's paradigm of love could be seen again and again. At times it is repeated almost verbatim, and at others it is reflected in new terminology. In addition to her groundbreaking classification, Rabia's methodological approach of classifying lovers of God according to their motives opened up the possibility that love between God and man can be experienced and communicated. In short, it paved the way for the later generations of Sufis to construct their paradigms of love based on their personal experiences. A precedent had thus been set.

In summary, Rabia's paradigm of love was centred on the concept of disinterested love. She strongly believed that love for God should be purely for His sake. In this way she aimed to cleanse religious life from the "evil" of egoistic desires. This emphasis was welcomed not only by the Sufis, but also by the mainstream scholars of Islam. It is also interesting to note that Rabia was accepted among the Sufi circles as the originator of divine love. This indicates the Sufis' readiness to admit female disciples into their inner circles.

The second stage in the development of the paradigm of love shows the first signs of a theory of love being developed by Rabia. This stage is also characterised by simplicity, in contrast with the complex systems which were to come later.

### The Third Stage

The simple division of Rabia's theory of love was evolved by other Sufis into increasingly systematic and complex theories. Rabia had limited the application of her paradigm of love to the field of worship. Later Sufis made their paradigms of love as the basis of their cosmologies, making love the central focus of creation, so much so that love became the cause of all creation. Furthermore, Rabia had not delved into the intricacies of the process and nature of love between man and God; this untrodden path was traversed by later Sufis. In short, no stone was left unturned, and every possible avenue was explored. During this process, the paradigm of love became the preserve of a select few. For the scholars of mainstream Islam, the Sufis were moving into dangerous territory, bordering on heresy and blasphemy. The third stage led to the deterioration of the good relations that had existed between the Sufis and the mainstream scholars after Rabia's time.

The Sufi mystic Hallaj best exemplifies this trend. His pronouncements, such as *ana al-Haqq* (I am the divine truth) and concepts such as *fana'* (annihilation in the beloved), and the unification of the lover and Beloved, posed a threat to the mainstream scholars, and in the end, Hallaj was executed for his views. This stage is marked by increasing hatred and suspicion between Sufis and scholars. Suspicion grew as the Sufis developed their views and became bolder in giving expression to them (Gibb 1984, 91). The brutal execution of Hallaj was the culmination of this rift.

In addition to this, Sufi love became more complex and structured. Rabia's paradigm of love drew a sharp division between worldly love and divine love; the two were not compatible. For example, one could not claim to love a worldly object with a religious intention or motive. Contrary to this, the paradigms of love of later Sufis, such as Ibn Arabi, allowed for the possibility of loving anything as long as one remembered that God is manifested in everything. Although the dichotomy of Rabia's paradigm of love lost much of its significance, the two paradigms still retained certain similarities. However, it is clear that the paradigms of love of Hallaj and Ibn Arabi, for example, evolved further away from the original paradigm of love expounded by Rabia.



### **The Fourth Stage**

The next phase of development is characterised by the movement for synthesis and harmonisation between the scholars of mainstream Islam and the Sufis. The gulf of hatred that had arisen in the third stage needed to be bridged. The personality of al-Ghazali played a leading role in this process of reconciliation. He was the voice that would soften the attacks of the orthodox scholars against Sufi love.

In order to make his position acceptable to mainstream Islam, al-Ghazali based his arguments on the authority of the Qur'an and hadith. In addition, he employed rational arguments extensively. Furthermore, within his paradigm of divine love everything is explicable in terms of human love. For example, the causes of divine love are all exemplified, or their counterparts are found, in the field of human love. This would explain the success of al-Ghazali in bringing Sufi love into acceptability both to the scholars and the ordinary people. In other words, he targeted both the mind and the heart without sacrificing one for the other. In contrast, al-Ghazali's Sufi predecessors had sacrificed the intellect over the ecstatic experiences of the heart, and were thus misunderstood by the mainstream scholars who relied more on the mind than the heart. Furthermore, the importance of communicating their ideas in a clear way was not an important consideration for the earlier Sufis. For al-Ghazali, the presentation of his ideas in a clear and structured manner was crucial. His teaching experience will most certainly have played a role in his methodological approach.

### **The Fifth Stage**

The culmination and final synthesis of the Sufi paradigms of love is found in the writings of the great Sheikh Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, the famous mystic of Murcia. His paradigm of love has influenced the history and development of Islam greatly, as his paradigm of love is the most comprehensive both in terms of metaphysics and cosmology. For this reason, our research has devoted a comparatively greater space to Ibn Arabi than other Sufis.

The basic current, highlighted in the previous four stages, revealed themselves at different times and with varying degrees of intensity. The prime example of their synthesis can be seen in the Paradigm of love of Ibn Arabi, who harmonised these currents. The main motives behind his paradigm appear to have been taken from the teachings of Ibn al-Farid, which manifests itself in the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*, that is, in the conviction that everything is a manifestation of God, and consequently, every form of love is a reflection of God's love. In other words, God's love permeates every aspect of creation. Therefore, in Ibn Arabi's understanding, mercy and love are the essence of God and of religion.

On the other hand, the style of Ibn Arabi, reflects the intellectual methodology of al-Ghazali. The Shaykh al-Akbar's paradigm of love is presented in an organised and a rational manner.

Finally, the significance of Ibn Farid in the development of the paradigms of love lies not in any novel ideas but in his style of expression. His utilisation of profane poetry as a medium of expression for his views inadvertently led to the mass popularisation and dissemination of Sufi ideas. The key distinction between Ibn Farid's poetry and that of earlier Sufi attempts are his mastery of Arabic poetry and his exclusive usage of poetry to propagate his beliefs. In many other respects, the love paradigm of the *Sultan al-'Ashiqin* (Prince of lovers) was similar to that of Ibn Arabi.

Having presented a brief summary of the Sufi paradigms of love from a theoretical perspective, our conclusion would remain incomplete without mention of the practical consequences that these paradigms produced in the hearts and minds of Muslims both past and present. Beginning with the early Sufis, the emphasis on the concept of fear of God and the baselessness of human beings led to a pessimistic outlook on life in general. In their belief, the world had no value in the eyes of God. On the social level this resulted in their withdrawal from society, as they believed society was innately wicked. In short, the society envisaged by the early Sufis was one characterised by a gloomy view of religion and God. Similar social ideals can be seen even today in some parts of the Muslim world, especially in the areas where Sufism is not popular.

The later stages of development of the paradigms of love have had an enormous impact on Islamic thought in general. The shift of emphasis to the positive aspects of God centred on the notion of love proved popular: God created us because he loves us. As a result, humanity became a centre of God's love and its manifestation. Humanity was now considered innately good, and the Creation as the manifestation of God's beauty. This approach shows elements of the philosophy of humanism, that is, putting the fulfilment of humanity at the centre.

This shift in emphasis naturally necessitated a reappraisal of the way in which God was perceived. God was no longer seen as a stern judge on the lookout for mankind's errors, waiting to inflict his wrath upon them. On the contrary, the conception of God was transformed into an exceedingly merciful and beneficent God, whose mercy extended over all humanity irrespective of their perceived evil. For example, Ibn Arabi and Hallaj brought Pharaoh and Satan, the embodiments of evil in Islamic tradition, under the ambit of God's all-encompassing mercy.

This approach to religion and humanity opened up new dimensions in the development of Islamic thought, providing an alternative to the strict asceticism and formal piety of some Muslim groups, an alternative which had lasting appeal to the Islamic world both in the past and the present. The strong humanistic undertones of the Sufi paradigms of love also attracted great interest in academic circles in the non-Islamic world, in particular the western world. The voluminous amount of literature and translations of Sufi Masters whose works centre around the concept of love provides evidence of their enduring validity and appeal.

Today we need to understand this rich tradition of love in Sufism and strive to bring out more from these unearthed treasures. The modern world needs such an endeavour more than ever.

## Notes

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1. The Greeks were inclined to believe that God could not be spoken of as "loving" man, for if God felt the movement of love for any being other than Himself, He would be a needy creature, yearning to overcome some inadequacy in His own nature. Since God has no need in His Being, God remains unmoved. see (Ramsey 1993, 105-106).
2. The Qur'an speaks of a single Gospel which is given to Jesus. Hence, Muslims think that there is only one Gospel that is revealed to Jesus and dictated by him as the Qur'an was dictated. See, the Qur'an, 5:47. However, from a Christian perspective the Gospels are the records of Jesus' sayings and life. In that sense they equal the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad.
3. The neighbor is more important than the house itself. In other words the Master of Paradise is more important than Paradise itself.
4. *Lahut* and *Nasut* are two Syriac words that are used to describe Jesus's Divine and human natures. These phrases seem to have passed into Arabic through Syriac Christians.
5. The Mu'tazilah claim that it is impossible to see God.
6. In *Kimiya'* he specifies this group as the sect of *Zahirites*; the sect that believes in the letter of the law only. See al-Ghazali 1980, 66-7
7. Van Den Bergh claims that the notion that there can be no love between God and man because of the great distance between them had been already affirmed by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. He holds that the *Nicomachean Ethics* had been translated into Arabic and this saying of Aristot-

le may have become a common notion among the theologians. See Van den Bergh 1956, 306

8. Al-Ghazali, makes clear in his *al-Munqidh* that man consists of body and heart and by heart he means the reality of the spirit (ruh) not the physical heart which is owned by the dead as well the animals. See al-Ghazali 1956, 110

9. Due to the length of the list of his teachers, we do not give their names. To give an idea, Ibn Arabi mentions about ninety of his masters in Hadith science in an autobiographical note. For the list see Addas 1993, 312-314

10. See for more detail Addas 1993, 27-33

11. The text of the hadith attributed to the Prophet by the Sufis is "I was a hidden treasure, so I loved to be known. Hence I created the creation that I might be known." The scholars of hadith consider it a forgery but for Ibn Arabi this hadith is proven to be authentic through *kashf* (vision of the Prophet in dream; see Chittick 1989, 391; also for more about the cosmology of Ibn Arabi see Chittick 1988, 1-162

12. This chapter will be used as the basis of Ibn Arabi's idea of love in this research for the reason that among his books this is the most comprehensive work of him about love.

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This book investigates the significance of divine love in the Islamic tradition, with particular reference to Sufism. Although Sufis are considered the forerunners of writing on the subject of divine love, there is a relative paucity of literature regarding the details of their conceptions of love. Therefore, *Love in Sufism* by Süleyman Derin should be considered as one of the first instances in its field that covers the thought of a wide number of Sufi figures writing in Arabic.

Süleyman Derin not only provides us with a comprehensive account of the Sufi paradigms of love presented by Rabia, Hallaj, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi and Ibn al-Farid --with an analysis of the specific motives of each particular paradigm--but also provides insight into the social and historical context of their milieu. This book addresses not only academia but also general readers of Sufism.

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